

Call for papers: Contemporary forms of money

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Money is at the heart of development policies in the Global South, where it takes various forms: conditional cash transfers, microcredit, or green finance. Over the past fifteen years, digital money has joined this list and shaped the development agenda. The M-Pesa mobile payment system in Kenya, launched in 2007, was the forerunner of this digital shift. While Africa has long been the epicentre of this digitalisation of money, Asia and Latin America have experienced strong growth in these payment methods in recent years. Today, it is estimated that three-quarters of digital money services are located in low- and middle-income countries (Al Dahdah et al., 2023). At the same time, new digital currencies have emerged, such as cryptocurrencies and central bank digital currencies. Depending on the case, these aim to surpass or reaffirm the role of the state in monetary transactions.

These new monetary forms serve a variety of purposes (development projects, financial and/or civic inclusion, remittances from migrants, data collection, tax control, illegal economies, employment opportunities, etc.) and involve a wide range of actors (central banks, mobile phone operators, foundations and private banks, start-ups, etc.). Far from operating in isolation, they exist in contexts where they coexist with long-standing dynamics of money management, circulation and appropriation. Thus, while economic anthropology has extensively documented the plurality of money and the diversity of its forms and functions (Guyer, 2004, Maurer, 2006), contemporary forms of money invite us to rethink this plurality in light of this new digital materiality. These contemporary forms of money have been analysed mainly from a top-down perspective, demonstrating the effects of surveillance and extractivism that they imply (Zuboff, 2019; Langevin & Lefèvre, 2021).

In addition to these approaches, this call for papers seeks to shed light on the multiple ways in which these monetary tools fit into specific contexts, such as local arenas, politics, development programmes, or particular communities. From a critical perspective, the aim will be to analyse the role played by the different categories of actors involved, whether in terms of their design, implementation or adoption. We encourage a 'pragmatic approach' to currencies, analysing the appropriations, deviations and circumventions to which they are subject (Ortiz, 2024). In addition, we invite you to consider the changing and varied 'contexts' in which they operate. We are also open to interactions between these contemporary monetary flows and pre-existing monetary forms and practices, such as tontines, microcredit (Baroin, 2019) and conditional cash transfers (Olivier de Sardan & Picolli, 2018). Finally, we welcome contributions focusing on African, Asian and Latin American contexts.

Among other topics, we are particularly interested in the following areas:

Area 1 : Money and development policies

Economic anthropology primarily approaches money as a social bond, whose uses are intertwined with interpersonal relationships and the symbolic, moral and political orders in place in a given society (Parry & Bloch, 1989; Servet, 2012; Zelizer, 1994). But money is also a tool of development policy in the Global South; and we know from the socio-anthropology of development that these policies are constantly being diverted according to local political arenas and aspirations (Mosse 2004; Olivier de Sardan 1995). These appropriations can fuel forms of redistribution, which in turn reconfigure local power relations around figures such as big men (Laurent, 2000).

Economic and financial practices in the Global South are therefore the result of local practices and a wide range of development projects and policies, such as microfinance and financial inclusion, which aim to formalise the economy. Today, digital money stored and transferred using digital wallets is at the heart of these formalisation processes. Development agencies – including the World Bank and the AFD – consider it to be the new lever for financial inclusion (Gabor and Brooks 2017). This formalisation of the economy, focused on the digitalisation of money, is leading to structural changes that are reshaping financial practices and livelihoods.

This first theme invites proposals on the changes generated by digital financial inclusion programmes, but also those that highlight continuities with older monetary circulation practices such as microcredit, tontines, savings and money transfer systems that pre-date these transformations.

Area 2 : Public and private actors

Many private and (non-)governmental actors promote digital technology as the driving force behind progress and economic dynamism in the Global South (Al Dahdah & Quet, 2020). Much attention has been paid to the increasing privatisation of public infrastructure with digitalisation (Jeannot & Cottin-Marx, 2022). For example, the emergence of digital money has contributed to the compartmentalisation of payment infrastructures for the benefit of private companies, which profit from every digital transaction (O'Dwyer, 2015). This enrichment comes not only from imposing high transaction fees, but also from the accumulation and resale of data (Al Dahdah, 2023).

However, the deployment of these infrastructures does not always refer to straightforward privatisation, as the boundaries between public and private seem very blurred in most cases. In Kenya, the success of M-Pesa was based in particular on the adoption of a nationalist discourse, as a monetary tool promoted by the Kenyan giant Safaricom, making the telecom operator appear to be a large public company, when in fact it is owned by the British multinational Vodafone (Park & Donovan, 2016). Similarly, central bank digital currencies (already launched in some countries, such as Nigeria) have the potential to reaffirm the role of the state in a financial system dominated by private actors (Ortiz, 2022).

This second axis will therefore aim to examine the ‘institutional arrangements’ (Ortiz, 2024) and the links between the public and private sectors that structure and condition the deployment of these monetary and digital infrastructures.

Area 3: Imaginaries and political programmes

Following up on Area 2, we invite contributions on imaginaries, as well as political and social programmes that come with contemporary forms of money. Indeed, several studies have demonstrated the political dimension of money and the ways in which it contributed to the formation and cohesion of political communities (Aglietta & Orléans, 1998; Helleiner, 2003).

This was the case, for example, during the independence movements, particularly in Africa, where national currencies served to mark the existence of new nation states (Donovan, 2024; Pallaver, 2022). However, the existence of these new currencies was accompanied by forms of post-colonial monetary dependency, as in the case of the CFA franc in West Africa.

Once again, digital technology is part of broader imaginaries and social projects. This is the case, for example, with digital payments, which are sometimes imagined as a means of returning to pre-colonial forms of currency circulation (Kusimba, 2021). Similarly, digital currencies are used by certain states in broader narratives of the 'digital nation', for example in China with the renminbi or in El Salvador with bitcoin. Finally, certain monetary tools aim to put an end to colonial forms of domination and reaffirm the digital sovereignty of countries in the Global South (Jiang & Belli, 2024).

This third theme will therefore seek to examine the ways in which these monetary and technological tools fit into distinct political imaginaries and may contribute to the implementation of specific political and social programmes.

Area 4: Subjectivities and social positions

Despite their apparent simplicity and a techno-optimistic rhetoric, several studies have demonstrated how the monetary tools promoted in development policies were not neutral and were accompanied by normative and moral impositions from a top-down perspective. In the case of microcredit, these impositions have served to encourage a type of self-employed individual who is responsible for their own development (Graeber, 2011). These discourses also have the effect of reinforcing gender stereotypes, often contributing to the naturalisation of dominant forms of debt management for women (Guérin et al., 2023). Similarly, cash transfers under aid programmes facilitate forms of domination of beneficiaries, who become indebted to the state, as in the case of pension payments to the elderly in Uganda (Jacquin, 2022).

At the same time, these monetary and technological tools are proactively appropriated by social actors to negotiate social positions. This is the case, for example, in China, where the new possibility of obtaining credit via digital platforms makes it possible to break free from forms of moral control associated with debt networks between relatives (MacDonald & Li, 2020). Similarly, in Argentina, amateur cryptocurrency investors claim a positive identity as smart and daring individuals through their investment practices (Sánchez, 2024).

This theme will therefore seek to examine the normative and moral impositions that come into play through these monetary and technological tools, as well as the ways in which individuals appropriate them to negotiate their social positions.

Area 5 : Inequalities and resistance

Finally, the proliferation of payment tools and digital currencies invites us to consider the ways in which they contribute to the (re)configuration of inequalities (Swartz, 2020). For example, it has been shown that algorithms produced through data collection tend to discriminate against the most disadvantaged people (by limiting their access to certain resources such as credit), in addition to contributing to the naturalisation of these inequalities (Fourcade & Healy, 2013). Similarly, digital payment tools, through their technological imposition, risk excluding people who are unable to finance and meet these technical requirements (Nelms et al., 2018).

At the same time, analysis of the practices of those involved shows how they resist these forms of exclusion, for example by developing avoidance strategies or finding alternative ways to access these digital tools (O'Dwyer, 2019; Crucifix, 2024). These intermediate spaces

make it possible to maintain and sustain other values, as well as other forms of monetary circulation, particularly redistributive ones (Thanka & Dalinghaus, 2020).

Thus, the final focus will be on examining the inequalities and forms of exclusion that these contemporary forms of money displace and transform, as well as the ways in which different actors and social groups react and resist them.

Instructions for contributors

Complete articles (maximum 50,000 characters, including notes, bibliography and spaces) should be submitted by 15 October 2025, following the instructions for authors provided here: <https://journals.openedition.org/anthropodev/523>. The final issue is scheduled for release at the end of 2026.

If necessary, we invite interested parties to contact the issue editors to discuss their proposals (clement.crucifix@ird.fr, marine.aldahdah@ehess.fr).

Articles should also be sent to the following address: revue@apad-association.org

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