Press Release

Washington, September 10, 2019

ERC Starting Grant for German Historical Institute Researcher

Dr. Jan C. Jansen, research fellow at the German Historical Institute Washington (GHI) was awarded a Starting Grant by the European Research Council, ERC, for his project “Atlantic Exiles: Refugees and Revolution in the Atlantic World, 1770s–1820s.”

Each year, the European Research Council (ERC) awards grants to the most promising early-career researchers to run groundbreaking research projects in Europe. The ERC Starting Grant provides funding of up to 1.5 million euros for a period of up to five years. From a total of 3,106 applicants, 408 researchers from all disciplines were considered for this year’s grant competition (https://erc.europa.eu/news/StG-recipients-2019). GHI research fellow Jan C. Jansen succeeded in securing the highly-coveted award. The funding will help him to build up his own research team and conduct pioneering research. The ERC Starting Grants this year amounted to a total of 621 million euros and form a part of the EU research and innovation program "Horizon 2020."

Jan C. Jansen has been a research fellow at the German Historical Institute Washington since 2014. Jansen’s project explores comparatively the large-scale refugee movements set off by the revolutions in North and South America, France, and Haiti. “The ‘age of revolutions has been often considered a pivotal moment in the rise of Western political modernity and the emergence of new notions of sovereignty, citizenship and political participation,” Jansen explains. “It was, however, also intertwined with the emergence of political refugees as a mass phenomenon.” The great political upheavals and the violent conflicts that accompanied them put well over a quarter million people on the move. Based on case studies from the Caribbean and the American continent, the project sets out to show that political migrants and refugee movements were at the very core of major transformations that the Atlantic world underwent during these momentous decades. It examines (1) the role they played in the reshaping of citizenship and subjecthood regimes; (2) their impact on changing practices of welfare and early forms of humanitarianism; (3) the ways they navigated the porous and shifting boundaries between freedom and slavery; and (4) how they contributed to making exile a transnational field of politics. While there is growing consensus that revolutionary ideas and actors in the Atlantic basin can no longer be studied in isolation, those who opposed and fled these revolutions have received strikingly little attention thus far. The project seeks to break new
ground on several levels of inquiry. It recasts the Caribbean as one of the world’s major receiving and transit region for refugees during this period, and it provides the first systematic combination of Atlantic history with the nascent research field of refugee history. In addition, it sets the findings from the Atlantic world into the context of the global history context of involuntary migrations. “Jansen’s project reconceptualizes the scope of Atlantic history,” notes GHI Director Simone Lässig, “and thereby exemplifies the scholarly innovation the GHI seeks to promote.”


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