



## Call for Papers

# Odious Investment: How Finance Creates, Shapes, and Sustains Global Inequalities

The Centre for Economic Cultures at the University of Manchester invites proposals for contributions to an international conference on 6-7 July 2023 exploring the history of investment in controversial enterprises, particularly environmentally destructive ventures, unfree labour, and corruption. We approach this topic at a global scale and in the longue durée, from the early modern period to the present day. Scholars and activists are increasingly familiar with the legal notion of “odious debt” (debts acquired by sovereigns with neither the consent of nor benefit to the state’s citizens) yet the questions this doctrine raises about investment, inequality, and economic legitimacy can be fruitfully applied beyond the realm of states and sovereign borrowing, as well as to other forms of financial activity. “Odious Investment” is interested in the wide range of actors – from the ordinary individual to large corporations to non-profit institutions – that make crucial decisions to invest in controversial enterprises, and seeks to interrogate their understanding of this behaviour and its structural support and consequences, aiming to study how these micro-level activities relate to macro-level economic development and patterns of global inequality.

This is not a historical investigation of socially responsible investment and its limits (though we expect to develop important findings in that area) so much as it aims to be a collective inquiry into the significance of relations that are constituted by investment, the effects of distance and intermediation on financial practice, and the meaning and politics that financial activity – particularly in contested ventures – can generate. The notion of “odious investment” is a provocation that aims to put the social, environmental, and political costs of investment at the centre of our financial histories, and to compose actor-centred accounts. In doing so, we believe we will learn important things about how ordinary people make sense of their roles as financial actors and their contributions to the cultural and political authority of modern finance, allowing us to clarify linkages between capital, its globalization, and the everyday. At the same time, we encourage discussion of the cultural and intellectual systems that informed and shaped investment and facilitated (or stymied) the translation of economic action into moral categories.







We welcome contributions on the following themes, as well as on related topics:

- Environmental degradation and investor concern
- Labour conditions, regulation, and investment interests
- Investor lobbies and investor activism
- Histories of socially responsible investment
- Corruption and business practice
- Controversial commodities and their biographies
- Investment as imperial practice; Empire and extraction
- Accounting standards, company reporting, and narration
- Legal intermediaries and controversial investment
- Foreign direct investment, information, and country marketing
- Investors and regime transitions
- Methodological and disciplinary challenges of pursuing controversial financial practice; responsibility and reparations

We welcome applications from scholars in disciplines related to these themes and areas of interest – law, sociology, economics, political science – provided their research is substantially historical in nature and engaged in historical debate. The conference organizers will support travel and accommodation costs (particularly for early career scholars); applicants with access to institutional or grant funds to support research travel will be asked to consider these sources first.

Presenters are asked to submit the following materials by **30 January 2022**:

- Paper title and abstract (maximum 500 words)
- Short CV (maximum 2 pages)

Applicants will be notified of the outcome by **27 February 2023**. The conference will be held in Manchester on **6-7 July 2023**, and participants may be invited to develop papers for subsequent publication.

To apply, or for any further information, please email the conference organizers, Dr. Alexia Yates ([alexia.yates@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:alexia.yates@manchester.ac.uk)) and Dr. Edmond Smith ([edmond.smith@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:edmond.smith@manchester.ac.uk)). This conference is generously supported by the Hallsworth Conference Fund at the University of Manchester.

