CHAPTER EIGHT

THE HUGUENOTS IN BRITISH AND HANOVERIAN EXTERNAL RELATIONS IN THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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The impact of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes on European history was extraordinary. It prompted a huge population movement around France's borders and beyond. Wherever the Huguenots went they changed fundamentally the societies where initially they sought refuge and eventually found a home. Huguenot craftsmen and designers transformed their new surroundings and the networks of Huguenot exiles were able to use connections, familial and otherwise, to further trade in an increasingly capitalised European market. Beyond cultural and economic change, though, the Huguenot diaspora had other impacts. News, as well as trade, was able to flow easily across Europe, thanks to Huguenot connections. Information, of course, had an economic value in its own right, as Jürgen Habermas and others have argued.¹ Yet the transfer of information could also be turned easily towards more political purposes. Assimilation was not the only option for first-generation exiles. They continued to hope that the ebb and flow of European politics might be turned to their advantage in the specific sense that something might be done to humble Louis XIV and allow the return of Huguenots to their homeland. As time went by, and the prospects of this happening began to fade, Huguenot energies were turned towards a more general aspiration. Huguenot propagandists and leaders found themselves acting as Europe's conscience, arguing the case for religious toleration and calling on Europe's protestant princes to defend their co-religionists when they were threatened with persecution.

To explore all of these themes lies beyond the scope of this chapter. Yet within its compass it is possible to pursue several interesting lines of enquiry. Much fruitful work has been done on what might be called the ‘local’ dimension to Huguenot studies – exploring the impact of diaspora communities in their new surroundings and, with the aid of extensive genealogical study, discussing how those communities evolved and changed over time.\(^2\) There is enormous value in such work and it is an excellent example of the ways in which the concerns of ‘professional’ historical practitioners and amateur contributors can overlap and cross-fertilise in important and stimulating ways. However, there is also considerable value in seeking to put the Huguenot story into a broader context of international experience and encounter.

In recent years there has been a strong move away from writing history within a national context and boundaries. Much emphasis has been placed on how connected the world was, even before the twenty first century. It is not entirely coincidental that this move has taken place within a world in which the processes of globalisation are clear for all to see – from the instantaneous contacts made possible by the rise of global communications technology, through the huge growth in air travel overcoming borders and broadening perspectives to the increasingly global nature of problems from financial crises and terrorism to the challenges posed by how to continue to support life on the planet. While the move towards a more supranational perspective on historical writing may be as tied to contemporary concerns as other important historiographical shifts, there is merit to it nevertheless. Huguenot history, with its inbuilt sense of the global, has much to offer transnational perspectives. As this chapter will demonstrate, Huguenots thought about themselves as belonging to a community that could not be confined within national borders and used this insight to make claims on behalf of Protestants as a whole.

The court was also an important institution in many European countries and historians have become increasingly interested in it in recent years. As this chapter shows, courts offered a variety of opportunities for Huguenots. They were centres of conspicuous cultural consumption and therefore offered opportunities for the employment of skilled craftsmen and painters.\(^3\) Yet court patronage did not stop with

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\(^3\) The essays in Vigne & Littleton, *Strangers*, part III, serve to open up this theme.