

Refugees in Europe and the Atlantic World

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Refugees were a common phenomenon in the early modern world, yet their histories have rarely made it into mainstream historiography. This negligence can be explained by the focus, sources, and languages employed by scholars in the past. In a wide range of historical subfields, from political and religious, to social and economic history, institutional angles often obscured the perspectives of outsiders and minorities. At best, refugees featured in the margins of textbooks as the anonymous victims of early modern conflicts. Archival politics have played a role in this as well, because few early modern polities recorded systematic data about migration. Sources about refugees, be they quantitative or qualitative, are therefore patchy and subject to debate. An assessment of available material is finally complicated by confusion about terminology. Contemporaries generally used a different set of terms to express the causes, character, and impact of migration in their society. As a rule, distinctions between labor migrants, religious refugees, political asylum seekers, or common travelers were blurred or not made at all. Stranger was the term most commonly used for any type of newcomer. How then, are we to write a history of refugees in an age when the term and even the concept may not have existed?

These empirical and conceptual challenges have led some scholars to claim that the refugee did not exist as a recognizable category in society until the nineteenth or even twentieth century. In their view, a sense of nationhood and border-crossing are defining elements of the refugee experience. Its emergence was therefore dialectically linked to the rise of modern nation-states. As a fixed legal category, moreover, the refugee only came into being in 1951, when the Geneva Convention defined the term, agreed on the rights of the displaced, and specified the obligations of states to protect them. These state-focused and legalist approaches to the history of refugees have been challenged, however, by other migration scholars. They point to the many examples of expulsion, dislocation, and asylum that have been known in Europe,

Africa, and Asia since Antiquity. Indeed, some of the world's most revered religious texts, including the Hebrew Bible, Christian New Testament, and Islamic Quran, are replete with stories about flight and exile. There is also sufficient evidence that from the mid-fifteenth century the number of displaced people in the European orbit increased dramatically. Some have even dubbed the Reformation era the world's first refugee crisis. The need to address the premodern history of refugees is finally confirmed by evidence from linguistics. Contemporary sources reveal how the language of migration gradually shifted in Europe over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, categorizing different types of migrants. The emergence of the term refugee (in its many varieties) exemplifies this growing semantic sensibility.

Integrating these different strands in scholarship, this chapter will map the early modern history of refugees and explain how it interacted with the construction of refugee categories in Europe and the Atlantic world. Rather than pretending to offer a comprehensive overview of all refugee movements c. 1450–1750, it identifies some major groups, examines the forces that created their coerced migrations, and assesses the larger impact that refugees made on early modern societies.

Incentives

Seeking refuge could take a variety of forms in the early modern world. It could be voluntary or coerced, temporary or permanent, directed toward a particular destination, or part of a broader migratory experience. The incentives behind such displacements were equally diverse and defy easy categorizations. We can, however, distinguish a number of interrelated causes that drove and characterized forced migrations and assess the groups that were most affected by these. As the work of ancient and medieval scholars testifies, most of these causes were not particularly new, nor specific, to early modern Europe.

First, the demand for refuge could be the outcome of war and military violence. All major conflicts of the sixteenth century, including Germany's Peasants' War, the French Wars of Religion, and the Dutch Revolt, sparked substantial refugee movements on the continent. The latter conflict may have displaced as many as 200,000 men and women, which corresponds to roughly 10 percent of the population of the Low Countries. The growing internationalization of warfare in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries added to the growing numbers of war victims. The Thirty Years War (1618–1648), for example, displaced thousands of men and women, particularly in the

northeast and southwest of the German Empire. The city of Ulm, home to about 15,000 inhabitants in 1634, was said to have hosted no fewer than 8,000 war refugees in the 1630s. The depopulation of German war zones was mirrored by the growth of urban asylum towns. The population of Strasbourg doubled to 60,000 in March 1636 as refugees crowded into the Free Imperial City to escape the carnage.¹

The numbers of war refugees typically increased through a second, related set of causes: economic deprivation, ecological disaster, and epidemic diseases. During the Great Northern War (1700–1721), the Baltic region suffered from severe outbreaks of the plague, causing thousands of men and women to flee. These refugees became both victims and agents of the infectious pandemic, as their movements accelerated its spread into Sweden, Poland, and Prussia. Recent scholarship has asserted that climatic fluctuations during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries likewise affected agricultural production, fueling the outbreak of diseases and ecological crises. Severe droughts in Anatolia, in the heart of the Ottoman Empire, prompted what contemporaries called the Great Flight. Estimates suggest that between the 1570s and the 1640s the population of some Anatolian village communities declined by three-quarters.²

Changing economic demands served as a third incentive to flight. As forced labor, including Atlantic slavery and European serfdom, became more widespread, efforts to escape from them increased as well. Scholars have estimated that from the 1670s to the early 1700s no fewer than 350,000 peasants, among them 200,000 runaway serfs, moved from Central Russia to the southern periphery.³ In the Caribbean and the Americas, enslaved Africans frequently sought to escape plantation factories and household service. Some of these revolts were successful, and communities of runaway slaves or Maroons emerged, typically in remote, mountainous areas. A continuous threat to colonial authority, refugee slaves were the focus of numerous punitive military campaigns, such as the infamous Maroon War on British Jamaica in the 1730s.

These diverse examples also point to a gradual politicization of flight and the growing involvement of states. Both underpinned an important fourth incentive that was behind the rise of the refugee in the early modern

1 Peter Wilson, *Europe's Tragedy: A New History of the Thirty Years War* (London: Penguin, 2010).

2 Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 100–105.

3 Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 311.

period. The removal of dissenters and minorities developed into a common means of princes to enforce their authority, maintain social stability, or impose confessional unity in their realms. Legal banishment had long served as a control mechanism in societies where long-term imprisonment was uncommon. In Renaissance Italy, for example, exiling had been a popular tool of local authorities to outlaw criminals, expel deviants, and remove political rivals. These penal measures of migration were mostly aimed at individuals, but could also be imposed on families and even entire communities. Rebel leader William of Orange, for one, fled to his German estates in 1567 to escape retribution by Philip II's government in the Low Countries. Together with at least 10,000 other Netherlanders, he was subsequently banished *in absentia* by a special tribunal, the Council of Troubles. Throughout the early modern period, the households of exiled princes served as nuclei for larger refugee communities. After the lost battle of the White Mountain (1620), the self-styled King and Queen of Bohemia found a safe haven in The Hague, which subsequently developed into an asylum center for their followers. Paris and Rome were the preferred hubs of several ousted princely courts, including that of the British Stuarts after the Glorious Revolution of 1689.⁴

The politics of exile often had religious connotations. The persecution of heterodoxy had of course its ancient and medieval precedents, but confessional zeal would develop into a particularly powerful phenomenon in the wake of the Reformation. In contrast to older historiographic traditions, most scholars now contend that growing religious migrations in the sixteenth century were not kickstarted by Reformation disputes as such, but found their origin in deeper anxieties about uniformity. From the mid-fifteenth century, political centralization of European states coincided with socio-disciplining campaigns to forge more cohesive communities of faith. The removal of dissenters and religious minorities became a common means of authorities to create a more purified *corpus christianum*, or Christian body social. As Europe's religious landscape became divided into different confessional territories after the Reformation, repressed minorities also took the opportunity to move to areas that offered more religious freedoms. Various examples can illuminate the size, character, and impact of the Reformation's many migrations.

4 Christine Shaw, *The Politics of Exile in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Edward Corp, *A Court in Exile: The Stuarts in France, 1689–1718* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

The Reformation's Refugees

The displacement of religious minorities started well before Luther and Calvin took the stage. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Jews in Western Europe had increasingly been forced to convert to Christianity or to escape popular violence and legal harassment. In this repressive climate the Spanish monarchy took particularly drastic decisions. In 1492, the united monarchy of Castile and Aragon issued the Alhambra Decree, ordering the expulsion of all remaining practicing Jews from the Spanish kingdoms. The Jewish diaspora, consisting of at least 100,000 Sephardim, was followed by the gradual removal of about 300,000 Muslims or Moriscos from the Iberian Peninsula. The latter expulsions peaked in 1609–1614 and generated what is arguably the largest group of religious refugees of the early modern period. Meanwhile, the rise of Protestantism sparked tensions in Christian communities not used to the idea of a religiously divided society. The persecution of evangelical dissent by Catholic authorities prompted the flight of tens of thousands of men and women in the 1520s and 1530s. The outburst of civil war in France and the Habsburg Low Countries in the 1560s increased the numbers of predominantly Protestant refugees. A parallel, yet much smaller, movement of Catholic exiles emerged in areas where the government eventually turned Protestant, including in Henrician and Elizabethan England, parts of the Holy Roman Empire, Sweden, and the Dutch Republic.

With the rise of confessional states in the seventeenth century, questions about religious allegiance became increasingly intertwined with those about political authority. Evolving refugee movements during the Thirty Years War and the British Civil Wars (1640s) are therefore difficult to categorize under a uniform label. In the second half of the seventeenth century the Waldensian crises in Piedmont (1650s, 1680s) and the repression of Protestantism by Louis XIV in France (1680s) sparked a widely publicized exodus of about 150,000 Huguenots. Other Protestant minorities, including Socinians, Hutterites, Mennonites, and related Anabaptist denominations, were forced to migrate during a longer Reformation period, too. Many of these spread across Transylvania, Bohemia, Lithuania, and Poland. In contrast to Lutherans and Calvinists (Reformed Protestants), smaller Protestant minorities lacked the support of a confessional state and were therefore more dependent on local toleration policies. This was true for Jewish communities, too. Over the course of the seventeenth century, thousands of Ashkenazim in East-Central Europe sought safety from frenzied violence, shifting governmental policies, and dire economic circumstances by moving into Western European regions. Amsterdam, Hamburg, and London

developed into important hubs of migrating Ashkenazic communities. The displacement of about 20,000 Salzburg Lutherans from Austria in 1731–1732 has traditionally been seen as the last example of the Reformation's many migrations.

Islam, too, was affected by confessional migrations in a number of ways. The accommodation of 300,000 Moriscos from Spain transformed many outposts of the Ottoman Empire in the Mediterranean, including Tunis and Algiers. Simultaneously, the military successes of the Ottoman Turks sparked their own refugee movements. Despite a policy of religious coexistence, several Christian minorities moved from areas conquered by the sultanate. Greek Orthodox believers, for example, fled after the collapse of the Byzantine Empire and the taking of Constantinople in 1453. The Ottoman's main Islamic rivals, the Persian Safavid empire, added to the dislocation of minorities. From 1604, Shah Abbas the Great ordered the resettlement of thousands of Armenians to the Isfahan region. With the advancement of Shi'ism among Persian clergy, pressure increased on local Jewish communities to convert, which led many Jews to flee Baghdad by the mid-seventeenth century.⁵

The Reformation's refugee crisis had global repercussions. The diaspora of Sephardim in the Mediterranean gradually spread to the coasts of West Africa, Brazil, and the Americas, where Jews became brokers in expanding trading networks in the seventeenth century. English Puritans and German Protestant minorities flocked in substantial numbers to North America, in the hope of finding religious freedom and economic opportunity. The Huguenot exodus from France likewise led to colonial settlements in the Dutch Cape Colony of South Africa, British territories in North America, and the Caribbean ports of Tobago and Paramaribo (Suriname). Such global migrations could also be the outcome of continued movements within Europe. In the early 1520s, for example, about 8,000 Hutterites left Moravia. Movements through Bohemia and Transylvania in the following decades eventually took their descendants to North America in the early 1700s.⁶

This concise overview is necessarily incomplete, but brings out some important general characteristics. First, it demonstrates that confessional migrations became a common phenomenon in post-Reformation Europe, affecting all areas and denominations at some point. Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and Muslims shared a belief in, and commitment to, maintaining religious uniformity, and this confessional mindset also explains why victims

5 Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerard Wiegers, eds., *The Expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain: A Mediterranean Diaspora* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

6 Owen Stanwood, *The Global Refuge: Huguenots in an Age of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

frequently turned into persecutors. Second, it clarifies that confessional migrations followed from persecutory policies, but were equally informed by economic considerations and alternative options that were available to those involved. Not everyone could afford life in exile. Those who did, generally chose areas where they expected to be able to make a living and could build on existing support networks. The importance of material calculations is confirmed by the striking gender imbalance of many refugee communities. As a rule, men fled earlier and in larger numbers than women did. It appears that female relatives sometimes stayed at home to control the family's businesses and belongings, to follow their husbands at a later stage. Third, then, the Reformation's migrations complicate the notion of a single flight, directed toward a particular goal. A decision to move away regularly turned into an ongoing migratory experience. Numerous refugees returned within a couple of months, or continued their journeys elsewhere. In this way, confessional migrations interacted with many other forms of mobility, including economic travel, pilgrimage, and missionary activity.⁷

These conclusions are also pertinent for our understanding of the ways in which religious migrations were interpreted and remembered. However varied and blurred the underlying motivations of their movements may have been, religious minorities tended to frame their migrations in biblical categories with use of terms such as exile or diaspora, which resonated with well-known Old Testament narratives. Since many religious migrants became chroniclers and historians of their respective communities, their writings have infused later historiography with highly selective accounts and tropes. Recent scholars have therefore questioned the reliability of early modern refugee storytelling. Some have noted a tendency even among second- and third-generation offspring to rewrite their family's past into particular confessional scripts of exile. Seventeenth-century descendants of Hans Martens from Antwerp, for example, altered the written chronicle of their family to prove that Hans' migration from the city in the 1560s had been the result of religious persecution and exile.⁸ The rhetorical

7 Liesbeth Corens, *Confessional Mobility and English Catholics in Counter-Reformation Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, "Religious Refugees or Confessional Migrants? Perspectives from Early Modern Ireland," *Journal of Early Modern Christianity* 6 (2019), 3–18.

8 Johannes Müller, *Exile Memories and the Dutch Revolt: The Narrated Diaspora* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 135–138; Alexander Schunka, *Gäste, die bleiben: Zuwanderer in Kursachsen und der Oberlausitz im 17. und frühen 18. Jahrhundert* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2006); Jesse Spohnholz, *The Convent of Wesel: The Event That Never Was and the Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

power of these deceptively uniform narratives has proven very difficult to combat and has had profound consequences for the development of the concept of refugee itself.

The Concept of Refugee

Religious conflict goes a long way toward explaining the rising numbers of displaced persons in early modern Europe and the Atlantic world. At the same time, it elucidates the discursive invention of the concept of refugee. Well into the sixteenth century, contemporaries hardly distinguished between different types of mobility. Refugee as a term or a distinct social or legal category did not yet exist, as dictionaries from the period attest. In the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, a new discourse about migration gradually emerged as displaced minorities experimented with a new set of terms to describe their particular position in society. In an effort to make sense of their misery and to mobilize support for their cause, many turned to the language of exile, taken from biblical and classical texts. These revered intellectual resources enabled displaced men and women to present themselves as partakers of a long, Christian tradition and to foster a more heroic interpretation of the confusing experiences of expulsion and flight. Among Protestant dissenters, for example, it became common to compare evangelical refugees to the chosen people of Israel, who had suffered exile in biblical times themselves. In Lutheran and Reformed circles, the concept of religious exile had developed into an established topos by the end of the sixteenth century.

Presenting oneself as reenactor of a revered biblical tradition was not a specifically Protestant phenomenon, though. Diaspora narratives had long served as markers of identity among scattered Jewish communities. In the later sixteenth century, groups of displaced Catholics appropriated similar rhetorical models. Although the concept of exile seems to have been less popular than it was in Protestant circles, Catholic refugees drew on a number of ecclesiological commonplaces to reinvent themselves as part of a proud Catholic history of martyrs, missionaries, and pilgrims. Moriscos, too, turned to the catalog of flight narratives in the Quran, including the wanderings of the prophet Ibrahim. However different their belief systems, each of these confessional rivals explored arguments and models that contributed to more respectable readings of the experience of displacement.

It was in these circles of victimized yet combative religious migrants that exile narratives were enriched with particular refugee vocabularies. The French

verb *se réfugier*, for instance, had medieval origins, but its past participle *réfugié* gradually became used as a noun and hence an indicator of identity. Although most textbooks claim that the term refugee was coined by Huguenots in the 1680s, contemporary sources suggest a much earlier, Catholic origin. In 1585, the Spanish-Habsburg government already used *les réfugiés* to single out what they called “good Catholics” who had escaped Protestant violence in the Low Countries. Being a refugee, in this context, thus implied a particular type of migrant who had become the victim of Protestant aggression and deserved solidarity and support from Catholic co-religionists. The concept of refugee gained wider recognition after it was cleverly exploited by Huguenot publicists after 1685, who also turned it into a Protestant myth. Well into the eighteenth century, the refugee remained a confessionalized and hence contested term. Used as a rhetorical strategy by opposing groups, being a refugee could mean different things to different people.⁹

The activism of repressed religious minorities explains why many other early modern victims of flight (from war violence, economic deprivation, or climate change) were generally not seen, or indeed did not see themselves, as refugees. It was the language of religion that first provided displaced men and women in Europe with a distinct refugee identity, which aligned their experiences with venerable precedents and set them apart from other, unprivileged migrants. As the expression of confessional exclusivity, exile and refugee vocabulary was not always deemed useful or feasible, for example for those who aimed for social assimilation or economic integration into host communities. Even committed confessional migrants used refugee terminology selectively as a discursive strategy to describe themselves, depending on context, audience, and purpose.

Refugee Aid and Humanitarian Zeal

The growing respectability of the refugee in confessional circles translated into a culture of embryonic humanitarianism. It is notable that early forms of organized refugee aid and humanitarian zeal seem to have originated from the agency of the victims themselves. As historians of the Reformation have remarked, the experience of exile abroad generated a sense of group-bonding among various Protestant dissenters in the sixteenth century. In asylum

⁹ Geert H. Janssen, “The Legacy of Exile and the Rise of Humanitarianism,” in *Remembering the Reformation*, ed. Brian Cummings, Ceri Law, Karis Riley, and Alexandra Walsham (London: Routledge, 2020), 226–242.

towns such as Geneva, Emden, and London, groups of evangelical refugees often made use of the same church institutions, charitable facilities, and confessional media. Some have even claimed that Calvinism was grounded in such unifying, international exile experiences. Although several scholars have recently complicated the confessionalization effects of exile, there is no doubt that displacement forged international bonds and new solidarities. A similar development can be observed among scattered Sephardi communities in Venice and Amsterdam, where the experience of diaspora encouraged re-Judaization and fostered charitable mentalities. More recently, historians have pointed to the rising appetite for a kind of International Catholicism among Catholic expatriate communities in the later sixteenth century.¹⁰

Such informal refugee support networks would pave the way for more professionalized aid campaigns in the following decades. In the seventeenth century, international aid to co-religionist refugees would develop into a popular tool of confessional expression. During the Thirty Years War, for example, large-scale relief efforts and church collections were organized among Protestant congregations in England and the Dutch Republic. A powerful Protestant printing press underpinned the notion of a transnational Reformed world and the responsibility of believers to help their brethren abroad. During the troubles in Ireland, the Spanish monarchy on its part felt obliged to support and accommodate Catholic Irish emigrants. It is no coincidence that, in the same period, Jews in Hamburg and Amsterdam set up fundraising schemes for repressed Ashkenazi Jews in East-Central Europe. Many of these competing yet parallel humanitarian campaigns also shared an ambiguous agenda. On the one hand, they fueled a sense of transnational solidarity and identification with the suffering of co-religionists abroad. Yet, on the other hand, fundraising campaigns were often shaped by domestic concerns and aimed to keep foreign refugees at a comfortable distance by providing funds for local aid.¹¹

Recognizing the potential of this emerging cult of transnational charity, the Huguenots made effective use of it during the troubles of the 1680s. In popular media, the varied motivations of fleeing Huguenots were effectively reduced

10 Geert H. Janssen, *The Dutch Revolt and Catholic Exile in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

11 Ole P. Grell, *Brethren in Christ: A Calvinist Network in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Ciaran O'Sceá, *Surviving Kinsale: Irish Emigration and Identity Formation in Early Modern Spain 1601–40* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015); Yosef Kaplan, *An Alternative Path to Modernity: The Sephardi Diaspora in Western Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

to a standardized script of exile in which the current exodus was presented as the latest example of a long history of Catholic barbaric terror. By exploiting the printing press, Huguenot publicists were able to inform Protestant audiences across Europe about their suffering and to spur their co-religionists abroad into action. In Switzerland and the Holy Roman Empire, escape routes for Huguenots were established in 1685, including regional distribution centers and *chambres des réfugiés*, for which funds were raised in Protestant churches all over the continent. The innovative language and infrastructure of the Huguenot aid campaign would resonate during the refugee crises that followed in the early eighteenth century. In the 1730s, for example, the expulsion of Salzburg Lutherans generated a similar European refugee support effort that was as much an act of transnational solidarity as an expression of confessional self-fashioning.¹² While these emerging humanitarian mentalities were thus firmly confessionalized, seventeenth-century sources also show the parallel development of more secular narratives, in which refugees were portrayed as victims of what contemporaries called barbarity. In England and the Dutch Republic, for example, a language of non-confessional empathy and even humanity was introduced in popular pamphleteering in the 1650s. Three decades later it served, among other things, to encourage Catholic and Jewish citizens in Dutch towns to contribute to the accommodation of Huguenot refugees. In contrast to claims in older Enlightenment scholarship, these secular arguments did not so much replace older, confessional ones in the eighteenth century. Rather, it appears that the two could coexist and were even applied flexibly, depending on purpose and audience.

Accommodation and Impact

Despite the popularity of transnational refugee charity, the arrival and accommodation of displaced minorities met with mixed responses. As a rule, early modern communities were not well equipped to host large numbers of newcomers. Housing was limited and foreigners were generally excluded from guilds and urban welfare facilities. In some towns, (former) religious convents were transformed temporarily into asylum centers during periods of humanitarian crisis. Yet urban records also reveal how authorities sought to limit entry to their towns or note the dire living conditions of refugees unable to find

12 David van der Linden, *Experiencing Exile: Huguenot Refugees in the Dutch Republic, 1680–1700* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015); Mack Walker, *The Salzburg Transaction: Expulsion and Redemption in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

shelter. In war-ridden Amsterdam in the 1570s, for example, refugees had to show written proof of their impeccable Catholicism before they were allowed to enter the city. These examples have created an image of societies inherently hostile to refugees. More recently, scholars such as Benjamin Kaplan and Susanne Lachenicht have pointed to more positive attitudes toward (particular groups of) refugees.¹³ These could be grounded in humanitarian arguments, but equally important was calculated self-interest. More specifically, the refugees' search for protection frequently interacted with the economic, global, sociopolitical, or military ambitions of early modern authorities.

In an age of mercantilism, the accommodation of skilled artisans and wealthy entrepreneurs was widely seen as profitable. In the 1560s, Protestant refugees from Flanders were allowed to settle in English towns such as Norwich because of their familiarity with lucrative drapery industries. Sephardim were kindled to settle in Amsterdam in the 1600s because their financial services and business contacts in the Mediterranean could expand the city's commercial reach. The actual economic impact of these different refugee groups often remains uncertain, though. There is little doubt that Antwerp entrepreneurs who flocked to Amsterdam after the Habsburg conquest (1585) contributed to Holland's economic boom in the following decades. But the economic contribution of the Huguenot refuge seems to have been more limited than contemporary publicists and later historians have claimed. The artistic and intellectual achievements of refugees have generally received more positive assessments. Although few scholars still claim that the exodus of Greek scholars after the fall of Constantinople (1453) marked the beginning of Renaissance humanism in Italy, refugees greatly facilitated the spreading of science and knowledge more generally. The works of intellectual figureheads such as René Descartes, Jan Amos Komensky [Comenius], Benedict de Spinoza, and John Locke were all informed by the experience of refuge and dislocation. Immigrant artists also reinforced the creative cosmopolitanism of hubs such as sixteenth-century Venice, seventeenth-century Amsterdam, and eighteenth-century London. The Huguenot diaspora in particular transformed the media industries of England, Switzerland, and the Netherlands.

Apart from their capital, networks, or skills, refugees could be regarded as useful in the expansion schemes of globalizing states. Maritime powers such as England and the Dutch Republic greatly relied on the influx of refugees

13 Benjamin J. Kaplan, "The Legal Rights of Religious Refugees in the 'Refugee-Cities' of Early Modern Germany," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 32, 1 (2019), 86–105; Susanne Lachenicht, "Refugees and Refugee Protection in the Early Modern World," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 30, 2 (2017), 261–281.

and other immigrants to fulfill their ambitions overseas. With a population of about 1.5 million, the United Provinces was far too small to maintain a global trading empire in Asia, Africa, and the Americas. Estimates suggest that about half of the seafaring employees of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) came, in fact, from abroad. Protestant refugees from Germany and elsewhere also filled the ranks of Reformed clergy that were sent to Dutch colonies. From the 1650s, the magistrates of Amsterdam used the new medium of the printed newspaper to advertise attractive conditions for Protestant refugees from elsewhere in Europe who were willing to move to the city's American colony of New Amstel (Delaware). In the troubled 1680s, Waldensian refugees from Piedmont and Huguenots from France were likewise recruited for the Dutch colony in South Africa.

Other early modern states saw refugees primarily as an asset in their political and religious policies. Hosting minorities of the right denominational color could help to populate distant areas, confessionalize newly acquired regions, and hence strengthen state control. Already in the early seventeenth century, a number of German princes had experimented with accommodation schemes for religious dissenters, by establishing *Exulantenstädte* (refugee cities). Here, immigrants received special rights to settle, including privileges such as tax freedoms, and were sometimes given dedicated urban space. Brandenburg-Prussia explicitly welcomed escaping Huguenots in the 1680s, in an attempt to cultivate parts of East-Prussia, reinvigorate local industries in the Berlin region, and enforce Protestant state control in the expanding Prussian territories. A similar strategy was explored by the Ottoman sultanate, who appointed expelled Moriscos to key positions in its growing bureaucracy. In the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Moriscos served as dedicated diplomats of the sultan and seem to have furthered the confessionalization of Islam as well. In addition, there could be military gain in attracting refugees. The Spanish-Habsburg armies, for example, included sizable Irish-Catholic regiments, whose commitment to the Catholic cause was beyond doubt. Huguenot refugee-soldiers were routinely incorporated in William III's military enterprise against Louis XIV, the monarch who was held responsible for international Protestant suffering.

The economic, confessional, and military potential of refugees explains their considerable negotiating power. For all their misery, religious migrants in particular were often able to lobby for attractive settlement privileges, such as freedom of worship, citizenship, lucrative fiscal arrangements, and land ownership. The negotiating leverage of refugees has been highlighted in particular regarding the Edict of Potsdam of 1685. Issued by the

Great-Elector of Brandenburg, it formalized a catalog of special privileges for Huguenots. Because its articles were subsequently copied by other lobbying refugee groups, the Edict – unintentionally – established a model of refugee protection in the eighteenth century. The standardization of refugee protection laws was simultaneously shaped by the works of scholars such as Francesco de Vitoria, Hugo Grotius, and Samuel von Pufendorf. Grotius, for one, argued in the early 1600s that the United Provinces had a natural duty to offer hospitality to strangers, including Jews. Such legal arguments, based on natural law thinking, interacted with a discourse of humanity and even human rights that emerged in popular media of the later seventeenth century and eighteenth centuries.¹⁴

The privileges and other legal rights that groups of refugees managed to secure for themselves also allowed them to remain a separate group within host communities. In seemingly disparate places such as Venice, Amsterdam, and Berlin, the accommodation of refugees and other immigrants involved the creation of segregated, parallel communities within the urban fabric. Local authorities allowed particular groups of refugees to organize themselves religiously, but also compelled them to take care of their own welfare facilities and educational institutions. For confessional migrants who sought religious freedom and enjoyed tax freedoms, social or economic assimilation may not have been their principal goal either. As a result, historians have argued that the rise of refugee settlement arrangements in the early modern period inhibited processes of social integration. Some migration scholars have suggested it took one or two generations before refugee identities faded and descendants merged into local communities. Still, as recent studies have shown, an appetite for religious exclusivity did not necessarily exclude social incorporation in other civic spheres, such as guilds, neighborhoods, or forms of sociability. Thus, processes of integration and segregation could go together. This conclusion is also pertinent for our understanding of the development of refugee identities in the early modern world. Diasporic identities were sometimes deliberately cultivated, or even reinvented, by second and third generations if they could be used for contemporary concerns or fit local traditions. In the Dutch Republic, refugee credentials (real and imagined) were cherished by families who used them as a token of pride and respectability.¹⁵

14 Lachenicht, “Refugees and Refugee Protection”; Marc de Wilde, “Seeking Refuge: Grotius on Exile, Expulsion and Asylum,” *Journal of the History of International Law* 20 (2018), 471–500.

15 Müller, *Exile Memories*; Alexander Schunka, “Konfession und Migrationsregime in der Frühen Neuzeit,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 35 (2009), 28–63.

Conclusion

Early modern refugees have long been presented as the anonymous outsiders of European history and the marginalized victims of modernizing states. In recent years, historians have added more shading to this dominant picture, emphasizing the visibility, agency, and impact of various refugee groups. This strand of scholarship has demonstrated that early modern states did not just create refugees; refugees also created early modern states. Because the needs and desires of displaced minorities regularly aligned with the agendas of princes, religious refugees in particular had more leverage in their host societies than has sometimes been assumed. As victims and agents of empire, they were also instrumental in the global expansion of trading networks in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The early modern history of refugees finally invites us to rethink the origins of the concept of refugee itself. Prompted by a desire to distance themselves from other migrants, those who identified themselves as refugees made use of a malleable discursive strategy that served particular groups of confessional migrants in specific ways. Asserting claims of legal protection, religious freedom, and international solidarity, these activist religious minorities nevertheless paved the way for a lasting culture of empathy and humanitarianism that went on to shape sensibilities in the modern world and into the present.

Further Reading

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