



# Carceral economies of migration control

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## Abstract

This article conceptualizes carceral economies of migration control. First, I argue that ‘privatization’ signals a reorganization of authority, rather than a relocation of ownership from public to private domains. Second, I argue for greater attention to the socio-technical practices of valuation specific to migration control through which commodification becomes possible. Third, this reorganization of authority has produced (1) status value, a form of value specific to immigration policing’s juridico-political position; and (2) valuation practices that translate, commensurate and circulate migrant life as a marketizable entity.

## Keywords

carceral geography, detention, immigration, law, migration, value

## 1 Introduction

This article argues that the carceral geographies of migration control have become *carceral economies*. Combining detention, forced mobilities and border closures, contemporary migration controls have produced new ways of valuing people on the move. In the United States, carceral economies have relied heavily upon the private prison contractors to develop and expand infrastructure for detaining adults, children and families, including the wide use of electronic monitoring. European Union member states have worked with private prison companies, security companies, and non-profit organizations in their efforts to both harmonize asylum systems and enforce borders. Germany has hired three global consulting firms – McKinsey & Co., Ernst and Young, and Roland Berger – to advise on cost-saving efficiencies in its asylum processing procedures, resulting in the widespread use of subsidiary humanitarian protection that prevents family reunification

(Stanley-Becker, 2017). Some EU member states administer debit cards, drawing together financial services companies, international NGOs and refugees in entangled transactions (Tazzioli, 2019). Outsourcing migration control is not confined, of course, to the Global North (cf. Heller, 2019). In South Africa migrants are detained in a privately owned and operated detention centre, and policed in ways that draw on longer histories of racialized foreignness (Vigneswaran, 2019), while the International Organization for Migration manages borders, detention and repatriation in other under-resourced countries (Andrijasevic and Walters, 2010; Ashutosh and Mountz, 2010). Containing migrants through economic management,

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contemporary migration control practices have produced new ways of commodifying migrant life.

The *carcerality* of migration control practices is critical to these economies of control. Carceral spaces simultaneously criminalize, contain, and mobilize migrants, inscribing national borders onto migrants' bodies and embedding bordering practices in everyday life (Mountz et al., 2013). Seen as a 'fix' for surplus, risky, and racialized populations, incarceration's expansion has relied upon the linking up of different circuits of value (Gill et al., 2018; Gilmore, 2007). Imprisonment has become a go-to policy response for social problems, as carceral punishment and labour regulation are mutually embedded (Cassidy et al., 2019). Noting the mobility of carceral *tactics*, carceral geographers have called for a broader conceptualization of carcerality to include electronic monitoring, post-release reporting requirements, and other punitive approaches to poverty and social risk (Moran et al., 2018). These economic changes intersect with highly creative state territorial strategies of offshoring, outsourcing and externalization to manipulate when and where people claim refugee status from persecution (Tazzioli, 2018; Tazzioli and Garelli, 2018; Mountz, 2011). In deciding admissibility, detainability, and deportability, immigration and asylum laws attempt to make migrants dependent on service providers and, in doing so, valuable to others in their excludability (Coddington et al., 2020).

This diversification of spatial practices has led carceral geographers to retheorize carceral space through the mobilities (Turner and Peters, 2016), intimate (Conlon and Hiemstra, 2017) and macro-economies of detention, imprisonment and encampment (Gill et al., 2018). Research on migration control has been especially important for rethinking carceral space, as migrants are detained on ships, in waiting rooms, in hotels, and in 'hotspot' processing centres. As Mountz et al. (2013) argue,

detention is a *process* of bordering, mobility and exclusion, rather than a closed space. In fact, geographers have argued that redirecting people, things and practices is so essential to carceral space that mobility – not enclosure – constitutes the carceral (Turner and Peters, 2016; Mitchelson, 2019). Similarly, critical migration research has generated a fundamental rethinking of how state power, space, rights, politics, identity and citizenship constitute each other, especially in migration control's outsourcing and privatization of executive powers to detain and deport migrants (Burrige et al., 2017; Coleman, 2012; Doty and Wheatley, 2013; Fernandes, 2007; Flynn, 2017; Golash-Boza, 2009; Hiemstra, 2019; Lahav, 1998; Zolberg, 2008). For this reason, Gill et al. (2018) argue that 'carceral circuits' better describes the meta-institutional networks that enable and sustain expanding carceral geographies.

Despite the dynamism of theorizing carceral space, borders and biopolitics, there is a tendency within these approaches to invoke economy *as context*, as a backdrop or supportive infrastructure to the politics of migration control. Harvey's theorization of neoliberalism and circuits of capital has become particularly important (see Gill et al., 2018; Hiemstra and Conlon, 2017), but without engaging with vibrant debates over capitalism's relationship to non-capitalist economies, value and commodification, marketization or feminist political economy. To account for the heterogeneity of carceral economies, researchers need to conceptualize how different but complementary political and economic practices constitute migration and border control practices.

Below I show how migrant life is made valuable for extraction within the scattered and strewn relations that make up the apparatus of migration control, where private contractors, in particular, thrive with little oversight. Specific forms of value, economic calculations, and commodities make these relationships hang together and facilitate immigration and border

policing in a fragmented, but effective, manner. How has migrant life, ostensibly excluded from political rights, attained value to be extracted by private firms or across industries? What rationalities, practices, and relations of force circulate within them, and what novel forms of value, labour and commodification is migrant life within carceral economies capable of producing?

To conceptualize carceral economies of migration control, I turn to research on the bio-economies, marketization and racial capitalism to query the specific economic forms at work in carceral economies of migration control. Marketizing of non/human life has changed who and what is understood as living – as a political subject and as a rights-bearing subject – and recent expansions of capital and finance into nature have produced new kinds of commodities (Collard, 2014; Cooper, 2008; Rajan, 2006; Johnson, 2016). Critical economic geographers and sociologists argue that marketizing value is itself a political project to reconfigure the terms through which individuals (primarily) accumulate and circulate value (Berndt and Boeckler, 2012; Callon, 1998). Moreover, as making markets relies on sovereign and legal power (Langley, 2015), migration policies have been important to this project: national economic policies utilize sovereign power to make workers mobile (Martin and Prokkola, 2017), depoliticize exclusionary practices (Darling, 2016a, 2016b), dispossess them of land and withdraw support for social reproduction (Tadiar, 2013). This article offers a framework for conceptualizing the socio-technical practices that draw law, labour, waiting time and disciplined mobility together in new ways.

This article contributes a nuanced conceptualization of carceral economies of migration control as assemblages made to circulate specific forms of value. I locate these economies in broader transformations of capitalism, especially new ways of commodifying and devaluing racialized lives. Below, I first discuss how the concept

of industry has dominated and limited political economic analyses of migration control and then argue that these economic relationships mobilize multiple economic rationalities, producing fragile, chaotic and contingent circuits of value. To understand how migrant life is made valuable – and how that value circulates – I argue that we need to analyse the socio-technical practices that compose these circuits. Legal categorizations (refugee, asylum-seeker, labour migrant, illegal alien) produce a particular form of value specific to migration control regimes, which I call *status value*. I go on to discuss how migrants' contracting and outsourcing *translates* status value into commodifiable services. In turn, these practices *commensurate* conflicting economic rationalities. Status value then *circulates* in multiple ways: as revenue from outsourced services, as data about migrants' movements, as un- and under-paid migrant labour, as cash paid for abandoned migrant futures. This approach decentres the literature's emphasis on privatization, as well, and asks what work the public-private boundary does. To close, I discuss the contributions this approach makes to carceral, political and economic geographies.

## II Conceptualizing carceral economies

### I Troubling industries

In this section, I argue that various formulations of industry have dominated – and limited – conceptualizations of political economies of immigration control: the immigration industrial complex (Fernandes, 2007; Doty and Wheatley, 2013); the migration industry (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sørensen, 2013; Hernandez-Leon, 2013); the illegality industry (Andersson, 2014); and the detention rights industry (Morris, 2017). Addressing these limitations requires rethinking privatization as a reorganization of authority to confine non-citizens. Specifically, industrial conceptualizations overstate the coherence of these systems, while

underspecifying the economic relationships at work. For Doty and Wheatley (2013) the immigration industrial complex is a ‘massive, multi-faceted, and intricate economy of power, which is composed of a widespread, diverse, self-perpetuating collection of organisations, laws, ideas, and actors’ (Doty and Wheatley, 2013: 438). Their analysis notably theorizes an industrial complex as *more than economic*, sustained and expanded by anti-immigrant discourses, elite social networks, and lobbying organizations: it is neither purely economic nor purely political nor social. Yet, theorizing these relationships *as industries* relies upon economy/society, private/public boundaries and interprets the movement of carceral goods and services across them as problematic. Moreover, Doty and Wheatley’s conceptual project is very much wedded to the case of for-profit, privatized detention in the US, and remains focused on US legal regimes and politics. This approach embeds US-specific distinctions between political/economic and public/private in their theorization of the immigration industrial complex, limiting the reach of this concept.

Research on migration journeys has also relied upon the concept of industry. Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sørensen (2013) define the migration industry to include ‘control providers’ and non-profit ‘rescue industry’ organizations (expanding on Hernandez-Leon, 2013). For them, facilitation, control, and rescue form three overlapping prongs of the migration industry with varying degrees of ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ market integration. They tease out how economic rationalities are imbricated with migration decisions at every part of the facilitation and management process; ‘economic logics’ are not defined by institution. For Andersson (2014) this migration-enforcement feedback loop is both economically and discursively productive. As such, Andersson’s ‘illegality industry,’ ‘allows for the consideration of a dispersed “value chain,” or the distinct domains in which migrant illegality is processed,

“packaged,” presented, and ultimately rendered profitable’ (Andersson, 2014: 15). The use of quotation marks signals a broader ambivalence towards theorizing economies, value, production and exchange in migration control regimes. Throughout this literature, it remains unclear whether migration control economies are merely similar to – but not exactly – industries or if they are actually-existing modes of production that extract, process, generate and circulate value.

What work does ‘industry’ do conceptually? Defining migration control’s economies via industries and privatization takes some empirical facts for granted: the actually-existing markets for migration control services and dominance of for-profit firms. For some, privatization defines the political economy of immigrant detention. Politics is understood as economics by other means, and the economic is implicitly understood as a for-profit venture and profit motives as the drivers of particular policy decisions. For others, market relations of integration, supply and demand become explanatory concepts for migrant and state decision-making. These approaches incorporate implicit assumptions about market functions into research on carceral geographies of migration control. Yet research on marketization and commodification demonstrates that economizing life produces new forms of value, commodification and labour (Murphy, 2017).

Conceptualizing highly contested, faltering, fragile economic relationships as coherent industries gives them an independence that reproduces, rather than challenges, their power. Accounting for the role of economic rationalities in migration control requires a theoretical and methodological starting point that holds value, commodification, and labour as questions, rather than assumptions. How can we account for the multiple rationalities, discursive and material forms of productivity, and circulation of value in carceral economies of migration control?

## 2 *Assembling economies*

Critical security and international relations scholars have approached similar problems in a different way, theorizing the privatization of security (including and beyond migration and borders) as an assemblage of actors, practices, relationships and infrastructure rather than as an industry. Focused more on the transformation of sovereign power to secure the circulation of goods and people in these transnational public-private assemblages than on carceral spaces of migration control, this literature understands public-private relationships as ‘not so much a tightly drawn sovereign power but an apparatus in which diverse and sometimes contradictory elements come together to produce a logic of governing’ (De Goede, 2012: xxii). Critical security studies scholars have highlighted how financial and state securitization processes share knowledge practices, expertise, and conceptions of risk (De Goede, 2012; Amoore, 2013). And because governments awarded counter-terrorism risk analysis contracts to some of the world’s largest financial and accounting firms, the connection is not metaphorical but material and monetary. Moreover, security professionals in North America and Europe use banal monetary transactions to track everyday mobilities and associations, so that economic activity itself becomes a medium of security knowledge (Amoore and De Goede, 2008). Finance-security assemblages have also become a key geoeconomic terrain (Cowen and Smith, 2009). American dominance in the private security sector has become an economic development concern for EU policy-makers, so much so that some EU-level agencies seek to establish a ‘European civil security market’ (Hojtink, 2014). A series of EU-level research funding schemes recruited expertise from private sector security firms for recommendations on how to build a civil security market, thereby producing it as a field and a market (Bigo and Jeandesboz, 2010). In so-called ‘weak states’,

the privatization of security is rife, from private security firms hired to police neighbourhoods to consulting on security policy-making to training police and military forces. For Abrahamsen and Williams (2009), nominally state and private security functions are so intertwined that state sovereignty cannot be understood through traditional state-centric modes but must be understood as a security assemblage.

Carceral economies of migration control can both learn from and contribute to this literature. Firstly, this article argues that these assemblages operate because they translate, commensurate and circulate value between different spaces, practices and actors. The racialization of value, and valuation practices’ fundamental role in economic assemblages, has been under-theorized in security assemblage literature. Secondly, assemblage approaches emphasize the discourses, technologies and practices that hold these relationships together. They do not assume an overarching logic of capital to explain these relationships, but instead show how different logics are brought together to enable new configurations of power. This is crucially important for understanding how non-monetary values like racialized hierarchies, xenophobia, and patriarchy enable particular economic relationships. Thirdly, security assemblages do not fit neatly into narratives of public sector privatization because state, supranational, non-governmental, and corporate organizations work together in a wide variety of capacities, with different contractual obligations. This leads to a different set of questions about state power: what mechanisms order and circulate power over life? How do financial practices of privatized security reorganize and distribute sovereign power? How are public and private put to work in new ways, and what work do they do? How are these relationships formed and networked to circulate money, practices and expertise? These questions shift the empirical, theoretical and methodological starting points for analysing how economic relationships

govern carceral spaces of migration control. They emphasize that there is no *necessity* to the form and direction of finance-security relationships; neither state nor capital logics produce the worlds they imagine.

### 3 Rethinking privatization

From this perspective, privatization's explanatory role in industrial conceptualizations can be rethought from two directions. First, the research discussed above shows how outsourcing data analysis drew specific pattern recognition and risk analysis practices into state security practice, so that state security came to be discursively and materially constructed in financialized terms. In other words, these processes drew financial knowledge practices into state decision-making and blurred the distinction between economic and geo-political risk knowledge practices. Second, 'the economy' as such has always required state power. Legislation, for example, has always been essential to defining 'the economy' as a separate sphere of human activity, and this apparent public-private/state-society boundary has long been understood as an effect of power (Mitchell, 1998). The distinction between state and economy should be understood an internal boundary within the space of governing. As Mitchell argues, 'the ability to have an internal distinction appear as though it were an external boundary between separate objects is the distinctive technique of the modern political order' (1999: 77) and public/private distinctions, in particular, *generates resources of power* (Mitchell, 2008). Privatizing detention, asylum accommodation, and border enforcement is therefore a political technology that reorganizes and expands governmental authority (Martin, 2017). In doing so, privatizing detention centres, for example, produces and extends the governance of migration, precisely by multiplying who can confine migrants, where and by what means. The question becomes not only 'who profits?' but how is

state authority reorganized? How are these assemblages composed?

Below, I argue that carceral economies of migration control work through particular valuation practices, specifically through the production of *status value*. In doing so, I 'read value against the grain' (Bigger and Robertson, 2017), analysing not the private or non-profit sectors' definitions of value, but identifying the unique forms of value, commodification, and circulation produced by migrations control's carceral circuitry. This approach allows me to counter-map migration control's circuits of value (Gill et al., 2018), to show how the differentiation of migrant life from citizen life enables states to assemble outsourcing, labour extraction and disciplined mobility in highly productive ways, generating resources of both power and money.

### III Valuing migrant life

To theorize how migrant life comes to bear value for carceral service providers, non-governmental organizations and state agencies, I draw from research on the commodification of nature and racial capitalism. Research on the commodification of nature has focused on the development of new kinds of commodities: biological material (Cooper, 2008; Rose, 2007; Johnson, 2016), animals (Collard, 2014), human tissue (Fannin, 2011), carbon (Collard and Dempsey, 2013), adoption, and organs (Radin, 1996). Similarly, clinical labour and surrogacy have challenged the boundaries of whose and what reproductive capacities may be paid for (Cooper and Waldby, 2014; Lewis, 2019). The emergence of these new markets has relied upon the valuation of *processes* and the commodification of biological *reproduction*. Bioeconomies, in particular, have focused on commodifying self-reproducing biological material (Johnson, 2016), which has required legal recognition of biological matter as intellectual property (Cooper, 2008; Rajan, 2006).

Importantly, these new economies generate new forms of value, commodities and legal relationships that do not take traditional manufacturing as the model of capitalist production. Research on new markets for environmental processes and biological material has analysed how these entities become knowable as commodities – and that marketization is contested, fraught with problems, and usually inadequate to capture the ecological processes it seeks to represent. To capture these tensions, this literature has argued for a focus on *valuation practices* (Bigger and Robertson, 2017), technologies of measurement (Robertson, 2012), and processes of commodification and commensuration (Christophers, 2016). Rather than asking how markets, neoliberal rationalities or industries manifest capitalist logics, they ask: which techniques, rationalities, and discursive practices allow these novel markets, value forms, and circulations to work? What *kind of capitalism* and *what kind of nature* are presumed to be operating? These questions destabilize the capitalist logics and industrial relationships presumed to be structuring immigration and border privatization.

Marxist approaches understand value as an abstraction of embodied labour, an abstraction that allows the separation of labour value from particular workers (see Christophers, 2016). Generic labour value is immeasurable until commodities are traded with others. By comparing labour time through commodities, that labour time is translated into a commensurable quantity and the specific context of that labour falls out of the valuation process. Exchange value operates as a ‘concrete abstraction’ that translates and commensurates – and in doing so, enables circulation. These regimes of value are always more than economic and inherently political, however, as people negotiate, contest, and change the terms of exchange (Appadurai, 1998). Here I argue that, in a similar fashion, valuation practices render actual, living migrants as abstract migrant life. Understood as a combination of life-sustaining processes,

migrant life becomes valued in terms of services.

Racial capitalism theorists argue that *all* value is racialized: surplus value from labour has historically relied upon grossly unequal exposure to danger and death; to the non-payment of work; the stagnation of housing values in predominantly black neighbourhoods in the US (Moore, 2016; Gibbons, 2018); and in settler colonial contexts to genocidal clearing of land for European settlement (Ybarra, 2020). The racialization of poverty, criminality and illegality are fundamental conditions for the emergence of carceral economies of migration control, epitomizing the ways in which colonial, imperial and white supremacist projects ‘requir[e] the continued disappearance and displacement of myriad “undesirable peoples” from the landscape’ (Bonds and Inwood, 2015: 722). Gilmore’s (2007) work explains how incarceration has become, in the US context, a solution to the overproduction of four kinds of surplus: land, labour, finance and state capacity. Different forms of value (real estate, wages, public debt, human resources) were brought together and thereby produced classed and racialized economies that did not explicitly present themselves as racialized. These differentiations disproportionately expose rationalized groups to social and physical death (Tyner, 2019), an exposure exacerbated by locating detention centres in polluted areas (Ybarra, 2020). For Byrd et al., these ‘economies of dispossession’ ‘hierarchically organiz[e] and dispos[e] social life predicated on and operationalized through empire and colonialism’ (2018: 3). Drawing from these literatures to interrogate carceral economies of migration control, I argue that the racialization of value and the devaluation of surplus populations has made migrants valuable *in their detainability and excludability*. As I go on to show, carceral enclosures enable the marketization of biological reproduction – the process of staying alive – by categorizing, pricing and mobilizing migrant life.

### *1 Producing status value: Illegalization*

Here, I examine the valuation practices that make migrants valuable in specific ways. The first practice is legal categorization, which paradoxically does not appear to be an economic practice, per se. Yet it is foundational: legal status decisions do the work of differentiating between various forms of deserving, vulnerable, criminalized, and excludable migrations. Critical geographers have provided rich documentation of the means and implications of states' various illegalized, criminalized, stigmatized migrant others (Coleman, 2008; Conlon, 2010; Gill, 2016; Hiemstra, 2019; Mountz, 2010; Ngai, 2004; Varsanyi, 2008). For others, these legal categorizations are economically productive in a more direct sense. De Genova (2002) argues that 'some are deported so that others may stay' as labourers under the threat of deportation; Harrison and Lloyd (2012) show how illegality affects work conditions for dairy farm workers in the Midwest US. Thus, the production and valuation of migrant-as-surplus is part and parcel of broader trends in capitalism that rely upon both non-capitalist modes of exchange and reserve pools of under-employed labour (Coddington et al., 2020; Denning, 2010; Gidwani and Reddy, 2011). Non-citizenship and illegalization are fundamental conditions for the emergence of carceral economies of migration control.

By making migrants valuable in a particular way, legal status decisions produce what I call *status value*. In differentiating between mobile people, legal status decisions produce detainable and deportable subjects and, in turn, make migrants valuable in their excludability, detainability and inability to legally support themselves. Status value is, then, a value form produced by the illegalization of mobile people: it refers to the specific potential their illegality offers states and service providers managing that illegality. As Kate Coddington's (2018; Coddington et al., 2020) work in Thailand

shows, refugees' legal status enables their encampment and enclosure and, subsequently, their identity as a captive labour force for a neighbouring special economic zone. Status decisions embed migrants in dependent relationships with institutions that manage migrants' biological life and constrain their everyday mobility (see Aradau and Tazzioli, 2020, on biopolitical value). Particularly for excluded migrants and asylum-seekers, status decisions make migrants valuable to firms and NGOs working in the asylum sector, addressing the needs produced by the exclusion from work or other forms of care. Migrants' status value rests in their potential in/voluntary labour, revenue for service contractors, transaction data and waiting time.

Legal categorizations thereby produce particular kinds of life: people prohibited from working and caring for themselves through wages or further migration. Importantly for the discussion here, these decisions – and the spatial constraints they allow – arrange labour, reproduction and care. Carceral spatial practices of migration control enforced deprivation (Conlon and Hiemstra, 2014) and invite the commodification of migrant life biological processes: eating, washing, staying warm, caring for others. These carceral economies do not commodify migrants as property but as assemblages of services, bed space, data and mobility. As I discuss below, carceral economies translate, commensurate, and circulate multiple forms of status value and diverse economic rationalities. In particular, contracting, migrants' in/voluntary work, debit cards and Assisted Voluntary Return programmes extract and circulate status value and, in the process, assemblage carceral geographies of migration control.

### *2 Translating status value: Contracting*

Where legal categorization generates status value, contracts assemble a range of organizations to manage migrant life in carceral spaces.



Privatization, outsourcing and offshoring rely on legal agreements to authorize the delegation of the sovereign right to deny physical autonomy. As such, contracting is a socio-technical and political practice that embeds certain norms of economic practice in migration control (Darling, 2016a, 2016b; Martin, 2017).

Contracting, outsourcing and offshoring have been essential to the speedy expansion of carceral migration control practices because outsourcing allows states to bring existing expertise and infrastructure together and move politicized practices out of public sight. For example, US family detention capacity grew from 95 beds in the Berks County Family Shelter to approximately 3500 beds across three facilities in a matter of months. Two practices enabled family detention's speedy expansion: repurposing existing facilities and Inter-Governmental Service Agreements (IGSAs) that avoided lengthier competitive procurement processes for private firms. The Artesia family detention centre repurposed a border patrol training facility site in a remote area of New Mexico, far from immigration attorneys and oversight agencies (Manning, 2015). The Karnes Civil Detention Centre in central Texas previously held low-risk detainees and was built to hearken the Obama Administration's new 'civil approach' to immigration enforcement (US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2012). To change its population from men to families, Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Karnes County changed the wording of their Inter-governmental Service Agreement (IGSA); Karnes County then changed the wording of its contract with GEOGroup, a private corrections firm. The South Texas Family Residential Centre in Dilley, Texas, emerged from a similar process of IGSA and contract revisions, but required building a new facility specifically for families from the ground up. The location was more difficult to explain: the Corrections Corporation of America (now CoreCivic) contracted with the city of Eloy, Arizona, 900 miles

(1448 km) away from the facility (Burnett, 2014). Because IGSAs operate between government agencies, they are exempt from the normal (and lengthier) competitive bidding processes required for contracts between ICE and non-state organizations. Counties are supposed to provide oversight of these facilities and keep a portion of the ICE payments for that service. Within outsourced facilities health, religious, language, food, cleaning and commissary services are often subcontracted, as well (see Hiemstra and Conlon, 2017). Similar contracting practices are common in EU member states, but with highly active participation of non-profit, religious and humanitarian organizations (see Aradau and Tazzioli, 2019; Tyler et al., 2014; Morris, 2017). Contracting is highly diverse and localized, but across contexts the practice draws together a wide range of organizations with different aims into temporary and contingent agreements.

In the case of US family detention, state agencies actively and enthusiastically outsourced their work to other organizations in ways that cannot be explained by capitalist logics. Close analysis of privatization's mechanisms therefore reveals multiple economic rationalities: revenue-seeking government offices; market-avoiding private enterprises; and the delegation and outsourcing of the sovereign right to imprison non-citizens through a series of legal instruments, maintained through money transfers. While revenue may be an aim, public revenue, local employment and personal bribes are not the same kind of transactions as profit-seeking objectives. They circulate debt and obligations according to different rules and relationships. Contracts are simultaneously social, economic and political technologies that link different valuation practices. As such, they connect, translate and circulate migrants' status value between the organizations involved.

As socio-technical practices, contracts define both units and mechanisms of exchange,

translating and commensurating different registers of value. For example, detention and accommodation contracts price space in similar ways to hotels or residence halls. It is common to break costs down into 'bed days' and 'person days'. Contracts therefore include things like calculations of square footage, staffing, services and food per migrant per day, signalling a broader efficiency rationality at work. Here, the goal is to keep migrants alive in custody at the lowest cost. For private sector actors, pricing includes a profit margin, and for government agencies contracts must still meet certain quality standards, especially for children. For firms, meeting quality assurance standards increases the chances of additional government contracts (though poor performance is curiously under-enforced). While important, these valuation practices remain rather internal to firm decision-making and they operate in relation to highly politicized migration policy-making. Executive orders, legislative processes, and local activism change the broader conditions of these economies and can do so swiftly. In other words, privatizing migration control does not fully embed immigration policy-making in capitalist logics; they co-exist with other norms and objectives. As such, they do not signal a relocation of family detention from public to private domains, but the reorganization of authority over detainable, deportable people. These arrangements mobilize public-private boundaries to expand policing power over noncitizens.

### *3 Commensurating conflict: The politics of status value*

In linking diverse actors with different rationalities, contracts do not work smoothly and outsourcing creates conflicts between different regimes of value. For example, efficient migration detention can also mean the maximization of deportation, rather than the minimization of cost. In the United States, Congress mandated a

daily occupancy rate of 34,000 migrants to Immigration and Customs Enforcement out of fear of under-utilized detention beds and wasted tax dollars. This, in turn, triggered calculations of daily targets for regional operations and quotas for individual officers' arrests. The Detention and Removal Operations (DRO) agency oversees transfers and deportations, moving migrants from centre to centre to maximize the number of people detained for dollars spent on bed space. For state actors, management and performance targets are not oriented towards lowering operating costs or public expenditure but increasing the numbers of bodies moving through a system. Outsourcing connects, therefore, actors working under multiple economic rationalities, calculating value according to different metrics, with different aims and objectives.

Divergent registers of optimization frequently come into conflict, in fact. Overcrowding detention space has been equally problematic, prompting human rights investigations, reviews, and additional oversight in many cases. Migrant rights organizers frequently point out the conflict between moral, political and economic norms, but these critiques travel in multiple directions. In Austria, for example, privatization of migrant detention emerged as a *response* to human rights organizations' condemnation of overcrowded, outdated prison facilities (Global Detention Project, 2017). These examples cannot be well-explained through US-based conceptualizations of industrial dynamics, logics of neoliberal state restructuring or capital accumulation. We may identify shared practices (like outsourcing), but they are embedded in different regimes of value driven, in many places, by ethno-nationalist and populist political movements. To understand how privatization, migrant rights, and efficiency come together requires precise analysis of the multiple and overlapping calculative practices at work in the business of confining, deporting and deterring migrants.

#### **4 Extracting status value: Unfree labour practices**

Under- and unpaid work has become a key technology for both ensuring compliance and for keeping contractors' costs low. Bales and Mayblin (2018) argue that detention labour should be located on a spectrum of unfree labour, distinct from – but bearing some similarities to – coercive and exploitative workplaces. For Conlon and Hiemstra (2014, 2017), the violent social abstraction of bed space in US detention centres accompanies bureaucratization, labour extraction and engineered deprivation. Offered the 'privilege' of working in exchange for \$1–\$3 per day, detained migrants in the US perform routine tasks for the detention centre to earn money to purchase inflated commissary items. Thus, the conditions of captivity produce additional opportunities for extracting value from migrant labour twice over: through migrants' physical labour and through inflated commissary prices (Conlon and Hiemstra, 2014). Counties receive percentages from some of these subcontracting arrangements, investing public entities in this cycle of 'accumulation by dispossession' (Hiemstra and Conlon, 2017). For Conlon and Hiemstra, these intimate economies of detention dispossess migrants and their families and reappropriate money to private subcontractors and countries; at the same time, money flows to these entities through federal contracting, thereby reappropriating public money to counties and firms.

In Italy, meanwhile, asylum-seekers have been required to perform 'voluntary work' in host communities as a condition of receiving accommodation and subsistence support (Haller, 2017). Prohibited from waged work, mandatory voluntary labour becomes both disciplinary and normative: community work is criteria for highly differentiated potential inclusion, an opportunity to 'earn' status, and a demonstration of 'the deserving asylum-seeker'. The value of asylum-seeker labour in Italy

is not productive in an industrial sense; it circulates in multiple directions, with multiple objectives that overlap with, but cannot be reduced to, profit or industrial growth. Instead, unpaid labour points more clearly to the enduring carcerality and disciplinarity of asylum-seeker reception regimes beyond detention centres.

#### **5 Circulating status value: Disciplined mobilities**

Status value can also circulate through disciplined mobilities (Moran, 2015) in migration control. While the example of family and adult migration detention draws attention to the role of enclosure in producing, calculating and circulating status value, movement itself has become a mode of value production. Firstly, in places reliant on detention like the US and UK, transfers between detention facilities and deportations have introduced additional logistics (Walters, 2019), contractors, and opportunities to engineer legal outcomes (Gill, 2009). In fact, these economies rely on the forced and often chaotic movement of detained migrants between centres (Hiemstra, 2019). Where human rights laws have limited detention, cash-based and cashless support use financial transactions to monitor compliance with aid recipients' rules, as purchase data stands as a proxy for migrant mobility. Debit cards, in particular, are becoming widely used to disperse funds to refugees and asylum-seekers in the UK, Greece, Jordan and Lebanon, as well as in post-disaster recovery operations (UNHCR, 2016). The World Food Program and UN promote debit as revolutionizing humanitarian aid, both in allowing asylum-seekers and refugees to choose their purchases and in quickly and efficiently dispersing money to them (Kenyon, 2016; UNHCR, 2018). At the same time, the cards produce the same kinds of transaction data used to analyse deviant patterns of movement (Aradau and Tazzioli, 2020; De Goede and Amoore, 2008). Debit card programmes are

managed by different organizations and agencies from country to country, however – sometimes in partnership with banks, sometimes operating as a distinct flow of money. To work (and many times they do not work), the debit cards rely on financial transactions companies like Mastercard, Sodexo and the UK firm Financial Services LLC.

In Greece, asylum-seekers agree to certain conditions to receive debit cards, tying assistance to particular kinds of behaviour and biopolitical control (Aradau and Tazzioli, 2020; Tazzioli, 2019). In the UK, debit cards operate in a similar way, but for rejected asylum-seekers, the cards cannot be used to withdraw cash. They must be used in shops that accept the cards; previously, these were confined to major chains and charity shops. The UK Home Office has explicitly stated that they use transaction data to monitor mobility and usage, deducing infractions of cardholders' conditions from these patterns (Coddington, 2019). For example, if recipients use the card in too wide an area, the Home Office assumes they have access to money for travel or forms of support that violate their qualification as destitute and stop payments. If they do not use it for a period of time, the HO assumes they do not need it and stop payments. While non-governmental organizations in Greece do not currently use transaction data in this way, the UK Home Office is explicit about embracing debit cards for their surveillance potential (Unity Centre Glasgow, 2017). Cashless debit cards for refused asylum-seekers treat purchases as traces of their everyday mobilities. Simultaneously, the data only become meaningful when analysed by private sector experts. Using cashlessness as a deterrence/expulsion technique circulates transaction data between asylum-seekers, shops, services companies, their contractors and the Home Office: here, migrants' everyday lives produce value as both needy (destitute) subjects and as data.

Assisted Voluntary Return uses money in a similar way. For example, the International

Organisation of Migration facilitates payments to migrants and refugees if they return to countries of origin. These payments recognize migrants' goals and desires in migrating: to work, make money and return home with some demonstrable success (International Organisation for Migration, 2019). But this example also demonstrates another way in which money becomes a mechanism of migration control. While the UK system uses cashless support to push self-deportation, Assisted Voluntary Return 'pulls' migrants with cash payments upon exit. Thus, destitute asylum-seekers and refugees become valuable to financial services companies as a population in need of particular kinds of services. NGOs connect, translate and value *populations* of asylum-seekers to those firms, drawing new actors into asylum-seeker and refugee service provision and making asylum-seekers intelligible as service users. In addition to connecting diverse actors, the circulation of money and cash are not (only) infrastructural enablers of migration control as above, but themselves vectors of migrant governance.

These examples are intentionally diverse and show how carceral economies of migration control connect actors with different economic rationalities through specific socio-technical practices of valuation. My argument is not that these particular valuation practices constitute carceral economies of migration control everywhere in every case, nor do they constitute 'migration economies' generally. Across these practices, however, states and contractors contain and redirect human mobility through diverse forms of valuation, dispossession and incentivization.

## IV Conclusion

This article contributes a nuanced reconceptualization of migration control's economies to the vibrant scholarship in carceral geography. Geographers have done important

work tracing the new spatialities of sovereignty, state power, and bordering's embodiments, but political geographers have not asked how these re-spatializations rely upon particular deployments of public/private economic categories. Likewise, economic geographers have not adequately asked how punitive migration control practices produce new economic forms or interlace with local and regional economies. While grassroots and community-led movements exceed human rights claims, forging far more complex claims to social, economic, health, and cultural recognition (e.g. Border Network for Human Rights, 2019), researchers too often accept boundaries between political and economic, public and private, social policy and geopolitics.

We should instead ask what work the boundaries of public/private, political/economic, inclusion/exclusion do. Conceptualizing political economies of migration control as industries has, I have argued, accepted these boundaries as propositions where we should treat them as questions. Shifting from industrial complexes to assemblages, the article offers a conceptual framework for analysing how migrant detainability and deportability have enabled new governmental assemblages. Contingent and under continual transformation, these assemblages have produced specific regimes of value that connect up different valuation practices. For value to circulate in these economies, migrant life must be valued, translated and commensurated. US detention, UK and Greek debit cards and Assisted Voluntary Return show how the project of staying alive in detention (eating, washing, staying warm) becomes commodified as service provision; migrant time becomes priced as 'bed space' and 'bed days'; migrants' mobility becomes transaction data, valuable to analysts and to UK Home Office enforcement officers; migrants' imagined futures become cash incentives. Across these examples, migrants under state control are figured as particular kinds of economic subjects: benefit-

seeking, persuadable, but most certainly not potential workers or neoliberal entrepreneurial subjects (cf. Tazzioli, 2019). Rather, neoliberal entrepreneurial subjectivity becomes a privileged position for the highly skilled, self-sufficient migrant and the status value of excludable migrants renders migrant life available to commodification and datafication in novel ways.

While institutionalized and enforced differently around the world, contracting remains an important political technology through which migrant life, detention space and mobility are made valuable. Contracts link state and non-state actors, subcontractors and service providers in relations of obligation and financial transaction, and contracts name a price for keeping migrants alive in confinement. At the same time, competing rationalities cannot be reduced to or explained as a profit logic. Rather, privatization mobilizes the public/private boundary to reorganize authority over migrants' everyday lives. Privatization itself requires a range of calculative practices – bed space, medical capacity, nutritional needs, hygiene, and clothing – to value migrant life. Beyond detention spaces, the datafication of migrant mobility within and outside of state custody points to new ways in which everyday mobilities become rendered as valuable sources of data for asylum agency decision-makers. Moreover, assisted voluntary return policies calculate the value of repatriation against the non-liveability of illegalized status, inducing behaviour with the offer of cash. Because these practices do not commodify migrants' bodies as property, but commodify their routines and biological needs as services, these carceral economies can be reconciled with liberal democratic regimes and international human rights frameworks.

Analysing valuation practices of migration control also emphasizes the local specificity of these arrangements. The examples above do not describe a global carceral economy or an abstract model, but the opposite. No single

over-arching logic explains these assemblages, their composition, or operation. They instead bring multiple rationalities, forms of expertise, regimes of value into relation in new ways. Incorporating analysis of localized processes of racialization is essential to this analysis. Carceral economies of migration control draw upon existing processes of racialization, marketization, and anti-immigration policies. Like other disciplinary and confinement institutions, carceral economies of migration control are racialized and that racialization informs how migrant life is valued *in its excludability, confinement and disciplined mobility*. Moreover, national immigration and asylum regimes use different categories and procedures, drawing non-state actors and migrants together in different configurations, held together by different governmental rationalities and socio-technical practices. While diverse and variable across space (Burridge and Gill, 2017), immigration, asylum and refugee laws render mobile humans as people in need, confinable, detainable or deportable.

Focusing on the assembly of carceral economies of migration control opens up new questions not only for research on human mobility but also for political and economic geographers interested in reconfigurations of sovereignty, outsourcing and offshoring, and the politics of marketization. The conceptual framework above questions the apparent coherence of industrial complexes, instead pointing to the diverse, place-specific ways in which migrant life is made valuable. Rather than ask how a detention or migration control system operates, we should ask: what kind of political project is at work in the marketization of migration exclusion? How does the illegalization of mobile people enable specific economic relationships? What socio-technical practices work to bridge the conflicting regimes of value that pervade migration and asylum politics? How do these relationships translate state agencies and excludable migrants into other regimes of value,

as consumers, users, clients? What difference does marketization make to immigration politics and vice versa? As these assemblages embed migrant exclusion in broader networks of value, exchange, and circulation, what infrastructure, logistics and financing are necessary to sustain them? Analysing carceral economies in this way reveals how migration control draws from and contributes to racialized, gendered and postcolonial geographies of precarious life.

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