



Call for papers: International Workshop, July 9-10, 2026, German Historical Institute, London

Concept Note: **Transformations and Contestations from the Global South: Rethinking Livestock Frontiers**

Organizers

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While ecological concerns and contemporary livestock practices have generated criticism in Western societies, the production of animal flesh for human consumption continues to expand persistently (Weis, 2013). This expansion is underpinned by the quest for appropriating nature and its resources into commodities of trade and profit, a characteristic feature of global capitalism. This concept note proposes an international workshop to offer critical analysis of these contemporary concerns regarding livestock practices. This calls for an examination of global networks that tie ecologies to livestock frontiers and the commodities (meat, hides or skins) that are produced and circulated across the Global South.

The workshop invites contributions from various disciplines (social, economic and labour histories, geography, sociology and anthropology, science and technology and environmental studies) and regions (Asia, Latin America and Africa) within the Global South, with the aim of fostering a collaborative understanding of the expansion and transformation of frontiers and global networks related to the trade of commodities. We seek papers that explore life histories of social actors, the production and negotiation of infrastructural spaces, the impact of technological innovations on skills, labour, and markets, as well as strategies of resistance and subversion.

Recent scholarship, following Jason Moore's concept of the "commodity frontiers" (Moore, 2000) has presented an agenda that calls for a rethinking of the relation of change and contestation in peripheral or frontier spaces to processes of globalisation. The Commodity Frontiers Initiative (CFI) calls for studying the history and present of capitalism through the lens of commodity frontiers and commodity regimes, exploring local resilience, contestations and ecological transformations in the countryside (Beckert, Bosma, Schneider, Vanhaute, 2021). The CFI agenda has been further expanded to include "livestock frontiers", that is both processes and sites in which animals are bred, reared, cured, traded and commodified in novel ways, by -reallocating land, labour, capital, knowledge, and other resources, to enhance productivity and maximise gains (Schneider, & Coghe, 2021).

These initiatives are both novel and ambitious, with much research still ongoing. A key question is the nature of the transformations and contestations in the Global South, which this framework views as a frontier of capitalism. In this regard, Crosby (2004) demonstrates that even before the transatlantic explorations of the 15th and 16th centuries, forms of subsistence and political structures existed across the diverse ecologies of what is now termed the Global South. The exploratory nature of what came to be regarded as voyages of discovery (Obeyesekere, 1992; Trouillot, 1995) took precedence in Eurocentric historical narratives. This emphasis served to obscure the true nature of imperial extraction, which, by the late 18th century, developed into a veneer of respectability in economic discourse promoted by Smith, Malthus, and Ricardo (Govind, 2011). Consequently, this prevented a closer examination of the interconnections between capitalism and empire, ultimately creating two distinct realms: one of a rapidly industrializing Europe and the other of a non-European world characterized by insularity and temporal backwardness.

The Commodity Frontiers Initiative and recent discussions in global history have highlighted the non-European world as constituting a capitalist frontier, where non-capitalist spaces are subjected to rapid and punitive displacement driven by unchecked capitalist accumulation. Pomeranz (2021) intervenes in these debates by illustrating how the alleged divergence that marked European ascendancy in the 18th century was built upon ecological advantages and resource extraction nodes. Berg (2004) shows that changing consumer demand in the West led to import substitution and a resurgence of industrialization, wherein imports of niche Chinese and Indian goods were replaced by the mass production of consumer goods in England.

Such interventions aim to challenge the notion that non-European regions passively awaited benevolence and the emergence of modern law from self-imposed insularity. Yet, this perspective perpetuates the myth of a European resurgence often attributed to the positive values of capitalist economism. As a result, global historical projects tacitly undermine the histories of distinct regions that converge through ideas of piety, trade, mercantilism, and political potential. These histories have much to contribute to the conversation about global transformation that began in the 17th century and continued onwards. While the Commodity Frontiers Initiative has attempted to address the shortcomings of global history projects, the research agenda must include micro-historical sites of accumulation and economic spatialities that constitute the 'frontier.'

At the "frontiers of capital," social actors constantly seek to reclaim their stakes within and outside the fiscal, legal, and spatial standardizations established by laissez-faire economism. Scholarship on medieval South Asia (Wink, 2016; Kumar, 2015; Eaton, 2005) demonstrates the unpredictable nature of frontiers, which continually inform practices of kingship. Attention to social actors, markets, and mobility across distinct ecologies is evident in the contested textual and material constructions from the 12th to the 18th century. The pre-colonial backdrop provides ample evidence for considering the uncertain nature of colonial conquest as it interacts with regions in South Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

To view such a frontier is to revisit colonial and unofficial archives to uncover nodes of resistance and non-compliance that help us understand histories of caste and occupational groups, labor processes, markets, and, more specifically, human-animal interactions. The conference aims to explore these themes as we journey to micro-historical sites, demonstrating how materiality remains in critical dialogue with our understanding of global history.

We invite contributions that engage with the themes outlined below, focusing on various elements of the Livestock Frontier, including but not limited to commodities (meat, hides, skins, leather, cattle, etc.), social actors (butchers, artisans, traders, tanners, merchants), infrastructural spaces (slaughterhouses, ranches, tanneries, leather goods factories, etc.), markets, and patterns of land use:

1. Empire, Imperialism and Colonialism
2. Transformations and Transitions
3. Negotiations, Mobility and Subsistence
4. Practices of Resilience and Resistance
5. Technological Innovations and Skill
6. Variegated Ecologies and Contested Environments

This workshop, scheduled for July 9-10, 2026, at the German Historical Institute in London is being organized with support from the Gerda Henkel Stiftung and the Max Weber Forum for South Asian Studies, Delhi. The

proceedings will be compiled into an edited volume. We invite contributions that engage with the themes outlined above. The deadline for submitting a 300-word abstract is 15th February, 2026. We will inform the selected participants by 20th February and they will be required to submit a 6,000-8,000-word paper by June 20, 2026.

The workshop will feature pre-circulated papers, allowing participants to read each other's contributions, which will foster engaged discussions and extensive feedback on each paper. Following the workshop, authors will be invited to revise their papers within 3-4 months, incorporating the feedback received, for formal submission to the volume. We hope to provide funding for travel (economy class flight tickets for participants outside the EU and 2nd class train tickets for those within the UK/EU), as well as accommodation for two nights in London for all invited participants.

References

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