

H-France Forum

Volume 17 (2022), Issue 6, #3

Owen Stanwood, *The Global Refuge: Huguenots in an Age of Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. xii + 295 pp. Maps, figures, notes, and index. \$36.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-19-026474-1.

Review Essay by Joy Palacios, University of Calgary

Histories of early modern France tend to focus on Paris and nearby Versailles as a self-contained world, home to the seat of absolutism, the rise of the professional theaters, the *hôtels* where men and women of letters gathered in salons, and so many of the seminaries and pulpits that nourished the French Catholic reformation. For reasons both practical and ideological, scholarship on France's colonies similarly occupies its own sphere. Any project with ambitions to connect these worlds by retracing the movement of early modern French peoples around the globe faces significant obstacles, including the cost and logistics of archival research across the full breadth of an early modern empire and the impulse to embed each former colony's history in the narrative of one of today's nation states. New France's position as "early Canada" in North American historiography, for example, provides an incentive to view its story in isolation from other French colonial endeavors. A growing number of studies push for a more expansive and integrated history of early modern French activity and expression. For the theater, Lauren Clay uncovers the history of theater-building and performance in eighteenth-century France's provinces and its colonial holdings in the West Indies.[1] Shenwen Li compares the strategies of French Jesuit missionaries in New France and China.[2] And Céline Carayon examines non-verbal communication between French colonists and indigenous people throughout the French Atlantic.[3] Yet, studies that examine early modern France as an empire remain rare.

Owen Stanwood joins these efforts. *The Global Refuge: Huguenots in an Age of Empire* offers a bold, big story of French empire that zooms in with fine detail to colonial outposts around the world as it recounts the history of Huguenot migration after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes through the decades following the French Revolution. Three layers interweave in Stanwood's account, a geopolitical layer that reveals the dynamics of competition between empires, an institutional layer that reconstructs the mechanisms that transferred resources, information, and people around the world, and an individual layer filled with dramatic stories of the personal adventure, dreams, and loss experienced by Huguenots as they sought refuge outside France. Like dye that runs across fabric to gather at and reveal its seams, Stanwood's focus on the movement of Huguenots at the edges of the empire leverages the micro to reveal the macro. His method and structure illuminate shifts in imperial relations among European powers and cultural transformations from an age of monarchs to an age of revolutions and republics. *The Global Refuge* sets a high bar for anyone wanting to tackle an empire-sized research question.

Above and beyond the book's thoughtful historical arguments, *The Global Refuge* resonates in a time still witness to refugee crises. To name just three of the book's important implications, it shows how a focus on minorities reveals the workings of power, how national and religious identities are supple over time, and how a minority group's reputation matters perhaps more than

their track record to help them survive and flourish in diaspora. In regard to the first, Henri Duquesne's plans to establish a Huguenot colony on a remote island as a new "Eden" demonstrates how competition at the geopolitical level reshaped theologically inspired projects in surprising ways at the level of lived experience. As Stanwood explains, Duquesne's idea was to find "a *tabula rasa* where Huguenots could build a republic of their own" to work out their salvation in peace (p. 57), instead of seeking patronage from existing powers. To find a suitable island and send refugees to it, though, Duquesne needed resources from institutions like the Dutch East India Company and had to appeal to the political pressures faced by their governments. Consequently, while Duquesne promised settlers a utopian refuge "on a deserted island" (p. 122), he "represented the Eden colonists as an invasion force" to convince the Dutch of the project's merits (p. 122), which in the end led him to dump a small group of eight male refugees on a different, nearby island without explanation while he tried to gather intelligence and assemble fighters (pp. 122-3). The eight stranded Huguenots (who did eventually escape) show how religious ideas were enacted within the constraints of global power, and sometimes became unrecognizable: competition between the Dutch, English, and French for militarily strategic locales turned Eden into hell.

Although in many ways a French story, it is no mistake that the terms "France" and "French" do not figure in Stanwood's title. In relation to scholarship on early modern France, the global story of Huguenot refugees marginalizes the usual characters of king, court, and nobles and highlights the suppleness of national and religious identities over time. What it meant to be a Huguenot was in constant flux during the period studied by Stanwood, which means they often evade easy categorization. Stanwood's method of organizing his material proves an effective way to deal with the difficulty of placing Huguenots, over the long duration of their history, in neatly packaged cultural and political boxes. Structured thematically and more or less chronologically, Stanwood recounts different aspects of individual people's stories over the course of the book, in light of themes such as Huguenot utopian aspirations, the Huguenots' reputation as good workers with specialized skills, and the tension exiles navigated between autonomy and assimilation. Duquesne's Isle of Eden, for example, features in almost every chapter, the full story blossoming slowly as each theme sheds light on a different angle. Although these themes represent mainstays of research on the Huguenots, Stanwood paints them with unparalleled scope. As families appear and reappear in Stanwood's account, their lives demonstrate the broader shifts elucidated by the book. At the beginning of the story in the 1680s, Pierre Jurieu's apocalyptic vision emphasized the Huguenot's Frenchness alongside their Protestantism and inspired the first refugees to aspire to build autonomous communities—preferably not too far from home—in the hope of preserving the French reformed church and returning to France. Within a century, however, "assimilated Huguenot[s]" (p. 227), like John and Henry Laurens in South Carolina, spoke little French and viewed their heritage as a point of pride but not as the determining factor of their identities.

In the first decades after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, however, the Frenchness of the Huguenots enabled their mobility, a phenomenon Stanwood examines in chapter three. France's enemies actively recruited Huguenots to their colonies because they believed the French to have specialized skills as producers of wine and silk, a perception the Huguenots fostered. Even though none of the places where Huguenots settled became mass producers of either product—and in some regions, like the Cape of Good Hope, Dutch and German settlers made as much or more wine than the French (p. 102)—as Stanwood shows in chapter seven, the Huguenot's supposed expertise in wine and silk continued to motivate a new wave of projects in the 1740s-1770s aimed

at helping Huguenots still in France relocate to places like the Americas. Some Huguenots did, of course, possess these sought-after skills. As Stanwood argues in chapter six, their bilingualism, biculturalism, and extended interpersonal networks across the Protestant world further positioned the Huguenots to make themselves “particularly useful” (p. 168) as they climbed the ranks in English and Dutch institutions like the military, the Anglican Church, and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. Nonetheless, one aspect of the Huguenot story remains how their positive reputation and strategic self-positioning as a chosen people facilitated their ability to thrive in lands not their own.

Thanks to the way Stanwood’s work establishes the broad strokes of a global story for the early modern Huguenots, it invites further research with the same geographic scope on features of the Huguenot experience not explored by *The Global Refuge*. Most obviously and urgently, Stanwood’s research will hopefully inspire a far-reaching account of Huguenot women in diaspora, given that *The Global Refuge* tells an almost exclusively male story. In this, Stanwood is not alone. Raymond A. Mentzer and Bertrand Van Ruymbeke’s *A Companion to the Huguenots* likewise devotes almost no attention to women in diaspora.[4] Granted, fewer sources provide firsthand insight into Huguenot women’s lives in the refuge, but such sources do exist. Memoires provide one place to start, like those written by Marie de La Rochefoucauld and her daughter Suzanne de Robillard de Champagné, or by Anne Marguerite Petit du Noyer.[5] Carolyn Chappell Lougee’s work in *Facing the Revocation* provides a model for such a project by reconstructing Marie de La Rochefoucauld’s diasporic experience.[6] Nonetheless, scholarship on the Huguenots awaits a comparative study of Huguenot women in the global refuge.

For this reader, Stanwood’s global account also aroused hunger for an empire-scale study of Huguenot worship in diaspora. Stanwood touches on church size and governance, especially in chapter four (“Disappearing to Survive”), as well as on the absorption of some Huguenot congregations into the Church of England. He also details the movement of pastors from place to place and recounts more than one tale of congregations splitting, all of which give some sense of Huguenot religious life in the refuge. What is missing is a picture of the liturgical and devotional activities of a people who left their homeland precisely to continue enacting their faith in keeping with their conscience. It would be unfair to ask a book that already interweaves geopolitical, institutional, and individual layers to add yet another *couche* to its already impressive scope. Like Huguenot women, though, Huguenot worship also awaits a historian to pull together the disparate microhistories of individual churches in diaspora to craft a broad account of Huguenot religious life in the refuge.[7]

The questions of women and worship signal the fruitful avenues for research opened by Stanwood. For readers new to the study of the Huguenots, *The Global Refuge*’s scope makes it an ideal gateway to further study, while for those already acquainted with the Huguenots its reach inspires new ways to approach old questions.

NOTES

[1] Lauren Clay, *Stagestruck: The Business of Theater in Eighteenth-Century France and Its Colonies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

[2] Shenwen Li, *Stratégies missionnaires des jésuites français en Nouvelle-France et en Chine au XVIIe siècle* (Saint-Nicolas, Québec: Les Presses de l’Université de Laval/L’Harmattan, 2001).

[3] Céline Carayon, *Eloquence Embodied: Nonverbal Communication among French and Indigenous Peoples in the Americas* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

[4] Mentzer and Van Ruymbeke's collection does include a chapter on women Huguenots in France before the Revocation. See Amanda Eurich, "Women in Huguenot Community," in Raymond A. Mentzer and Bertrand Van Ruymbeke eds., *A Companion to the Huguenots* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), pp. 118–49.

[5] Carolyn Lougee Chappell, "'The Pains I Took to Save My/His Family': Escape Accounts by a Huguenot Mother and Daughter after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes," *French Historical Studies* 22, no. 1 (1999): 1–64, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/286701>; Henriette Goldwyn, "Mme Du Noyer: Dissident Memorialist of the Huguenot Diaspora," in Colette H. Winn and Donna Kuizenga eds., *Women Writers in Pre-Revolutionary France: Strategies of Emancipation* (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 117–26; For a list of other Huguenot memoirs, some of which are by women, see Carolyn Chappell Lougee, "Huguenot Memoirs," in Raymond A. Mentzer and Bertrand Van Ruymbeke eds., *A Companion to the Huguenots* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), pp. 342–47.

[6] Carolyn Chappell Lougee, *Facing the Revocation: Huguenot Families, Faith, and the King's Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[7] For two examples of local histories on which a global study could build, see Francis W. Cross, *History of the Walloon and Huguenot Church at Canterbury* (London: Huguenot Society, 1998); Margaret Middleton Rivers Eastman et al., *The Huguenot Church in Charleston* (Charleston, S. Carolina: The History Press, 2018).

Joy Palacios
University of Calgary
Joy.palacios@ucalgary.ca

Copyright © 2022 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and its location on the H-France website. No republication or distribution by print media will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France.

H-France Forum
Volume 17 (2022), Issue 6, #3