

## Colloquy



## MOBILE LIVINGS: On the Bioeconomies of Mobility

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The ongoing Coronavirus pandemic has made the economization of human and nonhuman mobile life stark and visible in new ways. Concerns are raised about the movement of wild animals into human wet markets, or the juridical and social predicament of stranded surrogate babies. Surveillance apps to prevent the spread of infection that track and trace peoples' movement are gathering personal data, bringing biosecurity into the realm of capital. The circulation of vaccines is underscoring geopolitical inequalities. Pandemic times unsettle taken-for-granted mobility, just as they bring the economization of different forms of human and nonhuman movement into sharp relief.

Such mobilities prompt us to ask a number of pressing questions: Through what arrangements is mobile life, human and nonhuman, economized? What kinds of mobilities best help us specify and analyze the extraction of value from life itself? What does this mean for an anthropological inquiry into our present condition? This Colloquy takes the economization of life to denote practices and processes of governing, managing, and even disposing of life, both human and nonhuman, to generate and extract value. Specifications of such processes have formed part of a plural conversation in anthropology and the wider social sciences. Focusing on

biopolitics, or the management of aggregate populations, [Michelle Murphy \(2017\)](#) defines the economization of life as those processes of valuation and optimization through which present and future life is oriented toward macroeconomic horizons. Others gravitate toward what [Michel Foucault \(1998\)](#) called “anatomy-politics,” or the correction and improvement of the body, to reveal how life is brought into the realm of accumulation ([Franklin 2007](#); also see [Helmreich 2008](#)). A significant emphasis has been on pathways of economization that decompose “life itself”—the vitality of human and other living beings—“into a series of distinct and discrete objects,” such that they can be “isolated, delimited, stored, accumulated, mobilized, and exchanged, accorded a discrete value, traded across time, space, species, contexts, enterprises—in the service of many distinct objectives” ([Rose 2007](#), 7). These processes, as [Nikolas Rose \(2007, 5–7\)](#) argues, have, at the close of the twentieth century, given rise to a new economic space, “the bioeconomy,” with biological products and processes, or “biocapital,” as its new capital (also see [Braun 2007](#); [Cooper 2008](#); [Sunder Rajan 2006](#); [Waldby and Mitchell 2006](#)).

Scholarship on bioeconomy and the rendition of life into exchangeable and tradeable units, however, has remained focused on the fields of biotechnology, biomedicine, pharmaceuticals, and genetics ([Lemke 2011](#)), just as work on the economization of aggregate life has emphasized technoscientific practices such as statistics and birth control ([Murphy 2017](#)). Bringing mobility and migration into these conversations allows us to think of many other avenues through which value is extracted from life and how value travels across boundaries of different kinds. Importantly, mobility highlights vulnerability and reminds us that the bioeconomy is always shadowed by the necroeconomy, where life’s disposability is a condition for wealth accumulation (cf. [Mbembe 2019](#)), and which has been a persistent feature of colonialism and racial capitalism. A turn to mobility and migration therefore enables us to ask which forms of accumulation from human vitality continually persist and which forms have undergone change. Equally, mobility allows us to interrogate different situations and practices that mediate the encounter between economy and life ([Helmreich 2008](#)).

In anthropology and the wider social sciences, engagements with mobility have broadly concerned themselves with social, political, and economic dimensions of mobile life and, simultaneously, with how movement and connections across time and space forge economic, political, and social activity ([Cresswell 2010](#); [Glick Schiller 2018](#); [Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013](#); [Salazar and Smart 2011](#)). Some of this scholarship gravitates toward Foucauldian biopolitics, including the ways migrants’ lives and the mobility of people and things are regulated and governed so

as to administer and securitize populations (De Genova 2017; Tazzioli 2019). This body of work brings the figure of the migrant into analyses of populations and biopower. However, economic implications of biopower, hinted at in Foucault's (1998) early formulations, from which much literature on bioeconomy derives, remain somewhat neglected. Political economic analyses of migration and mobility, on the other hand, mainly concern themselves with the circulation of raw materials, commodities, and wage labor (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013), rather than mobile "life itself." And yet, as Ruben Andersson (2018) argues, we are beginning to witness the emergence of bioeconomies that seek to manage, regulate, and profit from mobile life on multiple levels, from data to bodies to populations. At the same time, migration and mobility draw attention to the effects of occupation, extraction, and dispossession that result in "necrospeculation," or the production of new capitalist value through the destruction of life (cf. Manjapra 2019).

The essays in this Colloquy query how we might theorize the nature of the relationship between mobility and bioeconomies. We use bioeconomies in the plural, as different kinds of markets and economic arrangements exist through which value is extracted and realized. Similarly, "life itself" takes on a variety of forms, from oocytes and animals to the human body. It travels differently across borders and its movement is underpinned and enabled by diverse infrastructures. Life forms, and their disposability, become sources of profit in varying ways. In the concluding contribution, Andersson (2022, this issue) argues that there is purchase in attending to the bioeconomy as a tentative singular, particularly in terms of highlighting processes that act in a top-down fashion. By turning to plurality, and to some of the productive tensions between the singular and the plural, this Colloquy takes understandings of bioeconomies beyond their customary remit of pharmaceuticals and biotechnology industries, just as it brings migration and necropolitics into understandings of orienting populations toward economic horizons.

A first set of contributions that the Colloquy makes is to reveal the importance of different arrangements through which mobile life is economized. Unauthorized migrants crossing borders are subject to predatory economic practices; they become "stock" and sources for a rentier form of extraction that has necropolitical orientations (Achnich 2022, this issue). Similar bordering practices can give rise to other clandestine economies centered on vitality, witnessed in instances of smuggling that involve not only people but animal commodities as well. For example, where the securitization of borders results in a trade in parrots, the birds' vitality has bearings on the itineraries of their circulation as drivers make periodic stops to ensure that the commodity is breathing and alive (Lucht 2022, this issue).

Other essays in this Colloquy further complicate what constitutes mobile life by drawing attention to relations between wholes and parts (also see [Paxson 2019](#)), and how the economization of one depends on the other. Markets for assisted reproductive technologies, for instance, arise from an intersection of regulations, infrastructures, and debt-driven migration ([Reeves 2022](#), this issue). In reproductive markets, gametes or oocytes might be hypermobile, while the bodies that provide them remain immobile or even banned from crossing borders. The economization of mobile life, therefore, results in clear hierarchies of which mobilities are valued. Equally, bioeconomies become constituted through practices of policing and regulating nonhuman mobility ([Green 2022](#), this issue), many of which involve attempts to regulate unintended and unwanted mobiles such as pathogens that travel with the living commodity. By creating conditions of virulence, such mobiles can in fact disrupt bioeconomies that aim to profit from nonhuman vitality, although unwanted mobiles also spark new economies of control and eradication that emerge in response.

These diverse, complex, and variegated bioeconomic arrangements are situated and contingent. They foreground the importance of anthropological inquiry for specifying *how* and *where* mobile life is brought into the realm of economic activity, and with what consequences. Valorization proceeds through channels that are formal or informal, or an intersection of the two. There can be markets, with varying degrees of regulation, in which vitality is willfully transacted by those producing it ([Reeves 2022](#), this issue), or situations of predatory accumulation where those generating data have no say in its sale and circulation ([Andersson 2022](#), this issue). These specifications also point to new ways of thinking about borderwork and the bio-, necro-, and geopolitics of governing movement. Borders can be generated from the very relations and separations enacted by policing and regulating different mobilities. Thus, contra a narrow focus on biopolitics that places agency on actions of the state, this Colloquy shows how biopolitical practices can emerge from the encounters between varied economies and mobile life.

A second contribution of the Colloquy is to pluralize the bioeconomy by drawing attention to the difference that constitutes the *bio* in the bioeconomy. “Life” encompasses a range of beings and lives, rather than being subsumed by a singular, monolithic (human) entity. The essays attend to what [Madeleine Reeves \(2022, this issue\)](#) terms value “generated from the *differential* mobility and transactional value of human and nonhuman bodies” to capture what is not registered in the term *bioeconomy* (as singular) alone. Value, for instance, can be generated through intimate relations and labors of care between migrants in precarious cir-

cumstances. These intimacies, vital for the reproduction of the mobile body, become the source from which predatory actors profit (Achtnich 2022, this issue). Equally, in markets for reproductive services, a worker's living substrate helps create bio value. It makes for an essential element in the productive process, and reproductive capacity becomes exchange-value, that is, use-value for others (Reeves 2022, this issue). Profiting from mobile life can also proceed through human migrants themselves becoming raw material for surveillance capitalism and subterranean markets (Andersson 2022, this issue). In a different register, the vitality of livestock, typically seen as "raw material" in conventional political economic analysis, is a means through which living creatures reproduce their own bodies. This is a long-recognized but often forgotten form of vitality that lies at the heart of the bioeconomy of industrial agriculture (Franklin 2007); and more recently, techniques for intervening in the mobility of zoonoses have been added to the list of animal bioeconomies (Green 2022, this issue). As Melinda Cooper and Catherine Waldby (2014) point out, querying what constitutes "life itself" in any economic arrangement has implications for the analytical categories one deploys to specify and analyze the economic.

A critical thread running through this Colloquy's engagement with life is to note instances at which vitality is devalued. As Hans Lucht (2022, this issue) shows in the context of clandestine economies of mobility emerging in response to increased surveillance and border externalization, when migrants are "dumped" in the middle of the Sahara as a result of law enforcement, journeys become more life-threatening. Lucht (2022, this issue) and Marthe Achtnich (2022, this issue) show that the mobility of many human and nonhuman bodies is organized around their abjection. Often, vulnerability or fragility are the preconditions to predation. This necropolitical dimension to the generation of value (Manjapra 2019; Mbembe 2019) surfaces again in Andersson's (2022, this issue) argument about surveillance capitalism, for accumulation's raw material is often the life-threatening journey that migrants embark on. Together, these ethnographic and analytical insights into life's disposability allow us to move beyond specifications of the bioeconomy as that which veers toward life's optimization (cf. Rose 2007). Bioeconomies in their plurality reveal the intimate connections between the biopolitical and the necropolitical.

Together, our emphasis on mobility, economic arrangements, and the difference that constitutes life, or *bios*, directs anthropological inquiry to arenas beyond what one could call a "pharmaceutical model" of the bioeconomy centered on the molecularization and optimization of life (Rose 2007), as well as accounts

of the economization of life centered on aggregate populations and their orientation toward a macroeconomy (Murphy 2017). The expropriation of surplus, as our emphasis on mobile livings and bioeconomies in the plural indicates, is not universally uniform or homogeneous, but takes the form of diverse arrangements (cf. Manjapra 2019). And yet, a wider bioeconomic frame allows us to hold mobile life and diverse economies in conjunction, to open up novel directions for economic anthropology beyond conventional political economic remits. Conversely, viewing mobility through the lens of bioeconomies fosters new understandings of mobility, opening up fresh avenues of inquiry into a world constituted by movement. Bioeconomies of mobility chart directions for anthropological research on a pressing contemporary issue, whose saliency will likely increase in times to come.

## ABSTRACT

*This Colloquy brings into conversation two terms critical for an anthropological inquiry into our present condition: mobility and bioeconomy. It moves beyond established accounts of the bioeconomy based on biotechnology and biomedicine to draw attention to the tempo, intensity, and reach of the economization of mobile life across diverse scales and domains. Case studies include emerging forms of surveillance and bordering regimes that generate profit from the vitality and vulnerability of mobile life. They also entail the escalation of certain mobilities and the halting of others, not only demonstrating how value travels and is remade as it crosses boundaries of different kinds but also revealing how life's disposability can make for a precondition for trading in life itself. Rethinking and extending conventional political economic analyses, the Colloquy offers new directions for anthropological understandings of economy and mobility. [bioeconomy; mobility; migration; biopolitics; necropolitics; nonhuman; value]*

## NOTES

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