Dr. Sharif Youssef
Visiting Assistant Professor at Amherst College

The Long Refugee Crisis

The refugee is a literary invention. How is it that Anglo-American literature conceptualized the refugee first and with greater complexity than law did? Sharif Youssef turns to eighteenth-century texts such as Daniel Defoe’s A Journal of the Plague Year and J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur Letters from an American Farmer to trace how the concept of the refugee emerges together with the idea of the liberal nation-state. The figure of the refugee creates a crisis for the state, requiring ethically complex decision-making that reveals the limits of political governance.

Sharif Youssef is Visiting Assistant Professor at Amherst College. His book project, The Actuarial Form, is about the emergence of the categories of risk and information in the use of mass casualty statistics in eighteenth-century works of literature and political economy.