



Call for Papers

Who is a Refugee?

Concepts of Exile, Refuge, and Asylum, c. 1750–1850

ERC Project “Atlantic Exiles: Refugees and Revolution in the Atlantic World, 1770s-1820s”

University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany

30 June - 1 July 2022

The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, signed at Geneva on 28 July 1951, defined who is eligible for and what constitutes asylum for refugees under international law. Its universal expansion in 1967 remains the cornerstone for today’s global refugee regime, which has shaped the legal definition of the refugee and rights to asylum for over fifty years. Well before the second half of the twentieth century, however, the term *refugee* and related concepts were used, debated, shaped and mobilized by a variety of historical actors and state authorities in different regions of the world. And despite being inscribed in international law, refugee status and asylum remain contested and politicized, and continue to apply unevenly to people fleeing violence and oppression.

This workshop seeks to build upon the emerging field of refugee history by focusing on the transition and overlap between early modern and modern periods. Scholars of early modern Europe have studied how the trajectories of religious refugees brought about new languages of “humanitarian” aid and belonging. Historians of the major political upheavals across the Atlantic world and beyond have increasingly focused on the emergence of mass political migration as a new category of refugee that would shape national and international concepts of exile and asylum during the nineteenth century, and after. Cutting across the division of (early modern) religious vs. (modern) political exile, scholars have refined our understanding of the categories at play in the forced migration and flight of (formerly) enslaved and Indigenous men and women. Religious and political involuntary migration was not isolated from other movements of people fleeing violence or being removed violently in and beyond the Atlantic world. The diversity of refugee migrations traversed states and empires, and so did the refugee experience and concepts. Still, concepts of being a refugee and granting refuge were applied unevenly and remained contested and malleable across societies at a global scale.

Against this backdrop, the workshop sets out to discuss empirically grounded reflections on concepts of refugee, exile, and asylum during the transitional period of c.1750-1850. We ask, who was a refugee, and on what grounds? How did one claim to be a refugee? How was asylum granted and by whom? What constituted the experience of exile, and how was it narrated? Who was denied the status of refugee? How translatable were the concepts of refugee, exile, and asylum across societies? And what other terms might overlap with the

concept of *refugee* or replace it? To what extent did these concepts create distinctions between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” forms of mobility? This workshop seeks to explore new historiographical and analytical approaches that cut across well-established specialized subfields and deeply engrained binary categories (e.g. religious vs. political; early modern vs. modern; free vs. enslaved etc.), as well as national and imperial boundaries. We particularly welcome fresh work from historians and social scientists working in the fields of conceptual history, legal history, diplomatic history, migration history, colonial studies, early humanitarianism, and histories of slavery. Contributions beyond the Northern Atlantic will be appreciated.

Possible topics include (but are not limited to):

- Intersections of race, gender, class, religion, nation (in a broad sense), and legal status (free / unfree) in shifting definitions of refugees and identification (or not) as refugee; and how such categories affected refugees’ interactions with state (or other) authorities and each other.
- Distinctions (or lack thereof) between labels of refugee, migrant, émigré, exile, asylum-seeker etc., their various legal, social, political, spatial etc. dimensions.
- Narrative use of concepts in accounts about individuals or groups labeled or described as refugees during or following their migration, including self-narratives, petitioning etc.
- Concepts in institutional governance of refugee migration and their transformations, including: administrative practices of identification, registration and control; regimes of refugee protection, relief and their transformations (e.g. the persistence or “secularization” of religious sanctuary and free soil policies; politicization).
- Conceptual histories that ask which populations were not considered refugees, or other notions of asylum or refuge that do not align with Western categories.
- Inter- and intra-state (imperial, national) transfers of concepts; international legal concepts and their uses by institutions and historical actors.
- Historical roots of modern-day asylum rights (e.g. the emergence of principles of non-refoulement; debates on (non)-extradition; the overlap of human rights and asylum) or *longue durée* histories of asylum.
- Potentials and pitfalls of applying today’s notions of refugee to historical cases.

The workshop language will be English. The organizers will cover basic expenses for travel and accommodation.

Submission:

Please submit a proposal of 400 words and a short CV of two pages by **30 November 2021** to atlantic-exiles@uni.due.de, under the following header:

Surname_AtlanticExiles_Whoisarefugee

This workshop is organized and hosted by the ERC Project *Atlantic Exiles: Refugees and Revolution in the Atlantic World, 1770s-1820s* (<https://www.uni-due.de/atlantic-exiles/>).