



**Global Labor History Network
2022 Conference in Saint-Louis, Senegal**

Topic

**GLOBAL LABOR: Evolving Responses to the Challenge of
International Frontiers - Spatial Reconfigurations and Social
Transformations.**

Host Institution: *Institut d'études avancées (IEA)*, Saint-Louis, Senegal
<http://www.iea-saintlouis.sn>

Provisional Schedule: 13 – 16 December 2022

Deadline for proposals: abstract: July 31, 2022 and full proposal November 30, 2022

CALL FOR PAPERS

Background

Since 2000, trailblazers in the field of labor history have been pooling their energies in an effort to create research forums promoting scholarly studies on the work process. This collaborative endeavor has taken various forms, from brainstorming sessions to exchanges of papers, in a dynamic of programmed networking. The global network emerging from converging inputs of participating individuals and institutions has focused on one topic: Labor History.

Labor history in the broad sense, and including working-class history was for a long time studied mainly in the advanced capitalist countries (plus, with a very restricted political focus, in the so-called socialist countries). The term 'labor history' has a dual meaning. Strictly speaking the concept refers to the history of the labor movement: parties, trade unions, cooperatives, strikes and related phenomena. More broadly interpreted, the concept also refers to the history of the working classes: the development of labor relations, family life, mentalities, etc. This ambiguity seems characteristic of the term in English. In many other languages labor movement history and working class history cannot be summed up in a single term (e.g., *histoire du travail et histoire du mouvement ouvrier*).

The time has come to recontextualize the resulting strands of labor history, within the wider process of globalization. Optimally, this can be done without losing sight of specific characteristics of different regions and countries in the world. Multiple discussions have concentrated on the process, under a variety of forms. The Global Labor History Network (GLHN) is an interdisciplinary network of historians and other social scientists, founded in Barcelona on June 16, 2015. The GLHN promotes research, the collection of data, the sharing and mobilization of knowledge, and the preservation of archives and other historical materials. The network encourages the formation of collaborative transcontinental working groups and envisages the organization of global conferences.

Since its inception, GLHN is engaged to organize a two years international conference to consolidate efforts to foster research and various initiatives on Global Labor History. In Asia, in March 2018, the Global Labor History Network held its first conference in New Delhi. The second conference was held in Stockholm, in Europe, in January 2020. The third conference, extending the ongoing dynamic of reflection on the social history and general situation of labor, is scheduled from 13 – 16 December 2022. The host city: Saint-Louis, Senegal, in Africa. The topic for the conference, scheduled for Saint-Louis, Senegal, is: **GLOBAL LABOR: Evolving Responses to the Challenge of International Frontiers- Spatial Reconfigurations and Social Transformations.**

Conference Topics

The colloquium on “**Global Labor: Evolutionary Responses to the Challenge of Frontiers: Spatial Reconfigurations and Social Transformations**” embraces converging orientations of institutions responsible for the organization of the Global Labor History Network, along with the missions adopted by the Institute of Advanced Studies, Saint-Louis, Senegal. The institutions involved share a common ambition: To promote the discussion of issues across disciplinary boundaries, in such a way as to enable practical applications of multidisciplinary approaches and hands-on interdisciplinary cooperation, in the search for solutions to problems affecting labor and the working world, in various parts of different

continents and countries throughout the world. The common aim is to strengthen bonds between a range of scholarly communities, actors and institutions involved in the study of global labor issues.

This colloquium is open to researchers in the social sciences (specializing in History, Law, Sociology, Anthropology, Economics, Geography, Literature, Philosophy, etc.), as well as to professionals, trade unionists and institutions working on issues of labor throughout the world.

Prospective participants wishing to present papers at the colloquium are requested to organize their contributions, as far as feasible, within the following advisory conceptual and research guidelines:

1. Labor and Frontiers in the Age of Globalization
2. Workplace Frontiers and Social Transformations
3. Computerization of the World of Labor: Effects on the Job Situation
4. European Borders versus International Labor Migrations
5. The Covid-19 Pandemic and the Redrawing of Labor Frontiers
6. The Crisis in Reproduction/Care work/Care Economy,
7. Youth Population versus Aging Population in the labor market: What challenges?

Conference Format

The conference is scheduled from 13 to 16 December 2022. The venue is the Centre de Recherche et de Documentation du Sénégal (CRDS), in Saint-Louis, Senegal. The conference format comprises two phases:

Phase One: Presentation of Papers, with Follow-up Sessions;

Phase Two: Organization of a Summer Institute for Doctoral Candidates and Young Researchers.

Papers will be presented in a series of sessions, each focused on a specific topic. In addition, there will be sessions devoted to selected topics. A special session will be devoted to the launching of the French edition of Marcel van der Linden's book *Workers of the World*, originally published in 2008. The book launch will provide an appropriate opportunity for paying tribute to the pioneering author, Marcel van der Linden, founder of the Global Labor History Network.

Arrival will be on 11 December and the transfer to Saint-Louis will be on December 12, 2022. The conference will last from December 13 to 16, 2022. In order to enhance inter-generational exchanges between researchers, a Summer Institute will be organized on March 16, a day dedicated to the young scholars. Its topic is : Global Labor History: Methodological Approaches and Presentation of Case Studies.

From December 16, departure can be planned in the early afternoon. Most of the flights leave at night.

The conference program will make room for optional visits to historic sites.

Rules for the Submission of Papers and Resumes

Colleagues are urged to format their papers and contributions, with summaries attached, as single WORD or PDF files, in the working languages of the colloquium, French or English. A brief CV should also be attached to each. The whole should be sent by email to

glhn2022@glhnet.org

Deadline for proposals: **abstract: July 31, 2022 and full proposal November 30, 2022**

The email Subject field should contain the following words: “**GLHN 2022**”

English and French are the working languages to be used at the conference.

The conference is free, but participants have to take care of travel and hotel costs at their own expense. If you have any trouble in raising funds please contact the organizers.

A selection of adopted conference papers is to be published in the journal *International Labor and Working Class History* (ILWCH).

Contextual Conceptual Axes

Labor has undergone profound changes. These have left a lasting imprint. In the last two decades, the lowering of trade and investment barriers has speeded up production processes. This acceleration has been compounded by technological advancements in transport and communications.¹ Digital technology and services now offer workers opportunities to exercise new skills. New work processes are steadily overriding old barriers separating commercial and non-commercial environments. Innovations stream out in a ceaseless flow. Concurrently, technology is transforming every sector of our existence. So vast has the scope of the digital revolution become, that it seems to presage the end of paid employment, perhaps even of the work process itself.

But while the digital revolution in its varied forms engulfs new areas of activity, it simultaneously deepens inequalities between workers, by pushing the overwhelming majority into precarious jobs.

The resulting inequalities affect both access to jobs and the quality of the work process. They do so by marking out distinct spaces within geographical work places. Further, they compartmentalize different groups of workers, cutting them off from each other. Thus, the siting of work places in different geographical areas, whether in different countries, or in urban as distinct from rural zones within the same country, ends up creating new inequalities among workers. Similar differentiations occur with regard to wages, gender, type of work, and technologies used. Eventually, these inequalities harden into barriers. An ILO study of labor income patterns, for all workers including the self-employed, indicates that income inequalities are much greater than formerly supposed.²

¹ Calista Cheung and James Rossiter, “La délocalisation et son incidence sur le marché du travail et la productivité” : a review of recent online documents. <https://www.banqueducanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/cheung-f.pdf>

² ILO 2013, Country Profiles on Decent Jobs. 52 p

The fact is that labor markets do not distribute yields from economic growth at all rationally. Worse still, in many situations, job training opportunities fall short of actual labor market demand. The shortfall aggravates unemployment.

So young women today may, on paper, have somewhat higher qualifications than their male counterparts. Yet they face various forms of discrimination on the job market. They suffer from a segregated system that nails them to a professional status inferior to that of males, thus keeping them trapped within certain economic sectors. For example, Country Profiles for Decent Jobs indicate that in Mali, Niger and Senegal, as in most countries in the sub-region, most women workers operate in just four economic sectors: farming and herding, trade, processing, and housework. Men, by contrast, are heavily represented in other sectors of activity, like construction, transport, fishing, real estate, and the civil service.

Furthermore, in Africa, South America and some parts of Asia, the young make up the majority of the jobless. Many gravitate to unproductive, low-quality occupations. Under such circumstances, particularly common in the informal labor sector, they find themselves bogged down in precarious conditions of extreme poverty. It is this kind of context that pushes the young to risk clandestine migration, criminal hustles, and sundry dodgy expedients, including prostitution, alcoholism, and drug addiction.

Unemployment and under-employment also threaten the political stability and social cohesion of states. The paradox is that the developing countries possess a substantial labor force, due to the low average age of their population. Such a crucial asset is lacking in the developed countries, with their aging populations. However, the developed countries are currently struggling with economic crises. And they are terrified at the prospect of being “swamped” under a foreign labor influx. So they tend increasingly to seal their borders, by applying ever more restrictive immigration policies. The result: Year after year, hundreds of job seekers, trying to reach Europe and the United States of America via clandestine routes, end up dying instead. The press has relayed tragic scenes of young Africans at the entrance to the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, hurling themselves *en masse* at barbed wire walls several meters high. These scenes show the world the reality of an underlying pressure for migration. They reveal the despair haunting youths ready to risk clandestine migration. In the Americas, it is dozens of South Americans who die in the desert trying to reach the United States. Over the past several years, expulsions of clandestine migrants, along with forced repatriations across borders, have multiplied.

Anti-migratory policies have hardened in the special context of the Covid-19 health crisis. Political measures taken to deal with the pandemic have further destabilized the world of labor. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced enterprises and workers to shift massively to a work-from-home regime. Incidentally, the flexibility of this new system has prompted some enterprises, chiefly in the tertiary sector, to consider making it a permanent option in the production process, even after the end of the health crisis. However, the system entails a number of liabilities for the labor market. It requires fewer workers. Socially, in addition, it makes the distinction between paid labor and the professions harder to discern (ILO 2020). “As far as workers are concerned, the key risk is the likelihood of the erasure of frontiers between time on the job and time spent for oneself and one’s family.”³

In fact, these frontiers are not watertight. The informal and the formal labor sectors, for instance, are neither separate, nor hermetically sealed off from each other. They interpenetrate each other, in tune with prevailing social, economic and political conditions.

³ ILO 2020, Working from Home, A Response to COVID-19: .Employers’ Guide, International Labor Office, Geneva. 35p.

All this makes the concept of frontiers a particularly useful framework for the analysis of relationships between various spaces and societies. In this report, the examination of the labor process, through the conceptual prism of frontiers, enhances our ability to understand changes that have occurred in the labor environment, and in various societies. The concept of frontiers covers multiform realities. It is rooted in a powerful symbolic field, and vectors such as connotations as barriers and transitional zones.⁴

Over time, the concept has been coming under increasing revision. In the process, it is taking on new meanings, beyond the narrow geographical sense in which it was “traditionally” used. Normally, frontiers are component parts of configurations in which alliances and antagonisms play complex, shifting roles. They impose particular, original characteristics on various activities and spaces. And they do this not just in their material forms, but also in the experiences they generate, the cultures they help to shape, and the collective identities they create.⁵

In this context, globalization has profoundly overhauled the geography of production, along with the work process itself. Increasingly, different territories have found themselves competing against each other. Under the impact of economic hardships, aggravated by ever more ferocious competition, as well as pressure from shareholders to maximize profits, businesses and corporations have, in a sense, adapted to new realities by becoming mobile. The delocalization of companies and enterprises has become a trade-mark characteristic of worldwide business redeployment.⁶

Admittedly, delocalization can help particular enterprises to maximize their profits. But because it entails such consequences as job losses, it may impact source countries negatively. As for the countries that welcome delocalized enterprises, in a bid to acquire a competitive edge, they also end up having to deal with low wage levels and a precarious job market.

In the face of these challenges, brainstorming on the topic “**Global Labor: Evolving Responses to the Challenge of Frontiers - Spatial Reconfigurations and Social Transformations**” presents an opportunity for discussions within a framework that enables participants to propose strategies useful to youths of an age to enter the work force, by pointing them toward decent jobs that give them a chance to reach their full potential at work. The availability of relevant data on these issues can inspire the formulation of economic and social policies capable of serving as guidelines for the sustainable and inclusive development of interested countries (ILO 2019).

Coordination

A **Scientific Committee** has been set up, with a remit to draft the agenda and vet the quality of papers, as well as to coordinate scholarly work and cultural activities during the conference.

Committee Chair: Professor Marcel van der Linden (International Institute of Social History), Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Members:

Andreas Eckert (Re:work – Humboldt University)

Raquel Varela (Universidade Nova de Lisboa)

⁴ www. <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

⁵ Piermay J. L. la frontière et ses ressources : regards croisés [online publication] <https://books.openedition.org/irdeditions/3399?lang=fr>

⁶ Dalila Messaoudi, Entreprises et territoires : entre délocalisations et relocalisations d’activités de production <https://www.cairn.info/revue-annales-de-geographie-2018-5-page-588.htm>

Edward Cottle (University of Witwatersrand, South Africa)
Samita Sen (Cambridge University)
Leo Lucassen, (International Institute of Social History)
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Prabhu Mohapatra (Delhi University, India)
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Longhau Cui (East China Normal University, China)
Pape Touty Sow (IEA Saint-Louis, Senegal)
Maty Ndiaye SY (IEA Saint-Louis, Senegal)
Joan Sangster (Trent University, Canada)
Aruna Magier (New York University, USA)
Donald Weber (Amsab-ISH, Belgium)

The Scientific Committee will be supported by a **Steering Committee** responsible for preparing for the conference, and for monitoring its smooth conduct.

Coordinator: Babacar Fall.

Members, all volunteers:

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