Course Code & Title	**LISS381 Following the Money: Introduction to open source asset tracing research methods**				
Convenor(s)	Florence Wolstenholme, Queen Mary University London, School of Politics and International Relations				
Institution	Queen Mary University London		**Department**	LISS DTP	
Academic Year	2023-24		**Term**		
Number of sessions	3	**Research Platform**	Research Methods	**Length of Session(s)**	2 hours each
Day, Date		**Start : End**		**Room Location**	
Wednesday 15th May 2024 Thursday 16th May 2024 Friday 17th May 2024		10:00 – 12:00		WATERLOO FWB 2.43 (IN PERSON)	
Enrolment Links:	Available to book on SkillsForge from **Tuesday 2 April 2024**. Click to log in and register: https://training.kcl.ac.uk/kcl/#he/dev/eventDetails,;em,providerCode=LISS,providerOrgAlias=kcl,number=381,; Questions? Visit our Training FAQ here: Frequently Asked Questions - LISS DTP (liss-dtp.ac.uk)				

Course Description:

As a research method *asset tracing* ("following the money") provides researchers with robust, precise, quantifiable case study evidence that allows us to explore who owns, controls and benefits from capital and the power relations behind this.

Drawing on methodologies more often used in law and consulting, this course is designed to provide an introductory survey of the open source resources that can be used to trace assets. While there is not one simple tool to unlock the identity of beneficial owners of assets, a variety of research methods encompassing leaks, luck and tenacious internet searching can shed light on ultimate beneficiaries and the assets they control. This process can be laborious, time consuming and frustrating, but working out who controls these international networks is fundamental to understanding global capital, who benefits from it and how.

While the focus of this short course is on asset tracing it draws on the general principles of open source research (OSINT) which has a wide variety of applications, encompassing activism, human rights and corruption investigations and social media analysis.

The course will be delivered in person as an interactive workshop through a combination of lectures, discussions and group activities.

Reading List:

N.B. This is a general background reading list (please see details below on specific preparation for each session). The books and articles below are drawn both academia and investigative journalism and are designed to enhance participants' understanding of open source research, asset tracing and offshore finance.

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Bullough, O. (2019) *Moneyland: the inside story of the crooks and kleptocrats who rule the world*. New York (N.Y.): St. Martin's press.

Christophers, B. (2011) 'Follow the Thing: Money', Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 29(6), pp. 1068–1084. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1068/d8410.

Christophers, B. (2023) *Our lives in their portfolios: why asset managers own the world*. London ; New York: Verso.

Higgins, E. (2021) *We are Bellingcat: global crime, online sleuths, and the bold future of news*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Hughes-McLure, S. (2022) 'Follow the money', Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space, 54(7), pp. 1299–1322. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X221103267.

Koram, K. (2022) *Uncommon wealth: Britain and the aftermath of empire*. London: John Murray.

Ogle, V. (2020) '"Funk Money": The End of Empires, The Expansion of Tax Havens, and Decolonization as an Economic and Financial Event*', *Past & Present*, 249(1), pp. 213–249. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtaa001.

Prelec, T., C. Michel & T. Mayne. (2022). 'Exposing kleptocracy: why we need more – and better –collaboration among academics, journalists and anti-corruption campaigners', in A. Pitcher & R. Soares de Oliveira, eds. Special Issue on Authoritarian Power and the Global Economy, APSA Democracy and Autocracy Newsletter, March. Available at: https://connect.apsanet.org/s35/wp-content/uploads/sites/26/2022/03/Democracy-and-Autocracy_Mar-2022_Authoritarian_Power_Global_Economy.pdf

Shaxson, N. (2012) *Treasure islands: tax havens and the men who stole the world*. London: Vintage Books.
Soares De Oliveira, R. (2022) 'Researching Africa and the offshore world', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 60(3), pp. 265–296. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X22000210.

Middle East Report 291, 'Paper Trails', (Summer 2019). Available at: https://merip.org/magazine/291/

Eligibility:

This course is open to all PhD students using social science methodologies.

Pre-course preparation:

The course is designed to serve as an introduction to open source asset tracing research methods. No previous experience or knowledge is required and you do not need any special technical skills beyond how to use a basic internet search engine.

However, if you do have experience of open source research either in an academic context or in another role, please do join. The workshop will consist of a number of collaborative group activities – all levels of experience are encouraged to contribute.

Please bring a laptop or tablet that can connect to the internet to sessions 2 and 3 (preferably not a phone as it will be difficult to do the group activities on a small screen).

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Number of students: 20 max.

Session 1: Introduction to asset tracing: background and theory

What is open source research and what is asset tracing? How could researching who owns and controls assets be useful for academic research?

This first session considers the role of "following the money" as a research methodology and provides a brief theoretical overview. We will cover untangling beneficial ownership and the role of the offshore structures in holding assets, including the colonial history of offshore secrecy jurisdictions. We will also discuss the limitations of open source asset tracing and the politics of ownership transparency.

During this session we will explore the principles of planning and organising an asset tracing research project in the context of seemingly infinite online resources, including the importance of identifying your "exam question" and rating the reliability of information.

Preparation for Session 1:

Please read the Christophers (2011), Hughes-McLure (2022) and Prelec et al (2022) articles from the reading list and look at some of the articles in Middle East Report Summer 2019, 'Paper Trails'.

The three articles provide a theoretical framework for asset tracing as a research methodology and the MERIP issue includes some wonderful examples of scholars' and journalists' uses of open source research and asset tracing as a research methodology.

In advance of the session please also think about how asset tracing could be helpful for your own research. Don't worry if this is not initially clear, we will use group discussions throughout all three sessions to help you clarify this.

Session 2: Research methodologies

If you want to follow the money you need to know how to use the resources available to trace assets. This session will therefore provide hands on training on how to use some key open source databases.

The aim of this session is also to eliminate the mystique around open source intelligence (often called OSINT) techniques and show it is accessible to anyone with internet access and basic database skills.

Preparation for Session 2:

Participants will be provided with a list of examples of open source databases in session 1. Please spend some time exploring these in advance of session 2.

Session 3: Interactive workshop

Session 3 will be an interactive workshop during which you will have the opportunity to put the research tools introduced in session 2 into practice through guided step-by-step examples and group activities.

Preparation for Session 3:

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In preparation for session 3 please think about an "exam question" from your own research that you could use the methodologies discussed in the first two sessions to help you answer. We will work through these questions together as part of a group exercise.