Digital privacy and personal, social and civic agency: Refugees' experiences

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PhD Dissertation
University of Nottingham

Horizon Centre for Doctoral Training
Nottingham University School of Business

In partnership with
The Open Rights Group

Abstract

This dissertation explores how refugees in Europe and the UK manage privacy on social media. It aims, firstly, to empirically qualify if and how privacy supports individual, social and civic benefits with which it has been associated in theoretical literature and popular concern. Secondly, it connects these discussions on privacy to digital anthropological discussions of globally-situated social media use and an emerging multi-disciplinary literature on refugees' social media use which have grown concurrently since the 2015 'refugee crisis'. The research was conducted through in-depth interviews with 23 refugees, asylum seekers, and other individuals from countries in conflict; participant-observation in eight migration-related NGOs; and ethnographic relationship building. The project was primarily conducted in the East Midlands of the UK. The methodology and theoretical approach draws from digital and existential anthropology.

Many academic and popular discussions of privacy since the late 1800s are derived from legal theory and concerns related to new technologies. These have held that privacy allows individuals to self-actualize and rest at home; selectively self-express in public to manage differing social expectations; and participate in civic life. These discussions generally concern an idealized 'private citizen,' usually as American or European home-owning heads of household with near-absolute control of his or her private space and public image. Today, vast quantities of personal digital data are created, stored, analyzed, and sold outside the purview of the individual. How individuals and infrastructures manage this information – and what happens when it escapes imagined contexts – are major concerns.

The dissertation links these early, theoretically rich discussions to present-day discussions that emphasize data management, while using refugees' experiences to challenge the idealizations found in both. Unlike the envisioned private citizen, refugees have left their homes to escape danger, a key legal requirement for gaining asylum. An asylum infrastructure – ostensibly there to protect them – proscribes their rights of 'private life' to reside, work, and live with family members. Refugees today also use mobile phones and social media to travel and stay in touch with distant friends and family. They thus have interests in protecting their digital data – with sometimes life-or-death stakes – while lacking or having lost many of the assumed underpinnings suggested by the term 'privacy'.

The research found that refugees situate their experiences leaving their home countries within their overall life trajectories. While the UK asylum process requires refugees to demonstrate the necessity of having fled their

homelands, rejecting them if their accounts are deemed not credible, even people in danger move in part because they can imagine better futures for themselves, their families and their careers – the life that ‘privacy’ is held to protect. Many refugees use social media to seek news and information about family and friends. At the same time, as other digital anthropologists have observed with many communities, refugees are highly selective about how they incorporate self-development into their online identities. They often add minimal content to their broadly-visible Facebook walls while extensively using messaging services like WhatsApp geared toward small-group or individuated communication. These practices are notable in that as they face challenges and offline expressive possibilities in European life, they continue employing norms of their home countries online so as not to further upset social continuities with distant friends and family. As they settle into life in Europe, they increase use with their local lives and self-actualization in mind. They ultimately engage in widely visible activity that can support both ‘close’ and ‘far’ lives without compromising either. It is easier to build these public personas and privately self-actualize – as the aforementioned literature has discussed privacy – with the ‘civic rights’ to legally live and work (through refugee status or student or work visas) in place. In these senses, public and private agencies and benefits are bound to each other, and ‘private life’ is not necessarily foundational to public life.

In contrast to privacy in everyday social life, institutional data management practices are often more explicitly codified. Like privacy, they are often aimed at maintaining a practical or performed status quo that can support or hinder particular individuals’ agency. Codes of ‘confidentiality’ can meaningfully regulate information sharing because they generally govern specified situations – such as meetings with doctors, lawyers, or caseworkers – that, may involve sensitive, personal information but are largely separate from everyday social life. Confidentiality helps to maintain this separation.

Purportedly clear informational practices, however, do not necessarily always (or, in and of themselves) serve individuals’ interests. For those stuck within it, the UK asylum bureaucracy can be a dystopic example of careful information management. Its ‘culture of denial’ suggests that presenting or withholding information is not necessarily effective unto itself unless claimants are granted credibility by people assessing their social performances of need. In the asylum system and refugees’ social lives, information management – as emphasized in present-day discussions of privacy – is one factor in maintaining privacy. Information can be employed and withheld agentively by refugees in ongoing social life. It can also be varyingly scrutinized by assessors to accept or deny claims or friends and family to maintain ongoing social relationships. The terms ‘confidentiality’ and ‘security’ – respectively, codes of conduct and technical affordances related to information transmission – can often be employed more precisely than the more connotatively-suggestive word ‘privacy’.

Research Aims

Altogether, the research aims to:

- Explore refugees’ perceptions of privacy in their personal and social lives in relation to their use of digital communication media
- By applying empirical research, better qualify information’s role in supporting these agencies, improving the applicability of theory to more diverse digital technology users
- Contribute to a growing body of literature on refugees’ social media use

Research Questions

How do refugees and asylum seekers exercise ‘privacy’ as they use social media? Are information revelation and discretion effective tools for social self-presentation?

Does privacy – as it has been held to do – support individuals’ personal, social and civic agency? What preconditions would be necessary for privacy to function as it’s been held to?

How can the experiences and practices of refugees and asylums seekers inform an understanding of privacy?

Acknowledgements

It feels strange to type the beginning of my dissertation as I near the end of the challenging, rewarding PhD journey I began nearly five years ago. It would be impossible to adequately thank everyone, though at this brain-frazzling hour I hope I remember to thank most of you.

First, thank you to all my participants, who took time with me and talked about difficult things with someone from a very different background. I count many of you as friends, and I hope I've done well by what you shared – even as codes of privacy and confidentiality (perhaps ironically) dissuade me from naming you here. Thank you to my supervisors – Scott McCabe and Sarah Martindale – for all your advice, draft-reading, and keeping me on track during the process. Thank you to Javier Ruiz at ORG for keeping me up-to-date on topic-relevant discussions. Thank you also to Bill Walton for all your support, and to Mark Wilkinson, Piotr Kuhiwczak, and Sherri Wong.

Thanks to Judit, for encouragement and an almost-endless stream of ideas bounced back and forth. Thank you also to my parents and relatives, for their encouragement. Thank you especially to my dad for joining me on fieldwork in 2012, which I regret forgetting to acknowledge in MSc dissertation.

Thanks to Rob and Celia, especially for how much you've fed me in the final write-up stages. It's further been helpful to live under the same roof as a retired lawyer to be able to query about UK legal practices. Thanks to Rich and the Ramchurns, and Horia and the Maoirs, for friendship, support, and the occasional joint vacations. Anna, for advice, friendship from the start of our MSc's and last-minute assist on revisions. Bronwyn, for the same and sharing drafts. Mirjam, for professional encouragement and thoughts at a crucial time. Audrey, for co-writing a paper and all the discussion that came with that. Angela, Jake, Dave, Holly, Elizabeth, and Steven for taking the higher ed trail ahead of me. Ambrus, Juliet, Hannah, Niki, alongside me. To all the teachers I've had. To the animals. To my friends at UCL and LSE anthropology and communications for suggesting I think about doing this, and all my colleagues in the CDT, Horizon, and NUBS. I am sincerely sorry for any omissions.

Financial support declaration

The author is supported by the Horizon Centre for Doctoral Training at the University of Nottingham (RCUK Grant No. EP/L015463/1) and by the Open Rights Group.

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Chapter One: Introduction

I. Parallel crises

The privacy crisis

On March 6, 2019, Mark Zuckerberg posted a message to Facebook outlining a "privacy-focused vision" for the social networking service he founded, which included increasing private messaging features and data security. Facebook had long been known as a platform designed so that users could build one profile and share the same 'posts' with every 'friend' in their social circle. To some, it was the ur-villain of modern privacy threats. The company was one among many that gave the 'Five Eyes' intelligence agencies users' data, as Edward Snowden revealed in 2013. It had subsequently come under fire for letting other companies profile users to show them inflammatory and inaccurate political ads during the testy 2016 US Presidential Election and UK Brexit vote, which respectively were won by Donald Trump and the Leave campaign. A data breach announced in September 2018 exposed 50 million users' data (Lee 2018). Now Facebook – at least rhetorically – was responding to calls to provide greater privacy and security.

Online news outlets were sceptical. One went so far as a to posted a headline that Zuckerberg's "Manifesto Is Not About Privacy. It's About World Domination" (Harris 2019). This captured the mood of the moment regarding privacy in some circles, in which even vaguely committal shifts in corporate emphasis were met with accusations of "world domination" plans. Indeed, periodic surveys suggest individual users do not trust Facebook to respect their privacy (example: Weisbaum 2018). Yet a 2019 Pew survey found that 74% of American adults *also* did not understand that Facebook kept a list of user traits and preferences to assist it in targeting advertising (Hitlin and Raine 2019). "If Americans believe Facebook is capable of anything, why don't they think it's capable of the most obvious thing?" griped one think-piece writer (Tiffany 2019), suggesting that commonplace practices like user profiling were "obvious" in face of survey evidence they were not.

"To its profound distress, the American public has recently learned of a revolution in the techniques by which public and private authorities can conduct scientific surveillance over Individuals," wrote Alan Westin at the start of *Privacy and Freedom* in 1967 (p.1). Westin and others argued that privacy allows for the individual to take a break from social obligations, selectively present oneself in different social settings, and participate in political life – capacities which were under threat by changing uses of technologies like the polygraph. At least as far back as Warren & Brandeis' influential 1897 articulation of a "right to be let alone", privacy was held in contrast to new, technologically-driven threats. To be discussed in the literature review, these have generally reflected the voice of the private property homeowner, the settled person, the present-day knowledge economy worker who expects control over home and public image, and to engage and withdraw from society as s/he wishes. Had we ever really *had* privacy? Or was the ideal of private control in conflict with the imperfect reality of practice?

Yet, in another sense, digital data plainly *has* dramatically changed the world. To adapt Erving Goffman's *Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (1951), data has created many 'front stage' opportunities for us to ostensibly present ourselves to our liking, to whom we choose. At the same time, the digital 'back stage' – our store of emotions and experiences – is stored, managed, and transmitted in a global infrastructure in which the individual has little control. The companies whose platforms facilitate these online interactions analyse, sell, and share this data for profit, often through advertising. Otherwise-uninvolved interlopers – 'ticket scalpers' ('ticket tout' in British English) – take information from the front and back stages with impunity. Businesses and researchers scrape data and meta-data online. Intelligence agencies gather the same in bulk. Databases can be hacked. Leaks happen. Careers ended when decade-old Tweets suddenly became viral news.

In 2019, all this occurs as a matter of course.

Thus the tones and focus of the 'privacy' discussion often frame the matter in terms of technological and potential social disruptions, amid people going about the continuous business of their everyday lives. Norms and times do change – and allowing that some past thoughts and actions may be private, in part, allows a buffer between the people we once were and the present world and selves we are today. Nonetheless, the breadth of data – and the possibilities and threats it evokes – calls for an empirical approach that can qualify fears and threats in light of lived practice. To understand how these continuities and changes play out, this dissertation proposes looking not to an idealized vision of home life but to people who have experienced pronounced challenges and disruptions, while continuing to live their lives.

The refugee crisis

While settled Europeans and Americans were concerned about digital privacy, Syria was in the midst of Civil War. In 2011, the ‘Arab Spring’ protests – partially coordinated with social media – had brought optimism about the power of digital technology to connect people, resist oppression, and coordinate politically. Bashar Al-Assad’s government, however, resisted calls for greater openness and accountability and violently cracked down on protestors, leading to full-on Civil War that killed 400,000 by 2016 (CNN 2019). By 2016, 4.8 million fled to nearby countries and around 500,000 had applied for asylum in Europe (Syrian Refugees 2016). 13 million were displaced by 2018 (UNHCR 2018, p.6).

Syrians were among the 3.6 million people in total who arrived in Europe seeking asylum between 2014 and 2018 (EuroStat 2019). 3,735 people were missing and assumed drowned (UNHCR 2015 A). From high-profile shipwrecks in May 2015 onward, the ‘crisis’ become a topic widely discussed in media, though it was not new. The press dubbed this crisis “Mediterranean.” Later it became the “refugee crisis” and the “European Crisis” (Goodman 2016, see also Georgiou & Zaborowski 2017, esp. p.8-11). Even so, it was not Europeans who were fleeing danger, nor receiving most of those who were, nor was it new. Global factors of violence and economic imbalance that drove migration – often linked together – had existed long before the ‘crisis’, and while sometimes harsh anti-refugee rhetoric may have been more at the surface post-2015, harsh border policies had long been the status quo and continued afterwards. Just 272 refugees had gone through the initial EU settlement process as of the end of 2015 – or 0.17% of the total 160,000 the EU pledged to relocate, and .03% of the total who arrived (Kingsley 2016). As of 2018’s end, 70.8 million people are displaced, 80% of which are “in countries neighbouring their countries of origin” (UNHCR 2019). Edward Snowden himself received asylum in Russia, but did not describe his stay as by “choice.” He applied for asylum in 28 countries, many in Europe, in the hopes of moving elsewhere (Snowden 2019). Some of my project participants who I met as asylum applicants in 2016 have not, as of 2019, received a decision.

These asylum seekers were fleeing mortal fears. Yet, as with ‘privacy’, the UN definition under which they sought protection – like privacy – was closely tied to personal identity and self-actualization. According to the 1967 Refugee Convention, a refugee is someone who:

> owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or

> political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or… unwilling to return to it.

To qualify for refugee protection, one's life did not just have to be threatened by circumstances such as lack of economic opportunity or famine. Rather, the definition emphasized endangerments provoked by identity or belief, chosen or proscribed – traits that might be called 'personal' or 'private'. Yet refugees had a very different relationship with the assumed underpinnings of privacy as described above. They had left their homes under force. They had often fled persecution by one government only to enter into an asylum system that seemed reluctant to believe they need protection, governs their movements, and restricts their capacity to work, earn money, and generally build their lives in public or private.

Nonetheless, the refugees who came to Europe arrived carrying mobile phones, which they used to travel, stay in touch with diverse friends and family, and organize their local social lives. They were subject to data gathering just as the settled people envisioned to have 'privacy' concerns, yet seemed to have less to benefit and much more to lose through loss of privacy.

II. Project outline

Research aims and questions

This dissertation explores the online privacy practices of refugees and asylum seekers in Europe – especially within the UK – and applies this empirical work to critique theoretical and legally-developed Euro-American concepts of privacy. The empirical work included interviews with 23 refugees and asylum seekers, along with participant-observation work with eight migration and refugee-focused NGO's. As described above, refugees are often active social media users, yet have different backgrounds than the more typically-envisioned private citizen. They have left their homes and moved from one culture and set of norms to another, where their capacities to materially establish themselves are often tightly managed through the asylum system. Through looking to refugees this dissertation seeks to better describe the practical benefits and disadvantages of privacy, and to in turn understand what anxieties in modern European and American culture its mythic aspects point toward. As Georgina Born described, anthropology has the power to "stress the risks of reification and media-centrism inherent in that very term, 'the digital', which [it], in time honored fashion, aims to deconstruct at the same time that it elevates it" (2019). The project further empirically enters into current academic conversations on refugees’ digital practices and social media use, which it hopes to complement and enrich through engagement with privacy literature.

Altogether, the research aims to:

- Explore refugees’ perceptions of privacy in their personal and social lives in relation to their use of digital communication media
- By applying empirical research, better qualify information’s role in supporting these agencies, improving the applicability of theory to more diverse digital technology users
- Contribute to a growing body of literature on refugees’ social media use

The research questions it will use to pursue them are:

> How do refugees and asylum seekers exercise ‘privacy’ as they use social media? Are information revelation and discretion effective tools for social self-presentation?
>
> Does privacy – as it has been held to do – support individuals’ personal, social and civic agency? What preconditions would be necessary for privacy to function as it’s been held to?
>
> How can the experiences and practices of refugees and asylums seekers inform an understanding of privacy?

Chapter outline

The dissertation has a nesting structure focused around three privacy-related subject areas: digital privacy concerns developed in Europe and America; refugees’ interpersonal communications; and asylum seekers’ informational interactions with institutions. The conclusion and first three chapters – the introduction, literature review, and methodology – situate benefits associated with privacy in relation to literature more critical of how conventions of public and private expression support sometimes-restrictive social structures. Chapters Four, Five and Eight discuss how refugees and asylum seekers selectively share information to conduct their social lives with digital technologies, beginning with leaving their home countries (Four), through to maintaining relationships with ‘far’ friends and family (Five), and finally establishing local ‘close’ lives’ (Eight). In the middle, chapters six and seven discuss how asylum seekers interact with institutions that support them (seven) and asses their worthiness of legal protection (Six). Contrary to concerns around data protection, in these contexts, refugees often have trouble producing credible information, while careful data management practices effectively reduce expressive possibilities. Getting approved via the asylum process described in those middle chapters is an important factor for materially establishing the multi-faceted, local private and public life described in the final chapters.

Chapter Two, the literature review, first discusses the personal and social benefits of privacy as conceived by two key, pre-digital texts: Warren and Brandeis' 'right to be let alone' (1890) and Westin's *Privacy and Freedom* (1967). The former portrayed an individually-focused, partially mythic sense of control over one's sense of self, mind and domestic space. The latter situated individual interiority within social life, and identified three key benefits to privacy: the capacity to temporarily withdraw from social pressures, to selectively self-present to different publics, and to participate in political life. The two present partially contradictory lines of thought: the former emphasizes the singularity or immutability of the self, while the latter considers identity as selectively performed. The chapter then elaborates on the move toward associating privacy with personal information management practices amid massive increases in digital data in the world. While many discussions emphasize regulating information disclosure, this has a socially and technically ambiguous relationship with information's impact. Empirical research, meanwhile, shows that people generally work within technology's apparent affordances to configure their information's visibility. The chapter then takes a more critical stance toward privacy. The idea that self-actualization may be most fully achieved in private is relatively historically recent and does not account for the internal dynamics of multiple people within homes. At the same time, private action may leave the social structure not directly challenged. Rights to privacy are further supported by social convention and civic structures that unequally proscribe the ways people – refugees a challenging case in point – have material access to private space and are encouraged to express themselves publicly. The literature review concludes with recent literature on refugees, migration, and refugees' digital use.

Chapter Three: M**ethodology** discusses the practicalities and underlying philosophy of the empirical research from which this dissertation is drawn. The research employed interviews with 27 refugees, asylum seekers, and people from countries in the midst of conflict; ethnographic relationship-building with some participants; and participant observation in refugee support NGO's in the East Midlands area. Its qualitative methodology is underpinned by two traditions in anthropology. The first, digital anthropology, is applied as a mixture of online and offline methods to situate digital activity in offline life. The second, existential anthropology, is used here to study other cultures with an eye toward Western philosophy – here, ideas about privacy.

Chapter Four: Leaving and arriving in context describes research participants who travelled long and indeterminate distances to arrive; who originally arrived for reasons of work or study and transitioned to refugee status; and who arrived in the UK as part of the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme. While asylum seekers may be dismissed as 'economic migrants', those who had 'economic' work or study visas sometimes found it easier to stay than did asylum seekers who travelled under harsher circumstances. Nonetheless, proving worthiness of asylum often depends on funnelling leaving stories through factors of danger. Many refugees, however, described their reasons for moving not just in terms of well-founded fears of physical danger, but in terms of pursuing meaningful and materially-grounded private lives for themselves, their families and their careers. Exploring these complexities supports privacy's valuation of selective self-presentation, allowing that stories might be shaped for the asylum system in one way, and for other audiences in other way.

Chapter Five: Refugees' 'far lives' and informational privacy describes how interlocutors 'conservatively' configured their Facebook profiles – which are often visible by many people – rooted in the norms of their 'far lives' in their home countries, often displaying little information about themselves. They also actively communicate with family and friends through individual and small group-focused massaging services like WhatsApp. Social media functions for them not as a tool to re-invent unified public identities, but to maintain interpersonal continuities across their lives' other changes.

Chapter Six: Contexts without integrity: information in the asylum system discusses how personal information enters into and is assessed in the UK asylum bureaucracy. In contrast to concerns expressed around privacy about protecting information, many asylum applicants have difficulty presenting information that that the United Kingdom Border Association (UKBA) finds credible. The chapter contrasts this with implicit credibility granted by volunteers at the Evidence Team, an NGO that works with rejected asylum seekers to find evidence for fresh asylum claims. This demonstrates that information concealment and revelation is only impactful inasmuch as others grant the social performance credibility.

Chapter Seven: Confidentiality in a refugee service organization discusses how information is managed within The Center, an NGO which connects asylum seekers and refugees with benefits. The chapter discusses the parameters of interaction between sympathetic volunteers and clients as they sort who can (and cannot) be referred for further benefits. In contrast to the purported benefits of privacy and security, and in common with the bureaucratic systems described in the previous chapter, careful information management serves to limit individuals' expressive possibilities according to predetermined goals. The chapter further describes the value and purposes of confidentiality in these exchanges, which serve to define limited contexts for personal information exchange. This functions to specify conduct in formal, professional interactions - though it is allowed because these interactions happen in contexts more limited and specified than the socially complex and normatively diverse spaces of social media.

Chapter Eight: Negotiating privacy in the 'close' life discusses how refugees use social media to build relationships in their immediate offline social context – their 'close lives' – while still keeping in mind maintaining continuities with the 'far lives' discussed in Chapter Five. Refugee status and other legal rights to presence enable people to proceed with building public and private lives in Europe, while social media also allows refugees to self-actualize amid the joys and stresses of domestic life.

Chapter Nine: Qualifying privacy summarizes key points from the empirical chapters and returns to the broader digital discussions found in the literature review. Refugees negotiate social continuities and breaks with lives built in their home countries, as they develop lives in the Europe. Personal self-development may be facilitated with social media, but is oftentimes not directly expressed in widely-visible online spaces. At the same time, capacities to build private life require establishing credibility within the asylum system seemingly motivated to disbelieve. Within both the asylum system and ongoing social relationships, information is selectively disclosed to create effect. However, information can also be selectively ignored or scrutinized to preserve the status quo, whether to maintain relationships or exclude individuals. The information in such situations – while it may be personal – is often not hidden. For refused refugees, it is unclear what new information could be produced to demonstrate worthiness of human rights amid circumstances that are readily apparent. Privacy remains a complex, culturally-situated concept. It is difficult to maintain the social and personal flexibility privacy supports while trying to define the concept for myriad eventualities. The terms *security* and *confidentiality* – respectively, technical affordances (as in, those that restrict data flows) and a code of conduct around information sharing – should be used when possible for greater accuracy instead of *privacy*.

Chapter Two: Literature review

I. Introduction

In a general sense, privacy concerns that which is personal and relegated from public consideration. Despite (or perhaps because of) extensive academic and popular discussions, it remains nebulous and difficult to describe, define and regulate. Geerty wrote in 1977 that privacy “has a protean capacity to be all things to all lawyers… a powerful rhetorical battle cry in a plethora of unrelated contexts… [that] has lost any precise legal connotation” (p.233-34). His publication was neither the first nor last to be titled “Redefining Privacy”. Literature searches turn up thousands of articles and books seeking to ‘rethink’, ‘redefine’, or ‘reconsider’ privacy. Human-Computer Interactionists Dourish and Anderson defined it in 2006 as “a catch-all term for how individuals might lose control of information” (p. 322). These two ambiguity-laden definitions, however – separated by thirty years – reflect a shift in understanding of the topic from a claim, right, or “rhetorical battle cry” to an individually-beneficial experience of temporary social separation, toward interests in managing information as a medium to that experience. This was coincident with a digital explosion in the quantity of data made by and about individuals, managed stored and transmitted in an infrastructure over which they have little control. With this definitional ambiguity in mind, this literature review seeks to identify underlying themes regarding how privacy is held to benefit individuals or support their agencies, and how those benefits may be linked to information management and challenges posed by the quantity and accessibility of digital data. It qualifies these with empirical research on how people manage digital privacy, as well as theory and social science literature more attentive to the relationship between private and public agency.

Following this introduction, Section II discusses two influential accounts of privacy: Warren and Brandeis’ 1890 ‘right to be let alone’ sought to safeguard an idealized vision of personal freedoms that could be best realized within the home, free from public scrutiny. Westin (1967) expanded privacy to situate individuals’ mental and domestic interiority – and their benefits – within social life. His work (and others’) value privacy for offering individuals’ agency to withdraw temporarily from social obligations; to present selectively to different groups with different expectations; and to participate politically without undue pressure. These two accounts reflect two partially conflicting ideas of self-hood that remain in current privacy debates – respectively, a sense that privacy protects an essential or immutable self, and that it enables the self to be selectively and flexibly performed in social interactions. Westin concluded that regulating information could practically regulate access to the self, which – as the following section discusses – would become a dominant idiom in the digital era.

Section III discusses current digital era privacy concerns around data's wide accessibility. Drawing from Goffman (as Westin also did), it considers how data provides many 'front stage' opportunities for self-presentation, along with a 'back stage' digital infrastructure largely beyond individual control. Interloping on this process are 'ticket scalpers': governments, commercial actors, and researchers harvesting this personal data at will. Digital privacy is often closely associated with security, or technically preventing disclosure. The chapter pays particular critical attention to Nissenbaum's 'contextual integrity' (2008, 2010, 2011) which holds that digital information should be withheld and disclosed according to offline norms, as emblematic of how – in the digital era – reasonable reactions to various actors data pillaging have been associated with assumptions that careful information management effectively provides assumed benefits of privacy. Yet information disclosure has a complex relationship to social impact, and data analytics make inferences from variable amounts of information largely unconcerned with users' performative intentions. At the same time, regardless of the above concerns, ethnographic literature – especially from Daniel Miller and associated anthropologists – asserts that people in diverse cultures generally, with forethought, use the apparent affordances of social media to negotiate social distance.

Section IV situates privacy in relationship to public life, qualifying the heretofore articulated benefits of privacy with attention to conventions that restrict individuals' self-expression. The idea that individuals could self-actualize in private is historically contingent and developed in modernity along with urban private property ownership. It reflects idealized concerns of the head of household with little regard for others. Individuals expressing personal, stigmatized traits that cannot easily be hidden – from whom discretion is often expected – may be criticized for not performing the impractical or impossible task of keeping them ‘private’. Private space nonetheless allows private expression without public conflict, preserving the immediate social structure while allowing the liberalization of attitudes over time. Rights to public and private self-expression are guaranteed by and embedded in political structures that restrict people’s self-expression unevenly, especially refugees.

Section V discusses emerging literature on refugees’ digital usage. Refugees arriving in Europe during the 2015 migration ‘crisis’ and after used mobile phones to navigate their journeys and stay in touch with family and friends. They have left their private homes, to start over in a political system that ostensibly guarantees their rights while closely governing their capacities to build public and private lives. This highlights questions about privacy’s individuated benefits for individuals otherwise restricted by civic and social structures.

The claim to individual control over personal information is an understandable one, especially pertinent amid the reach and longevity of digital information. To suggest we are in danger of losing that control, however, implies we had it in the first place. The benefits privacy has been thought to support have been frequently envisioned as idealized visions of Western middle class home-ownership – as epitomized by the phrase ‘a man’s home is his castle’ – that functions differently and unequally for people who cannot realize control of private space and identity. Indeed, it has not functioned in the ideal for heads of household. Better understanding privacy’s association with the benefits it is held to support is thus applicable to all, and an urgent challenge for both individuals using digital technologies and those seeking to design and regulate them.

II. Privacy defined and valued

Introduction

The section discusses two influential, pre-digital accounts of privacy: American lawyers’ Warren and Brandeis’ 1897 “right to be let alone” and Westin’s “states” of privacy from his 1967 book *Privacy and Freedom.* The former is one of the first articulations of a distinct right to privacy. It focused on protecting individuals’ mental and domestic interiority, amid technological advances in mass media (then, tabloid newspapers and photography) that challenged and complicated late modern, middle and upper class distinctions between the public and private spheres. Writing in the late 1960s, Westin also held then-new technology to threaten privacy. He more extensively articulated the experience and benefits of privacy, situating individual interiority in social and political life. He held that privacy could be defined by four states: solitude, intimacy, anonymity, and reserve. He further held that privacy supports individual capacities to:

- Act – within limited scope – largely free from accountability to broader society, as a temporary break and to engage in various personal pursuits
- Exercise agency in interpersonal relationships by managing different public self-presentations to groups with differing expectations and requirements
- Participate in democratic society

While the two accounts of privacy share much, they present different strains of thought regarding the nature of the self which are still present in current discourse, and will be returned to in Chapter Nine. The former emphasizes the singularity of the self, while the latter emphasizes how privacy enables the self to be selectively performed. Westin held that managing information controls privacy, which – to be discussed in Section III – became a key idiom of understanding privacy in the digital era.

'The right to be let alone'

Warren and Brandeis' 1890 American law article "The Right to Privacy" described privacy as the "right to be let alone" and established the tone and themes for many discussions that followed. The authors considered privacy as a product and necessity of complex civilization, threatened by new technology. While they held that privacy was a valuable right for all individuals, they wrote in terms most applicable to the head of household, a figure they idealized as unaccountable to others within or outside the home. This vision of privacy outlined a reasonable-sounding claim that barriers with society allowed the individual to self-actualize. At the same time, impossible to realize, it presented a gap, ready to be filled by anxiety, between the ideal of privacy and its imperfect practice which would resurface in privacy concerns that followed as technology and norms changed.

Warren and Brandeis saw their “right to be let alone” as an aspect of various parts of American law that needed to be distinctly clarified as a result of the “complexity” of modern life and the rise of what was then ‘new media’: photography and gossip columns in newspapers, which had invaded the “sacred precincts of private and domestic life” (p.195). This new media was exposing the noteworthy to the undue curiosity of the public rabble, creating an impetus to clarify privacy as a distinct right:

> “To occupy the indolent, column upon column is filled with idle gossip, which can only be procured by intrusion upon the domestic circle. The intensity and complexity of life, attendant upon advancing civilization, have rendered necessary some retreat from the world, and man, under the refining influence of culture, has become more sensitive to publicity, so that solitude and privacy have become more essential to the individual” (p.196).

The authors’ claim drew from precedents in property law and rights to “liberty”, but they ultimately considered privacy a heretofore un-described right to “inviolate personality” that could be most fully realized in private (p.205). This merged senses of self-actualization, the protection of dignity, and property ownership. Discussing the intellectual context of the original authors, Glancy writes that the concept “embodied a psychological insight, at that time relatively unexplored, that an individual’s personality, especially his or her self-image, can be affected, and sometimes distorted or injured, when information about that individual’s private life is made available to other people” (1979, p.2). This was rooted in then-contemporary social and legal conceptions of individuality, as well as strong distinctions between public and private space (p.17-28). Their valuation of the ‘private self’ was further part of a larger shift in Western culture – discussed in Section IV – from self-actualization in public toward self-actualization in private (Sennett 1976).

The authors’ inward-focused concerns do not extensively concern themselves with social consequences or benefits of privacy as would Westin, whose ideas are discussed below. Rather, the authors seek to preserve a space in a world otherwise beyond the individual’s control. Their contemporary E.L. Godkin – founding editor of *The Nation* – made connects between privacy and the capacity for public action in “The Rights of the Citizen…to His Own Reputation”, also published in 1890 (see Gurstein 2018). Godkin’s discussion connects public reputation to a general respect for a sovereign, civilized privacy of the home and mind. He wrote that “the outward and visible sign of the law’s respect for his personality as an individual, for that kingdom of the mind, that inner world of personal thought and feeling in which every man passes some time.”

As with digital era privacy discussions – discussed in the section that follows – Warren and Brandeis emphasize disclosure as the mechanism by which privacy is lost. Like these digital era concerns, they focused on then-developing technological mediums – for Warren and Brandeis, newspapers. They wrote that “[t]he common law secures to each individual the right of determining, ordinarily, to what extent his thoughts, sentiments, and emotions shall be communicated to others….The right is lost only when the author himself communicates his production to the public” (p.198-199). These “thoughts, sentiments and emotions” read as less definite than digital era ‘information’ and ‘data’. Rather, the emphasis is on a claim to feelings that disclosure might violate.

These claims to self-actualization in private space were most applicable to men of a certain means. While the authors argued the right applied to “all persons, whatsoever; their position or station,” (p.214) the terms, benefits and threats they describe seem most applicable to those of high social standing: the heads of households, with space to retire to, property to be invaded, a public interest to placate and face to lose[1]. The authors do not discuss how their right might be held by spouses, children, servants, non-landowning tenants, or the otherwise homeless. Indeed, in as far as the right considers social stratification, it is class-coded, aiming to protect targets of newspaper gossip from the illegitimate interest of the “indolent”. Altogether, the ‘right to be let alone’ was – from its inception – partially mythic, suggesting an autonomy to which the landowners may have aspired but no one held absolutely.

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[1] The ‘right’ can be situated in the authors’ biographies. Samuel Warren, born into Boston high society, had, by likely-apocryphal legend, personal motives in initiating the piece: dismay at newspapers publishing details of his domestic life in general and his daughter’s wedding in particular (Solove 2007, p.105-110). By contrast, Glancy suggests that as a “southerner, a man of limited financial means, and a Jew, Brandeis brought a certain amount of objectivity and a more democratic approach to the argument for the right to privacy” (p.5). Brandeis later wrote the dissent in *Olmstead vs. the United States* (1928)*,* arguing against the majority ruling that law enforcement could wiretap without a warrant on the grounds that communication over telephones was voluntary. Brandeis is also credited with the pro-transparency, technology-positive (at least, metaphorically) maxim that "publicity is justly commended as a remedy for social and industrial diseases. Sunlight is said to be the

While the language of the ‘right’ suggests it is held innately, it is also in a sense a values statement about how the world ought to be, the need to clarify it implying that the right is imperiled and not universally held. This is not unique to claims to natural or human rights – a classic example being the American claim that “all men” have “unalienable rights…[to] Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness”, set down in the Declaration of Independence to declare a break with England for violating these rights. Discussions of refugees’ rights – suggested to be held by all, but guaranteed and proscribed by the state – will return to this in Section IV.

The ’right’ was further difficult to translate directly into actionable law. While Warren and Brandeis suggested privacy was a previously extent right, they offered few specific, novel mechanisms for legal enforcement. American constitutional rights to private property already existed, including Third Amendment protections against being compelled to quarter military personnel and Fourth Amendment protections against unwarranted search and seizure. The latter protections are arguably what has been breached in digital-era cases of mass data collection by governmental agencies. The authors did suggest that “matters of which the publication should be repressed… which concern the private life, habits, acts, and relations of an individual” (p.216), yet publishing facts about individuals’ private lives was and remains legal, protected by First Amendment rights to freedom of

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best of disinfectants, electric light the most efficient policeman” (Brandeis University 2016).

speech and the press. Thus, while the authors sought to *distinctly* clarify privacy, they also highlighted its nebulous relationship to other claims.

Such free expression rights further also do not exist in other countries, including the UK, where publication can more easily be legally restricted to protect private life – for example, withholding crime victims' names from publication to spare them attention. To the extent that information involves otherwise noteworthy individuals, this may, however, be impractical – as in 2011, when football player Ryan Griggs received an injunction against the UK press to prevent them from covering his extra-marital affair. It was nonetheless widely reported internationally.

Indeed, the years following Warren and Brandeis' publication were marked by American court rulings that tested legal grounds for enforcement of privacy. Jhaveri (2018) and Prosser (1960, p.385 – 388) detail the 1902 case *Roberson vs. Rochester Folding Box Co.,* in which a young woman's family sued the defendant for using her photograph without consent. This connected 'privacy' to the related concept of right to one's likeness. According to Prosser (p.385), the corporation successfully defended their use of the photo on "lack of precedent, the purely mental character of the injury, the 'vast amount of litigation' that might be expected to ensue, the difficulty of drawing any line between public and private figures, and the fear of undue restriction of the freedom of the press." While the defendants won the case, Prosser writes that many U.S. states shortly thereafter passed laws protecting individuals from having their likenesses appropriated.

Altogether, by the early 20th century, privacy was articulated as a "right to be let alone": a claim to separate from society, on one's own terms; and to protect one's possessions of home and mind, for the purposes of self-actualization. This right was nonetheless difficult to distinctly define or legally enforce. It was difficult to disentangle from related claims to property, likeness, reputation and communication. It could remain partially attainable as a state, but never wholly fulfilled to limit others' communication.

Westin's "states" and the experience of privacy

This section discusses Westin's (1967, p.33-35) four "states" of privacy – solitude, intimacy, anonymity, and reserve – as a framework to think about present-day privacy concerns elaborated further in the next section. As with previous authors Westin sees privacy as defending individuals’ mental and domestic lives, especially from new technologies. He more extensively describes the experience and reasons for defending privacy, and situates privacy’s inner benefits within social life. Digital era literature would seize on a simplified version of Westin’s conclusions without his social nuance: that access to the self could be regulated through information control.

Solitude, the first of Westin’s states, separates the individual from physical or mental intrusions. Unlike Warren and Brandeis’ absolute claims to being ‘let alone’, Westin acknowledges solitude may not be perfectly realized – noises may interrupt, and the individual “may believe that he is observed by God”. Nonetheless, he states that “solitude is the most complete state of privacy that individuals may achieve” (p.34). Other authors note how solitude may or may not be associated with aloneness. The anthropologist Michael Jackson, for example, describes how people cycle between periods of focused attention and withdrawal, in effect (in my interpretation) seeking solitude moment by moment (2012, p.1-21). The below section on domestic life describes how individuals maintain private thoughts in close living quarters. An explicitly-articulated desire for solitude is largely absent from digital privacy discussion, while concerns about technology’s invasive and distracting qualities remain.

In intimacy, the second state, “the individual is part of a small unit that claims and is allowed to exercise corporate seclusion so that it may achieve a close, relaxed and frank relationship” (p.34). Here, sharing and withholding information and experiences builds some social relationships while keeping others at a distance. Dourish and Anderson likewise suggest that information “cement[s] a bond between those who share it and mark their difference from those with whom it is not shared” (2006, p. 332-3). Digital technology is held to be both enabling and threatening to this kind of intimacy. It enables instantaneous and extensive communication with distant relations – to some complaints that individuals neglect those around them to stare into their screens. Platforms like Facebook, however, encourage people to share information with large groups without regard for differing social expectations. As elaborated further in Chapter Five, this research supports Miller et al.’s (2016) conclusions that people often use social media’s affordances in deliberate, nuanced ways to maintain desired levels of closeness with others.

The third state of anonymity concerns an individual's ability to not attract attention in public. Westin draws on Durkheim's concept of *anomie* (1897/1951) – feelings of aloneness amid urban life – but where Durkheim emphasized potential threats of *anomie* to the psyche, Westin considers its virtues. Anonymity allows for a degree of openness. Individuals may be relaxed with strangers, experiencing a relief from some social pressures when among people with little personal interest in one other. The identifiability of individuals within the massive quantities of digital data produced, databased, and analyzed about individuals is a current major concern. The EU's General Data Protection Regulation (updated 2016) considers privacy in terms that relate to anonymity, describing data as "personal" if it is "relating to an identified or identifiable natural person" (Article 2a). Further related concerns will be discussed in the section below on digital privacy.

Reserve, the fourth privacy state, "occurs when the individual's need to limit communication about himself is protected by the willing discretion of those surrounding him" (p.35). Westin draws this state from Goffman's "civil inattention" (1963). Koops et al. (2017) similarly describe the "norms of seeing but not taking notice (or perhaps rather, demonstrating not to take notice), for instance by averting one's eyes" (p.58). We expect that others will not scrutinize us – or rather, feel freedom to go about our activities if others don't *appear* to be unduly watching us. In the digital era, personal data is routinely observed, databased, and analyzed, by everyone from individual "creepers" who observe social media profiles without interacting to government agencies that monitor cell phone signals to plan drone attacks. As argued throughout this dissertation, it is difficult to tell to what extent one is digitally observed and the practical impact thereof.

Individual, civic and social benefits of privacy

Warren and Brandeis considered privacy as the sovereign province of the individual, whose being can be most fully expressed in private, and rooted in assertions of property and liberty. By contrast, Westin's states – solitude, intimacy, anonymity, and reserve – are interpersonally and situationally negotiated. A walk in the woods may lend itself to solitude or intimacy among companions, and the crowd at a sporting event to anonymity and the willful reserve of one's neighbors. Westin also associates privacy with a large number of benefits, which I have organized as *individual, civic*, and *social*: respectively, relief from the outside world; a capacity to participate in democratic life; and agency to strategically present different aspects of oneself in different social situations.

Westin frames privacy's internal benefits in terms of relief they offer from external factors. Westin argues that privacy takes pressure off individuals to fulfill multiple social roles at once. Among other capacities it supports, he values privacy for allowing individuals to 'vent' their frustrations without affecting their social lives; gives people leverage to bond selectively with others at their discretion; and allows a space to reflect (p.26, 35-56). Solove – who wrote the introduction to a later edition of Westin's 1967 volume – phrased the value as thus: "Privacy is the relief from a range of kinds of social friction. It enables people to engage in worthwhile activities in ways that they would otherwise find difficult or impossible." (2006, p.484). This space of relief allows not just for self-actualization, but a space for developing oneself for public and private pursuits:

> Each person is aware of the gap between what he wants to be and what he actually is, between what the world sees of him and what he knows to be his much more complex reality. In addition there are aspects of himself that the individual does not fully understand but is slowly exploring and shaping as he develops. (1967, p.36)

Beyond these benefits for an individual's interiority, Westin argues that privacy benefits civic life and the individual's agency within it. Westin describes privacy as a democratic virtue, in contrast to "primitive" and totalitarian societies (p.10-18; 25-31). As Warren, Brandeis and Godkin before him, he held that privacy was both a condition of modern life and threatened by it. To Westin, liberal democracy protects individuals' rights to act independent of governmental pressure to pursue private leisure pursuits; democratic action through anonymous voting; and civic advocacy without fear of reprisal. Similar concerns remain current around the government and private companies surveilling the home, data and political action. This dissertation considers 'civic life' broadly, beyond the individual's voice in governance, so that it might encompass even more foundational rights and values that are allowed or prohibited by the state. For asylum seekers, these include legally permitted to reside, choose their place of residence, and work to materially support their homes and families.

Thirdly, in addition to individual and civic benefits, Westin portrays privacy as an integral element of social life (p.36; 57-68). To Westin, privacy allows people and organizations time to get their public faces in order without being intrusively scrutinized during the process. As he describes, effectively maintaining a public face involves a “balance of privacy and disclosure” (p.43). The backstage – within the mind and behind closed doors – is a place of relaxation and planning, a store from which individuals select what aspects will be selectively incorporated into public personae.

Westin’s conception of this social interaction draws from Erving Goffman’s then-current, now classic *Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (1956), which uses theatrical metaphors to describe how people ‘perform’ certain roles in public. Goffman divides interaction between front and back stages. The ‘frontstage’ is public life, while the ‘backstage’ is metal space and the home. The individual selectively works to create impressions within different social contexts. Much of Goffman’s book concerns how this performance is maintained in interpersonal interaction with methods, strategies, and “props”. To Goffman, social interaction is a kind of jointly-negotiated fiction that often prioritizes social “harmony” over the individual’s interior desires:

> [E]ach participant is expected to suppress his immediate heartfelt feelings, conveying a view of the situation which he feels the others will be able to find at least temporarily acceptable. The maintenance of this surface of agreement, this veneer of consensus, is facilitated by each participant concealing his own wants behind statements which assert values to which everyone present feels obliged to give lip service. (p.3-4)

To Goffman, it’s in the interests of individuals to keep the everyday social performance moving, sustaining it through a “mixture of cynicism and belief” (p.13). He neither precludes nor discusses social change. The awkwardness and challenge of breaching the performance is often, implicitly, not worth the risks. This is born out – for an anthropological example – in Schieffelin’s (1996) account of a séance (in the proximal living space of a Kaluli longhouse, no less) in which the audience and two mediums – one credible, the other absurdly not – maintained attention and investment enough throughout the performance to see it through to completion.

It is worthwhile to note here two meanings of the English word *performance:* Goffman's performativity, and to act *well* (see also Schieffelin p.60-61). The latter has been largely absent from treatments of privacy, even as one's ability to "act" (as in, to create an impression) is contingent on one's ability to "act" (that is, to do so *effectively)*. An individual's capacity to act, then, depends on his or her interlocutor recognizing and – if not *believing* him or her – at least playing along. For people with stigmatized identities or proscribed social positions – as are asylum applicants, whose interactions with the asylum system are discussed in Chapters 6 and 7 – this credibility may not be granted.

A dystopic alternative to this kind of selective performance was described by Goffman in the "total institution" (1961), in which mental patients – under constant observation for different professionals charged with their care – found it difficult to manage conflicting expectations. Similar fears of surveillance as a means of social control are expressed in Foucault's discussion of Jeremy Bentham's 'panopticon' (1977) – a fictional prison designed so all prisoners would be constantly observed – which is often evoked in present-day privacy concerns. Marwick and boyd's "context collapse" (2013) – in which social groups with differing expectations share the same online spaces, critiqued below – likewise speaks to fears that wide visibility of social performances inevitably produces conflicts for the individual.

Like earlier and later authors, Westin conceived of new technology as a threat. After the theory section discussed above, he devotes a substantial section to "new tools for invading privacy" (p.69-184), a third section to cases studies, and a fourth to policy suggestions. The book's detail level – and linkage of theoretical concerns to new practices – puts many modern accounts of privacy concerns to shame, frequently articulating *how* new technologies posed a threat to the values he described. For example, Westin perceived the then relatively-new technology of the polygraph (lie detector) as threatening privacy, describing it as tool of "psychological surveillance" (p.145). He considers the technology to violate privacy on three counts: "the attempt to penetrate the 'inner domain' of belief," which would be against American law; "interference with the individual's sense of autonomy and reserve"; and "the increased psychological power over individuals" the test effects (p.264). These respectively displayed concern about the interiority of the mind, the capacity to subvert self-presentation, and the power exerted by the observer over the observed. In another prescient passage, Westin groups consumer profiling under the heading of "psychological surveillance." Westin considered "data surveillance" (p.173) and the threats that computers pose to privacy as paramount:

> The most significant fact for the subject of privacy is that once an organization purchases a giant computer, it inevitably begins to collect more information about its employees, clients, members, taxpayers, or other persons in the interest of organization. (p.176)

In these cases, Westin largely considers thoughts and "information" to be meaningful unto themselves, in danger of being 'collected', and does not directly discuss how 'collected' data might be applied to generate radically different inferences. Yet, if we apply Westin's standards directly to extensive, common data analytics practices – as discussed below, often performed by "ticket scalpers" who interlope on digital interactions – they would almost certainly violate privacy by peering into the 'backstage' to form views on subjects independent of their frontstage performances.

Altogether, Westin's vision of privacy is interpersonally negotiated, and held to support the democratic, liberal society it also takes as a precondition for privacy. The personal benefits of private self-actualization and preparation for public life are most easily realized if one has a comfortable space for which to retire. Civic participation is most effective if one has the right to vote on a responsive government. Social performance runs only if one has social credibility. Not everyone has these capacities, however, and – as will be discussed throughout this dissertation – refugees' relationships to all three in Europe are particularly fraught and proscribed.

The shift toward an informational understanding of privacy

To this point, privacy involved information, but information control was not an end in and of itself. Goffman's impressions are not – strictly speaking – *informational,* even as information may be a tool or 'prop' brought forth from the backstage to the front. Warren and Brandeis advocated restrictions on publishing private facts, but it was not a major part of their discussion. Access to information and property, however, could be legally or conventionally regulated in a way that senses of privacy could not be directly.

Information could become a medium of privacy management. With property laws well established, Westin concluded that:

> personal information, thought of as a right to decision over one's private personality, should be defined as a property right, with all the restraints on interference by public and private authorities and due-process guarantees that our law of property has been so skillful in devising. (p.362)

Elsewhere in his book he defines privacy as "the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others." (1967, p.7). In a 2003 publication, he referred to privacy as "the claim of an individual to determine what information about himself or herself should be known to others." (p. 431).

Many privacy-related concepts more readily suggest governance of information and its transmission than privacy. Security – as I define it, referring to technical affordances – can prevent data from being transmitted. Confidentiality – discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven – is a professional code detailing under what circumstances information might be communicated. Simmel – in his classic discussion of secrecy – described information concealment as a mutually-understood facet of social life, with the display or appearance of hidden knowledge granting power (1906, especially p.441). As will be discussed in Chapter Nine, I believe that referring to secrecy, confidentiality, and data security is often more comprehensible and technically accurate than invoking privacy. Nonetheless – because or in spite of its malleability – the word 'privacy' has become entrenched as a rallying cry.

Steeves (2009) notes that Westin's *Privacy and Freedom* "was followed swiftly by a series of governmental studies in France, the United Kingdom, Canada, Sweden, and the United States, and each of these countries subsequently passed data protection laws based on Westin's definition of privacy as informational control." (p.191). No doubt these filled gaps in information management law. They also, however, set the stage for the digital era – to be discussed in the following section – in which privacy would be considered strongly in terms of controlling information disclosure and flows, with little attention to the relationship between information management and the agencies privacy had theretofore been held to support.

Summary

Pre-digital discussions of privacy often situated the concept as a claim to – and supportive of – personal liberty and property. Warren and Brandeis' "right to be let alone" considered privacy a claim to control access to one's person and property, based on a highly idealized vision of life as the head of a household. Westin's "states" of privacy situated the interiority of privacy within social life, further exploring its values for personal, civic, and social life – respectively, to temporarily withdraw from social pressures; participate in democracy and its freedoms; and selectively self-present in social interactions. As digital-era authors that followed, they held privacy to be threatened by advances in communication technology. Westin positioned information as a possession and a primary medium through which access to the self could be regulated, a primary focus of digital-era privacy literature discussed in the following section. Divergently, they emphasized privacy's role in protecting two different, hesitantly reconcilable versions of the self: one as immutable, the other as selectively performed. While framed as individuated, these benefits applied most accurately to people who had homes, civic rights and social standing – privileges which many people do not possess. This suggests a need to clarify how more diverse individuals actually experience privacy's purported benefits.

III. Information and privacy in the digital era

Introduction

Since the 1967 publication of *Privacy and Freedom*, digital technologies such as computers, mobile phones and social media like Facebook became extensively integrated in the daily lives of people around the world. These technologies created myriad opportunities for interpersonal communication – in Goffman's terms, frontstages on which individuals present themselves. Yet online posts, images and videos – and the metadata that supports their transmission – might nonetheless travel far beyond where individuals know or intend. Confidences shared between some friends might damage relationships with others; off-color jokes could ruin careers if they attract hostile viral attention. Meanwhile, the ‘backstage’ split between people’s homes and minds, and vast, global digital infrastructures over which they have little direct control. Alongside this numerous interlopers emerged, which I term ‘ticket scalpers’: businesses and intelligence agencies which aggregate, buy, sell, and analyze data, with sometimes ambiguous or little consent from the people to whom it pertains. Where this information will surface remains difficult to predict.

Given all the extant personal data and entities seeking to gather it, many privacy-related discussions turned – as Westin had in his conclusion – to how to manage information and its flows. These discussions, however, have not granted much attention to how information management is associated with privacy benefits, nor how data is situated personally and interpersonally. Helen Nissenbaum’s ‘contextual integrity’ (2004, 2010, 2011, 2015) reflects many of these tendencies, expressing concern at mass data gathering projects and contending that privacy can be managed if ‘information flows’ meet normative offline expectations. Yet while technology users are extraordinarily diverse, discussions of norms tend to still evoke idealized expectations of the relatively privileged, of sovereign control over private space and public identity. At the same time, ethnographic studies show that, contrary to accounts of privacy that emphasize threats and fears, people generally use the perceived affordances of social media to configure their online visibility and manage their social distance with others.

Security-focused models are a limited part of this picture. Technically preventing disclosure offers little guidance on what to do with data once it ‘escapes’, especially as analytics generate diverse inferential meanings hesitantly related to frontstage presentations. At the same time, information’s social effect once revealed is complex. This calls for greater attention to the social role and effect of personal information management practices and their relationship to private, social, and civic benefits associated with privacy.

The digital frontstage, backstage, and ticket scalpers

To promote agency in interiority, self-presentation, and civic participation, Westin concluded privacy could be maintained by regulating information as property. Digital-era privacy concerns have likewise focused on information. The change that digital data – and ‘Big Data’ analytics – have brought are often described in terms of increasing information’s scale, of expanding its ‘volume, variety, velocity, and veracity’ (Kitchin 2013, 2014). Large quantities of diverse information now exist, coming quickly, and offering interested parties more and more detailed insights. These technologies allow users numerous opportunities to communicate with others and shape public personas, while their supportive infrastructures produce long data trails. This occurs as a matter of course through the course of daily use of digital devices. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter encourage broad visibility. Voice and video calls and messages enable communication with other individuals and small groups. The meta-data records that record mobile phone users’ locations and contacts to support these interaction reveal contacts, user locations, and more. Applying Goffman’ and Westin’s framework of ‘self-presentation’, digital technology offers many frontstage opportunities for individuals to present themselves, supported by a backstage technical infrastructure over which they have little control. Both front and back stages are frequently beset by what I call ‘ticket scalpers’: data observers, brokers and analysts who interlope on their performance. This section describes the scope of this data and its potential consequences for frontstage self-presentation.

In an optimistic view, digital technology has provided people more options than ever for communication and self-presentation. Early digital theorists (notably Haraway 1991) celebrated how digital technology allows individuals to explore varied personas. Anthropologists (Boellstorff 2008) and journalists (Dibbell 1998) have studied people’s social interactions in online virtual environments as ‘fieldsites’ on their own terms, largely separate from their offline lives. Digital technology also allows people to discover new interests, meet new friends, and stay in touch extensively with relations. In cultures like China – where personal space is often closely shared and cultural norms tend to not value individual ‘privacy’ – phones allow people to select who they will message, out of view of families or roommates (Wang 2016). For these affordances, Miller et al. (2016) argue that social media ‘increases privacy’ (see also UCL 2016a). They further describe how – in intimate, selective communications – people still ‘perform’ versions of themselves.

Historically, information’s limited accessibility has helped facilitate different credible performances in different contexts. Selinger and Hartzog (from philosophy and law, respectively) argue for the value of informational “obscurity”, “the idea that information is safe – at least to some degree – when it is hard to obtain or understand” (2014, p. 2) as a way to preserve privacy. Limiting data’s reach is part of the logic behind the European Union’s ‘right to be forgotten’ (Article 17 in the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation [GDPR]), which allows citizens the right to petition websites and search engines to remove outdated or inaccurate information. Digital information, however, has a long reach and potential to be viewed out of its original context. Solove writes that “[i]ncreased accessibility, however, creates problems such as the increased possibility of disclosure. Information can readily be exploited for purposes other than those for which it was originally made publicly accessible. (2006, p.537).” Schneier (2015), Solove (2007) and Ronson (2016), all writing for popular audiences, recount many anecdotes about consequences individuals faced when digital, personal information reached broader publics, and relatively minor breaches of decorum that would have otherwise been ephemeral were shared online. The “internet is a cruel historian,” Solove quoted an otherwise unnamed message board contributor, referring to inopportune items that may appear at the top of webs searches (p.11). Solove and Ronson display changes in online activity between their decade of publication. The former mostly concerns individuals who did not seek attention (who were, for example, recorded with CCTV or had emails shared against their wishes). Ronson primarily discusses social media posts that went unexpectedly ‘viral’.

The above examples most impacted and occurred at the frontstage. Digital communications, however, are shared through a ‘backstage’ global infrastructure, including both content and ‘meta-data’ not necessarily of interest to users but which enables transmission to function (such as cell phone call logs). While not necessarily of interest to users, if analyzed meta-data can reveal individuals’ relationships, locations, daily routines, and other information. Compiling, analyzing, and selling user data and insights derived from it – often for advertising – is an integral part of many services’ business models, which for many become entrenched with limited regulatory oversight. The common adage “if you’re not the customer, you’re the product” captures this commercial state of affairs; if you’re not paying to use a service, value you generate may be used to make money. This includes how data from the front and backstages is sold to, given to or scraped by third parties (often, other companies and governments) which I refer to as “ticket scalpers”, whose analytic practices will be discussed in a subsequent subsection. In this sense, Facebook and other social media have a financial stake in encouraging users to 'share' even if they frame these calls to openness in terms of social benefits (Van Dijck 2014).

Front and backstage information – transmitted and stored in databases – is further vulnerable to potential exposure. The need to secure this data – to prevent it from being leaked, exposed or hacked – has been a major topic of concern in the digital era, often growing to (as discussed in the following section) frame privacy concerns. Indeed, high-profile data breeches are frequently reported in the news. Credit cards numbers are stolen. Politicians' and other public figures' emails were stolen and published online, such as US Presidential candidate Hillary Clinton's emails during the 2016 election season. In 2015, data about users of the marital infidelity-enabling website Ashley Madison were published online, including real names, addresses, and search histories. Several users subsequently committed suicide (Lamont 2016). Sometimes organizations have exposed their own databases, as when the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) posted the social security numbers, addresses, and other personal information of 428,828 public housing clients to its website (Lane 2016). The data was shared to help facilitate agencies monitoring public housing residents for weekly public service requirements. In December 2018, a file known as "Collection #1" was discovered on file-sharing services, apparently aggregated from existing data hacks to contain 1,160,253,228 email addresses and passwords (Hern 2019). Despite this, mainstream journalists appear to have engaged with these hacks intermittently (e.g. Gurantz 2019), and the impact of these exposures on citizens not otherwise famous or noteworthy to the public is often unclear. The voluntariness of people's participation in these databases exists on a spectrum, from a seemingly avoidable spousal cheating platform to email – good luck conducting social or professional life without it – to a compulsory database for vulnerable individuals receiving public support.

Given all this potential for exposure, writers have turned their attention – also under the heading of 'privacy' – toward categorizing the ways data control can be lost. Solove (2006) classifies 'privacy harms' recognized by American law by four types of data intrusion: information collection, information processing, information dissemination, and invasion. Koops et al. (2017) analyze the privacy literature cannon and legal policy from eight countries – creating a taxonomy of eight 'ideal types' of privacy (Figure One): bodily, spatial, communicational, proprietary, intellectual, decisional, associational, and behavioral (2016, p. 69-70). These are considered as zones of influence by which individuals may act autonomously and enforce separation from others, such as freedom to think ('intellectual') and the ability to determine one's relations ('associational'). They exist on two continuum axes between the "public zone" and "private zone", and "freedom from" action and "freedom to" act. The authors position these elements within a broader category of informational privacy: that is, internal thoughts, interpersonal communications and bodies are thought of as (or being governable by) *information.*

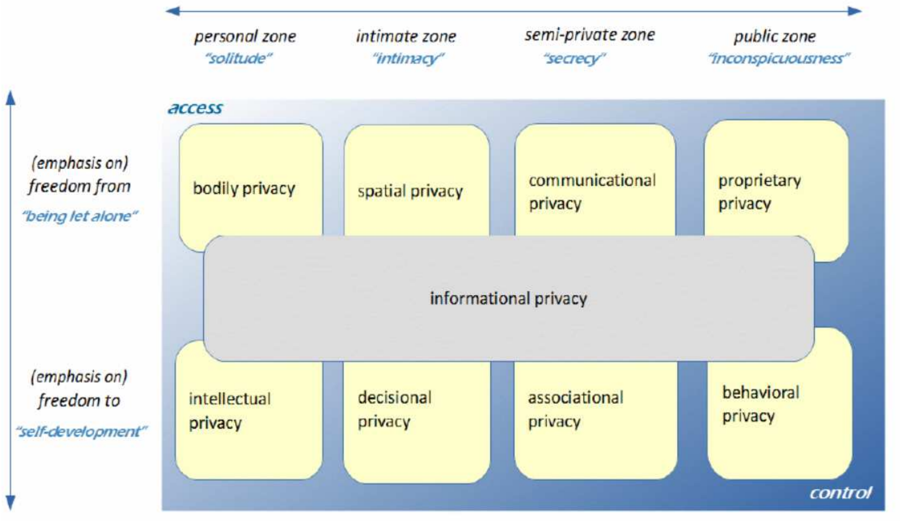
personal zone
"solitude"
intimate zone
"intimacy"
semi-private zone
"secrecy"
public zone
"inconspicuousness"
access
(emphasis on)
freedom from
"being let alone"
(emphasis on)
freedom to
"self-development"
bodily privacy
spatial privacy
communicational privacy
proprietary privacy
informational privacy
intellectual privacy
decisional privacy
associational privacy
behavioral privacy
control

Image: Koops et al. (2017)'s taxonomy of privacy

Thus not only have writers on digital privacy turned their attention to the vast quantities of personal information produced, shared, held, distributed, traded, sold, and hacked – but information control has frequently become a major idiom through which privacy is understood. This information enables frontstage expressive possibilities, is held in a global backstage infrastructure, and mined by businesses, governments and researchers who have interloped as 'ticket scalpers' on acts of communication. The contexts in which any of this data might surface are difficult to predict.

Front-stage self-presentation: empirical and ethnographic work

Amid all this data pillaging, and to the consternation of security professionals, people often appear to express more concerns about digital privacy than they take practice to safeguard (e.g., Acquisti, Brandimarte and Loewenstein 2015, and popular media citations from Chapter One). Ethnographic studies, however, tend to portray social media users as proactive about the decisions they make about sharing online.

Among the most extensive anthropological projects on social media use is Miller et al. 2016's "Why We Post" project, which theorized about global social media practices from a collaboration between 9 ethnographers working for 18 months each in eight different countries, each of whom have also produced a separate ethnographic volume from the research. Their work expands on Miller and Madinou's concept of 'polymedia', which describes how people make decisions about how to use media based in part on their affordances in relationship to other media (2011, 2012). The authors describe social media as existing on a spectrum of public to private, with networks such as Facebook and Twitter being more public than the messaging service WhatsApp. In more privately-oriented social media, this has directly enabled people to exist in different contextual spheres at once, without direct overlap. For example, project participant Haynes (2016) conducted research among Chilean miners who alternate between extended periods at their worksites and home. WhatsApp enabled them to stay in touch with family while at their worksites, and trade bawdy jokes with co-workers while with their families. In contrast, Miller et al. argue that "public social media is conservative," a somewhat provocative phrasing (elaborated on in Chapter Five, and borne out by this dissertation) of how people shape their postings to the norms of offline contexts. Broadly visible platforms like Facebook are treated 'conservatively', similar to how one might behave in offline public spaces. If we would say this online conservatism is felt as undue pressure, one should also note that *all* situations have social expectations. It is difficult to imagine behavior entirely divorced of expected consequence or positioning.

Miller et al. also suggest that nervousness over social media privacy is partially provoked by how social media forces users to make visible "friend" lists and precisely define relationship statuses that could previously remain ambiguous. Miller's solo work from the Why We Post project argues that such privacy anxiety may be particularly pronounced in England. He writes that "social media simply makes evident the exquisite sensibility of many English people to the exact state of their relationships" (p.109), which Miller et al. suggests may apply further globally, and further states that a "good deal that the English see as characteristic of being English has to do with the complex relationship between public and private" (2016, p.5). Specific to England, Miller argues the use of Facebook involves a "Goldilocks strategy" of "middling distancing": keeping social relations at just the right distance, similar to how the character Goldilocks sought an appropriately-sized bed in the fairy tale (p.100).

This research altogether suggests that people generally use the digital tools available to them to configure front-stage presentations for distinct audiences, as well as interact more conservatively on more widely-visible platforms like Facebook. At the same time, the capacity of groups (such as teenagers) with relatively little civic and social power to use social media provokes a paternalistic, concerned reactions over their alleged self-exposure.

Data, surveillance and social control

Returning to 'backstage', infrastructural concerns, fear of governmental surveillance became a major topic of public discussion in 2013, when Edward Snowden revealed massive, near-indiscriminate data gathering projects by five English-speaking countries' intelligence services, including the US and UK. Tech companies had willingly complied with secret orders to provide the data (Greenwald 2014, Portias 2014). While at face value bulk data collection would seem to brazenly violate constitutional rights against unwarranted search and seizure, America presented a legal justification for mass data collection was *Smith v. Maryland* (1979), which – in a case that involved recording phone calls that were placed (in effect, a kind of a 'meta-data'), without a prior-obtained warrant – found that citizens who give information to businesses or other third parties, even if the use of otherwise 'private communication' requires it, do not have a "legitimate expectation of privacy" (see also Lizza 2013). This followed a similar precedent in *Olmstead v. the United States* (1928), later overturned, in which Louis Brandeis wrote the dissent (Atkins 2014). Brandeis' dissent was later cited in *Carpenter v. the United States* (2018), which overturned the *Smith* decision and declared warrants were required to collect cellphone data.

What security agencies practices currently are – by nature of their work – remain obscure from outside. Likewise, the effects of widespread surveillance are not obvious. Schneier suggests that “we tolerate a level of electronic surveillance online that we would never allow in the physical world, because it’s not obvious or advertised” (2015, p.33). Various scholars (Lyon 2014, Solove 2006), journalists (Portias 2014, Greenwald 2014, Silverman 2016), and activists (Coustick-Deal 2015) have focused ‘privacy’ concerns around surveillance intrusions. Marmor is exceptionally detailed in describing commonplace scenarios involving digital observation, including airport body scans, CCTV surveillance, and a teacher pseudonymously posting an anecdote about a student. “Suppose that I just walk through the streets of downtown Los Angeles…” he hypothesizes, “and later find a photo of myself taken on the street posted on the Internet, available for millions to see…” (2015, p. 20). Westin – as discussed above – valued *reserve* and *anonymity* as states of privacy, both involving freedom from the scrutiny of others.

While it is difficult to ascertain surveillance data’s use, this mass collection raises questions about whether this kind of surveillance is conducive to the free and open society which privacy is held to protect. In contrast to countries with a pretension to democracy, China is implementing a ‘social credit system’ in which law abidance, financial credit, rights to travel, and other factors are tied together (Denyer 2016, Chin and Wong 2016). This would exist alongside the country’s ‘Great Firewall’ which filters residents’ access to global content (including platforms like Facebook) and significantly hinders the distribution of locally-produced content which does not adopt the Party’s line (Strittmatter 2019, Griffiths 2019). For example, Baidu Baike, the Chinese produced and sanctioned alternative to Wikipedia (which is banned), does not have an entry for the year 1989, casting a wide breadth to avoid any references to the Tiananmen Square massacres (Strittmatter p. 100; pp. 97-118). Even though, as discussed, mobile phones allow Chinese citizens relatively new opportunities to selectively manage their social relations in relative privacy, the country tightly controls access to factual information that might challenge the government, and is creating a system where political protests or even minor infractions like traffic tickets could make it difficult for one to gain employment, travel, or purchase basic items.

While it may be difficult to directly associate surveillance with consequence, a *lack* of invasive monitoring does suggest some respect for individual self-determination and flexibility between public presentation and private action. On one hand, Silverman discusses how – in democratic countries – having one's name on a watchlist can lead to more scrutiny (2016). On the other, resources remain finite for enforcing the law – and even highly authoritarian countries – as Kim (2010) showed for North Korea – do not aim for absolute control but rather to proscribe the range of flexibility for their citizens' compliance. Refugees are useful to look toward in that they have experienced threats, many from authoritarian countries, as well ambiguities in how data has been applied to restrict their actions within Europe. This can help to address the central research questions of how their information sharing practices relate to pronounced public effects and concerns thereof.

Digital context, norms and contextual integrity

While many of the above writers assessed the scale of digital data and its possibility of exposure, others turned their attention to potential data management solutions. These discussions often emphasize data security – that is, technically preventing information disclosure. While they (and theories above) are concerned with the potential social consequences of inopportune information, they often pay little attention to how information becomes socially positioned – which, as discussed in the following subsection, may be a bigger challenge for preserving privacy in the digital era. The anthropologists Miller and Horst (2012) argue that digital technology heightens the dialectic between the global and the local. In the case of privacy, a challenge is how to reconcile the individuated effects – and localized norms – of information with broadly-applicable rules that govern the large networks which carry and store it. If information privacy seeks to prevent information from escaping 'context', and the world is in a sense 'together' online, how would context be defined and what rules could govern it?

One oft-cited approach to managing information privacy – and how to handle personal data outside the hands of individuals – is Nissenbaum's "contextual integrity", which I discuss for how it establishes a reasonable baseline for addressing these issues while embodying many problematic tendencies that make it difficult to apply in practice. Drawing primarily from American legal traditions, she describes privacy as a matter of ensuring information is managed according to ‘normative expectations’ (2004, 2008, 2011, 2015). Information intended for particular contexts should not necessarily flow into others (e.g., your doctor should not generally share the details of your visit with your friends). This – as with many discussions above – walks a line between associating human experience with information and interpreting the former through the latter. “A central tenet of contextual integrity is that there are no arenas of life *not* governed by *norms of information flow,* no information or spheres of life for which ‘anything goes’," she writes (2004, p.137).

Nissenbaum’s work acknowledges that there are many aspects of data infrastructures over which the individual has little control. Her version of privacy suggests that it can be upheld if individuals’ expectations are met – if with regard to the “status quo; common practices are understood to reflect norms of appropriateness and flow, and breaches of these norms are held to be violations of privacy.” (2004, p.145) She elaborates:

> We have a right to privacy, but it is neither a right to control personal information nor a right to have access to this information restricted. Instead, it is a right to live in a world in which our expectations about the flow of personal information are, for the most part, met. (2011, p.231)

The concerns and examples Nissenbaum discusses (especially in her 2015 article) relate to increases in data-gathering practices post-9/11, such as invasive airport security scans. Contextual integrity is most reasonable as a baseline of data defense, that argues that the technical affordances of digital data gathering do not mean that businesses and governments should (or legally can) take and use everything they can. Nissenbaum presents an argument for proactive data management practices that calls to consider individuals’ interests in light of technical capabilities to gather data about them.

Other authors have phrased similar concerns about ethical selectivity of what can be gathered or focused upon amid the present technical capacity to do so. Baghai – a sociologist – phrases a contextual concern around content: “privacy conflicts arise when an event in one social system becomes relevant, arguably without justification, to selection of communication in another system.” (2002, p.956). He argues that the standard to consider for privacy should be an item of information’s “functional relevance of communication.” (p.962). Baghai makes the judgement call regarding “functional relevance” about *information* itself, rather than Nissenbaum’s focus on the flows that carry it. Marmor (2015)’s examples, discussed above, also generally declare a privacy violation if some combination of observation and transmission occurs outside established social norms, and he also suggests more systematic governance solutions to prevent disclosures. In general, to the extent that they invoke normativity, Nissenbaum and others choose examples in which relatively clear norms and codes of conduct exist. If airport body scanners can reveal something like naked bodies – for example – then compulsorily requiring such scanning violates many cultures’ (and inter-cultural) norms of urban public self-presentation, international travel, and public conduct. As will be argued below, data analytics in some senses inherently violates the concept of front stage presentation on which much social interaction rests.

The implication that relying on norms or data security, however, can help individuals agentively select what data to disclosure is more fraught. Marmor writes, “I can only make choices about what I reveal to others if I can predict the causal relations between my conduct and others’ uptake” (2015,p.12). Koops et al. (2017) [drawing from DeCew (2013) and Rachels (1975)] state that privacy “is not merely limited to control over information. Our ability to control both information and access to us allows us to control our relationship with others” (p.66). Claims to the importance of managing information, thus, are rooted in some sense of being able to predict the chain of causality that will follow it, which many authors root as normatively governed. Navigating social norms is difficult, however, and they are often restrictive to individuals. Writes David Graeber:

> In almost any other aspect of human existence [than games], [rules] are ambiguous. Think of a family quarrel, or a workplace rivalry. Who is or is not a party to it, what’s fair, when it began and when it’s over, what it even means to say you won—it’s all extremely difficult to say. The hardest thing of all is to understand the rules. In almost any situation we find ourselves in, there are rules—even in casual conversation, there are tacit rules of who can speak in what order, pacing, tone, deference, appropriate and inappropriate topics, when you can smile, what sort of humor is allowable, what you should be doing with your eyes, and a million other things besides. These rules are rarely explicit, and usually there are many conflicting ones that

> could, possibly, be brought to bear at any given moment. So we are always doing the difficult work of negotiating between them, and trying to predict how others will do the same. (2015, p.191)

Graeber identifies bureaucracies and games as two domains where the ‘rules’ of life are relatively clear and unambiguous – the latter utopic, the former dystopic (as, for asylum applicants, will be discussed in Chapters Six and Seven). Indeed, in cases of online shaming or lost employment over statements (including jokes or political views) made online (such as discussed by Ronson 2016), generally something that was accepted in one context has received widespread scrutiny in a context where it is found to be objectionable. Nissenbaum’s vision of social “norms” overall is remarkably free from conflicts except between an assumed user and an assumed infrastructure and interlopers and draws from examples and expectations to control public credibility that – as Warren and Brandeis before – are most applicable to middle class Americans and Western Europeans. As Graeber goes on to argue, however, such people are often the most well-equipped to understand and benefit form bureaucratic solutions, unlike others – as with the HUD clients whose data was exposed, and asylum seekers whose bureaucratic experiences will be discussed in more detail in Chapters Six and Seen. In a related way, Dawes (2011) is critical of Nissenbaum for “neoliberal” conception of the privacy agent as a consumer, rationally weighing choices according to literal and figurative market values.

In another sense, ‘privacy’ is less defined as a codified set of norms than as a suspension of them. Solove writes that “Privacy is a recognition that in certain circumstances, it is in society’s best interest to curtail the power of its norms.” (2008, p.95). Etzioni defines privacy as “a *societal license* that exempts a category of acts (including thoughts and emotions) from communal, public and governmental scrutiny.” (1999, p.196). This is not to say that the private realm is not governed by norms, but rather that *the private* is in part defined as a space in which public norms are partially supsended. This agreement on limitation is itself socially configured, though it can be supported by technology. For an analog example, it is convention in the UK not to enter another’s house without permission, but a door lock deters individuals who might seek to violate the convention.

Altogether, looking to ‘norms’ to guide data management works best in situations with already extant, relatively clear norms or codes of conduct. Yet the global digital infrastructure contains the personal data of many people, and is relatively distinct from any particular social situation. ‘Contextual integrity' represents a step beyond leaving matters of governance of information to ad hoc and commercially-minded decisions to govern information storage and flow, to ensure data is not hacked by malicious actors, or exposed by careless ones. As will be discussed below, however, once information is disclosed, information flows are difficult to predict for either laymen or technically literate individuals.

Technical critiques of the emphasis on data disclosure

The above sections described the massive amount of digital data created, stored, and gathered, and how privacy concerns turned toward managing this data by securely preventing its disclosure or transmission. A binary revelation / concealment dynamic fits comfortably with some established elements of privacy theory and legitimate technical considerations around data. Digital data is encoded in binary 1s and 0s. Privacy has often been considered as separate to the public, however transgressed or malleable the line between the two is in practice. Goffman divided the front stage from the back. While Nissenbaum aims to regulate "flows", she discusses information less as fluid than as a series of disclosures that can – at one point or another – be stopped, as a ship that stalls in a river lock. Steeves saw in Westin's depiction of the individual an unsupportable dynamic of "an autonomous self acting in isolation of others" (p.205), in which privacy is "juxtaposed against social interaction," (p.206), with one or the other's interests needing to be overruled. This section discusses limits of the emphasis on preventing data transmission to attain benefits associated with privacy, and in particular to predict information's effects in our data-saturated era. Technically, data analytics use variable amounts of data to produce inferences independent of front-stage performances. Socially, information – digital or otherwise – is situated in numerous complex ways that make its impact (or even, others' awareness of it) difficult to predict.

For the technical critique, a particular challenge for digital privacy is the asymmetrical relationship between information revelation and the meanings that can be inferred from it. This upends a fundamental assumption of using privacy for public self-presentation: that one can disclose information with a reasonable expectation of how it will be received. I argue there isn't an easy-to-understand analogue between individuals' 'performances' and what data analytics can mine from them.

As discussed above data analysts are often ‘ticket scalpers’ who interlope on a combination of front and backstage data who do not have a direct a relationship with the actors. These are the businesses, researchers, and security agencies that scrape data, analyze and sell it, connecting data sets to build profiles of individuals. Analysts can make inferences about identity and personal preferences through a combination of observation and analytic effort – including where people physically are; who they associate with; their relationships; and their sexual orientations, medical histories and political views – a laundry list of ‘private’ and potentially stigmatized details. This can be relatively simple inferences – suggesting that two individuals who share a hotel room periodically might be having an affair – to complex claims about facets of identities. Political ads drawn from psychological profiling were considered to have an impact in the US 2016 elections and UK Brexit referendum (see Chapter Nine). For a particularly noteworthy example of the capability of inferences, Kosinski, Stillwell and Graepel analysed 58,000 volunteers’ Facebook likes to predict “highly sensitive personal attributes including: sexual orientation, ethnicity, religious and political views, personality traits, intelligence, happiness, use of addictive substances, parental separation, age, and gender” (p.46, 2013). They claimed to be able to predict these traits with 88% accuracy. The study’s authors were employed at Cambridge and Microsoft at the time of publication; its lead author took a position at Stanford. This suggests the ethical acceptability of such methods, subsequently knowledge produced and research directions to elite institutions.

In terms of privacy theory, analyses like these constitute at least two related violations. Firstly, they violate Westin’s reserve or Goffman’s civic inattention. While other modes of surveillance also could be held to do this, analytics focuses on details that may be abstract by human standards and hesitantly connected to primary messages users intend to convey. Analytics may be, for example, unconcerned with the aesthetics of the images that you post. It may be tremendously interested in login times, geolocation data, and your phone’s monetary value. Schneier (2015, p.153) refuted a Google executive’s contention that worrying about data analytics is “like worrying about your dog seeing you naked” by stating that the difference is in that “[t]he dog can’t understand…won’t remember or base future decisions on what he’s seeing….and the dog isn’t able to tell anyone” (p.153). Secondly, data analytics’ methods and goals disregard or subvert front-stage performances. These processes generate meanings that can be highly personal, involving inferences about topics such as medical or credit histories, without regard to the individual's interests, desires, social context, or expectations.

The meanings themselves are embedded in the analyst's context, and embedded with its prejudices and assumptions. Barocas and Selbst (2016) write, "the predicted likelihood of missing a certain number of loan repayments is not a self-evident answer to the question of how to successfully extend credit to consumers. Unlike fraud or spam, "creditworthiness" is an artifact of the problem definition itself." (p.679). These insights are not 'neutral' or definite facts, protected until they are disclosed, but generated interpretations. As the authors explore with respect to 'accountable algorithms', forethought can correct for biases that occur in these systems – for example, racial bias in hiring. But it does not solve fundamental questions of disclosure: whatever banal details we think we are revealing, analysts are waiting to ask questions of them. On one hand, the more data is available the more – at least theoretically – meanings can be generated. As Onouhu notes, "especially combined, data sets reveal far more than intended" (2016). At the same time, data *quantity* does not necessarily mean more detailed or accurate insights **–** it may be that insights similar to Kosinski, Stillwell and Graepel's could be worked out through other means, or through relatively small amounts of information. What analytics may generate tomorrow may be different from what they produce today.

Altogether, this points to a fundamental disconnect between disclosures and meanings generated, making it difficult (if not impossible) to predict the chain of action around any item of data.

Social critiques of the emphasis on data disclosure

For the social critique of emphasizing disclosure, it is often difficult to predict the public consequences of information. Data security is only part of preserving privacy, and has a complicated, situated relationship to both amenable, close relationships and hostile actors. This has not necessarily changed even given the present quantity of digital data.

Firstly, lack or surplus of data does not necessarily deter bad faith actors. One defense against large-scale data gathering is that, given enough information, *something* untoward can be found. Schneier voices this contention:

> In the 17th century, the French statesman Cardinal Richelieu – "Show me six lines written by the most honest man in the world, and I will find enough therein to hang him." Lavrenity Beria, head of Joseph Stalin's secret police in the old Soviet Union, declared "Show me the man, and I'll show you the crime." Both were saying the same thing: if you have enough data about someone you can find sufficient evidence to find him guilty of *something.* (p.108).

Yet these quotes do not speak to the value of information quantity so much as the arbitrariness of information to people intent on using force to predetermined ends. It is likely that Richelieu or Beria could produce a guilty verdict with no lines, six lines, or a million data points. Chapter Six likewise argues information can be arbitrary when absent of good faith consideration, with discussion of UKBA assessors' apparent motivated disbelief in asylum applicants' credibility.

Secondly, which facts are 'true' or worth acting upon are socially constructed, and different people or groups within a society do not necessarily agree on truth or action. In digital age terms, Tripodi (2018) discussed how using different Internet search terms on the same topic can lead users seeking online 'facts' to dramatically different sets of politicized results. Drawing from broader anthropological knowledge, Taussig described the relationship between knowledge, inaction, and social power in terms of the "public secret", which he defines as "that which is generally known, but cannot be articulated", as embodied in experiences where "people dared not state the obvious" in a way that reinforces the social power demonstrated through the denial (p.5-6). The *defacement* of this public narrative – or attention to the 'secret' which everyone 'knows' – provokes a performance of surprise or shock. An archetypal example of a 'public secret' is the folktale 'the emperor's new clothes', famously adapted by Hans Christian Andersen, in which the titular king's subjects would not acknowledge his nudity after he told them that his clothes were made of cloth that only the intelligent could see (see also Taussig, p.121-2). Agreed-upon social fictions can be very large, as shown in the documentaries *The Act of Killing* (2012) and *The Look of Silence* (2014), in which director Joshua Oppenheimer confronts the perpetrators of Indonesia’s 1965-66 purge of suspected Communists (which left 3 million dead), who had been installed in the country in positions of power and a national narrative that cast their actions as heroic (see also Kerr 2014, Voigts 2015).

Thirdly, to keep immediate social performances moving and maintain long-term relationships, people do not acknowledge all they know about their friends and family members. They are also able to infer things about one another from intuitive, intimate understandings that close social relationships foster. Among Nissenbaum’s examples, she suggests that a “sexual partner may be entitled to information about the other’s HIV status, although the same demand by a friend is probably not warranted” (2015, p.143). Yet while it may be unfair to *ask* such a thing of a friend, Squire found that HIV-positive individuals who *hadn’t* disclosed their status inferred whether friends and family knew based on the precedents of their friends’ and families’ behavior (2015). Many have likewise found themselves in conversations with a friend and known sensitive information – a change in relationship status, for example, or a newly understood facet of sexual orientation – that is elided in conversation until it is ‘revealed’. Similarly, many personal matters – such as sudden illness – may not be intended to be hidden forever, but rather the individual may wish to control the manner of and narrative around disclosure.

Thus for people motivated both to ‘believe’ or ‘disbelieve’ in actors’ credibility – either to exclude, or to keep social performances moving – information can be selectively credible or effectively ignored. Unlike data analytics, social inferences are rooted in close interpersonal relationships and highly specialized, mutually-developed contexts. ‘Knowing’ information does not necessarily correlate with acting upon it. Thus the self-presentational benefit of privacy is only partially linked to information and its disclosure, and the broad frameworks that govern social media data flows.

Summary

In the digital era, popular and academic conceptions of privacy have paid particular attention to the challenges of information management, with many writers conceiving of privacy itself through the idiom of information. Ethnographic research suggests that people generally use the tools available to them to configure their social visibility online. At the same time, backstage infrastructures and ‘ticket scalping’ data analysts take large quantities data to surveil citizens, create advertising profiles, determine credit-worthiness, and other actions – to create meanings without regard for social performers’ actions, often with the aim of impacting their lives.

Some writers have turned to the management of information flows to preserve privacy – prominently, Nissenbaum’s ‘contextual integrity’ – yet while they claim to draw broadly-applicable data management practices from ‘offline norms’ they in fact speak, in a diverse world, to the value of clarified, codified practices for technological infrastructures not applicable to diverse users in diverse situations. While many non-ethnographic approaches to the digital era speak to social concerns, they lack the sense of social nuance described by older authors like Westin. At the same time, the security-centric emphasis on preventing data disclosure is only one part of contemporary privacy. In the current information-rich world, the quantity and substance of information we disclose has a hesitant relationship to the questions data analysts ask of it. Similarly, in social and civic life, information often bears an imprecise and highly situated relationship to others’ understandings and actions.

This suggests a need to re-examine the role that individual choices around presenting and concealing information plays in individuals’ social, personal and civic lives. Is controlling information really an efficacious way to manage social identities? As discussed in the next section, a further challenge for emphases on data management – by individuals or infrastructures – in supporting benefits association with privacy – is that conventions around private and public expression affect people unequally, and are bound to civic structures that restrict individuals as well as protect them.

IV. Private and public life

Introduction

The literature above holds that privacy supports individuals’ personal, social, and civic agency, which is both enabled and complicated by the vast quantities of digital data available. This section qualifies privacy’s virtues with social theory more attentive to social structure, the norms of which affect people unequally. While theory heretofore discussed considers privacy as a foundation that grounds public life, this section discusses how – whatever the individual’s actions – the determinants of their social life and the public sphere shape the benefits of privacy.

With respect to privacy’s first benefit – personal development and relief from public pressures – the private space is rarely a site of absolute individual freedom, subject as it is to negotiations with family and flatmates. The idea of home as a realm of personal freedom is further culturally and historically situated within Western modernity. With regard to self-expression, the second benefit, privacy allows a space of flexibility from public norms without directly challenging the overall social structure. The individual may privately exercise personal actions, information and aspects at home, provided these things are done outside the public sphere. At the same time, some personal traits and actions may be difficult to keep private, and the individual nonetheless blamed for not doing so. Anxieties over capacities for self-expression also partially reflect the fact that digital technology allows more voices in the public sphere. At the same time, the public sphere might be liberalized as action becomes acceptably practiced first in private. The third benefit – civic participation – highlights a contradiction in both ‘privacy’ and modern human rights: while such capacities or rights are held to be intrinsic to the individual, they are guaranteed by national and international governmental processes that heavily proscribe their exercise – especially by asylum seekers. Other writers - including Arendt and Sennett – have been critical of how focusing on privacy and self-development may come at the expense of improving society or living publicly.

The ‘castle’ mentality and self-actualization

Privacy is held by authors such as Westin to grant relief from public pressures and allow for expression of identity or interests that one cannot pursue publicly. Few discussions of the right or virtue of privacy however, situate relief or self-actualization in private in relation to the internal dynamics of the home. Most take domestic space for granted and as a virtue.

In line with this, ‘a man’s home as his castle’ is invoked as a maxim. Warren and Brandeis sought to protect from “intrusion upon the domestic circle”, claiming that “common law has always recognized a man's house as his castle, impregnable, often even to its own officers engaged in the execution of its commands" (1890, p.220). Over a century later Nissenbaum's makes a similar claim to social and legal normativity when she writes there exists:

> simple and ages-old idea of the sanctity of certain spaces…For example, "a man's home is his castle"—a person is sovereign in her own domain. Except when there are strong countervailing claims to the contrary, this principle apparently endorses a presumption in favor of people shielding themselves from the gaze of others when they are inside their own private places. (2008, p.129-30)

Many of the above authors – as discussed – considered privacy as a feature and requirement of modernity, which they sometimes contradictorily considered to be universally held. Nissenbaum, for example, refers to the new complexity of digital life (discussed in the previous section) alongside allegedly "ages-old" ideas about the home (discussed here). The 'man's home is his castle' logic, however, is heavily qualified in practice. Firstly, we must unpack the phrase of centuries of acquired connotations of the home's sanctity, sentimentality, and freedom. Secondly, it explicitly associates the freedoms of privacy with home ownership, which belongs to a relative few, without suggesting how it might function for more varied material living arrangements. Thirdly, it vests domestic authority with the 'king'. It tells us little about how privacy affects others who live in the 'castle'.

The 'home/castle' phrase originates in English law. In 1604, in the Semayne's Case decision, jurist Sir Edward Coke wrote that "the house of every one is to him as his Castle and Fortress as well for defence against injury and violence, as for his repose." Legally, this placed limits on under what circumstances law enforcement could enter a residence – threads that continue today in 'privacy' protections against, for example, illegal search and seizure. While 'repose' may be somewhat analogous to Westin's relief from social pressures, the rationale does not address the home as a space of self-actualization.

An increasing value on private self-actualization can be read alongside shifts toward the 'liberal self', individualism and interiority in late modernity, as documented in theology (Hyman 2012, Roper 2012), literature (de Grazia 2007), and science, where it was marked by an increased attention to the role of the individual's and instruments' perceptions of natural phenomena (Latour 1991). Over the last several hundred years, the individual became an active agent whose perceptions and desires *mattered*. This was accompanied by rising conditions in which privacy made sense: the rise of densely-populated urban areas and private property. The anthropologist Michael Jackson describes how notions of a domestic retreat are a product of late modernity, in effect separating the household from larger society, and the settled from those without fixed addresses – for him, the nomadic Walpiri aboriginals with whom he researched:

> For us, security is a function of the sustainability of the ideas and places we construct. Existentially and discursively we are less at home with indeterminate images and open horizons… A broken home means a broken life. This is undoubtedly why many Westerners regard nomadism as the epitome of primitiveness. Nomads are made out to be negations of ourselves. We cultivate; they plunder… This is the voice of the propertied middle classes, of the realtor. This is the image of home as a private, domestic, comfortable abode. A place of retreat. A metaphor for intimacy and inwardness.
>
> But in Europe this notion of home is no more than 300 years old. Its origin is inextricably tied to the rise of the bourgeoisie in the seventeenth century. Before that time, as John Berger notes, home connoted a place, a village, a group of kin, a state of being. (1995, p.85-86)

Home thus was once a sense of communal belonging, transcending space. Later it became material, and a tool to regulate the community's access to the self. Jackson argues these connotations imply antipathy with those who lack fixed, physical homes. Similarly, Bauman (2007) notes of panics over security in Western democracies that "contrary to the 'objective evidence', it is precisely the cosseted and pampered 'we' of all people who feel more threatened, insecure and frightened" (p.55). He places 'our' domestic security in contrast to that of the physically-insecure migrant from the 'developing world', those "latecomers to modernity [who] are obliged to seek *local* solutions to *globally* caused problems - with at best meagre, but more often than not non-existent chances of success" (p.32). Here, discourses of 'security' are not employed – as with data security – to the benefits of all, but to exclude some people on the pretext of protecting others.

Bauman (p.75-8) and Jackson (p.87) further suggest that household sanctity can serve as a barrier between the individual and other parts of society. In this, they are among writers who see a potentially oppositional relationship between private and public self-development. Of these, Richard Sennett's *Fall of Public Man* (1977) is among the most well-known, critiquing the late modern push to private self-actualization as at odds with more historic valuation of public relationships, rights, and civic-mindedness. More recently, Ehrenreich (2018) traced a 20th-century rise in 'self-improvement' in parallel with a declining sense of civic obligation, in which she argues people abandoned calls to improve society and instead focused on bettering themselves.

Within the home, the 'castle' mentality of private sovereignty does not offer ready solutions of how other residents besides the 'king' might express themselves. While idealistic 'rights' discussions above implicitly, or by omission, frame privacy interests in terms of the head of household or homeowner, laws often do so explicitly. Article 8 of the European Human Rights convention enshrines, with paternalistic language, a "right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence," with which "There shall be no interference" with limited exceptions. Particularly relevant to this dissertation, asylum claims may be supported by claims that one has established a family locally and being forced to leave would thus be a violation of "private life". While this has helped some asylum claims, as will be discussed, the legal limbo of asylum seeking is not conducive to establishing relationships or employment, and this does little to address the large numbers of asylum-seeking men who have arrived alone or remain single.

This sense of authority in home ownership – beyond being paternalistic – can be employed to place pressure on homeowners to enforce other hierarchies of property ownership. A digital case in point is Germany. The country is often considered to have strict digital privacy protections for pushing back against large-scale data collection by American companies like Facebook (Singer 2019). At the same time, it vests responsibility for IP traffic on the owner of the IP contract (*Störerhaftung* or 'inference liability') and strictly enforces copyright laws that are in practice routinely violated. This has facilitated an infrastructure of lawyers with a business model of monitoring file-sharing websites for violations and sending 'cease and desist' letters to IP address holders asking them for money and to sign a statement admitting guilt (Schmitz and Reis 2012, Settle in Berlin 2019). Business owners' reluctance to shoulder this risk has been blamed for a lack of public wi-fi in the country (Dobush 2016, Wright 2014). Anecdotally, the letters and fines have produced conflict within families who receive them. News reports explicitly warn refugees from watching copyrighted movies via file-sharing services; a Syrian refugee was reported as being fined €815 for copyright infringement (Kern 2016). Media piracy is the norm in many parts of the 'developing' world – from which refugees come – due in part to prohibitive economic factors and a limited number of localized international releases (Karaganis et al. 2011, Voigts 2005). Thus, for those who cannot afford or otherwise appreciate entertainment in the German language, the capacity to access it for relief or leisure is heavily proscribed, and in part achieved by leveraging the head of household's authority to enforce intellectual property laws into the privacy of the home.

Aside from the implicit or explicit paternalism around the head of household, surprisingly few discussions of 'privacy' seriously address the fact that few people live alone, and thus it is subject to interpersonal negotiation. Beyond the nuclear family, in the present-day UK one finds flat shares, prisons, hostels, university dormitories, care homes, hospitals, and the semi-detached house in which I used to live whose thin walls provided a scant auditory border with my neighbors. Within these spaces, individual control of space is not considered normative nor necessarily expected. For example, songwriter Leonard Cohen said of five years living in a monastery that the social situation "is designed to eliminate private space. There's a saying - like pebbles in a bag, the monks polish one another. So in that kind of situation, you're always coming up against someone else" (Gross 2016).

Within the 'standard' model multiple-occupant middle class Western household, individual expression, private functions, and even relaxation itself are often matters of contention. Parents and children clash over monitoring of Internet use. Flatmates argue over who uses the bathroom in the morning and what state it is in. Disagreements occur over which TV channel to watch. Families may not get along in general. Domestic abuse may be covered up as a 'private' matter, while often-gendered domestic contributions to cooking, cleaning and keeping up a home may be de-valued as private. At the same time, while the head of household may be the nominal 'king', s/he may be under pressure to work and materially provide for the family. The shelter the home brings from the outside does not render it a site of relief from the pressures within it, nor does appealing to one's authority within the household hierarchy necessarily lead to amenable resolutions.

Nonetheless, even in close quarters, individuals maintain private thoughts. Their mental interiority is partially inaccessible to those around them, suggested not just by their intended communications but the transparency of their emotions, the astuteness of the observer, and nuanced particulars of interpersonal relationships. For example, Anne Frank's father Otto – after spending two years with her in close-quarters of an attic, hiding from the Nazis – was still surprised at her diary's contents. The diary, while written to be 'private', went on to become among the most widely-read books of the twentieth century following Otto's decision to publish it:

> She never really showed this kind of inner feeling. She talked about many things, we criticized many things, but what really her feelings were, I only could see from the diary. And my conclusion is, as I had been in very, very good terms with Anne, that most parents don't know, really, their children. (Anne Frank House 2009)

The attic, for the Franks, was a social disruption that became routinized. In the substantial anthropological literature devoted to tribal societies, for many, a lack of privacy is considered non-disruptive. While their lack of privacy may be different from Western middle class society, it is likely that some of the overall dynamics of individual-group interaction are shared by those in close living quarters. For example, Stang (2011) describes life with the Mehinaku tribe, without digital technology or electricity: "There is an intense closeness of social life for the Mehinaku. In the houses, extended families of ten to fifteen or so people live in a space without walls, moving quite freely between the hammocks, so there is little spatial privacy at all…To be alone…is dangerous." (p.165). This is not to suggest that there are no norms of space usage. Certain areas are gender-segregated, for example. Yet even within these proximal spaces, individuals maintain a substantial amount of interpretive room regrading relationships and phenomena. Gossip is common, as are supernatural explanations for observable events. She writes: "I was shocked by the things some people would whisper to me about others they seemed very close to…At one point I realized that a man from every single house had been accused of sorcery to me." (p.167).

Discussion of the Mehinaku's cosmology forms a substantial part of Stang's book. Mehinaku tribespeople perceive elements of the world as material copies of ideal, spiritualized forms, and believe that different people may perceive these manifest copies very differently from one another. By contrast, digital technologies are designed so that user interfaces differ substantially from the material bases of data transmission and inscription. As Kirschenbaum argues, “computers are unique in the history of writing technologies in that they present a premediated material environment built and engineered to propagate an illusion of immaterialty” (2008, p.135). Perception, then, for the Mehinaku involves and acknowledges substantial individual interpretation and flexibility through the idiom of spiritual immateriality; digital technology, in a sense, is designed to reduce and obscure perceptions of difference and materiality.

Beyond small tribal societies, large-scale contemporary countries may not culturally value privacy. As Miller et al. (2016) note, while Chinese urbanites may be familiar with “yinsi” (privacy), rural residents “regarded [it] as a fashionable or Western word. The traditional rural family was a more collective unit, in which there was no expectation people would want or need private space” (p.189). Yet while China does not traditionally value being ‘let alone,’ Goffman’s self-presentation shares strong overlaps with Chinese notions of ‘saving face’ – to act in a way that all parties keep the appearance of honor and reputation.

Altogether, the notion that home is a place or relief or self-actualization is a modern, ‘Western’ one that is often legally, explicitly and/or implicitly tied to home ownership and paternalistic ideals that may work for or against particular individuals’ agencies. While these notions may provide relief from intrusion, the contrast of private freedom and public pressure ignores substantial pressures and conflict that occur in the home. At the same time, substantial interpretative room exists in many close living arrangements. This suggests a need to better connect the benefits of privacy and ‘private life’ with the pressures and restrictive aspects of private life

Privacy, self-expression and social structure

Westin and other authors have held that privacy allows the pursuit of activities not appropriate for public, and to prepare for selective public performances. Yet while private space allows those who have it some freedom to temporarily act out of public view, it also does not directly challenge public norms. Privacy, in the short term, maintains the public status quo. The individual may further be blamed for failing to keep difficult-to-manage or stigmatized self-expressions private, and thus ultimately discouraged from expressing him or herself publically or privately.

The anthropologist Pitt-Rivers framed secrecy in terms of social neutrality, noting that secrecy “permits conflicting social forces to co-exist and gives to this structure the resilience which enables it to persist” (1971, p.206). Keeping information and actions compartmentalized lets people work towards their own, sometimes opposing interests without revolutionizing the social structure. Individuals cannot expect society to be optimized particularly for self-expression as they would wish it; the private allows the individual a flexible, limited space of relative autonomy.

The private, then, partially functions as a quarantine zone for the public. Some actions – such as bodily functions – are common and not regarded as immoral. Other actions may be taboo or stigmatized. As Marmor describes, in social conventions regarding obscenity, it is “the *public* zone that is in need of some protection, not the private. People have legitimate expectations about what they encounter in public spaces” (2015, p.24). Privacy thus keeps publicly taboo activities out of sight – and allows the individual latitude to act when out of the potentially judgmental view of others.

Squeamishness over taboo topics may, however, result in a negligent lack of attention being paid to the needs of the vulnerable. For example, Kulick describes how classifying sexuality as ‘private’ in Sweden precluded disabled individuals under institutional care from accessing related services and information (2015). Depression and mental illness, similarly, may be encouraged to be kept private to avoid stigmatization – leaving many people without a clear framework to seek help.

By the logic of ‘freedom in private’, individuals may also be blamed for not keeping certain things ‘private’. Wilk (2018) argues that privacy places the onus of managing complex social relationships, technical processes in which we have little control and one’s own identity onto the individual as individualistic, “neoliberal” logic does in other spheres. This often manifests in framing ‘privacy’, implicitly or explicitly, around one’s employer’s potential reactions to what one does outside of work hours. For example, a popular press article imagines a scenario in which “It turns out your soon-to-be manager glanced at your Facebook account, noticed some awkward photos from your college years, and decided you weren’t quite right for the position.” (Illing 2019). Framings like these do not place the onus on employers to accept that employees have awkward college years or behave differently outside of the office than at it, nor on the law to protect employees. Rather, the surfacing of 'unprofessional' behaviour from years prior or in one's spare time is held to be expected grounds for termination.

If what is 'public' is classified according to what is broadly accessible or observable, this could effectively mean that the claim of the public would have essentially grown to encompass many things associated with private life. Edwards and Urquhart (2015) voice similar concerns that if exposed data is considered fair game for use, then mass data collection activities by governments and businesses (discussed above) would effectively have rendered vast stores of personal data as 'public'. In at least one study, the image of young people as comfortable (over)sharing in public has been presented as justification for increased legal scrutiny of online activity. Burkell et al. (2014), taking a "user-centric approach to the question of whether online social spaces are public venues," found "that online social spaces are indeed loci of public display rather than private revelation: online profiles are structured with the view that 'everyone' can see them" (p.974). This, to the authors, suggested that online activity can be admissible in court as 'public' statements. The authors based their conclusions on interviews with university students, whose norms and behaviors they considered general enough on which to base laws to govern all.

For traits that are difficult to obscure, I argue that 'public' norms may in effect colonize the private. Westin (2003) writes that when:

> a society considers a given mode of personal behavior to be socially acceptable – whether it is hairstyle, dress, sexual orientation… it labels such conduct as a private matter rather than a public matter. This generally means that such matters should not be inquired into for the purposes of denying someone access to the benefits, rights, and opportunities controlled by government or private organizations (p.433).

I agree – as with Etzioni's sense of privacy as a "societal license" (1999, p.196) – that which actions or traits to consider private are socially determined. Westin's examples, however – "hairstyle, dress, sexual orientation" – are a concise list of basic traits that might readily be considered personal; often difficult to keep 'private'; stigmatized for some people more than others; and frequent aspects of dispute between employers and employees. Professional environments often maintain strict dress codes. Employers may refuse to hire people with difficult-to-cover tattoos, which are in effect a permeant addition to one's appearance. The U.S. military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy (1994-2011) allowed gay and bisexual persons to serve, but maintained they would be discharged if they lived openly or their sexual orientation became known. Employers have sometimes demanded hairstyles (such as straight or short cuts) that are difficult for black people to maintain. A 2016 decision by the United States 11th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that dreadlocks – tied to black physical characteristics and African and African-descendent cultural practices – are a mutable characteristic that employers could legally request their employees not wear (Bates 2016). In response, a 2019 law was passed in New York City that employers could not dictate employees' hairstyles due to the potential for racial discrimination (Stowe 2019). In these examples, employees' rights to personal expression have been, at best, rendered inconvenient to privately or selectively express. This 'right to hairstyle' is a further example of partially conflicting understandings of identity as essentialized or performed. While some might consider hair or sexual partners as 'private matters' on the grounds that they are free for the individual to govern or 'choose', their present legal protection rests on understanding of their expression as rooted in functionally immutable traits.

The questions of what to allow in public and what to restrict to private is thus a more complicated task than merely associating privacy with freedom. Bejan (2017), writing of the age of democratized (and often angry) online discourse, states:

> Indeed the self-conception of liberal societies as "tolerant" hinges on the fact that members are not compelled to confine their differences to a private sphere of individual skulls or intimate familiars, but are permitted, even encouraged, to express them feely in public and to compete for adherents. (P.7)

Bejan's larger discussion concerns three modern philosophers – Locke, Hobbes, and Roger Williams (the Puritan minister who founded Rhode Island) – and their understandings of disagreement, civility, and tolerance for differing views. She praises Williams for insight that deeply-held beliefs, when expressed, inevitably produce conflict (see especially p.152-153), even as his conception of "mere civility" entailed frequent arguments and a belief in the superiority of his own religious views. In one sense, it may be respectful to leave others alone; in another, respect may mean engaging enough to disagree. In either case, the liberal social structure that values self-actualization in private also implies that one’s inner views should not be confined there.

The capacity to perform actions in private further allows for them to gain wider acceptance before becoming legal or officially sanctioned, as Schneier suggested (2015, p.115-6) with the examples of homosexuality and marijuana use. Today, analytics can make claims about, as Kosinski, Stillwell and Graepel (2013) did, “sexual orientation, ethnicity, religious and political views”. Were they to willfully enforce outlawed views and actions in private, it is unlikely that public change could occur in this way. In this respect, governance of large social networks inevitably brings the notion of liberal tolerance against views that might be widely accepted somewhere but subversive elsewhere.

Within cultures, the capacity for many voices to express themselves provokes concerns about the propriety of expression. Solove refers to the “norm police” who bring to light discretion on the Internet (2007, p. 6), while Ronson (discussed in the previous section) expresses discomfort with the Internet collectively uniting to shame individuals for perceived social discretions (2015). Miller et al. (2016) describe memes as a key element by which users’ social media postings express ideas about moral norms. Also invoking a law enforcement metaphor, they refer to memes as “the moral police of online life” (UCL 2016b).

Online privacy concerns about newly-empowered voices over-sharing can further be read in paternalistic terms. In a book-length conversation, Jenkins, Ito, and boyd (2016) reflect on careers studying how technology has opened spaces for young people to exercise autonomy otherwise absent in their home and school lives – and how adults have often to regulate this more than engage with it. Jenkins notes that older discussions around media focused on protecting youth from the adult world, while social media has allowed new avenues for parents to scrutinize their children. “Moms are now observing the nasty business of turning boys into men… often played out on their television or computer monitors,” he writes (p.40-44). boyd notes that “parents often jump to conclusions about what they see,” out of context (p.44).

The authors argue that teenagers turn to social media to socialize without being intensely scrutinized by adults, who observe them nonetheless. This ability to communicate online further does not translate into greater agency in adult-managed home and school life, nor do the adults around them take their self-presentations seriously. By contrast, the existence of private channels of communications (and teens' reputation for technological competence) appear suspicious. The teenagers are stigmatized – as are refugees, discussed in the following section – for appearing to act agentively. Despite this, boyd suggests their online activities may have less at stake – and be more responsible – than the adults in their lives. "At least when teens overshare, they tend to be exposing their own bumps and bruises, not the ones of those around them," she writes. "And, frankly, teens are often far less revealing in those practices than many adults" (p.55).

Altogether, private space allows action without challenging public norms directly, even as the disjunction between private and public action allows for public norms to change. At the same time, traits and actions that are difficult to keep 'private' – particularly from people with relatively little social power, now expressing themselves online – may be criticized for being too 'public'. The capacity to express oneself publicly and privately are thus bound together. Looking toward those who – like refugees – are in challenging public positions can help to qualify the practical limits of privacy's benefits to people who are not imagined, idealized high-status citizens.

Khososyah

Many of the conventions and expectations of privacy remain implicit. The Islamic concept of *khososyah* more explicitly delineates boundaries between men and women, and the home and public space. Drawing from research in Qatar, researchers in Human-Computer Interaction discussed privacy in these terms (Abokhodair 2016, Abokhodair, Hodges and Vieweg 2017, Abokhodair et al. 2016, Vieweg and Hodges 2016). Abokhodair and her co-authors describe broadly similar practices in Qatar as Costa (2017, 2018) did in Mardin, Turkey, and which will be discussed further in Chapter Five. These authors' participants used privacy settings to keep social groups separate, and refrained from posting images or text in forums that could be considered 'public' so as to avoid challenging norms. Abokhodair particularly notes how women do not post images of themselves so as not to violate sanctions against women's visibility in public. From a literature review, they identify three factors associated with the term: “(1) privacy of the home, (2) privacy for gender exclusive spaces and gatherings, and (3) individual privacy.” (Abokhodair et al. 2016, p.1). While the ‘Western’ theories of privacy discussed emphasize self-presentation and individual agency, these three aspects of khososyah explicitly delineate proper behaviour for relationships between groups – respectively, the family and others; two genders; and – in reference to the “individual” – injunctions to avoid looking onto others (p.3). These are described as inter-personally, rather than individually, focused:

> In the Gulf, the notion of privacy—as revealed in our data—is negotiated amongst the group; it is not something that individuals are able to seek out and attain without societal consensus. Both those who watch and those who are being watched are empowered to arrive at a mutual understanding regarding how social media should be used vis-à-vis the maintenance of privacy. (Abokhodair et al. 2016, p.8)

Khososyah is perhaps closer in meaning to ‘modesty’ than ‘privacy’ in English in the senses that it governs display. Like Warren and Brandeis’ “right to be let alone” (1890), it values separating the private space of the home from the public. Like Nissenbaum’s ‘contextual integrity’ or confidentiality (discussed in Chapter Seven), it suggests a clear set of normatively-guided rules to guide codes of behaviour and interaction. It is more clearly codified than the frequently contested and flexible ‘Western’ notion of ‘privacy’. Yet unlike these articulations of privacy, it does not necessarily protect rights to self-expression or to ‘be oneself’ freely in public or private. Privacy, by contrast, suggests more extensive promises, benefits, connotations and controversy – even as the two have factors that overlap.

As khososyah pertains theoretically to this section of the literature review, the focus on ‘family’ and ‘interpersonal relations’ seems to get beyond several ‘myths’ of the individuality of privacy this section of the literature review challenges. Yet it also conflicts with the individualist ideal in that its “societal consensus” explicitly suggests stratified norms of public display, especially around gender. My own participants – from different cultures, many also Muslims – were less conservative than the Qataris that Abokhodair discusses. As participants’ stories in subsequent chapters demonstrate, those that lived in the Gulf States found social attitudes and laws around work there restrictive and pushed back against them.

Civic life and the exclusion of non-citizens

Thirdly, Westin and others associated privacy with democratic political agency. Broadly, civic rights are guaranteed by the state, not just in the sense of participating in democratic governance but of otherwise enjoying the benefits of a ‘liberal’ society. For refugees, this is especially acute: they require asylum to have the right to work, earn money, and generally lay the foundations for modern private life. This is a noted contradiction in human rights – while ‘held’ by the individual, they are guaranteed, managed, and bound to a political structure that for many people (including refugees) are tightly managed. Hannah Arendt (1958) and Giorgio Agamben (1998) – writing about refugees and human rights – take a critical eye toward both these rights’ application and turns toward interiority by looking to their present-day modernity and back to Greek and Roman philosophy.

Arendt connected the then-current post-World War II refugee situation to Greece. For her, violence underpinned private life, so that people could self-actualize in public. She wrote in “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man” section of *On Totalitarianism* (1958)*:*

> What all Greek philosophers, no matter how opposed to polis life, took for granted is that freedom is exclusively located in the political realm, that necessity is primarily a prepolitical phenomenon, characteristic of the private household organization, and that force and violence are justified in this sphere because they are the only means to master necessity – for instance, by ruling over slaves – and to become free. (p.31)

Arendt – a German-born Jew who moved to America, writing in the aftermath of World War II, who was legally stateless from 1937-1950 – is suspicious of the individual rights allegedly granted politically to those left as refugees or stateless. Tracing the history of the nation-state and individualistic notions of human rights, Arendt writes that “the meaning of human rights [as it developed in the nineteenth century] acquired a new connotation: they became the standard slogan of the protectors of the underprivileged, a kind of additional law, a right of exception necessary for those who had nothing better to fall back upon” (p.293). These rights seemed to promise the right to ‘live’ for all – especially those whose basic necessities were in doubt – but nation-states were reluctant to grant them to the asylum-seeking non-citizens their political system depended also on excluding. The uneasy compromise often was to let people ‘live’ without meaningful political and social integration. These individuated ‘private’ rights were, to her, of limited value compared to capacities to act in the public sphere:

> Equality, in contrast to all that is involved in mere existence, is not given us, but is the result of human organization insofar as it is guided by the principle of justice. We are not born equal; we become equal as members of a group on the strength of our decision to guarantee ourselves mutually equal rights. (p.301)

At the same time, as discussed in Chapter One, the United Nations’ Refugee Convention (ratified in 1951, the same year *On Totalitarianism* was published, and updated in 1958) framed human rights in terms of political or personal expression. Asylum applicants have to prove not just that their life is in danger, but that it is endangered on liberal political grounds that one’s rights to ‘live’ or express oneself are threatened. This does not adequately address people today fleeing some combination of a lack of economic opportunity, climate change, or post-colonial disorder. If you can prove someone has credibly threatened to kill you, you are worthy of protection. If rising sea levels flood your fields, your own government can’t help, and you seek food and shelter elsewhere, you are an ‘economic migrant’ whose well-founded fear for your life does not obligate other governments to take steps so that you might not starve to death immediately or in the future.

As Arendt discussed at the time – as now – nations often did not fulfil even those basic requirements. Many Allied countries went to war while refusing asylum seekers who would die in Nazi death camps. Today, America and Europe readily bomb Syria and other countries ostensibly to liberate them, while refusing asylum to people who flee the violence. As will be discussed Chapters Four and Six, looking at the challenges Syrians – whose experiences most closely fit the Convention’s 1967 revision – have faced in the asylum system further contextualizes the experiences of others who face danger, but whose claims to the definition are less exact.

In *Homo Sacer* (1998), Agamben built on Arendt while returning to Roman history to better understand state restrictions on individuals amid modern ideas and laws ostensibly protecting human rights. He recalls that Romans had two words for what we call ‘life’: *zoe* and *bios*. *Zoe* referred to ‘political’ rights practiced in the public sphere. *Bios* was less frequently discussed and referred to basic biological functioning. The title figure of his work – *homo sacer* – was an obscure legal figure who could be legally killed but not ritually scarified; the ‘sacred man’ maintained *bios* but lost *zoe.* In merging bios and zoe, the modern state asserts its right to control not just one form of “life” but the other – that is, both to govern political participation (see especially p.12) and to legitimately and exclusively use violence to achieve its ends (Weber 1919)[2]. This has implications for human rights – of refugees in particular – whose personal rights exist outside the state and political rights exist within it:

> by breaking the continuity between man and citizen, nativity and nationality, they put the originary fiction of modern sovereignty in crisis. Bringing to light the difference between birth and nation, the refugee causes the secret presupposition of the political domain – bare life – to appear for an instant within that domain. In this sense, the refugee is truly “the man of rights,” as Arendt suggests, the first and only real appearance of rights outside the fiction of the citizen that always covers them over. Yet this is precisely what makes the figure of the refugee so hard to define politically. (Amaben 1998, Section 2.3, p.77)

Contemporary human rights and national practice are such that the system remains porous enough to let people in – unlike the *homo sacer* of Rome, the UK would find it unpalatable to outright kill them. In the absence of will to enforce deportation orders or allow asylum seekers basic civic rights to live and work, refugees are, in effect, confined with basic rights. As discussed in more detail below, while awaiting asylum decisions they remain excluded from the right to work while dependent on modest and highly proscribed publicly-funded housing and monetary benefits. In a sense, these rights remain ‘private’ – refugees can self-actualize in GS4-provided housing, and may stay in touch with family and friends online. But their rights to accumulate money (and purchase food, property, services or other items with it) remain restricted in ways that they are not for citizens.

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[2] By contrast, the Chinese government under Xi Jinping has more explicitly justified increasingly authoritarian restrictions on citizens’ self-expression in part through claims that it is using central leadership to pursue a high standard of living for its citizens (Strittmatter 2019, p.48-9). By contrast, civic, human, or universal rights claims are derided as ‘Western’ concepts (p.134-5).

Explicitly restricting European citizens to live in certain houses, neighborhoods, or from employment – for example – by race or religion would be considered a violation of their rights, if not an evocation of the lead-up to the Holocaust. Treating non-citizens as such – even non-citizens in need – is nonetheless par for the course, even to the point of constructing massive, convoluted infrastructures to manage their rights. As you read the complexities of that system in the following section and Chapters Six and Seven, consider whether expediently *letting asylum applicants live and work* would better support individuals’ exercise of human rights, private and public, and if encouraging their support would result in a society less secure than our present one for Bauman’s “cosseted and pampered ‘we’” whose rights and security are of such concern.

Summary

Privacy’s three primary benefits – self-actualization and temporary rest from public obligations; selective self-presentation; and political agency – have a more complex relationship to lived experience than the often-idealistic privacy-centric theory discussed above suggests. An emphasis on the private realm’s importance is modern, and is embedded with restrictive notions about different individuals’ capacities to express themselves within the home and in pubic. Private space allows individuals limited space to act – to the extent their actions can be kept private – without directly challenging the overall social structure. At the same time, the ways in which individual ‘human rights’ are embedded in governmental infrastructures leads to them being heavily proscribed for non-citizens – in particular refugees, who by definition have been forced to leave their private space. This suggests a need to better qualify the ways in which the values associated with privacy connect with capacities to materially support private life, which governments may allow or restrict, and the ways in which norms and myths around privacy might serve to restrict expression rather than support it.

V. Refugees and digital technology

The literature heretofore cited in this review – much of it derived from law – was in part chosen because it had been strongly associated with the term ‘privacy’. As described above, while ‘privacy’ concerns are often invoked in the digital era, they often lack the theoretical underpinnings of earlier landmark pieces such as Warren and Brandeis (1890) and Westin (1967). At the same time, analysis of these and digital-era literature revealed a focus on a typical ‘private citizen’ envisioned as the head of a household, with a home to which to retire, authority within it, and credibility in the public sphere. Explicitly describing this figure allowed us to consider that in real life, a relatively small number of people enjoy these privileges, and no one enjoys the ‘benefits’ of privacy absolutely. The figure of the refugee is in many respects a counter-point to this idealized ‘private citizen’, even as refugees still have concerns around data protection and public display (such as the norms of khososyah), may themselves head households and use social media to maintain social relations. Thus research with refugees offers an opportunity to interrogate the relationship of privacy’s ‘benefits’ to the assumed underpinnings that support it.

As discussed above, refugees have complicated relationships with home, public self-expression, and civic rights – domains in which privacy is held to support personal agency. They have been forced to leave their homes, and have arrived in countries in which their capacity to work and acquire private capital or property is heavily proscribed as they settle in the ostensible safety of Europe. Yet, as a newly-developing body of literature documents, they use digital technology to travel and communicate with distant family and friends. This section focuses on refugees, following Chapter One’s discussion of the ‘refugee crisis’ that received international media attention in 2015. It firstly discusses the general, diverse and somewhat disordered state of literature on refugees and asylum seekers. It identifies an underlying factor in conceptions of the figure of the refugee – sympathetic, unsympathetic, and legal – as lacking agency, in contrast to ideal privacy subject. It then discusses emergent literature on refugees’ technology use. Refugees in Europe, in the transition to variations on domestic life, are thus a pertinent community of interest to study how privacy’s purported benefits are experienced by people in the real world, beyond the idealized home-owning head of household. At the same time, current digital discussions on privacy and security can be applied to benefit refugees.

Refugees, research and agency

Research on refugees comes from multiple traditions. While it shares subject-area interest, it is commonplace to note (and sometimes lament) the lack of a unified body of theory that might encourage more systematic, abstracted discussions (Leurs and Smets 2018, Bakewell 2007, Landau 2007, Voutira and Doná 2007). This creates an opportunity to apply and test a theoretical body of literature – here, privacy theory – and, as will be discussed further in the methodology chapter, work with the specificity that ethnographic research provides. This also allows the research to enter into subject-oriented discussions covered in later sub-sections on refugees' social media use, and larger systematic projects ongoing such as MedMig assessing the larger-scale picture of migration to Europe.

The diverse nature of research in the field is a challenge among academics in different disciplines, aid workers, and refugees themselves, as Voigts and Watne (2018) argue, identifying contributing factors to a lack of "common knowledge" as power differentials between refugees and those who work with them; the transitory movement of researchers; and disagreements about focus. Terms such as *migrant, refugee, displaced person,* and *asylum seeker* have contextually different meanings (Bigo, Carrera, and Guild 2013). As Hayden writes, "it has remained impossible to define refugees in such a way that legal, ethical, and social scientific meanings of the term could align," (2006 p.472). This is exacerbated by how – as discussed above – the politically-oriented UNHCR definition of *refugee* is not well-equipped to address current migration which occurs for a combination of complex socio-economic and political factors. What these 'mixed migrants' "have in common is their relative poverty and suspicion attached to their movements," suggests Andersson of those migrants (2014, p.4).

In this dissertation I often apply the word *refugee* generally to refer to my participants. This is in part because I believe the term best reflects a general set of experiences and to avoid complicating terminology. While most participants had refugee status, legally others had "humanitarian" rather than refugee protection. Some were from Syria, but had work or student visas. Otherwise were still seeking asylum. These other statuses will be highlighted when relevant – otherwise, collectively the term 'refugee' is applied generally and for brevity.

The proscriptive and restrictive nature of the term *refugee* comes from the fact that, as described in the previous section, as a categorization it is designed to both protect individuals and control their movements. Writing in 2002, DeGenova suggested that “much of the scholarship has been persistently prescriptive” rather than interested in norms of behavior (p.419). He further writes that “the study of undocumented migration has long been lost in the shuffle somewhere in a corridor between demography, policy studies, and criminology” (p.421), with a particular dearth of information from anthropology and the migrants’ perspective. Researchers who seek to help the situation inevitably run up against the fact that the system is designed – frequently through passivity, as discussed in Chapter Six – with limited regard for asylum seekers’ time or welfare.

Whether in need of help or a ‘problem’ to be controlled, refugees, however, are generally considered by their lack of agency. The refugee is defined by a lack of choice. As Hayden writes:

> Legally refugees are defined by the fact that they have no choice in leaving their home; this seems to imply that they have no intentions, particularly towards the host society. Consequently it is generally assumed that their dispositions are formed towards home and the hope of repatriation… In fact, often individuals are only deemed legitimate refugees in the first country they visit after leaving their home country. In other words, they are not permitted to care about pull factors and are defined purely in terms of overwhelming reasons to leave. (2006, p.474)

The more refugees are seen to exercise agency, the less they may be seen as in need or authentically deserving – especially within the asylum system and the right-wing press. As Andersson (2014) writes, their “stereotype within the illegality industry was not that of Africans needing empowerment; it was of wild youth in need of domestication” (p.56).

Meanwhile, critiques have also been voiced about how even sympathetic voices portraying refugees as in need rob them of agency (Geurrero and Tinkler 2010, Malkki 1995a and 1995b). Indeed, two of the most popular images circulated in international news media of the ‘crisis’ were the photo of Alan Kurdi – a Syrian three-year-old who drowned Sept 2, 2015 – and one of five-year-old Omran Daqneesh – dirty and bloodied, but alive – following an airstrike on September 17, 2016. Both are young children, easy symbols of passive innocence about whom the audience need not have complicated feelings toward about their ability to flee, their decisions, and their potential complicity in different stages of a complex process. To counterbalance this Pearlman (2017), for example, spoke about wanting to counter portray Syrian refugees as actively politically rather than passive victims of violence in her book of interviews, *We Crossed a Bridge and it Trembled* (Irrelevant Arabs 2018). In my own research I was conscious of wanting to understand the ways in which people understood their actions and their potential effects, without romanticizing their struggles against oppressive regimes. As will be discussed, many of my participants did not overtly engage with politics, and few considered political engagement as central to their identities.

Overall, refugees' expected lack of agency is different from that of the agentive 'private' citizen. In contrast to settled homeowners, refugees are expected to have 'lost' their homes and other property. As will be discussed further in Chapter Six, the asylum system often does not grant asylum seekers credibility on which interpersonal performances rest – they are disbelieved as 'economic migrants' unjustly trying to game the system which proscribes their rights to reside and work. Looking to these experiences can contribute to research aims of qualifying how privacy supports capacities to act socially and politically, for people whose capacities to act in these ways have been notably, publicly limited and proscribed.

Europe and Middle Eastern migration and asylum-seeking

This research began in 2015, during what news media labelled the "crisis" or "European crisis" (see Chouliaraki and Zaborowski 2017, Zaborowski and Georgiou 2016). That year, 1,015,078 people arrived in Europe seeking asylum, 800,000 of them by boat across the Mediterranean. Around 3,500 drowned en route (BBC 2018). Syrians were the archetypal 'refugees' using a smartphone to navigate, fleeing a clear-cut conflict that erupted suddenly and closely met the UNHCR protocol – yet, as described in this dissertation, even they would sometimes meet problems in establishing their status.

The 'European' fixation is easy to critique as Euro-centric, both for how it shifts the focus from refugees themselves to an 'endangered' Europe and away from the vast majority of refugees around the world – most of whom have not and will not travel to Europe. The United Nations reported a new displacement every two seconds in 2017, the vast majority displaced to "developing countries" (UNHCR 2018). 80% of displaced persons stay in "neighbouring" countries (UNHCR 2019). The political, social, and economic factors driving this migration were at work long before the 2015 'crisis' increased refugees' visibility in Europe.

For some people fleeing a variety of socio-economic factors and/or physical dangers, seeking refugee status was not necessarily the most practical way to live in another country. Some African and Gulf countries allow people to live and work as 'guest workers' governed by systems like the Islam-derived *kafala*. Working in a nearby country avoids the uncertainties and difficulties of the journey to and asylum claims in Europe – as did Hakam and Amsale, whose stories are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively. As of 2017, 12 million out of 33 million people who live in Saudi Arabia are foreign born (CIA 2018). In these countries, however, workers' rights are closely tied to their employers, who maintain high levels of control over employees' capacities to change jobs, receive social benefits, and participate in society.

As described by Amira, a PhD student from Damascus whose story is discussed below, decisions to leave Syria for nearby countries reflected socio-economic possibilities, established family ties, and danger at home:

> 'Not everyone has the resources to be living in Turkey or Lebanon. If you have family in Qatar, and the situation is really bad, you could get a visitor visa. I know people who were working there for years. They had salary cuts. Their immigration system is difficult, but having Syrian employees there was normal. You would work, get some money, then go home and maybe buy a house.'

Not every country, however, granted the right to work to asylum seekers – as demonstrated in Chapter Four by Nabil's family's account of their time in Jordan.

Asylum seekers in Europe thus travelled further from home than most displaced persons, and entered into a situation where their presence and right to work were contingent on receiving asylum or other statuses (to be discussed further in Chapter Six). Many also followed the precedent of internationally-dispersed family and friends, who lived around the world on a variety of statuses, protections and visas.

Migration, refugees and digital technology

Refugees are one of many global categorizes of people for whom national fluidity is a norm. Bauman discusses refugees as one consequence of how in the current globalized world, split between ideological and national "liquidity" and an intense focus on the local (2007). In this view, the world's categories have plainly broken down (if they ever truly existed), and the struggle to enforce them results in tumultuous personal and global anxiety. The struggles to maintain privacy with respect to data, traveling across global networks – to maintain control over the domestic local and one's personality – may also resonate as a manifestation of this pull between the global and the hyper-local. While there has been research on settled migrants, and refugees in transit, there has been less research attention to refugees and asylum seekers in the process of settling.

Much more information exists on 'settled' migrants, though the overall theoretical concerns of long-distance communication and assimilation may be applicable to refugees. Komito notes that "Distance no longer limits communication between people, and, as a result, existing social forms will be transformed and new forms will emerge," (p.3), which allows for "low-intensity participation in the lives of people they know" (2011, p.24). Diminescu (2008) suggests that "the uprooted migrant is yielding to another figure – one that is yet ill defined but which corresponds to that of a migrant on the move who relies on alliances outside his own group of belonging without cutting his ties with the social network at home… Yesterday the motto was: immigrate and cut your roots; today it would be: circulate and keep in touch" (p.567-8). In the early stages of arrival, Diminescu details many of the practical digital challenges migrants face, including receiving funds and setting up phones.

The configurations of digital technology allow for closer contact in ways that were not possible in decades are centuries past, as in Miller and Madinou (2012)'s ethnographic work with Filipino domestic workers in the UK parenting their children back in their home country. Hiller and Franz (2004) divide the migration experience between three stages: *pre-migrant, post-migrant,* and *settled migrant.* The final stage primarily looks back to the homeland in symbolic ways and for nostalgia. At the same time, individuals lives and cultures are dynamic – as when Malkki (1995a) detailed the differences between groups of refugees in Burundi who had assimilated into local life versus those who had opted to remain as a separate 'culture in exile' in camps.

Refugees' lives are marked by a combination of movement and stasis. They have left their homelands, yet asylum seekers often remain stuck at different stages of a system that forces that makes them wait for civic rights while also envisioning their presence as transitory. Falzon (2012) argued that the transitory nature of migrants to Malta – where I conducted preliminary fieldwork as part of an NGO internship – "can be and often is actively and agentively manufactured", with boat arrivals "imagined as transients and sojourners rather than settlers" (p.1661) in contrast to the resource of tourists. Falzon and Andersson (2014), both ethnographers, describe refugee-ness as part of a ritual process that has broken down. In Van Gennep's 'rites of passage' (1960), initiates move from one state to another via the transitory, *liminal* state of the ritual process (Turner 1966). Andersson contrasts this process with the limbo brought by the European detention centers: "The rite had broken down. Liminality had switched to stasis" (p.206).

While their physical movements and civic rights are governed through the asylum system, digital technologies have been central to asylum seekers' movements in recent years. Throughout the 2015 and 2016 'European' crisis, international news media frequently noted that refugees were traveling with smartphones. Emerging academic research affirms that digital technology is employed by refugees during travel, detention, and settlement to seek information and communicate with distant family and friends. Refugees use smart phones while en route – often relying on wi-fi- for Internet access (Gillespie et al. 2016, p.11) According to Gillespie et al., "to get informed, plan their journeys, and stay in contact with smugglers and those who help them. All the interviewees agreed that mobile phones ensured their physical mobility," (p.43). "[M]any say that the smartphone is 'more important than food or shelter', " the authors also note (p.11). Andersson (2013) notes a related complaint from a migrant-turned-media-spokesperson, linking technology to basic needs: "We have no more electricity, no more Internet, no more water!" (p.272)." At the same time, Gillespie et al. caution that 'crisis'-era media coverage has paid extensive attention to "young, male Syrians who appear to be physically fit, well-educated and digitally literate" (p. 9) that may not reflect all travelers.

Andersson affirms that refugees use mobile phones to plan their journeys before they leave, and throughout their travels. He describes a secondhandmobile phone trader trying to move on to Europe (p.19), and elsewhere quotes a boat pilot who used technology to make the clandestine journey across the Mediterranean: "I looked at the Internet, waiting for the right weather…He made a note of it on the GPS and then sent the GPS to me by post" (p.74). This use of mobile phones continues if refugees are detained. Leung (2011) describes migrants within Oceania's communication in the initial stages of detention, waiting for asylum appeals, including attempts to contact home via expensive calling cards, and having friends on the outside communicate messages.

Overall, Gillespie et al. confirm that refugees have a pronounced experience with the central combination of intertwined utility and potential hazard that has defined digital privacy concerns: "despite their utility, mobile phones have a paradoxical presence in the lives of refugees – they are both a resource and a threat. The digital traces that refugees' phones leave behind make them vulnerable to surveillance and other dangers" (p.2). They further write that "Refugees will not share personal information online, preferring to remain anonymous for fear of reprisals, surveillance, detention and/ or deportation…Refugees do not tend to interact with institutions, preferring contact with trusted individuals"(p.17). Later, Gillepsie, Cheesman and Dajani (2019) expanded on the subjective experience of Syrian refugee women in refugee camps in Jordan, who likewise were concerned that their digital activity left them vulnerable to surveillance, yet found it hard to gauge the practical dangers. Overall, these research threads and directions suggest possibilities to apply afore-described discussions of privacy theory to refugees, among whom similar concerns have been identified and has been suggested to be applicable, and yet in which more research is needed. Other authors paint more complicated pictures of refugees' choices at different stages of their journeys. Andersson describes camp guards who "joked and chatted with the migrants and even befriended them on Facebook" (p.230). In some cases, refugees have collaborated with European citizens to share their stories, as in the Facebook group "Ideas: A WhatsApp Journey through the Balkans." In this, Sam Nesmeth of the Netherlands worked with a refugee (under the pseudonym "Ideas") to share his story and edited updates from his WhatsApp messages via Facebook. By May 2016, around when Ideas was granted asylum and its posts became less frequent, it had 378 members of the group. This project demonstrates small scale, person-to-person collaborative potential across cultures and mediums. To share WhatsApp's 'private' group chats – which the refugees used to document and plan movements - could make them vulnerable, especially if travel routes could be intercepted by authorities seeking to impede refugees' movements. By positioning himself as a medium, Nesmeth was able to more safely present a refugee's experiences and the experience of the journey for a wider digital audience. After settlement, Witteborn (2015), in a study of refugees in Germany pre-'crisis', describes how they choose to identify or not identify as refugees online for fear of social more than legal stigmatization.

Fears that technology might be used to restrict refugees' movements are easier to name than to practically assess. Andersson devotes a chapter to the use of radar and radar-like gear to spot boats in the Mediterranean, which are only intermittently approached (p.67-97). Metcalf and Dencik (2019) describe data collection practices used to manage refugees throughout Europe, including gathering biometric data and cash cards used to administer benefits (which restrict where asylum seekers shop and can document what they buy). As with other digital era data practices, however, immigration enforcement involves collaboration among private companies and governments for data and technological infrastructures. In America, the Department of Homeland Security, out of a $44 billion budget, devotes 10% to data management (Mijente et al. 2019, p.1). This comes in part through contracts with companies such as Amazon – the world's largest online marketplace – for data storage and analytics company Palantir, named for the magical orbs the villains in the *Lord of the Rings* fantasy novels use to watch far-away places. This data is also used by different aspects of security – and processed by different contractors and agencies for multiple purposes (see especially p.10-11). As such, while this data theoretically increases immigration agencies' capacities for information sharing amongst each other, it would be inaccurate to suggest that Amazon's contract for cloud storage (for example) automatically allowed Homeland Security access to their customer data.

Direct action against individuals, however, requires human resources. I am unware of any news reports of refugees being tracked via their phones in Europe, despite extensive use of more conventional, blunt technologies such as Hungary and Austria's razor-wire fences. If one looks to the borders and benefits assessment as primary sites in which refugees come into contact and conflict with states, then immigration enforcement would possibly have less incentive – and create more work for themselves – by otherwise pursuing refugees through location monitoring. I am only aware of one media-reported case of authorities – American Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) – using IP addresses to geo-locate an undocumented immigrant. A Facebook official comment described this as, "ICE sent valid legal process to us in an investigation said to involve an active child predator" (Fang 2018). That reporting article concedes that "the extent to which ICE uses social media is not well known," and the specificity of the case and effort required does not suggest routine coordination between data surveillance and dragnet-style raids. At the same time, such data may be more readily incorporated into existing, bureaucratic decision-making processes. U.S. immigration announced in 2019 it would require visa applicants to submit five years of their social media accounts, while agents said they had been scanning such data since 2014 to verify applicants' stories (Richardson 2019). As will be discussed in Chapter Seven, verifying social media does not fit well with the UK Border Association (UKBA) assessment methods, which primarily rely on assessors' subjective beliefs about applicants' credibility without individually verifying their stories' details.

Summary

As described in previous sections, privacy is closely associated with individual agency. Refugees, however, achieve their legal status by demonstrating a lack of choice. Yet the smart phone, social media, and the Internet afford them many opportunities to share information and communicate with distant family and friends, even as fears remain about the potential of these technologies to monitor refugees' movements. An emergent literature – largely subject-oriented – is working to assess refugees in Europe after the 2015 'crisis' use social media and manage their data. Empirical gaps nonetheless remain regarding refugees' perceptions, concerns, and the practical outcomes of their actions to which this dissertation can attribute by anthropologically considering refugees' experiences in light of the personal, social and civic benefits associated with privacy.

VI. Conclusion

Privacy has been held to be of the individual's benefit to control access to the self; present oneself in public and to different publics; and to work toward democratic political action. These claims are historically and culturally situated in modern liberal America and Europe, and often idealized as 'rights' rooted in claims to sovereignty over property that few people possess. In the digital era, privacy has become closely tied to the management of personal information, quantities of which in the digital era have dramatically expanded. This is managed in infrastructures de-contextualized from any individual social situation, and which are held in commercial infrastructures. At the same time, long-standing binary emphases on protecting information from exposure may not hold technically or socially, as interpersonal self-presentation differs greatly from data analytics, and the social effect of information has always been contingent on various factors bound up in social power, and which allow some people more public latitude than others.

Refugees, then, present an interesting challenge to privacy. They have been forced to leave their homes; are restricted in building private and public lives in Europe; and managed in a political infrastructure. Like information, the refugee moves between various social contexts. They use mobile phones and social media to seek information and communicate, while also have fears that the same digital platforms may be used to further monitor and restrict their movements. Where 'security' is held to protect data, the same word is employed to restrict their passage through national borders. Applying privacy theory to refugees allows an opportunity to test whether the personal, social and civic benefits of privacy transcend the social structures which seek to control them, or serve to further restrict their voices from public. It also is an opportunity to contribute to emerging literature on refugees' social media practices.

Chapter Three: Methodology

I. Introduction

This research applies anthropological theory and methods to empirically explore the personal, civic and social benefits associated with privacy in relation to the experiences of refugees. It further aims to ethnographically describe refugees' online privacy practices, contributing to an emerging literature on refugees' social media use. To address these goals the research employed theory and participant-observation methods from digital and existential anthropology. Digital anthropology situates digital practices within peoples' offline social lives, while existential anthropology pays attention to the intersection of Western philosophical concerns (here, privacy) with others' cultures understandings. Altogether, the research involved interviews with 23 refugees and asylum seekers; ethnographic relationship-building; and participant-observation and time spent in varying capacities in seven refugee-related NGO's.

II. Anthropology theory and methods

Anthropology: background and recent debates

British social anthropology began in the late 19th and early 20th century with researchers synthesizing cultural theory from field reports from the Empire and other second-hand sources. As the twentieth century progressed, it became strongly associated with the empirical method of 'participant-observation', which, much as the name suggests, involves alternating between observing a community's actions, participating therein, and reflexively considering one's role in the process. 'Participant-observation' was pioneered by Bronislaw Malinowski, who coined the term and provided it with a suitably intriguing origin story. A Polish national (and thus, a subject of the Austro-Hungarian Empire), Malinowski was in Australia and enrolled in the anthropology program at the London School of Economics in 1914 when World War I broke out. He avoided the conflict while conducting in-situ research in the Trobriand Islands. The resulting work, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), is among the first major anthropological work drawn from extensive fieldwork (Erickson and Murphy 2017, p.97-99).

Malinowski's methodological innovation – shifting from theorizing based on others' observations to firsthand fieldwork – set up a dynamic that would become a benchmark for and modus operandi for the discipline, in which theoretical ideas are tested against new observations in the field. Thereafter, anthropological research retained a dual character: an interest in relatively abstract cultural theory and the minutia of day-to-day interaction, with research in the field often involving a back-and-forth between the two. This enables the researcher to explore both the prosaic *hows* and the more abstract *whys* of action in a written ‘ethnography’, which Burawoy et al. describe as “the study of people in their own time and space, in their own everyday lives” (1991, p. 2). As Da Col (2017) states, referencing an article he co-authored with Graeber (2011), “ethnographic theory began as critique of anthropological knowledge” (p.4), with theory being employed to manage concepts across diverse individual observations (such as ‘kinship’ or ‘privacy’) and assure the validity of those observations. Jackson – whose ‘existential anthropology is described below – considers the process an extension of human attention cycles: “our minds are continually and spontaneously moving between absorption in a task and reflection on it – between doing something without thinking and thinking about what we are doing” (2012, p.8).

In the century since Malinowski, anthropological theory and methods developed alongside modern and post-modern turns within academia. A significant part of the anthropological discussion concerned how to account for diversity and difference, both within cultures and between them. A current form of this debate often falls under the heading of the “ontological turn” (see the meta-reviews of Holbraad and Pedersen 2014 and Pedersen 2012), and its’ attendant term “radical alterity”, which suggest that ideas about culture and knowledge developed in anthropology are inaccurate to project onto the ‘others’ it studies. The opposition in part argues that this idealizes the ‘other,’ and misses fruitful opportunities to apply multi-cultural knowledge to critique anthropologists’ own cultures (e.g., Graeber 2015). The ‘turn’ remains too complex and nebulous to discuss in detail here. Nonetheless, the historic trajectory in which it sits – further elaborated below – is relevant for how it relates to this dissertation’s positioning with respect to refugees’ personal agency amid systematic and structural factors that restrict them.

Paired together, Geertz (1988) and Ortner (2016) – the latter discussed several paragraphs below – form a succinct history of these shifts in the discipline’s changing preoccupations across the 20th and early 21st century. Geertz documents a transition that began with authoritative, matter-of-fact voices to an intense, reflexive focus on the writer. In the early 20th centuries, the frameworks of ‘structuralism’ and ‘functionalism’ considered cultures as largely cohesive, singular entities. However, empirical observation revealed that a great many things do not function as they are spoken of or intended to, nor do actions necessarily support expected social structures. The breakdown coincided with an increasing attention to the privileged position of the ethnographer as researcher, analyst and writer. While reflexivity on one's positionality is an important part of maintaining ethnographic credibility, in excess it may shift the focus from the other to researcher. Variations of this concern are voiced or acknowledged in many texts, including McQueeney and Lavelle (2017), Gans (1999) and Simpson (2006). Crang– a geographer – suggests that "[t]he apocalyptic tones of this debate seem particular to anthropology with its habitual definition of field work as residential participant observation – as opposed to the more plural practices of qualitative methods in geography" (2005, p.6). Geshiere (2010) phrases his version of the archetypal concern that "preoccupation among anthropologists with their own presence in the field [leads]…to the production of monologues", which he writes discounts the inter-cultural "dialogue" of anthropology, shifting the focus from 'others' to the researcher's own interiority (p.137). More succinctly, during my masters' studies, I heard these preoccupations with position framed as a joke, the origins of which I am unaware:

> Q: What did the native say to the reflexive anthropologist?
> A: Let's talk about *me* for a change.

Geshiere continues onward to discuss balancing stylistic word-craft with detailed empirical observations, particularly critiquing 'existential' work by and influenced by Michael Jackson (discussed below) on the grounds that it emphasizes poetic descriptions while providing little practical detail (p.143-145). In finding the balance for this research, I believe that one has an obligation to make a claim about the people, practices and concepts that one is describing that extends beyond one's own experiences, and that is supportable by evidence empirically gathered and transparently displayed. One should specify one's own subjective experience inasmuch as it is relevant to the other people one is describing; aids with the narrative; and provides the reader with useful knowledge to evaluate the credibility of the claims being made. Beyond this such description runs the risk of being a distraction. At the same time, one should strive to make a work stylistically engaging; word-craft should not come at the expensive of detail.

Regardless of positive and negative implications of reflexivity for the analysis, in the overall history of the tradition the certainties of the structuralism era and post-modern uncertainties gave way to subject-matter foci on dysfunction and oppression. From the 1980s to current day, Ortner (2016) described a growth (alongside global neoliberalism) of "dark anthropology", a focus on "the harsh and brutal dimensions of human experience, and the structural and historical conditions that produce them" (p.49). This was met with a reactive focus on happiness and resistance from within oppressive structures. While more optimistic researchers documented 'culture' with an empathetic eye toward the individuals within it and their actions, others emphasized oppressive mechanisms of power at work.

This research is situated amid these strains Ortner discusses, which I do not see as by necessity mutually exclusive. The research aims to describe the challenges of refugee life without undue emphasis on their challenges (for methodological and analytic reasons discussed below), and with attention to refugees' practical capacities to resist and subvert power structures and find meanings within actions available to them. In this balance, studies of refugees (described in the literature review) have often focused on structural challenges that refugees face. 'Digital' and 'Existential' anthropologies – discussed below, and from which this project draws – however, generally skew toward empathy and the power of individual actors. Applying both traditions of concern, the research aims to do justice to restrictions and agencies relevant to privacy and refugee life.

Digital anthropology

The research methodology here draws heavily from 'digital anthropology' as practiced at University College London's anthropology department, where I earned an M.Sc in the subject in 2012. The department's digital interests grew from a focus on 'material culture' (it publishes the *Journal of Material Culture)* and consumption, emphasizing how people use objects sometimes in contrast to their makers' intentions. The departmental researchers often argue against the prevalent myth that relationships with objects come at the expense of social relationships, instead paying close attention to the role of material objects in humans' social life (Miller 2008, UCL Anthropology 2017). In the late 1990s, researchers began shifting their interest to a growing topic of research that also was often accused of distracting from (rather than aiding) social relationships, but with a reputation for immateriality: the Internet (e.g., Miller and Slater 2000). This developed alongside other anthropologists incorporating digital technologies into their research (see Coleman 2010).

In 2012, Miller and Horst published a 'prospectus' on "digital anthropology" as part of a collected volume on the topic. The prospectus affirmed an anthropological "commitment to holism", which states that the researcher should look toward how actions are situated in context – usually offline culture. The authors affirmed the value of human interaction as the key point of observation, regardless of the apparent novelty of the technology that supported it. The researcher starts with people – their concerns and actions – and sees how digital elements are positioned within. Miller et al. (2016) – which expands on the same concepts, and is discussed throughout the literature review –wrote of the holistic commitment that "no one lives inside a topic of research. Holistic contextualization means that everything people do is the context for everything else they do. As a method ethnography cannot really get at every aspect of a person's life, but in trying to achieve this we at least gain a broader sense of what these aspects may be." (p.29) Following this 'holistic' emphasis, this research seeks to understand the contexts of digital privacy-related actions.

Miller and Horst further reject both technological utopianism and (similar to their stance on material objects) the notion that digital socialization is somehow lesser or less authentic than in-person socializing in contrast to popular myth and academics such as Turkle (2011). Instead, they sought to use notions of virtuality to reflect on offline interaction. Digital media reveals how social interactions have otherwise been mediated. The authors argue that despite the interconnectedness digital technology facilitates, it did not culturally homogenize the world – rather, it brought a number of specific instances together with their own (often conflicting) expectations for what constitutes normative behavior, facilitating a dialectal relationship between the particular and the universal. When expectations clash online, they reveal expectations *for* communication, culture, and social interaction – creating instances of observable behavior, as well as reinforcing the need to study the diversity of cultures.

Existential anthropology

As demonstrated in the literature review, 'privacy' is far from a universal or uncontested concept. The 'existential anthropology' of Michael Jackson provides a model for linking philosophical concepts (like privacy) to participant-observation, as well as applying them methodologically in fieldwork and the focus of ethnographic writing. Jackson goes further than Miller in emphasizing the value of holism, seeking to describe the phenomenological and experiential aspects of existence and employing the term 'lifeworlds' (the title of his 2013 essay collection), rather than the more limited 'worldview'. The term emphasizes the situated nature of actions and views as integrated and enacted in context, similar to (and drawing from) the phenomenology he described as aiming to understand "philosophies and theories" as "part and parcel of the world in which we live rather than transcendent views" while also "illuminating things by bringing them into the daylight of ordinary understanding" (1996, p.1). Jackson describes this methodologically, touching on above-discussed themes such as reflexivity and how to accurately familiarize the exotic:

> I have never sought the kind of knowledge of others that purports to transcend the world of their experience, reducing human lives to cultural representations, innate imperatives, social rules, traditional values, or global processes; my interest is in the knowledge that may contribute to tolerant co-existence. To this end one needs an ability *both* to think for oneself *and* to be open to the thinking of others, and a capacity for both self-analysis and social critique (2012, p.7).

Especially relevant to this research, existential anthropology frames "interdisciplinarity" as one of several "methods open to us for entering more completely into the lives of others – along with "ethnographic fieldwork", "critical reflection," and cultural "comparison" (2013, p.20-28). Jackson's method entails an engagement between the empirical aspects of anthropology and the logical rigor of Western philosophy. Applying ethnographic observation of other cultures (and their 'lifeworlds', practices and cosmologies) serves as a point of comparison and critique to the orderly "idealism" found in Western philosophy (2013, p.261) – not unlike how digital anthropology uses the conspicuous mediation of online interaction to reflect on how offline conversation is mediated. The existential approach allows multi-cultural concepts to engage with one another, seeking (citing Arendt's words, p.24) a "subjective in-between" of engagement with the other. If the challenge of anthropology was in part how to describe and account for difference, Jackson claims that interactions between different things change one another and produce something new.

Jackson has applied this to directly discuss how Western ideals often undermine the lives of others who have different life concerns in essays on nomads, refugees, and technology. Jackson's work with Aboriginal nomads – discussed in the literature review – led him to reflect on the privileged status the physical home is afforded in Western thought (1995, 2013 p.93-208). In encountering technology and refugees, Western ideals of control and categorization run up against the messiness and complexity of lived experience. As he writes, "the discourse on technology and the discourse on migrants and marginalized others run together, for both raise critical questions concerning not only our capacity to conceptualize the supposedly extrahuman as human but our ability to actually incorporate and control it" (p.195). To Jackson, descriptions of technology, migration, and Western philosophy employ ideals of order and control invariably complicated by the holistic complexity of life. Yet the processes are also unmistakably dynamic, constantly changing regardless of what intentions or descriptors we may ascribe to them. The ethnographer's challenge is partially to account for these complexities.

Existential anthropology provides a multi-disciplinary theoretical model for connecting Western philosophical concerns (here, privacy) with concepts from other cultures, as well as a subject-area tradition of addressing technology and migratory life. Together with general anthropological traditions and digital anthropology – which provides a holistic approach to considering how digital technology is situated in everyday life – it provides theoretical support to connecting the privacy theory described in the literature review with refugees' ideas and experiences.

Operationalizing anthropology

The method of participant-observation and its theoretical tradition of anthropology provide each other structure and rigor. Participant-observation describes *how* to research everyday life by becoming a part of it. 'Anthropology' suggests what to look for as one goes about it as one produces the completed anthropological work – called an 'ethnography'.

Crang (2005 p.4, citing Fine 2003, p.4) discusses the strength of ethnography as coming from its capacity to provide a rich description of actions in context (or 'holistic understanding'). Ethnographic works often accomplish this through what Geertz (1973) called 'thick description' – a narrative combination of observations, interpretations, and theory. One of Geertz's most famous examples of 'thick description' – his account of the Balinese cockfight (1972) – demonstrates these ideals well. The ethnography mixes a literary and precise description of what happens at the cockfight; a methodological account of how fleeing from the police with his informants helped build their trust; and describes how fight betting patterns relate to kinship (which engages with anthropological theory and provides an interpretation of the actions in juxtaposition to participants lives).

What constitutes valid or credible ethnographic knowledge, however, remains open to dispute. For one, anthropologists have a reputation for "methodological silence" (Okley 2012, pp.6-7). The research process develops intuitively and iteratively in the field and may be difficult to specify beforehand. As many of the citations above and below attest, descriptions of what anthropology 'is' often heavily emphasise the style of the outputs. Disputes over which particular processes can produce valid ethnographic knowledge as variations on the approach have grown in what Gans (1999) called "the era of ethnography" in a paper of the same name. The empirical affordances of the digital era have resulted in a diversity of approaches.

Within anthropology, Boellstorff treated the online ‘virtual world’ of *Second Life* as a ‘field site’ and studied the social interactions within it (2008). Kozinets’ online-focused ‘netnography’ (2015) – which does not usually involve an offline component – has found acceptance among business researchers. Neither approach seems suited to this research’s goal of understanding how online practices are situated in and affect offline life.

Amid the diversity of claims to ‘ethnography’, Shah (2017) articulates a four-point anthropological definition of the method which serves as a reasonable archetype of fieldwork: “Participant observation centers a *long-term* intimate engagement with *a group of people* that were once *strangers to us* in order to know and experience the world through their perspectives and actions in as *holistic* a way as possible (p.51, emphases in original text).”

To any particular project, these four points are adaptable, even as the ways in which they might be disputed speak to the complexity and state of the present-day world. The definitions of a ‘stranger’ or ‘group of people’ are difficult to define amid the increasingly complex ways individuals and cultures are globally configured through Internet-enabled technology, finance, and other means (Appadurai 1996). Methods such as multi-sited ethnography (Falzon 2009) aim to address the fact that individuals, cultures and communities are often not as bounded to geographic locations in ways they may have once been. Refugees are one such group which is difficult to define as ‘bounded’ to a particular place, having travelled from one country (to which they retain social ties) to another in which they may have uncertain or contingent legal status. ‘Digital anthropology’ (as discussed above) considers ‘holistic’ to mean situating online behavior in offline life, while Boellstorff studied virtual spaces of the internet as ‘holistic’ unto themselves.

The length of time required to conduct research is likewise methodologically and practically contested. Goulden et al. (2016) present a case study of collaboration between ethnographers and technology researchers that encountered many problems, partially as a result of having expectations for social scientific outcomes on a shorter ‘design’ timeframe (p.140-142). They note that relationships between digital designers and social scientists have worked in being “to provide an overview of one aspect of the setting relevant to the proposed system to be introduced. It is not to detail the setting in its minutia. (p.140).” By orienting around a singular ‘aspect of the setting’, privacy, it seeks to balance both focus of engagement (and economy of time spent in the field), while also retaining the holistic rigor of an anthropological description of the topic in its context.

With these methodological concerns in mind, this research – described below – involved series of engagements, from 2017 through 2019, situated within the environments of refugee-focused NGOs. This was conducted alongside relationships built with refugees, whose views on privacy on and online practices we discussed in interviews.

While the anthropological ideal often emphasizes the holistic, environmental focus of participant-observation, in practice it often also involves focused discussions with research participants. Crang and Cook (2007. p. 35) define ethnography as involving participant-observation and a variety of methods, including interviewing and multi-media engagement. Forsey (2010) discusses fieldwork as frequently involving "engaged listening", which aims to accurately describe fieldwork methodology and reassure researchers who worry that their own research lacks a (potentially mythic) purity (p.560). He later asserts that "my own reading of ethnography and hearing of countless research articles assures me that a significant enough portion of ethnographic writing is based more upon what was heard in the field than what is seen there. (p.563)." In the interview process, Rubin and Rubin (2012) describe how within the interview rapport is gradually built and lines of questioning increase in specificity of detail (p.115-169). Silverman notes that within this structure, the interviewer can check accuracy of what's being said throughout (2013, p.237 – 38). With this in mind, interviews are a useful tool for clarifying observations, including those surrounding the meaning and intent of online activity that transcends contexts, only some of which a researcher may naturally be able to observe.

Forsey writes, "To conduct interviews with an ethnographic imaginary is to ask questions beyond the immediate concerns of the research question." (p.568), emphasizing that the strength of the research is in its description of context. "The flexibility of responsive interviewing let us go beyond our initial interview questions and explore our material more deeply," write Rubin and Rubin in their textbook on qualitative interviewing (p.234), a justification similar in reasoning to Forsey's ethnographic approach. This approach lends itself to what may be called semi-structured, responsive, or flexible interviewing – an approach I employed in three years' experience as a marketing writer and journalist, during which I interviewed people on a near-daily basis. The ethnographic sensibility lends itself specifically to this conversational, less structured approach.

How this combination of participant-observation, relationship building, and interviews was put into practice is described in the following sections.

III. Project design

Data collection overview

Employing the above-described participant-observation and interviewing methods, my research involved:

> Ethnographically observing and participating in the work of service organizations; semi-structured interviews with other volunteers; and attending refugee-related performances and public events such as Nottingham's 'Refugee Week'
>
> Getting to know a core group of participants socially, sometimes in public events and sometimes in their homes
>
> Semi-structured interviews regarding refugees and asylum seekers' offline lives and online social media usage, especially Facebook and WhatsApp, supplemented by follow-up interviews at later dates
>
> Interacting with participants in their everyday use of social media

More details on how I conducted interviews and participant-observation follow below. Participant-observation and interview discussions supplemented each other, with the former providing rich context within which to interpret, evaluate and situate the latter. Semi-structured interviews formed the bulk of the quotes for the 'everyday life' chapters (four, five, and eight), while organizational participant-observation informed chapters on the asylum process and support therein (six and seven). Broad empirical emphases in both included:

> An investigation of refugees' experiences of privacy in context, in their own terms and based on informal and formal interviews
>
> An exploration of the choices made in terms of what personal information they share, the channels through which they share, and any thoughts, perceptions, and feelings towards their personal data as meaningful
>
> An analysis of how conventions and concerns around privacy aid and/or restrict desired self-expression and their choices regarding their personal information more generally

As discussed in the ‘digital anthropology’ section, the key methodological application is to describe online activity in the context of offline life. In one sense this involved understanding the asylum system and support networks related to it through organizational participant-observation (described below). In another sense, it entailed understanding refugees’ everyday ‘offline’ lives through interviewing and spending informal time together.

The credibility of this data is established in several ways. Firstly, via the contextual descriptions that ethnography provides. Secondly, it was gathered within the trust established in the ethnographic process. Thirdly, social media naturally creates an extensive (if selective) record of activity. Fourthly, I employed the data gathered via semi-structured interviewing to evaluate the data gathered from participant-observation, and vice versa. Interviewing some participants multiple times allowed me to ask follow up questions; to track social media engagement over time to see if evolved and accorded with what participants told me; and to iteratively adapt my focus. It further allowed me to present (my interpretations of) participants’ words back to them, to allow us both time to reflect on whether the record reflected accurately what they hoped to convey.

Consent and ethical research design

Based in part on the below considerations, the research was approved following ethical review by the University of Nottingham.

MacKenzie, McDowell and Pittaway (2007) frame a challenge of research with refugees as how design must not just respect, but promote, participants’ agency. Research frameworks are often drawn from bio-medical ethics, as Perry (2011) discusses in a survey of university internal review processes applied to studies with refugees, and thus often assume that the researcher presents information on his or her project and allows people to make an informed choice in the context of their lives. Yet the project’s risks or benefits may remain abstract to participants. The refugees Andersson (2014) describes further showed conflicted feelings more generally towards the journalists and academics, which would arrive for short research periods and use refugees’ stories as a professional commodity.

These questions around the design of individual research projects are situated amid many larger debates about whether development programs (such as those proposed by Betts and Collier 2017, and supported by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund) do more to alleviate global inequality or reinforce it (Yarrow 2008, Rice 2016). The faults and ambiguities of the system raise questions about the role of the researcher and what constitutes ethical actions, which are important to reflect on as an ongoing matter of practice. It is, I believe, important to be aware of these debates in a general, and to reflectively situate one's project within them.

As a solution to the consent problem in individual research projects, MacKenzie, McDowell and Pittaway advocate for ethical research design based on iterative consent models (common in anthropology) in which an ongoing conversation between researcher and participant implicitly and explicitly affirms the research participant's consent. This is similar to Jackson's 'empathetic in-between' described above. The relationships necessary for ethnographic research rely on the establishment and ongoing maintenance of trust with participants, as well as that they are aware of the purposes of research. This research ideally provided an immediate social and educational benefit to some participants, offering them an opportunity for discussion, reflection, social interaction, and English language practice. While I had produced consent forms – and initially used them in the context of organizational participant-observation – I found that presenting them was often not a good way to approach relationship-building. In all cases I obtained verbal consent to write about the matters we discussed. Taking notes during interviews further rendered transparent the notion that things said were documented.

All data was saved on password-protected drives.

Informed consent was largely obtained verbally, and implicitly confirmed through the initial agreements to be interviewed (often coordinated through text or social media messaging) and our ongoing discussions. I would begin interviews by describing my research in plain language and outlining that participants were free to withdraw their consent to be interviewed (or have their interview material used) at any time. I had initially written consent sheets to ask for signatures, but stopped using them as I found they created suspicion with participants. They were a poor way to start discussions and build conversational trust. This was approved in my ethics form on the grounds consent sheets were 'evidence of consent, not consent in and of themselves.' As many participants were met in the context of work with NGOs, I had also established initial trust in the context of institutions they trusted, while making it clear that I was a researcher independent of the institutions. Participants were free to (and on occasion, did) decline to answer particular questions or lines of questioning.

In another sense, the participants who wanted to talk about their experiences to me were partially self-selected. They wanted to talk to me, and generally were referred to me by an NGO worker or met in the presence of NGO workers whom they knew. Thus, I had further been verified by someone they trusted. By contrast – as discussed below – initial efforts to recruit participants at 'drop-in' sessions at the Center found people less inclined to indulge a random, curious interlocutor, and I abandoned this approach.

All participants are referred to by pseudonyms. Many participants did not know each other socially. Some participants may be identifiable to their friends were they to read this dissertation, though they are unlikely to be identifiable through my descriptions alone. In these instances I have endeavored to not include information of particularly sensitive facts. The commonalities that people fled danger and had emotional responses to it are not particularly secret. In these cases, as well, I received direct approval from participants to write about their experiences in certain levels of detail.

Ethnographic positioning

A key aspect of entering the field is developing a 'research persona'. Mitchell (1993, p.12-22) discusses the research persona in terms of two axes, 'informed' and 'naïve', and 'sympathetic' and 'unsympathetic'. Within these, the 'sympathetic' positions are generally preferable to start from to build informants' confidence, skewing toward 'naïve'. The danger of appearing (or acting as) too informed is that one may lose details and explanation that would otherwise be explained, within the context of a generally forgiving qualitative research environment. Skew too far toward the opposite end, and participants may lose patience. I hope to position myself somewhere between the two, in the sense that I recognize my own advantages of social stability (in a broad sense, not seeking asylum), while also not wishing to presume about details of my participants' lives, which I have not observed in detail. This follows Bucerius' (2013) insights that had she held to the presumptions of the social work 'gatekeeepers' which she initially trusted, she would have missed the nuance in the social dynamics of her community of study.

Bucerius further makes an argument from her research that argues that to gain ethnographic knowledge, "[t]he development of trust in the research process… does not *necessarily* depend on insider status." [p.691). As a white, non-Muslim, non-drug-dealing middle class German woman, she was markedly different from her informants, and gaining their trust did not depend on the pretence that she was 'like them'. Their differences – as she discusses in detail – did not prevent them from sharing experiences, and oftentimes explicitly provoked discussions while shaping their interactions. At the same time, deferring to the judgement of other 'outsider' social workers was not necessarily productive, as their own claim to 'insider' knowledge was often over-stated, and the need to portray knowledgeability dissuaded them from examining with her what they *did* and *didn't* know. In both cases of interaction (with social workers and her primary participants), time was needed to get beyond the more generically performative interactions they fell into when they first met.

While I never faced physical danger, I am a migrant – and over the course of research I would reflect on commonalities with participants in how I moved far, often amid uncertainties, in the hopes of building life and career. In 2011, I left Iowa to pursue a masters' degree in London. The 'Arab Spring' had given a new urgency to the social scientific study of digital culture, along with a sense of optimism for its role in large-scale social change. In March 2012, some Syrian students asked me to shoot some photos related to an ongoing conflict in their country about which I knew little. They acted as dead bodies and wrapped themselves in the Syrian flag. One held a sign that said 10,000 people had died. The number seems at once shocking and quaint now.

حرية
Freedom

حرية
MORE THAN 10,000 People Lost their lives since the SYRIAN REVOLUTION Started

Photos as described in the text, from March 2012, taken by the author

In one cliché, I was a small town kid who went to the big city and fell in love with it. I was further one of many middle-class third-country nationals from around the world. Some of us would look back on years spent trying to find ways to stay in a country that was happy to take international tuition money, yet offered fewer than expected avenues for work visas after. We could have, after all, simply 'gone home'. In British culture, to say something (like staying) 'might be difficult' suggests the difficulties may outweigh the benefits. A white middle class American, however, is prone to interpret rejections as exhortations to simply try harder. I didn't have an intuitive sense of how a system could be against my interests. I would also later contextualize my early career – before my masters' – amid the 2008 Financial Crisis, a consciousness partially spurred by the Occupy movement, whose tents were stationed at St. Paul's and meetings for which were also in full swing in late 2011.

It took two years after my MSc to get a PhD position in order, during which time I had the privilege to travel and later did, despite reservations, return to my hometown (pop. 3,000) and edit its local newspaper, *The Wright County Monitor*. The area was – as it had been as I was growing up – experiencing profound demographic changes of its own. The native-born population was aging. A lot of folks there, like me, were descendants of Germans and other Europeans who had moved in the 1800s, often to farm, when the legal aspects of immigration were easier to pass through. My paternal grandmother, who was born in 1920, grew up speaking German at home, and wrote a short book (only circulated amongst the family) about the family's experience immigrating and settling in the American Midwest. When I was very young, that fact seemed like a relic of such a time long gone that it was a novelty it could be within living memory. As I grew up, however, industrial agriculture incentivized new residents to move to this small place from Mexico and other countries. A documentary crew came to my hometown to document the sometimes-horrific challenges undocumented immigrant workers faced and the sometimes supportive, sometimes hostile response from the native-born community (Frontline 2013). A much more veteran local newspaper editor wrote a book about Storm Lake, where I had worked for several years at Buena Vista University, where these dynamics are even more pronounced (Cullen 2018).

Thus, while I have always have had a ‘home’ to return to, I had spent years in a slow-moving contest of wills with UK immigration, and was attuned to the particular ups and downs that can come with the vague hope that eventually things might go differently. What it meant to leave and stay in a place, and what factors were external and what were voluntary, was very much on my mind, along with what it meant to build a life in or amid different places. I also understood my own life, and the community life of places I knew well, as situated amid global migration flows that were both recent and part of centuries-long histories.

My goal in positioning myself as a researcher was to leverage my own apparent and assumed statuses as best I could. I am clearly *not* a refugee. I am also another in a long line of white, non-refugee citizens who have probed my participants with questions. When my American accent was not mistaken for British, it was sometimes an icebreaker in that I am also a ‘foreigner’. A common question I *also* get on meeting people (refugees or not) are ‘where are you from?’ and ‘*why did you come here?’* America is, further, often viewed as a ‘land of opportunity’ from the outside – thanks in no small part, to judge from conversations, due to its pop culture exports). It has a reputation as a place where one can build a life, despite its internal problems and foreign policy actions.

Many of the participants with whom I developed ongoing ethnographic relationships (rather than used a more interview-based approach) had obtained refugee status, and were in relatively secure positions. The asylum seekers with whom I met were often most interested in my time and to speak English, which I provided as I could. Relationships with Team clients were governed by that organization’s code of conduct. Sometimes it was difficult to refuse offers of food or coffee, which I accepted on the grounds that it helped to preserve my participants’ sense of value and that I would return the favor later.

Organizational access felt like climbing to a plateau. Initial emails with organizations required further meetings, paperwork, and was met with some scepticism, but once I was ‘in’ I was ‘in’. In my work with refugee organizations, it was easiest for me to adopt what Snow, Benford and Anderson (1986) describe as the “credentialed expert” role, in which the researcher accentuates his or her professional identity as a justification for presence and questioning. While I had initially been less formal – adopting more a persona of a “buddy researcher” (acting as a friend) – I found that acting the ‘university researcher’ made me a somewhat natural part of the environment. It allowed me credibility with gatekeepers and time to ‘hang out’, in a roles readily understandable to both staff and refugees that reflected how they appeared to perceive me. My academic associations have afforded me some status and credibility, a slight shift from my ‘student’ status within academia. In some cases – as with my communications committee chair-ship in the ‘local chapter’ discussed below, effectively became a colleague and ‘consulting expert’. My volunteering and participant-observation in these contexts provided useful context on the local refugee support infrastructure, and introduced me to participants. Two organizations, however, feature most directly into my research: Evidence Team, discussed in Chapter Six, and the Center, discussed in Chapter Seven.

Note-taking

In participant-observation situations, I recorded notes while or after experiencing events and talking to people – typically later the same day or the following one. I typed notes digitally, storing them on password-protected drives. These notes contain fairly literal direct descriptions (e.g., what happened); with miniature ‘thick descriptions’ of events (actions with interpretations – with careful notes as to what is my hesitant interpretations and what has been observed). I would sometimes highlight text in bold to indicate I should return to it later. I later would use colors to highlight points to explore further, clarify, or quote later.

For an example of how this has worked for other ethnographers, Diphoorn (2012) notes that she occasionally took notes while on patrol with the police officers she was studying, but it was impractical to record 12-hour shifts. She was selective on what she wrote based on in the moment judgement. “After each shift, I wrote up elaborate field notes that I brand as mosaics of data, including jotted down keywords, fragments of transcribed interviews, and detailed field notes written afterward,” that jumbled together numerous topics: “personal accounts and methodological issues blended in throughout the notes as an interwoven ingredient of the empirical data, resulting in "messy texts" (referencing Denzin 1997's term) that voiced various facets of the research process (p.208).

Hammersley and Atkinson note a case to be made for "a wide focus" and "as much care and self-conscious awareness as possible… The main purpose is to identify and develop what seem to be the most appropriate categories" (1997, p.175). They offer advice on taking care not to be obtrusive in note-taking, and to be as detailed as possible. One must trust to writing more than memory, later supplemented in writing by "head notes" that comprise more "tacit knowledge" gained as context (p.185). I was clear at the start to take careful note of the social media platforms used, frequency of use, the explicitness with which refugees give their identities (such as by use of real name or photo), the extent of social networks with local refugees and non-refugees, and attitudes toward social media. As research continues, deeper themes emerged – also as Hammersley and Atiknson suggested (p.215-17) – discussed in the results chapters.

IV. Participant-observation

Overview

Participant-observation included socializing with refugees and asylum seekers, as well as participating in the activities of organizations supporting and advocating for refugees and asylum seekers. Organizations in which I participated, to be described in more detail below, include the following. In most cases, I have rendered generic the names. Except for People for Change Malta, all the organizations were based in the UK's East Midlands:

> **Welcome Sessions** where I taught conversational English, which lasted an hour and a half weekly in the spring and autumn of 2017.
>
> **A Center** which provides a variety of services for refugees and asylum seekers including connecting them appropriate governmental and non-governmental agencies. I shadowed volunteers in General Guidance for multiple days each week over autumn 2017; interviewed managers; and used connections made through other events to recruit interviewees.
>
> **A Foundation** which organizes events, produces publications, and advocates for African communities in the East Midlands. I volunteered as a photographer at several events and got to know the group's leadership.

> **A Syrian community group**, with whom I celebrated *eid* holidays and through which I recruited participants.
>
> **The Evidence Team,** which offers advice to individual asylum seekers on unearthing new evidence for asylum appeals. I attended monthly meetings from fall 2017 through the final submission date of January 2020, and worked on four cases.
>
> The newly-forming **local chapter** of a national organization that seeks to provide services and advocacy for refugees and asylum seekers. I attended meetings – which began monthly before becoming more intermittent – from summer 2017 onward.
>
> **People for Change Malta,** a migration policy NGO based in Naxaar, Malta, with which I interned in autumn 2015, primarily working with existing quantitative survey data on migrants to the island nation which was published as Gauci et al. (2016). While my time with the group pre-dated my official fieldwork, it provided valuable background on the asylum process in another EU island nation, in the Mediterranean at the borders of Europe.

I also attended meetings and met with individuals from several other local organizations, with whom I did not work extensively.

The work of many of these organizations involved many conversations and meetings – for example, teaching English trough the Red Cross. As a result, my 'participant observation' often resembled interviewing, and highlighted the role of mediated information in refugees' lives. Through the conversations that occurred deliberately and incidentally throughout this work, had concentrated exposure many problems, issues and topics that refugees and asylum seekers encounter in their day-to-day lives, especially the navigation of the UK's labyrinthine benefits system and the organizations that support asylum seekers in the midst of it (see especially Chapters Six and Seven). I was able to use this knowledge to contextualize as I discussed the more specific concerns and experiences of individuals with whom I interviewed and spent social time. As discussed above in 'positioning,' I fit in as one of many familiar faces, somewhere between a professional and a volunteer, and occasionally was consulted for my perceived 'expertise' in technology.

I had initially planned to formally recruit participants through the above organizations. Instead, I found that the relationships I built in the process of 'gaining access' were more helpful in finding participants than relying on employees and volunteers to ask if their clients would be willing to participate. Thus, recruitment (and participant-observation itself) was partially a product of the long road to access potential participants, in bureaucratic systems that (for all involved) involve a lot of waiting. In the case of the Gender, clients came to General Guidance because they were in need of help, and after enduring multiple hours' waits they had little desire to spend more time satisfying a researcher's curiosity. Participants in the Center's Women's Group and English classes, however, were met in less urgent contexts and thus were more amenable to talk.

The Welcome Session

Between February and December 2017, with a break for summer, I volunteered regularly at 'Welcome Sessions' held by a local organization, which were largely staffed by university student volunteers. Around 40 people attended these sessions weekly. I attended around 20 sessions total as a teacher and subsequently would sometimes meet participants at the event. The majority of whom were male asylum seekers and refugees, and the majority of whom I talked with were men from Syria, Sudan and Eritrea. While the sessions comprised a variety of activities (including music, tea, and conversation), I volunteered to teach informally teach English (the biggest and most volunteer-intensive event of the evening). Downstairs, in the fellowship hall, would be tea, socializing, singing (with guitar), and information about related services. Upstairs were conversational English classes (which would draw over half the apparent attendee each session) taught by volunteers (me among them), mostly university undergraduates, in groups of one to four. It was held in a room that appeared to have been once a sanctuary but whose laminate wood floor and emptiness without chairs and tables, disassembled after every session, suggested a gym. In a third room – the dining room – trained educators worked with a smaller number of promising students preparing to take the IELTS or other standardized English tests often with the goal of using the results as part of university entrance applications. I found the attendees to be amenable to conversation and studious, interested learners of the language, whose level of proficiency was sufficient for us to interact in English. The atmosphere there was relaxed and friendly; unlike at the Center, people did not typically arrive with an immediate problem in need of solving but rather for socializing and the longer-ranging goal of English learning.

I initially began volunteering to understand more about refugees as I was planning more full scale research, as the organization said they would not help with participant recruitment. However, in this process, I built relationships with two people in key leadership roles, which also helped immerse me in the ‘community’ of volunteers. I also attended two ‘days out’ events for participants: a visit to University of Nottingham and a local car show.

The Center

The Center was a major research site, discussed in Chapter Seven. It is housed in a building which was once a primary school. Most of my research took place in two areas – the café / waiting area (once the cafeteria), and the advice centre (originally a gym), which now has cubicles around the edges and tables installed along its edges. In the middle, the supervisor and interpreter pool sat.

As part of initiating access, in June 2017 I participated in an art workshop at the ‘women’s group’ at the Center, after which I was granted permission to interview the attendees on their subsequent Friday meetings. In mid-August, I received word that the Center approved my application. At both the Welcome Sessions and the Center, my ‘presence’ (and the capacity to demonstrate a personable nature and commitment to the work) has gone a long way toward building relationships and establishing my personal legitimacy as a researcher.

Throughout autumn 2017, I spent two to three days a week at the Center. These would usually begin around 9:30 and end around 13:00 or 14:00. In the beginning, this involved shadowing General Guidance volunteers – which was how many volunteers began their work at the Center. This provided a focused exposure to the sorts of bureaucratic problems that refugees experience, and proved to be the most valuable aspect of the experience.

In November, I was given a table from which to conduct my research, and volunteers were invited to forward participants to me. This resulted in several brief discussions each day, which I deemed too inefficient to justify continuing. It can take hours to sort out a client, thus limiting the number of *potential* participants; volunteers wouldn’t necessarily prioritize forwarding clients; volunteers often had concerns about clients’ English levels; and, after long waits, clients were often eager to move on to other things rather than volunteer more time for questioning. Initiating conversation in the café, too (after being granted permission for a change of approach) proved somewhat difficult without being able to establish context. However, I did get to know various staff there and have discussions around the organization’s concerns and management. As a third approach, I introduced myself at the Center’s English classes, through which I met an ethnographic participant.

The Evidence Team

The Team was mostly (but not exclusively) made up of university student volunteers, many of them studying law, and led by volunteer academics whose research wasn't related to refugees. Participants were given case files from rejected asylum seekers, and would arrange meetings with them to discuss potential new avenues of new evidence to ground an appeal. I worked went through the training program, regularly attended monthly meetings from late 2017 through my dissertation submission in August 2019, and worked directly on four cases**.** The expertise of the organizers was invaluable in understanding the various arcana of how the asylum system works on paper (and how it works more complexly in practice). Chapter Seven discusses the work of the organization.

The Local Chapter

I attended the initial meeting of a newly-formed group which sought to unite area NGOs working with refugees; better coordinate services among them; and highlight and encourage area civic organizations and businesses to support refugees. This involved attending a meeting once every two months, which has continued from March 2017 through to early 2019. The group involved experienced volunteers, some active in other groups, and refugees with connections to the Welcome Sessions' lead organizer. I, as an apparently young, tech-literate person working on my PhD in technology, was drafted to head the Communications Committee, which sought to develop the website (based off the national organization's template and find the best digital mediums for reaching local refugees. The first meeting, March 24, 2017, was attended by 30-some community organizers and six refugees. This naturally included people I knew from other local organizations.

The Foundation

The Foundation was an NGO that works on a variety of African migrant-focused engagement projects, many of which involve refugees and asylum seekers. I was introduced via a contact I met at the 'local chapter'. I knew that the group wanted volunteers and participants for the events they organize – in August 2017, a 'day out' at a sustainable farm in a nearby community, and the 'Hyson Green festival' in an ethnically diverse area of town. I volunteered as a photographer at both events. Becoming a volunteer allowed me to meet with refugees in a more leisurely context, and to see other ends of the NGO system that weren't strictly focused on meeting day-to-day needs. Through this, I met several ethnographic participants.

Syrian Society

Through the Foundation, I met Jamal, a key informant – whose experiences are discussed in Chapter Eight – who invited me to the Syrian community *eid* celebrating the end of Ramadan in 2017. The heart of this was a pub converted into a mosque and community centre. Jamal welcomed me into the community and even nicknamed me within the group – providing the credibility, endorsement and semi-formal introduction I needed to recruit interviewees.

Informal research

Participant-observation with participants with whom I developed friendships involved 'hanging out'; bonding over meals in and outside their homes; and spending social time at home. Entering the home and online 'friending' required establishing trust through implicit or explicit verbal consent and the actions (messaging, 'friending') themselves. I further 'friended' such closer participants on Facebook, and welcomed their presences on my wall to the extent that they wanted to engage.

V. Interviews

Interview sampling

I conducted substantial interviews with 23 refugees, asylum seekers, and people from conflict zones. I also had dozens of other smaller, informal conversations over the course of participant-observation (described below). A reference list of participants who are quoted or described in this dissertation – named by pseudonyms, descriptors, and where they appear in the dissertation – is in the Appendix. Most participants live in mid-sized cities in the East Midlands, which enabled me to draw from different pools of participants than more-studied population centres with more established diaspora communities (such as London). I also conducted interviews with refugees outside the geographic area, based off informal networking.

The sample was largely one of convenience, skewed masculine, and prominently featured Syrians. Altogether, of the 23 participants quoted and described in this dissertation:

Five were female and 18 were male.

17 were Syrian.

Two were Eritrean

> Two were Iranian, and a third was Afghani and grew up in Iran.
>
> One was Sudanese.
>
> One was from Chad.

Aside from the Syrian community, the individuals with whom I talked were not necessarily members of the same 'community' as anthropologists have often studied. People did not necessarily have a complex web of relationships amongst each other, but rather I often observed them as individuals in relationship to immigration services and globally-dispersed family and friends. This partially meant that the focus became less individuals' relationships amongst each other, but rather how they understood themselves and their online activity in relationship to broader international and local social circles – discussed respectively in Chapters Five and Eight.

While the notion of what constitutes any particular demographic is thoroughly disputable (as described in the literature review, not the least of which is the term 'refugee' itself) – 60 million exist under the label worldwide (UNCHR 2017). The intent is not to homogenize their experiences, but to give careful, detailed consideration to a limited number of refugees to get beyond more generic depictions. In ethnographic research, the quality of interaction generally is more important than quantity of participants. As Margaret Mead wrote, in "anthropological sampling… the validity of the sample depends not so much upon the number of cases as upon the proper specification of the informant in terms of a large number of variables" (Mead 1953, p.654-5, quoted in Wolcott 2010). Allistone wrote regrading a case study's potential "sampling variety and external validity", he saw the study "not as an attempt to provide categorical 'truths'... but as an attempt to raise questions about [the topic] by looking at a single case in detail." (quoted in Silverman 2013, p.219). Similarly, this research seeks to generate examples that might confirm, challenge, or deepen the understanding of privacy, while producing enough data internally to suggest that the experiences described are not merely anecdotal. This is in line with anthropological commitments (especially as articulated in 'existential anthropology', discussed above) to not merely map Western modern concepts onto other cultures (also see Miller and Sinanan 2017 p.2, Bloch 2017 p.36).

Elicitation strategies

The trust-building that comes with entry to domestic and online spaces is part of a process of improving access to the data that participants are willing to provide. Ethnography itself is partially a research strategy to get beyond the everyday 'scripts' that conversation often falls into. As Miller et al. (2016)

note: “ethnographers tend to draw most heavily from the close friends they make after ten to 15 months. Such friends may admit that the things they said at first were intended to impress or disguise. Eventually they then provide much richer insights into what they really think is going on around them” (p.35).

As discussed above, in relation to the concerns of anthropology, these interviews were semi-structured. Segal et al. (2006) list the advantages of ‘structured’ interviews as increasing reliability and validity, the latter by ensuring “that diagnostic criteria are covered systematically and completely,” which is often relative to more clinical settings in which the authors were engaged. Nonetheless, this approach “may hinder rapport” and are “limited by the validity of the classification system” (p.125). For my approach, rapport was key, and rigid diagnostic criteria could be more a hindrance than a benefit.

With particular respect to those with complicated citizenship status, Gomberg-Munoz (2016) discusses ‘strategic sharing’, noting that (here – analogues to refugees) “undocumented people and their family members deploy their hardship stories to foster sociality, legitimize their experiences, promote political consciousness, and demand social change.” (p.743). This, however, also poses a research challenge, as discussions between the researcher and refugees may provoke an emphasis on hardship that may get in the way of gathering more nuanced information. Cabot writes:

> “ethnographic interviews may replicate, in many ways, the interviews that aid workers, medical examiners, or adjudicators conduct… I had to find ways of interrupting the rote interview format in order to generate less scripted response… One asylum lawyer explained to me that advocates seek to turn gray into black and white, whereas ethnographers try to do the opposite. (2016, p. 652)

What research strategies he employed, Cabot leaves to the imagination, though a general strategy may be to not ask questions that immediately accentuate or frame refugees’ experiences in terms of hardship, but to listen when they occur, paying close attention to what meaning they appear to have to those discussing them. I followed Coutin and Vogel’s advice that:

> when ethnographers encounter tales of hardship, instead of being quick to use these to denounce systems of power or to celebrate potentiality, it is important to linger and listen to the ways that migrants’ past experiences and journeys are constantly invoked in the present to project the future. (2016, p.637-8).

Not overtly emphasizing hardship was thus an elicitation strategy, a data-gathering orientation, and a part of the 'ethical research design' (described in Section III) to both document and allow agency to participants, reflecting a further concern to avoid defining participants *by* their vulnerability. Perry (2011) advocates for research design based in "[d]eveloping thoughtful, nuanced definitions of *vulnerability* that (a) do not rely on solely medical definitions, and (b) recognize and illustrate the interaction between participant, context, and research design" (p.909).

Indeed, while I had begun research with concerns about provoking traumatic memories, I often found the bigger challenge to be steering some participants *away* from dramatic tales and toward more mundane aspects of social media use – which, in turn, were difficult to ask about without establishing a rapport. Thus, in the context of conversations, I sometimes found social media use to be more guarded – individuated, concealable, personal, and indeed 'private' – than the challenges that led participants to seek refugee status. It was often easier to contextualize questions about both, and to maintain informal rapport, by making an 'official' interview. This is described further below.

The interview process

Interviews usually lasted between an hour and a half and two hours. They were conducted in person (at the participant's home or a coffee shop, pub or other public space), or over the phone with participants who did not live in the East Midlands. I spent social time with other participants, who I got to know as friends, at pubs, house parties, coffee shops, and walking around town. In interviews, as mentioned above, I would usually take notes as we were talking, which I would then type up and expand immediately after our discussion.

Most interviews took place in 2017 and 2018. I did not use an extensive schedule to plan the interviews beforehand. I did, however, keep a table of participants I had talked to and potential participants with whom to follow up. Near the end of interviews – in summer 2019, as I was writing up – I sought out an acquaintance of mine, who had been a part of the Syrian Resettlement Programme, to fill in one of the last gaps in demographics that was relevant to the structure of my developing chapters.

In interviews – with which I had experience as a copywriter and journalist – I typically took notes while participants talked. As described above, 'field notes' are often written after the fact. Methodologically, I did this in interviews to preserve informal rapport in our conversations and to render transparent my act of recording; to introduce a recording device would have, I felt, made participants reluctant to speak. I can type at a rate which captures most (though admittedly, not all) of interlocutors' speech content. Thus 'direct' quotes in this text should be considered approximations. Specific facts and quotations were clarified and further discussed with participants in subsequent discussions.

I would often begin interviews with general questions about participants' homes, families, journeys, and lives in their new countries. Along the way, plenty of relevant details appeared – around social media usage, phones lost and internet carriers changed, profile pictures, accounts lost or closed or otherwise disengaged with. This provided a tangible way to orient toward the topic of 'privacy', which sometimes remained relatively opaque until the end. This was in part due to the need to establish my own understanding of participants' social media use, and also the need to have provoked enough shared discourse and reflection to make my own questions make sense. I avoided topics that participants explicitly or implicitly suggested they did not want to discuss. By the end, participants were generally engaged and happy to offer thoughts on the topic. In two instances, participants thanked me for helping them to reflect on their experiences.

I was initially concerned that interviews would be too formal to discuss details for which I was looking. I also feared they might replicate many 'interviews' with officials and professionals (not all of whom may have been sympathetic or friendly) that participants had on their quests for asylum. Instead, I found that the interview was a way to encourage semi-focused discussions. By contrast, while the Center's clients had ample amounts of time available while waiting to be seen, it was difficult to move from casually to substantively talking while they were waiting. These short conversations lacked context, and it was likely *there* that I more closely resembled the prying official, inquiring about their social media presence for obscure reasons as they waited to address more immediate concerns.

'Replicating' prior interviews and discussions, however, proved a challenge in another way: participants' comments would often circle back toward the dramatic details of their journeys to Europe, and away from the more mundane details I sought. Stories of life-threatening circumstance were often more readily mentioned than stories of yesterday's WhatsApp chats. I interpreted this as being rooted partially in their own interest and their expectations for what an 'interviewer' would be interested in, based on their experiences. These stories – and the 'self-presentation' within – partially became a research matter in itself, as discussed in Chapter Four.

VI. Data analysis

By early 2018 I had completed the bulk of data collection phase and shifted to writing. Iterative design allowed me to share and reflect with participants and see if my ideas are valid to them; to keep them informed of the context of their participation; to ensure the accuracy of my analysis and interpretation; and to further build trust and build on established conversations. I further continued to interview new participants whose paths crossed mine. I conducted my last interview the final week of July, 2019.

This processed followed Silverman's advice to "analyse your own data as you gather them." (2013, p.233 -234). It also follows Hammersley and Atkinson's (1997) discussion that ethnography begins with clarifying ideas before fieldwork, and throughout is a "dialectical interaction between data collection and data analysis" (p.205) that has a "funnel structure" (p.206). This may, they note, make it difficult to gauge the development of one's own ideas (p. 205), and a potential conflict between (amid the limited time to write) the need to accurately describe what one has seen and to develop one's ideas about what one has seen (p.206-7). As I wrote I reflected on previous drafts, and made notes throughout the process about the development of themes. This iterative writing (and note re-reading) is also beneficial to focusing observation. Diphoorn (2012, p.208) noted that re-reading her notes helped her to keep in mind how her fieldwork and relationships developed. Arber further describes note-reading as a way to maintain reflexivity (2005, p. 12).

As the work progressed, I reflected on commonalities and variations appear existed amongst participants – part of what Hammersley and Atkinson (1997) call "sensitizing" oneself to concepts (p.218) and testing them iteratively as fieldwork progresses. General categories included:

- What digital media participants use (such as WhatsApp and Facebook)
- What distinctions they make between 'public' and 'private' content (leading toward classifications of degrees of privacy on social media)
- Attitudes toward the privacy of data
- Observable instances where social media postings appear in everyday contexts

Most notes were written in Word files. This enabled me to also write 'keywords' along with the text, and to scan for them later. I also highlighted particular passages or words of note in text, eventually developing a colorcoding system, especially purple for thematic relevance and red for follow-ups and fact-checks.

The sample was largely a convenience sample, in the hopes of capturing diverse participants who could mostly be met in-person. The sample is not intended to be representative of ‘all’ refugees, but was rather to understand the experiences of participants who had (broadly speaking) the shared experience of being a ‘refugee’ or ‘asylum seeker’. In early 2015, as research was being planned, the ‘refugee crisis’ was emergent, and understanding a broader sample of migrants seemed more important than seeking only those belonging to narrower demographics. I further reserved the option to narrow the final project to more specific demographics, but ultimately opted to preserve the total sample which – as mentioned previously – skewed male and Syrian.

Seeking diverse participants allowed the project to situate the ‘crisis’ and the asylum seekers who came with it in relation to those who had arrived before. This approach further uncovered demographics under-explored in the literature, such as PhD students while also may have limited options for more extensive demographic analysis. Chapter Four divided refugees’ ‘leaving stories’ into three demographics: asylum seekers who travelled informally, those who originally arrived in Europe on other visas, and those who arrived as part of a government-sponsored resettlement program. It also meant I have captured stories of individuals from different cultural contexts, and cannot extensively situate some of them within ‘anthropologies’ of these cultures. I also was not able to visit any of these non-European countries for myself over the course of the research period. I could, however, partially draw on my 2015 research / internship trips to Malta (which does not otherwise directly factor into the data) as well as travels with local friends in the Muslim-majority country of Malaysia.

I have, nonetheless, narrativized participants’ stories in ways I hope treat them as agentive individuals while also highlighting how their life experiences have been shaped by factors such as class, education, gender, wealth, and religion. An analytic point made in Chapter Four, is that participants from ‘middle class’ backgrounds – or who arrived on student or work visas (that is, for explicitly economic reasons), found it easier to evidence a legally-accepted reason of ‘need’ to stay in the UK than participants who arrived after long periods of travel, with little education or money.

VII. Conclusion

The ethnographic method of participant-observation – enriched by the anthropological theory alongside which it has developed, and supplemented by interviews – helps gather information about action in context. Digital anthropology emphasizes a holistic understanding of digital activity, amid the globalization of digital networks and the specificity of communities. Existential anthropology allows the placement of concepts such as ‘privacy’ among other ideas from diverse cultures. The research process applied these approaches to focus and contextualize refugees’ use of social media and experiences with privacy as empirically explored through interviews, ethnographic relationship-building, and participant-observation in NGO’s. The chapters that follow describe the results.

Chapter Four: Leaving and arriving in context

I. Introduction

This chapter places refugees' stories of leaving home and claiming asylum in the context of their social relationships and professional lives. As discussed in Chapter Six and the literature review, asylum is granted on the basis that individuals might face danger in their home countries. Participants often immediately and eagerly spoke to me – as a researcher – about their journeys. However, the 'leaving' stories refugees told me were more complex in emphasis and tone than the one-way journeys from danger crafted to meet legal standards or for the immediacy of news reports. This research finds that refugees situated their journeys from danger amid their planned life trajectories. Even in life-threatening circumstances, people often make decisions about moving or staying in different places with personal life trajectories of careers and family relationships in mind.

This chapter outlines three general ways in which refugees left home and arrived in Europe: long periods of travel; work or student visas; and formal resettlement. It then presents six 'leaving' stories, chosen for their richness in demonstrating how the complexity and diversity of leaving one place and establishing life in another of experiences relate to these legal contours. Refugees' capacities to materially establish their 'private' lives are tied to (and substantially facilitated by) two external 'rites of passage'. The first is gaining the legal right to reside and work through asylum – which some were able to do quicker and easier than others. The second is education for language or work. Refugees who achieved asylum quickly reflected on the emotions of the experience and the role of conflict and asylum in their life plans. Asylum seekers who had been on the road for indefinite periods of time sometimes presented a highlights reel of exciting adventures and frustrations amid long periods of uncertainty. Applicants who do not quickly receive asylum – discussed in Chapters Six and Seven – find these continuities more difficult to establish. Chapter Five discusses how relationship continuities are maintained through withholding and sharing information on social media.

To take seriously privacy as a means to selective self-presentation is partially to respect the excitements and frustrations voiced in these stories. Contextualizing the act of leaving places it as part of the continuously-lived, multi-faceted life which privacy helps individuals to negotiate the story's place within their lives.

II. General contexts: asylum and education

This section discusses two key factors important for locally gaining lawful employment, developing social relations, and starting a family: gaining asylum status and education. Establishing why refugees left home is a key part of asylum claims, described in Chapter Six. As described in the literature review, however, the UN definition of *refugee* – which emphasizes immediate physical safety from violence – is not well suited to the reasons why people in the early 21st century leave their homes. While people in the Middle East and Africa often arrive in Europe as 'asylum seekers', they have often moved other places first. Their motivations for leaving home and subsequent journeys may include combinations of desires for safety, work, and/or education. After arrival, refugees often seek to improve their English skills and pursue educational qualifications for work.

Means of arrival

The refugees in this study left home under different circumstances, which affected how quickly and effectively they could establish their asylum claims. These in turn fostered different concerns about how to contextualize their experience as refugees in their overall life trajectories. I have broadly categorized these leaving experiences into three categories: informal travel, 'other reasons', and formal resettlement.

Informal travel

These are the archetypal 'refugees' on which media reports focused, particularly during the 2015 'crisis'. They travelled by a combination of boat, walking, flying and train toward Western Europe. Europe was the latest step in a journey that may have taken weeks or years, during which they may have lived in other countries with a variety of legal statuses. Some were from Syria. Some were among the globally displaced, 'mixed migrants' (as discussed in the literature review) who left their homes fleeing a combination of economic inopportunity and danger. They were socio-economically diverse – some middle class with higher degrees, some without formal education.

While their origins and experiences are diverse, many faced protracted uncertainties before or after arrival. They may have been away from their home countries for years, and their asylum decisions may be delayed for months or years. If rejected on appeal in the UK, many remained without housing support or legal rights to work, under uncertain threat of deportation. Some had families abroad they hoped to bring to the UK, but could not without refugee status. As discussed below, the dramatic tales of their journeys figured prominently in our discussions.

Arrival with other visas

Many people from conflict zones, who would face danger if they returned home, did not initially leave as ‘refugees’. This includes individuals who arrived in Europe with student or work visas and later, finding their countries in turmoil, applied for asylum or reserve applying as an option.

These individuals’ life courses thus were not dramatically disrupted by the protracted bureaucratic limbos that the informal travellers faced. They had received asylum in the midst of earning degrees, establishing careers, and growing families outside of their countries of origin. While refugees are often dismissed in the right-wing media or rejected as asylum applicants as ‘economic migrants’ – seeking opportunity rather than legitimate protection – many individuals who arrived as students or economic migrants found it easier to establish legal grounds to remain than those who claimed asylum on their first arrival in Europe. These refugees – represented by Syrian PhD students in the discussion below – often reflected on the emotional experience of leaving within their overall lives.

Formal resettlement

A relatively small number of families who had been living in Jordan, Lebanon and other Middle Eastern countries were selected for the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme. From 2014 to 2018, 19,881 refugees were formally resettled in the UK through this program (Sturge 2019). 267 individuals were settled in the Nottingham area as of mid-2019 (Sandeman 2019). Resettled refugees’ legal positions were thus reasonably straightforward, and their relative privilege and vulnerabilities as refugees were exceptionally complex. They were classed as exceptionally ‘vulnerable’, and had lived as refugees in other countries. They also arrived together as families with refugee status, economic support, and plans for social integration in place – fundamentals for public and private life that few other refugees in Europe swiftly received. The existence of the resettlement program demonstrate that asylum can

> be granted with relative swiftness and reasonable support if political will exists.

Education

Education was for many refugees a second ‘rite of passage’ to acquire the skills for communication and work and in turn, to make a living. Learning English or other local languages is also necessary to functionally conduct public life. Many participants were thus in – or had the goal of entering – education in some form, from English classes to PhD studies. Other students – as mentioned above – had initially come to Europe on student visas.

As described in Chapter Three, I met some participants in conjunction with informal English classes offered by various local organizations which motivated learners could pursue. In particular, the Red Cross offered informal language classes using university student volunteers as conversational English teachers. They also offered more formal classes geared toward helping more advanced students pass the IELT language exams, which were further prerequisites to trade or university education.

For many, the pursuit of education further reflected their relative youth. Many asylum seekers arrived in their twenties or thirties. Refugees of all ages, however, found that degrees earned abroad did not necessarily transfer to Europe. If they had not yet attained the legal right to work, education was something to fill the meantime, and – as Georgiou (2019) described – a way to demonstrate worthiness of citizenship and utility to participate in economic life. Some refugees could take professional transfer courses, if the infrastructure was in place for internationals, as it was for medical professionals. Others embarked on a new career – such as Ali, discussed below – or started from scratch on a professional qualification, as did Malik, discussed in Chapters Five and Eight.

III. Leaving stories

This section contains stories of leaving and arrival, selected from among the above categories for diversity and how they demonstrate the practical and emotional complexity of arrival in all circumstances. Participants situated their arrival in the UK amid other life trajectories of movement, family life, and career development. Many refugees had lived internationally before they applied for asylum – some in Europe, some closer to home. Professional-class refugees who gained asylum status with relative ease emphasized continuities in their lives and reflected on the emotional aspects of their experiences. Travellers, by contrast, gave detailed accounts of their protracted journeys, replete with exciting escapes and petty frustrations. Resettled refugees still felt uncertainties. For all narrators, decisions to move involved considerations of personal safety, career and family. Asylum status enabled them to establish local life with long-term plans in mind, and to claim or compartmentalize their experiences as ‘refugees’ in our discussions.

Hakam

Hakam is a soft-spoken, but direct engineer. While he lives in the UK as a Syrian refugee, he spent most of his life in Saudi Arabia. Growing up in Saudi as a second-generation immigrant, he had difficulties reconciling a lack of local long-term personal and career opportunities, as well as the cultural differences he experienced – including those around privacy – with his parents’ Syrian hometown. His story demonstrates the opportunities and limitations of life as an economic immigrant in the Middle East, and how desires for safety, ‘putting down roots’, and economic opportunity are linked.

Working in Saudi brought Hakam’s family more money than they would have staying in Syria. As a ‘guest worker’, however, Hakam could not attend college in Saudi. Thus his first extended trip to Syria was when he moved to his parents’ hometown, Homs, for his undergraduate studies. He lived there for five years, but found the culture change difficult. He described this as a “recurring theme” in his life:

> I moved a lot, and every time I moved there was an expectation of what life should look like. Then you get this shock and you realize it’s not like this. Sometimes it’s better, sometimes it’s worse.

Growing up abroad, he considered himself a ‘hybrid’ between Syrian and Saudi. Returning, he realized he was used to having more money. ”Going out to a have dinner in fast food in Saudi is nothing,” he said. “Syria – it was a decision that had to be thought over for a few days.” He was also not used to fixing his own car or air conditioning if they broke. He further was frustrated by the lack of anonymity in the relatively small town of Homs, compared to the Saudi capital of Riyadh. “There’s no privacy in Syria,” he said. “Privacy is only when you sit in your own room and lock the doors.” Returning ‘home’, he had arrived in a place where people had long-established relationships. The scrutiny extended to what he did in public, and what he wore:

> Everybody knew everybody. Let me give you an example. When those [1990s style] baggy pants came into fashion. In Saudi, they were very

> popular, because the society there is very Americanized. But when I moved to Syria, the looks that I had from people were really harsh. I had people stopping me in the street and asking what I was doing. It has to do with living in a small city. Everyone wants to interfere with your life and give you advice. I think if I was in Damascus, things would be different. Damascus was the capital, no one cared what you wore, what you ate, or where you came from.

After graduating, he returned to Saudi Arabia for engineering work. When he joined Facebook in 2007, he didn't add his Syrian friends – the platform wasn't available in Syria then – and he purged his friend list when he made a fresh and abrupt break for the United Arab Emerites (UAE) shortly thereafter. He considered the *kafala* immigration system of Saudi Arabia a "slavery system". His employer kept his passport and chose when he could temporarily travel abroad. If they fired him, or if he quit, he would have to leave the country. When he was transferred from working remote technical support in an air conditioned office to the field, he grew dissatisfied with his work. So when he had a job offer in the UAE, he took time off from his employer (and reclaimed his passport) without the intention of returning.

In the UAE, there was "freedom." "There were cinemas, there were nightclubs, there were bars," he said. "In Saudi, single guys had no place to go, other than coffee shops." Yet as with Saudi Arabia, he understood there would be no possibility for eventual retirement in the UAE. Likewise, "in Syria, I would have nobody. It wouldn't be my country. I was looking for a place to settle down."

So after two and a half years in the UAE (which followed the same amount of time in Saudi), he went to the UK to pursue his PhD. It was 2013, six months after the revolution had begun in earnest. He arrived on a student visa. Later, he talked to a lawyer and received refugee status. He regarded this as a pragmatic choice that nonetheless reflected real, potential danger:

> Did I deserve [refugee status]? I was not jailed. I was not tortured. But my concerns about what would happen if I went back to Syria are real.

For Hakam, work visas in the Middle East had allowed him to make money, but did not allow him to settle with a long-term future in mind. Living abroad – as student, guest worker, and refugee – Hakam's moves were often for career, while the conflict in Syria meant he would face danger if he returned to his ostensible 'homeland'. Thus, becoming a refugee allowed him to build on his career and student status to establish a 'private' life.

Benyamin

Benyamin in part blames Michael Jackson. The Iranian government more – but in small part, also Michael Jackson. His story shows how mass media is bound unexpectedly to local dramas around the world, as well as how selectively presenting un-truths enabled and complicated evading authorities.

On June 12, 2009, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was re-elected, sparking widespread suspicion of election fraud. Protests resulted. While he did not describe himself as overly political before, he too took to the streets. "When I went to protests, it was only me," he said. "I can take care of myself. It's a big responsibility, if you persuade somebody there, and something happens, you can't forgive yourself."

Likewise, he was the only person he knows who left the country at the time, seeking political asylum.

For a couple of weeks, the protestors were active. "Every day," Benyamin said. He would watch multiple media – the BBC, the Voice of America, in Farsi – and it felt like the world was watching. "All the reactions of people around the world, people were condemning the election and protesting, it was a good feeling."

Then on June 25, Jackson, the hitmaker behind *Thriller* – the bestselling album of all time – died unexpectedly, and with it the focus of international media shifted. "We were in the news two weeks every day, and then Michael Jackson," he said. "I had this conspiracy theory in my mind, that these people might have killed somebody big" as a distraction.

The protests, nonetheless, continued. Security forces attacked and arrested protestors. He found himself caught in a crowd, as an undercover officer aimed to arrest him. *Just be a good boy and go to the car,* he recalled the man saying. Thinking fast, Benyamin bullshitted, insisting he was also undercover, "in the other unit."

> *As* I was saying that, it really embarrassed me, because this people who were booing, there were so many brave girls, and I saw this girl in front of me – she saw me and she believed me. That face I never forget. It was so disappointed. I just had to run.

He travelled to the Turkish border from Tehran, where he sought a smuggler. His family paid, and the men hid him in a truck to cross the border. He stayed in Istanbul for three weeks, before paying another smuggler to help him cross to Greece in a lorry. He flew Athens to Heathrow with an acquired Romanian passport. The man he bought it from said that as soon as he was on the plane, he should destroy the passport and claim asylum on landing. *They'll take you to prison because you broke the law, but they'll let you apply,* the man had said.

Benyamin decided to keep the passport. "That picture, the guy was not like me," he said. "He had green eyes." But it was an old passport so his looks could have changed. The border guard let him pass.

He called up an Iranian acquaintance after he go through the border, and – on his advice – submitted himself to a police station to apply for asylum.

Chapter Eight describes Benyamin's challenges with establishing local social life in the UK.

Amira

Like Hakam, Amira was used to living internationally in relative economic privilege. She was born in France, while her father – a university professor – was earning his PhD. From her view in Damascus, she describe the conflict's escalation after the Arab Spring as a shock:

> No one prepares you for this. Some people would say, oh you're from the Middle East, you should see that coming. For us it was all new. It was new to think about wanting to live in another country, even though I had done it. The idea of not having a country – your dreams are no longer the same.

In early 2011, as protests and repression were breaking out within the country, people did not know what would happen. Some thought President Asad would embrace the change of the 'Arab Spring'. At the time, as an English speaker with a degree from the UK, getting a job in Damascus wasn't difficult. Language teachers were in demand, and salaries were good. Liberalizations had allowed her mom to work as a school headmaster.

Then, on March 30, Asad gave a speech. Some thought he would voice support for the protestors. Amira had been pursuing her masters' degree abroad at the time, and rushed to the university library after a lecture to listen online as the President spoke. The speech, however, would reaffirm Asad's desire to maintain power at all costs. Laughing disconcertingly, he vowed to crush the protestors – which set the tone for the violence that followed (also described in Yassin-Kassab and Al-Shami 2016, p.40-41). Amira said

> I think we were naïve. He did lots of changes of the country. People were not as sceptical. Suddenly you lost hope. I didn’t think it would get that bad, because at the end of [my masters’ degree in the UK], I packed my stuff and went home. It was not even in my worst nightmare that I thought I would be a refugee. It took me very long to accept that.

In 2012, people she knew started to leave Syria. No longer feeling safe, they mostly sought employment in other countries rather than asylum. Her life went on. She got married in December of that year, not even thinking of leaving. And then “in February, I was a refugee on a plane,” she said.

For Amira, the Revolution thus was a life-threatening event, as well as a disruptive shock to her life plans. She returned to Heathrow and – still on a valid student visa – announced her intention to apply for asylum at the airport. “I’d been there many, many times when I went to Heathrow, claiming asylum,” she said, sarcastically rolling her eyes as we spoke.

> The guard said, ‘*you are born in France, why don’t you claim asylum there.’ I* said I haven’t been *there,* I’ve been to university *here*. I speak the language. Then I cried for six hours. Afterwards they were not nice to me. I think they thought I was crying for the war, but I was crying more for the situation at the airport.

Becoming a refugee was a way to safety, but Amira was frustrated by how it became a “new identity that they force it on you on every single level” in the same country where she had once felt welcomed as a student. In Amira’s telling, it was not just the revolution that that was hard to deal with – it was how asylum suddenly re-positioned her life and life trajectory, and the ways in which she was treated by institutions that had previously accepted her. Yet, despite her treatment at the airport, she attained asylum with relative ease. She made clear she was not seeking asylum support – she had cousins to stay with and money saved. “If you pay, you can get out,” she said, contrasting her treatment with friends who were detained. “They don’t care if they’re not going to give you money.”

Amira’s story illustrates the emotion, benefits and challenges of what this status can mean. Like Hakam, she was used to a trans-national life. Her relative ‘privilege’ is also complex: she did not believe the implications of the violent revolution until it was well underway in her own city and country. Her savings may have helped her escape detention, avoid the complex and unresponsive asylum benefits system, and get on with applying for further education. Yet this also came at a cost of social status, which will be returned to in Chapter Eight.

Firash

Firash has a relaxed manner. He was late for our meeting, which he apologized profusely for – he drives an Uber, and had an offer of a large fare to the next town over. Now married and employed - also as a translator – he can safely discuss the action and delays of his travels from two decades prior.

Firash's father – a mullah – moved his family from Afghanistan to Iran when he was two years old to escape conflict with Russia. As a Shia, they were better treated in Iran, though he wishes his father had accepted an alternate option he had available then to move to Europe. Around 2001, however, Afghanis in his family's situation were being deported from Iran. He was 18. He had attended an Afghani school, and then worked in a clandestine shoe factory in secret that operated hidden within another building. He entered through windows. It was hard. His father had since died, and he needed to support his family. Sometimes the police would stop, and could be bought off. Sometimes they'd just deport a man because they knew the family would follow. He faced both immediate danger of deportation, and a lack of long-term life options. "In Iran, you were stuck between places," he said. "You could get sent back to Afghanistan where there's no future, or stay where there's no future."

He decided to take his chances traveling to Europe. When he first left Iran in 2001, there were relatively few refugees traveling. His journey took a year. He would hide money wherever he could, such as in tubes of toothpaste. He'd pay off the smugglers and police as they went – "they just wanted money". They used whatever mode of transport they could get – walking, bus, train – as far as the Ukraine. The smugglers would hide them en route for indeterminate amounts of time. In the Ukraine, he stayed for months in a flat. He estimates between 10 and 30 people would be there at once, as they came and went.

When they told him to move, the smugglers hid him in a very small compartment in the side of a beer truck for 20 hours to Slovakia. He managed to urinate out of a hole in the side. Almost immediately after crossing the border to Slovakia, they were caught and sent back to the Ukraine.

They repeated the journey. During the year he was on the road he called home twice a week to report back what was happening by payphone; he had to pay by the minute.

When he first applied for asylum, he lied. He “stupidly took the advice of someone who had been here longer” and said he came direct from Afghanistan. He was refused. He went to Norway and lived for six months, tried his luck there, but they said he must appeal to the UK. When he told his lawyer the truth, it was believed, and was accepted. They told him it would have saved him trouble if he told the truth the first time around.

How Firash negotiates discussing his personal conversation to Christianity with his Muslim family is discussed Chapter Five.

Ali

For two years, Ali has worked in Nottingham as a motorcycle delivery driver. Like Firash, he works in the gig economy. On sitting down to talk, he launched immediately into an hour’s account of his journey, during which I could only ask questions to confirm details. His story is notable for how he discussed the use of technology en route.

Ali left Eritrea in 2009 and went to Ethiopia. His initial decision to leave was prompted by the perpetual nature of military service in the authoritarian country. After several years in the army, he had enough. As Eritrea didn’t issue passports, he had to leave by smuggler:

> It was very challenging to cross the border. The smuggler took us to his camp. He took six of us directly to the valley. We reached there and he said to us it was the border. We crossed the border at 6 am in the morning and when the sun came up we started walking; the spies in the military divisions come back after sunrise. While traveling this time, the Ethiopian military saw us. They followed us, climbing all the way into the mountains. We met one Ethiopian shepherd, a teenager, who give us water. We were very thirsty. At the top of the mountain, the Ethiopian army gave us food. We were safe.

He conveyed his story as a string of details – alternately matter-of-fact and with hushed excitement, sometimes in past and sometimes present tense (edited here for ease of reading at the potential loss of character).

After the action of the trip, there was waiting. He waited at the border again for one week. He stayed at the camp for six to eight months. The UNHCR visited and said the Ethiopian government would allow ‘refugees’ such as himself to study, but not work, and offered him a small stipend to study Computer Science at Addis Ababa University. Ali’s statuses as refugee and student thus overlapped with his ongoing steps to plan a career.

During this period he used Internet cafes and ‘pay as you go’ phones. Now Viber and WhatsApp are used in Ethiopia through Internet cafes, he said, while there is no mobile data and the Internet is 2G. 30 minutes cost five pounds then. It was the only way to call his brother and parents. He would go to the cafes to wait for calls. The signals would be weak. They would speak for ten or fifteen minutes, once or twice a week.

In 2014, after finishing his degree and without the local right to work, he decided to make the move to Europe – again by smugglers. “They are thieves,” he said, touching his sleeve cuff to indicate where he stitched money into. At times, he rolled his eyes indicating he did not trust them. He kept his phone until the smugglers took it in Libya. He saw a picture of the lorry he travelled in on Facebook. At the borders, they were not checked. They had travelled during Ramadan. The trip cost $1,800 dollars to pay the smugglers. He would call his parents via the Internet, friends and his uncle for money, and they would transfer US dollars.

From Libya, a Tunisian smuggle took them by boat into the Mediterranean. “It’s tough,” he said, in a voice as if levelling with me. In wooden boat, with an estimated 260 people, they set out at midnight. Sometimes he would make small talk on the boat. Sometimes he would feel tired. He was knew of the boat sinkings around Lampedusa.

Around 2 p.m. the following day the boat ran out of fuel and the captain made an emergency call. Helicopters and Italian rescue ships came. The passengers were given life jackets and transferred to the vehicles. He watched as the Italians scuttled the boat. “They made a hole in the bottom,” he said with a knife motion.

From Lovar he went to Milan to treat an infection in his leg. He stayed eight days to heal and after that, his brother got him money for the journey onward. He travelled onward – initially aiming for Sweden, but deciding to go to the UK:

> We took train to Paris. The French authorities, nobody wants you to be there. They never approached us. They say nothing to us. My priority was to be in Europe. My big issue was to be safe for myself. Everywhere is the same for me, more or less.

Now, he has legal right to stay. He has travel documents, but enjoys seeing the world through the Internet, though does not add his phone number or else friends of friends will add him.

Nabil and his family

Nabil and his family came to the UK as part of the Syrian Resettlement Programme after living in Jordan as refugees. His story demonstrates the material and linguistic challenges of establishing a career and family life as a refugee, the role of digital communication in social life amid international movement, and both support and uncertainty that came through the resettlement process.

Dangers had been visibly escalating for Nabil until a bomb went off not 100 yards from his south Damascus home. “I lost a lot of friends, with that bomb, exactly,” he said:

> I left everything – left everything. My small company, my car, my home. With my family and my parents, as well, and my brother. A small group in the same car.

He left his own vehicle – a pick-up he used to carry goods at for his textile manufacturing business – and took the car of a friend, with whom he was in touch, to Jordan. And so, his family became refugees for the first time.

At his home in Syria, Nabil had joined Facebook for Messenger, which he used like a phone book to keep in touch with family and friends. He accessed through personal computers. Having a smartphone was dangerous. Another friend had been killed by soldiers, who took his phone. “Not just killed him, they burned him, with fire,” he said, dismayed. “Why, I don’t know.”

He had his phone number for a decade. He loved the number. It was one digit off from his home land line. He had used it for all his business and personal calls. After he didn’t pay his mobile bill for a few months, however, the telecom company recycled his number. He called the number up to ask its new owner if he would give up the number, but the man declined.

Shortly after Nabil arrived, his mother needed surgery, which she had at a private clinic. The family struggled to pay for afterwards. His mother’s condition would be one of the main reasons he stayed in Jordan. He was not legally allowed to work there, though – as many Syrians did – he picked up informal, intermittent work where he could. These jobs might last for a week or two until police raids. Once, he saw people standing around a building, waiting for a police raid to pass before they could return to work. When this happened, they would arrest the workers and hold them for several hours, before requesting a signature and releasing them. The consequences were not likely to be long-term imprisonment, but it meant trouble for the employer, and that he himself would have to find a new job.

During this time he contemplated if returning to Syria might be better than staying in Jordan. Once, he even arranged a return. The bus would have been waiting at 6:00 am, but he turned on the TV at 2:00 to find a chemical attack had just happened where he was scheduled to be.

In Jordan he made an appointment to register with the UN, which took one year to be fulfilled and allowed his family some access to regular material support. During this time, he moved between cities. His daughter was born. Eventually, the UN contacted him that he had been selected for a resettlement programme which he was heretofore unaware existed. They offered him the choice of either the US or UK. He had no preference which, but had a friend living in the UK who had travelled to America who said that the UK was safer. “The final thing he said was to come to here, it’s better,” Nabil said. “I had no idea the difference between America and the UK. I have no idea what the laws or the life is like.”

In 2016, he arrived in Birmingham with over a dozen other families he did not then know, but kept in touch with later. He was under the impression he would stay in Birmingham, but instead was – along with everyone else – put on a bus bound for Nottingham. The newly resettled refugees were given homes to live in and phones with a small amount of credit.

On arrival no one in the family knew English, and he did not know practically what the next steps would be. A few days later, he was the only one in his family who was not running a fever. He knew that he could call 999, but not what he could say if he did. He was unsure what to do when his phone rang. It was a translator for a doctor’s appointment for his wife, which was scheduled to start in several minutes. He had no idea how it got scheduled; he had not called them. He asked if the doctor could also see his children and the translator said she would try, and she did.

Summary

Refugees configure their stories of leaving in relationship to their pasts and futures. For many refugees, the move to Europe was not the first. Decisions to move are taken to avoid danger, but also with long-term planning in mind. When people could not imagine a short or long term future, they left. An irony is that those who had explicitly, legally travelled for ‘economic reasons’

– or can suggest economic self-sufficiency – sometimes appear to find it easier to stay, while those who arrive in apparent need (described further in Chapter Six) are doubted as ‘deserving’ of asylum. In this sense, the protection of asylum is conceived by both refugees and the UK government as about seeking life beyond the basics, even if protection is granted on grounds of danger.

Refugees configure these threats and dangers in different ways. Some who achieved asylum after relatively quick journeys reflect on the emotional implications, while getting on with their ‘private lives’, including building families and careers. For others who had long journeys, the events can be spoken of enthusiastically as obstacles overcome.

IV. Conclusion

Reading these leaving and arrival stories in terms of privacy provides two main takeaways. Firstly, civic rights to live and work ground people’s capacity to build ‘private life’ in the sense of establishing a household and developing a career. The inability to envision a long-term in one place – whether in the relative economic comfort of Saudi, or the uncertainty of refugee life in Ethiopia – drives people’s movement to others, along with danger. In order to live in their new countries, refugees seek education for language and careers to become normatively self-sufficient members of society. People do not necessarily build ‘private life’ first and let ‘public life’ follows.

Secondly, establishing legal right to stay helps refugees to claim and negotiate their experiences in the contexts of their overall lives. This can be beneficial to interiority and selective self-expression. Privacy is held to both rely on and protect these continuities and selective self-presentation elements – to allow people multiple stories which more conventional narratives about fleeing danger deny. How refugees negotiate ongoing relationships with others will be discussed in Chapter Five, which follows, and returned to again in Chapter Eight.

Chapter Five: Refugees' 'far lives' and informational privacy

I. Introduction

This chapter discusses how refugees gather and share information via social media, and how these practices relate to and challenge informationally-oriented privacy concepts discussed in the literature review. These concepts – especially Nissenbaum's 'contextual integrity' (2004) – argue that privacy is upheld when individuals and institutions follow widely-held social norms regarding selectively withholding and sharing information. This allows individuals to manage different, potentially conflicting identities by keeping different parts of their lives separate. Norms of public and inter-personal disclosure and display, however, are often framed in terms of idealized concerns of European or American heads of household.

For the refugees described in this chapter, *not* explicitly sharing photos, news items, and opinions (controversial or banal) online is normative, rooted in the public 'conservatism' of offline culture. Refraining from overtly and publicly expressing oneself is an effective way to manage conflict. The value of 'public-facing' social media (especially Facebook) for self-expression is mitigated by social and physical risks associated with posting in maintaining continuities with what I discuss as their 'far lives' – distant friends and family back home and around the globe – amid other immense changes in their lives. At the same time, Facebook remains valued as a news aggregator and way to seek information from others. Facebook's Messenger service – along with other social media – can be used to stay in contact with friends and small groups. Through this, the technical affordances of platform security remain related, but distinct, from users' concerns about information flows.

For example, Amsale, an Eritrean who grew up in Saudi Arabia (whose story will be discussed) was one of several participants who could name their most recent Facebook post – which was several months in the past. She – like others – remains an active users of more 'private' social media like WhatsApp, messaging friends and family as individuals or in small groups. She uses social media to maintain existing relationships with other individuals, but does not necessarily post for wide, general audiences. While she seizes newfound offline freedoms in the UK, she does not discuss them openly online even as she uses social media to seek information, both personally related to friends and family and through mass media about news.

Chapter Eight discusses how – as the social context of refugees' 'close lives' in Europe becomes more immediate – they more overtly use social media with both new and old social contexts in mind as physical threats recede in their immediacy in European life. Chapters Six and Seven, respectively, concern communications with the UKBA and refugee support organizations, in which producing impactful information is often more of a challenge that protecting it.

II. Social media conservatism: why we (don't) post

This section discusses 'conservative' social media norms that underpin actions discussed in the sections that follow. I mean 'conservative' in two similar senses of the word. Firstly, as Miller et al. (2016, UCL 2016a) argue, "public social media is conservative" generally, by which they mean that people in many different cultures tend to treat widely-visible online spaces as they would public spaces offline, and to post items that will be positively received by some section of their social group. In spaces either more visible and more reserved – more 'public' and 'more' private – "people perform selves" and act according to social expectations regarding display. Secondly, I mean that norms of public display may themselves be modest or reserved. As will be discussed, Elisabetta Costa (2017) [one of Miller et al.'s nine co-authors] used digital anthropology to root 'conservative' social media activity (in both senses) in an offline cultural context broadly similar to many of this study's participants.

For refugees, these contexts form part of what I call their 'far lives' – a set of norms and relationships that refugees often seek continuity with, but from which their physical distance potentially affords flexibility, protection, and estrangement. Refugees often spoke well of their home countries and the possibility of return. It is a banal observation that different places do things differently. More interesting is the extent that while offline contexts change dramatically, established online platforms remain and social expression thereon must be negotiated. As this chapter argues, a primary challenge of these physically-distant, emotionally-established relationships is not 'building' them, but mitigating threats of deterioration and change. For many refugees, relationship-building is accomplished through private messages, whereas public or widely-viewable messages could pose social or physical threats that appear easier to avoid by not posting.

Conservative social media cultures

Costa's discussion of online conservatism comes from her ethnographic work in the city of Mardin in southeast Turkey, which shares broad cultural similarities with that of many of the refugees in this studies' homelands. Mardin residents have smartphones and Facebook profiles, but carefully consider what they post. Costa situated these actions within the anthropology of the Middle East and Islamic societies that have emphasized the valuation of ‘honour’ for men and ‘public modesty’ for women, both heavily configured around public expression described under ‘*khososyah’* in the literature review. Facebook and other ‘public-facing’ social media can become sites of contestation over whether certain items are appropriate to post. By contrast, the messaging service WhatsApp facilitates ongoing conversations among close relations, but does not challenge the line between public and private. In a particularly revealing example she asserts that “lovers in premarital relationships… may send each other up to 700 WhatsApp messages every day” (p.40). She summarizes the reasons as that:

> Public-facing social media are constantly under the gaze of family, neighbours and friends, more so than offline public spaces such as streets or cafes, whereas more private online spaces are often used to create and maintain new types of social relationship that break with existing social norms and traditional family ties… Yet the most significant finding is that even in these new online public spaces characterised by the intrusion of the intimate and the domestic, people perform selves, social relations and values that have traditional legitimacy in their society. (p.5-6)

Costa further wrote that her participants retained “discrete and disparate social groups on social media which are kept carefully separated from each other through the tight control of privacy settings and maintenance of different accounts” (p.44). In a conference paper Costa later (2018) elaborated these thoughts, arguing that Marwick and boyd’s concept of “context collapse” (2011) – in which individuals are frustrated by divergent social circles overlapping in the same online spaces – does not apply among residents of Mardin due to the stringency by which they use the affordances of the technology to retain established social groups’ separations.

Amsale and Emir: situating online freedoms in offline ones

The stories of Amsale and Emir demonstrate how and why personal expression offline is connected with, and can translate hesitantly to, visible online activity. For Amsale, an Eritrean who grew up in Saudi Arabia as part of a family of guest workers, expressing oneself online provoked social censure connected with life offline. Seeking information, however, did not. While she enjoys relative offline expressive freedoms in the UK, however, she does not necessarily want to bring these to the more multi-culturally visible spaces of social media. Emir, a artist from Iran, feared posting could bring danger even as physical distance from his home country brought both relative physical safety and an emotional immediacy over his difficulty to impact life back home.

Amsale – as with other participants discussed below – had to scroll back through her hesitantly-built Facebook profile several months to find her most recent photo. It was a travel photo of a location, from a trip to visit relatives in Norway, the same trip which gave her a WhatsApp profile picture that was even more abstract: a message of gratitude to Allah, over an image of the Norwegian sea. She was not physically visible in either photo, thus both conforming to and avoiding addressing any conflict over showing herself or her appearance (similar to as described above by Abokhodair et al. 2016). By contrast, however, Amsale had earlier experienced negative feedback when she shared 'personal' things online. She had received messages from her Saudi friends who said that 'personal and private' things – her opinions – shouldn't go online. She unfriended them and in turn criticized them for vapidly posting about 'food and fashion'.

There are at least two major takeaways from Amsale's online action related to the public and private. Firstly, these conflicts over propriety, opinions and food exist on the line between public and private that social media (as Costa described) can complicate. Secondly, for Amsale, her online expression intersected with her capacity to express herself offline. She felt her life options were limited in Saudi Arabia. As a guest worker, she had few civic rights. As a women, she felt her career options were limited to being a teacher or a "babysitter" (as she had worked as for a period). Both her lack of citizenship and her gender would make it difficult for her to pursue higher education. In the UK, however:

> No one in the UK told me I couldn't act like I wanted. I kept waiting. No one said because you're not *them*, you're not allowed to do *that*. No one. Here they respect you. They respect your personality.

Even so, in the UK, she does not necessarily wish to express herself loudly online either, even as she relishes her relative freedoms to expression, education and work offline. She does not articulate salient day-to-day discrimination on account of her gender, and – with her refugee status secure – she works as an interpreter and can pursue education. She still follows 'conservative' norms regarding posting online, refraining from posting in deference to the social concerns of the 'far life' even as she avidly consumes (but does not re-share) travel and food photos via Instagram and Facebook.

For other refugees, posting controversial opinions can entail physical risk to which it can subject oneself and one's family. Politically, in authoritarian countries, expressing controversial ideas could bring about violent governmental reprisal. Emir, an artist from Iran, said that:

> You are frightened. You're fleeing from something or somewhere. You're trying not to be mentioned to the authority or government. So you don't use social media. If you do, you use a crazy different name, very different with what you are.

Emir told me I was the first person with whom he discussed fear of posting online with. Nonetheless, he would not discuss the specifics of what led him to leave. He did, however, tell me of stories he had heard second-hand – of a man now in the UK, whose wife was imprisoned based off her Facebook 'likes'. Emir had wanted to interview him for a documentary project, but has not. For Emir, social media was associated with offline danger, while observing his old home through it highlighted his loss. He described feeling like an ineffectual "spirit" looking at the Internet:

> If someone gets in touch with someone, they may be in trouble. You cannot do anything. Sometimes I used the word that we are like people who passed away. If you believe in spirits, we are exactly the same. We cannot go back to that world. We might hear it, we cannot touch it, but we can see.

As will be discussed in Chapter Eight, however, Emir eventually became less fearful and decided to use his real given name online as he developed a professional life in the UK.

III. How we (infrequently) post

Given the 'conservative' posting norms described above, this section expands on how participants posted, messaged and sought information while mitigating social and physical risks regarding relationships established in their home countries. For many refugees, seeking information was more of a priority than expressing themselves. Relationships maintained through social media tend to be individually or small-group focused; participants had less interest in broadcasting their opinions, whereabouts or activities to large groups. They didn't often share news stories on their walls, post photos, take quizzes, 'check in' to restaurants, or otherwise express personal views in the widely-viewable forum of Facebook. In this sense, privacy – or 'not posting' works to mitigate alterations in a status quo in established offline relationships. For example, Luiza, from Chad – discussed below – actively messages friends through many platforms, but did not actively build a Facebook profile. She ‘works around’ governmentally-imposed affordances to communicate with individual friends In her case, maintaining distinctions between social circles does not necessarily conventionally align with individual notions of data security. Many Syrian participants, meanwhile, carefully crafted limited messages, with indirectness and subtly, about the complex, developing situation of the conflict.

Luiza: sharing little information, gathering a lot

Users are adept at using the affordances of a platform to maintain their desired level of security. Miller et al. (2016) argue that ‘choosing’ a platform is not necessarily a matter of weighing its individual affordances versus other platforms’, but rather factors such as the relationships that may be maintained through it. Users then configure the settings to a combination of what they like, understand, and is possible. This is aptly demonstrated by Luiza, an asylum recipient from Chad, who joined multiple social media platforms to maintain individual relationships, without putting effort into profiles for audiences of wider and diverse social groups. She uses the privacy settings of a variety of accounts to both access information (general personal) and enact a series of discrete relationships with individuals and small groups.

Luiza gained asylum on the basis that her family was pressuring her to remarry her ex-husband. She has an enthusiastic personality, and is an adept user of privacy settings to achieve her desired level of security while she seldom contributes to ‘public’ forums like Facebook. Yet she fully admits that learning how to use each platform was an (at times humorous) ordeal, during which she has been alternately careful and cavalier with her personal information. Her story offers an example of how technical security and personal privacy concerns are related but distinct.

Luiza joined Facebook to stay in touch with a friend who had moved abroad. She signed up for the platform from a PC in an Internet café and not having an understanding of how to use it, she relied on her friend to guide her. She called him. At one point she gave him her password in this process.

She arrived in the UK in 2014 and began learning English, in which she is now proficient enough to take classes to prepare for nursing school. She has around 400 Facebook friends but rarely posts on her own wall. She does join ‘groups’ on the service, including several that share international news, one for English learners, and another for staying in touch with her friends from school, with whom she grew up. Thus Luiza uses social media to *get* information from news posts and family and friends, even though she does not actively contribute content

On Facebook, others can search for her account – which is under a nickname. What little content is attached to her account is not visible to people who aren't her 'friends'. The nickname, however, is common in her language and marks her as from a particular region. She has configured Facebook's settings so her 'friends' cannot see her 'friend list', and thus do not know with who else she is friends. Despite this qualified visibility, she has not received (nor sent) requests from the relatives who tried to force her into re-marriage – despite the technical possibility of 'getting in touch', she and her relatives have not attempted to contact each other. Overall, she contributes little to building her profile and ensures her personal information remains unseen, while her relatives have not gotten in touch even though she has not technically rendered herself invisible online to them. Her privacy remains intact, through a deliberate – but not absolute – use of Facebook's available security features.

Luiza's WhatsApp profile photo is of her young son, who she is currently trying to get custody from her ex-husband (who also lives in the UK). She has not seen either her ex-husband or son since she left Chad. The photo shows up, too on a game (which is very popular in Chad) she plays on her phone, and in an edited form on her Instagram account (also on which she rarely posts). The imperfections of security, however, have worked to her favour with regard to the photo, which she took from her ex-husband's relatives' Facebook accounts – potentially an exploitation of lax security that many would find sympathetic.

Luiza originally joined different platforms to keep in touch with particular friends who had moved abroad (part of the diasporas of which many refugees are a part, discussed in Chapter Four). Luiza said:

> I've got Snapchat, which I don't use. I joined when a friend went to Saudi Arabia. I met him when I was doing my English class. We got a WhatsApp group for all the students there. When I came [to the UK], and when that friend left, he left and he said and texted me and said, 'Luiza download Snapchat and I will show you my country!' He sent me the link, I downloaded it. He found me.

Learning to use Snapchat required help – as did Facebook before it – this time from her friend's brother. Luiza did not, at first, realize that one of the key features of Snapchat (sometimes touted as a privacy bonus) was that messages disappear after a set time, and thus her friend had to re-send variations on a greeting message several times after she inadvertently let it expire. She laughed as she recounted the story.

Luiza is conscious of potential security compromises. Recently, she received friend requests from duplicates of her existing friends' accounts, and did not accept them for fear they are fake accounts. Some of these potential fakes do have friends in common with her account – whoever they belong to, she has friends who have friended them.

Overall, firstly, despite using a diversity of platforms – including Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat – Luiza was not interested in broadcasting aspects of her life to large groups. Rather, she joined a plethora of platforms, some of which are geared to mass information distribution, to maintain individual relationships, on the initiative of individual friends who used the services. Secondly, Luiza is conscious of security and maintaining a desired level of visibility, but what might be seen as conventional 'lapses' on security like password-sharing have not affected her experience of privacy. She is aware of security dangers online and has also, via awareness of others' settings, found photos online of her own son likely not 'meant' for her. She is find-able by people she wishes to be, yet her family has not used the affordances of the technology to threaten her. Thirdly, her life in Europe has successfully allowed her to remain free from the threats she faced in Chad and can pursue a career.

Using Facebook without posting

Many participants used social media (and Facebook in particular) to gather more information than they shared. This section discusses the infrequency of participants' posting, and briefly describes three other prominent ways in which participants used social media: news gathering, entertainment, and learning English. It also discusses 'anonymous' WhatsApp groups. In the context of privacy, these activities can be viewed as part of an overall strategy to gather information while revealing little personal information – and, in indeed, all can be done without building a public profile. While privacy concerns are often framed around the data platforms like Facebook generate and retain about users, at the level of public interface, users are adept at not revealing information to friends and family at large as they seek information online.

A primary activity participants – especially Syrian participants – reported using Facebook for was gathering news. This confirms what other studies have reported. Dekker et al. (2018), drawing from Syrian respondents in the Netherlands, confirmed that Syrian refugees there used a variety of strategies to figure out what was going on back home. “They mainly appreciated social media for the wealth of information that is available, the timeliness of the information, and specifically for information that is based on personal experiences,” they wrote (p.4). Wall, Campbell and Janbek (2015) described information seeking in a Jordanian camp, writing that “[r]efugees identified news as one of the key pieces of content that they both sought and disseminated themselves. This may be because the phone has become their tool for accessing the Internet and thus is used for multiple tasks, but it may also be because the phone itself is seen as more powerful because of the revolution” (p.13).

For this study’s participants, finding out ‘what happened’ for many involved scanning international news media (including Facebook pages and groups). Omar, who arrived in the UK as an economic migrant from Syria before the conflict, described watching CNN, Al Jeezera, and the UAE’s news to try and ascertain what was going on. “You cannot trust the news”, he said, indicating he watched multiple channels to get a sense of how the truth might exist among their divergent reporting. Amira – a PhD student in education, also discussed in Chapters Four and Eight – similarly described news gathering as a prominent activity on Facebook, following newspapers like the Washington Post. Luiza used small (<30 member) Facebook groups in which members shared mass media news items. A participant from sub-Saharan Africa, in casual conversation, suggested he and his friends do not use web browsers period. Participants describe actively visiting groups and pages to look for news rather than passively receiving it through their feeds.

The content participants see on their news feeds may be subject to Facebook’s algorithmic selection processes and the particulars of search terms and syntax (Tripodi 2018). Participants were nonetheless actively aware of the questionable reliability of news media, and looked to multiple mass media and personal sources to piece together a picture of what was happening. To supplement mass media accounts, people would look to friends and family to provide a more local view of ‘on the ground’ news for conflict-related events, such as who was responsible for particular bombings. They are further aware of the limitations and filtered nature of what relatives tell them. Malik – the engineer from Ghouta – suggested, “you can tell when something is wrong.” By contrast, PhDs Jamal and Hakam expressed frustration with getting direct information from talking with “aunts” back home. “They’re not going to tell you if everything is shit,” one said, the other concurring.

Participants also use social media for entertainment. For example, Amsale (discussed above) uses Pinterest to find interior decorating ideas (which, true to form, she does not ‘re-pin’, the site’s term for sharing content). On Instagram, she follows some friends and news accounts (including Al Jazeera) and other accounts that post travel and food photos with names like ‘beautiful destinations’ and ‘amazing cuisine.’ She scrolled past an image of a Tallinn marketplace in the snow as we talked. She used to be “addicted to the Internet,” she said. But now she has work as a translator, school, and other things to fill her time. Luiza said she would watch YouTube movies “all night” sometimes, to distract from her situation and “stop from crying”.

As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, one of the paramount tasks of many refugees to participate in life in Europe is learning the local language – English, in the UK, where many refugees I met sought to enter formal and informal English classes through various organizations, such as libraries and the Red Cross. English learners also looked to the Internet to help expand their English knowledge. Rafiq, a Syrian asylum seeker, mentioned he was learning idiomatic expressions on YouTube. He taught me the nautical origins of the phrase “cut me some slack”. Much as she was a part of small Facebook groups for sharing news, Luiza was also a part of similar groups for practicing English.

Another activity which some participants participated in was WhatsApp groups in which participants would share general postings, including text, video and images apparently ripped from other platforms (such as Instagram and YouTube) around the web. A participant I will keep anonymous forwarded me what I requested to be a representative sample of content from such groups. I would occasionally see the same content shared on Facebook among friends from around the world who were not refugees. The messages often involved inspirational content, some of which was secular and some religious-themed. Some involved conversion from Christianity to Islam, or Christians affirming Islam. Some involved criticism of Israel. Some was generically inspirational.

The content here is perhaps less interesting than the form it takes. For one, it lacks provenance: videos are taken from a variety of sources, without attribution, to be taken and consumed as part of long message threads that will stay on individual phones indefinitely. The participant did not personally ‘know’ other people involved in the group offline or through other venues, nor could he attach to them specific identities. He took the groups as an aggregate, and consumed their content.

As discussed in the literature review, Facebook has been a locus of concern about data privacy and ‘media manipulation’ (Data and Society 2019), respectively associated with data collection and how algorithms use it to decide which items to serve to news feeds. WhatsApp, by contrast, is considered technically secure, ‘private,’ with content shared among human users. However, in private WhatsApp groups, content is unmoored from its points of origin, both how the content was created and consistent and/or offline identities of the pseudonymous phone numbers sharing it. WhatsApp thus can be a platform with both strong ‘privacy’ and potential for spreading information of dubious origin or quality.

Infrequently posting

Almost all participants maintained Facebook accounts, though some participants posted on Facebook so infrequently that they could remember their last post. For example, Rami – the Kurdish draftee discussed below, currently a finance PhD student – had posted no more than three images throughout all of 2017, his first in the UK. One photo was of himself, on a trip to Amsterdam. As a refugee, he had legal travel documents, unlike for previous border crossings. Another was of himself when he started his PhD program. In both photos, he stands straightforwardly facing the camera, marking a significant life event. During over a year spent on the road from Turkey to the UK, he noted that he

> I took pictures along the way, but deleted them. The government will check the phone. The smugglers advised us to delete all the photos. I stored some in the cloud and could restore them, but not all of them because there were too many photos.

He thus keeps photos for himself, but does not necessarily share them. Nor does he keep in touch with many people he knew in Syria. In 2008, he finished his undergraduate degree and entered his the military service required of all Syrian men. He served in the military records and data processing division. He handled records of soldiers – their bio-stats, banal disciplinary actions. He did not make friends with the people around him, on or offline. Few people did. Few wanted to be there. In 2010, he finished the service only to find it was extended, likely indefinitely. In 2012 – as the conflict was going on – he asked for leave to return to his home in Kurdistan for a few months. “I didn’t worry they would harass my family,” he said “The majority had left from the first year, the beginning of the events. I knew. I knew from the records."

Luiza pulled up two postings from several months prior to our conversation. Both were tagged by a presently-local Iranian friend – one a photo from the previous year's eid, the other the results of a personality quiz. She did not view this as an intrusion on her personal life. As will be discussed below, she was aware of her privacy settings, which render most content invisible to people who are not on her carefully-selected friends list.

These posts unto themselves fit with digital anthropological descriptions of carefully chosen images that conform to local norms (Miller and Sinian 2017). They highlight significant events such as educational milestones (such as the beginning of classes and graduation) and travels. Yet to emphasize and overly analyse the photos themselves may distract from the more salient feature of how few images are shared overall.

Inasmuch as these rare postings *conform* to presentational norms, they also may reflect disinterest. Masoud, the student from Damascus, Syria – whose experiences are discussed further in Chapter Eight – described the word 'privacy' along conventional lines of withholding and revealing information. Yet he was reluctant to attribute his infrequent posting to a desire for *privacy,* expressing rather long-distance communication's distracting qualities from the immediacy of offline sociality*:*

> The term 'privacy' is a bit too complicated for me. Like if I go to a certain place, a bar or a coffee shop, I wouldn't necessarily like to check in. But that's not necessarily about privacy. I want to enjoy the moment. It's more about being present in the moment than worrying about people seeing what I'm doing.

Masoud's phrasing effects information control in public. Yet it does explicitly speak to a desire to protect information or his reputation, or contribute to online relationships via sharing information. Not sharing allows him to keep his offline experiences – and relationships – focused in the moment. In effect, a variety of reasons discourage him from constructing a public Facebook profile that would merge his 'far' life in Syria with his 'close' one in Europe.

'Grey people': Expressing opinions about the ongoing conflict in Syria

Despite 'conservative' posting habits, people do – nonetheless – express opinions through a combination of action and inaction, and often indirectly. The Syrian conflict is currently among the most prominent ongoing conflicts prompting people to leave as refugees, and thus how refugees from Syria express themselves online regarding it was a prominent topic of conversation in interviews. In the chaos that followed, many different ‘sides’ emerged. While much of the official news media within the country is governmental propaganda – and the Asad government is the dominant violent force – Syrians expressed to me complex and differing feelings about the violence and responsibility therefore that were not necessarily clean-cut pro or anti Asad.

Omar, the economic migrant, expressed views that – whatever the actions of the Syrian state – a different government could be worse, with ISIS and other extremists gaining territory. At least the regime had a plan – now in Syria, if you travelled the distance from Nottingham to Leicester, you would encounter a handful of would-be kings. “‘You want to sit on the chair [throne], what are you going to do?” he asked rhetorically. Hakam, the engineer, expressed himself in terms of disdain for all sides, of the Asad regime most of all: “I’m not a typical Syrian. I’m not affiliated with any of the fighting groups. I despise them all, but I despise the government more. They have a massive artillery. They could afford to be wise.”

Most Syrians to whom I spoke thus did not overtly take a ‘side’ in our conversations, but emphasized the conflict’s complexity and their frustration with and ambivalence toward multiple violent actors. They found it easier to be against the factions than to support them, and felt sadness and grief at what was happening. However, they would also profess to know what others’ political beliefs were, based off what was said and unsaid – especially in how individuals sharing mass media stories about particular attacks and deaths could be attributed to one side or another. The relatively conservative norms of the online sphere and its performative norms allowed people to read into the politics of others while believing they themselves had said little of their own views. The term *‘grey people’* was applied to those who did not take sides overtly. The connotations of which – as Rifai writes (2017) – (not unlike – as I’ve argued – privacy itself) moved from straightforward neutrality to a support of the status quo:

> Indeed, [Asad’s power on the ground] has pushed Syrians in the grey category *al fy'aa al ramadyyiah* - a term that was coined during the beginning of the uprising to refer to those Syrians who neither supported the regime nor the opposition- toward the regime as for them Assad’s Syria is secular and stable. In this grey category are Syrians who did not support the uprising because they feared chaos,

> violence and retaliation: those were mainly apolitical urban Syrians from the upper and middle class.

Amira, the education student from Damascus, contextualized her view of the 'grey' category within the Syria's authoritarian government:

> The politics in Syria is very involved in people's lives. People were careful even before social media. But it's also how you see the divide in the society. You grew up with people from different backgrounds. When the conflict happened, people chose sides.
>
> It's really surprising how you can see it on social media. You can pick which one is on which side. There is a term: 'grey people'. I was one of them – not because I didn't pick a side, but because I didn't want to be on social media on anyone's side. You're not safe both ways. I think the only time I saw people on the same side was when the Syrian team was trying to qualify for the World Cup a couple of months ago. It was refreshing to look at your news feed and see people. A little attempt can show that you're all the same and want what's best for the country.
>
> I have family there, my mom and dad. You cannot post things, because they're there. I share things about refugees. I couldn't be blunt about the government. I mostly shared things about being sad. I stopped for a while. A lot of people lost their families, because they got angry. They forgot they weren't free. Then their families get taken away. The next day your dad's in prison.

While Amira noted the danger that can come from expressing oneself online, her sadness comes through as a dominant emotion, while direct opinions on the conflict and responsibility remain directly muted to me, the researcher. She did not explicitly take a side in our conversation – nor did I ask – even as she alluded to more concrete opinions. She invoked 'refugees' (of which she is one) as a way to comment on the conflict while maintaining a vocally performative neutrality. At the same time, she claims to know – through context clues and implications – others' opinions.

The term 'grey people', for Imad – a researcher from urban Damscus – had the connotations of deference to the status quo Rifai described, when we first spoke in summer 2018. Imad is among the most active Syrian political posters I know on Facebook. He works on a visa in Hungary, which is known for its political hostility to refugees. Despite this, he is in a relatively insulated position as the son of academics, in a family of a dozen who have all since left and live throughout Europe and America on various visa statuses. While he does not know what he will do when his visa runs out, he is in a relative position of safety.

Imad's friend list is private – so his 'friends' cannot see who he knows, unless they post on his wall – but he told me he has 1,800. He frames this less in terms of danger than modesty. It was only recently that he posted an image of him and his fiancée, who is from the Czech Republic, which he frames as more a reflection of her social media shyness than his. It came with a much-liked joke caption about the local political mood: "angry Arabs stealing your women."

Like other Syrian participants, Imad said he strives to be sensitive to multiple sides of the conflict. Unlike other participants, Imad aims to be a 'news source' to friends and family of diverse backgrounds. His goal in posting is not necessarily to give 'his' view, but to report the violence that is happening. He has posted about attacks by ISIS and Syrians who only recently heard that their relatives had died long ago. When Imad's uncle once confronted him online about a particular post that blamed an attack on the Asad government, Imad reminded himself that his uncle still lives in Syria – his uncle is under different pressures, he has a different perspective. In situations such as these, Imad maintained his relationships while also expressing his own overall frustration with the conflict for a broad audience. This is, of course, a selective performance – as we should consider all opinions presented to me in the context of research interviews. When I discussed this characterization later with him, Imad laughed and more bluntly stated his political views, lest I miss some subtext at which I had guessed but will – following his lead – not overtly print.

Amira and Imad's tone notably contrasts the tone and sentiment to the sentiments of the interviewees of Pearlman (2017), most directly expressed by a doctor from Hama "[i]f we'd listened to our parents, we never would have gone out [to protest] at all… My generation is also afraid – but not like them. I now say to my father, 'Why were you silent all of those years?' We say this to their entire generation." (p.78-9). By contrast, the majority of people to whom I spoke did not consider themselves activists. Neither, however, were they passive victims – they demonstrated agency in moving away from danger, and in negotiating how to respond to the conflict online and off. To be further discussed in Chapter Eight, Amira later joined the University picket lines in the 2018 UK university strikes regarding pension funds. She advocated offline, in her 'close life', for causes which did not at present directly affect her.

Tariq: the limits of technical security

The most detailed security measures described, before arriving in Europe, came from Tariq, who journalistically documented the Syrian government's violent actions in his home city. As with Emir (discussed above) he now largely lives under his own identity. After being released from prison and giving interviews to international news media, he was accepted on scholarship to an American university. Following tightening American regulations, however, he was denied entry and deferred to apply his scholarship at a university in Germany. His story illustrates the strengths and limits of security and data gathering, of both him (as an activist) and the (ostensibly powerful) forces which he opposed. Security and privacy discussions often rely on bad or 'worst case scenarios' of social effect if information is released. Tariq offers a more mortal 'bad scenario' in which the effects of information remain ambiguous.

In 2008, Tariq got Facebook. In 2010, 17.7% of Syrians had Internet access (Internet World Stats). At the time (as Masoud also indicated) it was something that he and his closest friends used, while his usage of it would change over time. Tech savvy and conscious, he set up a creative website for school, with a forum. In 2011 (about the time of the Arab Spring), he started adding everyone he knew to his Facebook account. As he became an activist, however, he found ways to manage this apparent 'openness' with his new, more sensitive activities. He utilized multiple social media accounts to manage different, opposing connections. At one point, he had six email accounts. One was pro-government, to show the police if he was arrested. His activist friends saved each other's passwords, and if someone was arrested, they would immediately close compromising accounts, working within the affordances of the platform to maintain security as much as was possible.

His friends indeed closed his account when he was arrested. While he kept his face masked on TV interviews, someone recognized his voice. He was going back and forth between ISIS and state controlled areas frequently at that time and on a visit to his family, one of his relatives told the authorities where he was. Tariq was not impressed with the interrogators' informational literacy, which he was happy to exploit to confound them; in our conversation, he presented himself as a pluckily-defiant trickster figure. They had many fanciful ideas about him. They thought he was CIA-trained. So he played a game. He 'gave up' the names of famous western people (Andrea

Bocelli, for example). When his interrogators verified these names, it looked as if he knew nothing.

Tariq had password-protected a hard drive, intended for his mother if something were to happen to him. Security found it when they searched his house. At first, he told them didn't have a power cable. Then he claimed it was a wireless adaptor, which was a step too far – "we're not stupid', the interrogator told him. They finally got the drive plugged in, they tried to make him enter his password which he used as an excuse to attempt to re-format the drive. It was 75% complete when they realized what was going on and shut it off. The eventual lab report, however, came back that the drive was 'new and unused'. Drawing from these experiences, Tariq remains sceptical about the Syrian government's digital capabilities:

> 'The Syrian government preyed on the Syrians. They made us believe that everything we do the government knew about. I think this was a lie. Sometimes I wasn't using a proxy [to disguise my location]. They could have easily found me, but they didn't. We were afraid because of the propaganda.

Tariq's activist activities could carry big consequences – indeed, he was arrested. He used the same social media channels to connect with friends, living a 'normal' life, as he did to spread journalistic documentation of the regime's violence, using a variety of technical affordances to mitigate the chances of information entering unintended contexts. Tariq was clearly privacy conscious, yet he – as others – stated that he 'didn't know why' people used WhatsApp, without regard for its security affordances.

Tariq's dramatic story introduces several key themes that will be elaborated on social media use in subsequent chapters. Firstly, as with many participants discussed in Chapter Five, Tariq's solutions were often low-tech and human-centric, requiring not much technological literacy beyond standard usage of social media and physical data storage. These included the creation of multiple accounts on Facebook and the use of fake names, and his friends had agreed to make the (non-automated) human effort to erase online traces. These rely on human trust that sometimes supersedes individualistically-focused technical security (e.g., sharing passwords). Secondly, despite these immense risks and measures, Tariq did not consistently maximize his technical security – nor did the Syrian government consistently, competently use his lapses to pursue him. Rather, security was *reasonable,* but not maximized – and as with interactions with the UKBA discussed in Chapter Six – the *introduction* of information, even to hostile forces, does not necessarily produce a readily-understandable effect.

IV. Conclusion

Many refugees come from cultures with online norms more conservative than those of the conventionally-envisioned ‘privacy’ subject, who is actively producing information for different audiences. Many refugees, by contrast, come from offline cultures where ‘conservative’ postings are the norm amid the more general ‘conservative’ nature of broadly-visible online spaces described by Miller et al. (2016). A key privacy ‘action’ is inaction: not posting, while using these platforms to seek personal and mass media information (without revealing it to those in their ‘friend’ circles). Doing this helps refugees maintain consistent relationships in disrupted times. ‘Private’, message-oriented services like WhatsApp, and creative configurations of Facebook’s privacy settings, help refugees maintain continuities in relationships with family and friends abroad. The gap between countries provides some physical and social safety. In other ways it presents challenges to maintaining relationships with friends and family, as the norms of the ‘close life’ in Europe – and its social utility of developing a persona online – are pursued while still respecting the offline norms of the ‘far’ life.

As it pertains to ‘contextual integrity’ and other selective-disclosure and data-oriented conceptions of ‘privacy’, this affirms the importance of separating information for different audiences and purposes. Yet the active, selective introduction of information into public spaces is less valuable than strategically withholding it altogether. Throughout, the physical and social threats of information remain ambiguous, with social media serving as a flexible space to imagine and enact continuities in old relationships and seek information about the ‘far’ life and people in it.

Chapter Six: Contexts without integrity: Information in asylum claims

I. Introduction

The chapter describes the UK asylum system as a bureaucracy, a system of documentation and categorizations in which variable scrutiny and credibility can be applied to pass or stall applicants. As established in the literature review, discussions of privacy have generally held careful information management to support individual self-expression. This assumes that social participants have a shared set of expectations. Imagine a system that – on paper – has clear goals and explicitly-stated processes for handling personal, sensitive information. While this may sound like an ideal realization of contextually integrity, it would also describe a bureaucracy – oft-disparaged institutions, notorious for frustrating the people they ostensibly serve, both factors and gatekeepers to the civic life that privacy is held to protect. The UK Border Association (UKBA) – which assesses asylum applicants – follows this bureaucratic top-down logic.

This chapter contrasts the 'denial' or 'disbelief' within UKBA application assessment with the implicit 'belief' or 'credibility' granted by caseworkers at the Evidence Team – which seeks new evidence for rejected asylum seekers' appeals. The asylum system is often slow-moving and oblique. Its layers of documentation allow discrepancies and the appearance of discrepancies that can be used as pretexts to doubt – and therefore deny – applicants. The Evidence Team's focused goals around meeting evidentiary standards allow caseworkers to manage their empathy and belief in applicants as they adopt a conversational stance to elicit information.

Gaining asylum allows applicants to live and work without fear of deportation. In the asylum system, the complex experiences presented in Chapter Four get translated into narrow legal criteria, to decide whether and how refugees should be materially restricted from pursuing the 'close' lives discussed in Chapter Eight, in the context of ongoing online relationships discussed in Chapter Five. Understanding its processes – and how they can become stalled – further helps to understand how the 'audiences' for self-presentation may choose to believe or disbelieve information presented to them. Tight information control restricts potential outcomes to a range of predetermined possibilities, which can work for or against individuals' intentions.

II. The asylum process

This section describes the asylum application process and its potential outcomes.

What's at stake

In a simplified sense, asylum or similar legal statuses enable individuals to:

- Live without fear of deportation
- Legally work to earn money, including for housing and food
- Access regular NHS services, JobSeekers' Allowance, and other benefits
- Apply for family reunification plans to allow relatives to legally reunite in the UK

Asylum seekers' capacities to build 'private life', in the sense of family and economic self-sufficiency, are thus heavily restricted while they wait for their claims to process, even as they use digital technology to maintain relationships with family and friends. As they wait, as described below, asylum seekers live in government sponsored housing. While they do not have the legal right to work, some may earn small amounts of money working off the books. Many further take English classes or vocational training through venues like those described in the Methodology Chapter. I would most often encounter asylum seekers in these English classes; during my work with the Evidence Team, described below; or as they waited to have bureaucratic problems addressed at the Center, discussed in Chapter Seven.

The stories of Rafiq and Malik demonstrate limitations placed on material support and family life during this wait. Both are Syrian, and should have – theoretically – been able to easily demonstrate their need of protection. Malik's account, in particular, shows how even compelling information may be superseded by other factors as asylum seekers pursue long-term stability.

Rafiq is in his early 20s. We met at his government-provided housing. Among his possessions were a small few novels; he was reading *Sherlock Holmes* and Dan Brown paperbacks for fun and English-language learning and having more luck with the former than latter. He had spent the whole weekend working – painting, paid informally – during the Ramadan fast to earn enough extra money to travel to London to visit friends for the upcoming eid. As we spoke, due to these factors, he nearly fell asleep several times.

When we ran into each other, Rafiq had just discovered he had missed his bus to London. This was in part because a change in bus stop location had recently been prompted by coach station renovations due to last several years. The station closing had been advertised (in English), but his English language skills were limited and, regardless, the official notices were easy to see as well as to miss. He wondered if could find another £15 for a ticket the following day. Rafiq thus lives in physical 'safety', even though is capacity to earn money – and conduct social life – is restricted and highly vulnerable to circumstance.

For Malik, the pursuit of long- term stability had superseded clear evidence of his need for protection. He had moved to the UK after already applying for asylum (and submitting for biometric identification) in another EU country. This runs contrary to the Dublin Regulation, which states that refugees must apply and stay in the in EU country in which they first arrive.

Malik is a civil engineer from Damascene suburbs which were bombed intermittently by the Asad government following the 'siege' of April 2013 – the same time that prompted Nabil to leave for Jordan (as described in Chapter Four). A gregarious middle-aged man and a generous host, Malik was friendly, personable, and patient in our conversations. He brought a well-organized laptop with him across his journey through Europe, which contains scans of his diplomas and other documentation in systematized folders. He regularly keeps in touch with his family, who are in safety in a third country. If his application is processed, he hopes to reunite with them, and has enough documentation that he is professionally qualified. He also has clear and credible evidence that he is Syrian, and in need of protection. The UKBA's solution to this situation has been to not reach a decision on his application for three years, during which time he lives in asylum seeker housing on £37.75 per week.

In summer 2018, Malik received a letter that in less than a week, he would be moved to other, similar housing. No reason was given. Malik uses his time to take classes. He took English classes through the Red Cross. Throughout the first half of 2019, he completed a qualification in machine maintenance – a lower degree than his previous qualifications, but one that he says he enjoys due to its proximity to engineering. After that, he pursued a course in social care as he waits for legal clearance to work. He moved away from Syria to seek safety, and throughout the EU to pursue a life of long-term stability for himself and his family. While he and his family are 'safe' and in clear need of protection, they are not (yet) allowed to live together.

The UK asylum process

The United Nations’ 1967 Protocol – revised from the 1951 Refugee Convention – states that a refugee is a person who:

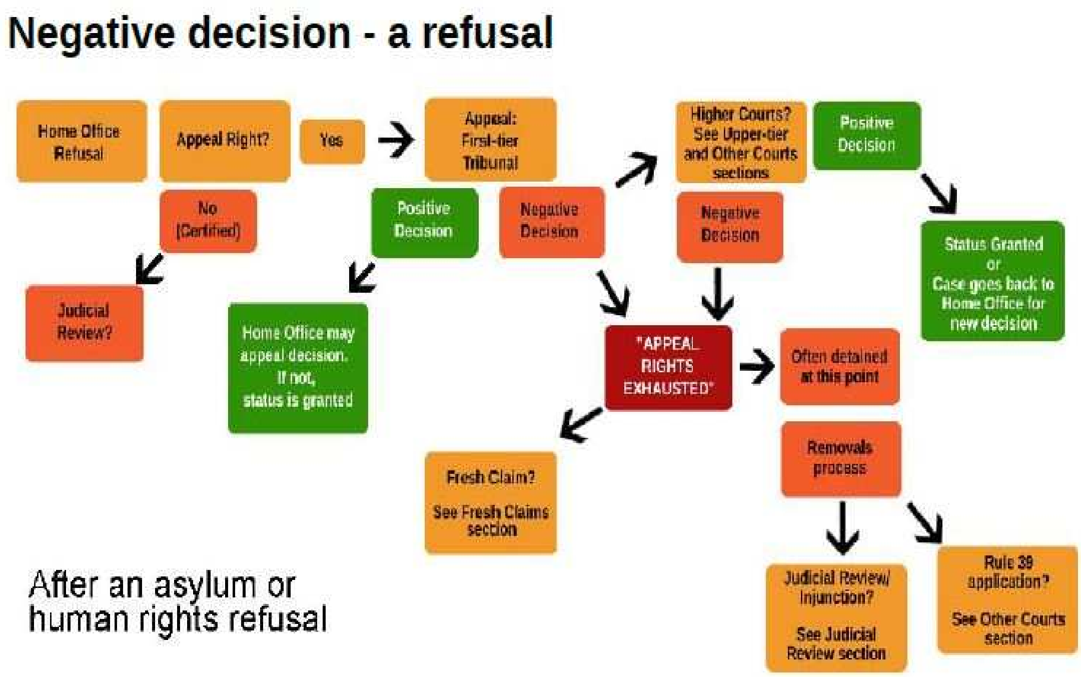
> owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or… unwilling to return to it.

As discussed in the literature review, this definition is – at its core – what asylum applicants are trying to prove they fit. The definition emphasizes threats from other people, on grounds of personal identity, chosen or ascribed. As will be discussed below, within the asylum process, the exercise of these factors is heavily proscribed. The definition does not protect people who are fleeing natural disasters, famine, or a general lack of economic opportunity.

As of 2018, around 6% of migrants in the UK submit an asylum claim (Hawkins 2018, p.3). In 2016, this was around 35,500 people (p.4). 29% of 2018 arrivals were from the Middle East and 23% were from Africa (p.3) – regions from which participants in this research drew who had arrived in other years. In the 2015 ‘crisis’ year, 32,733 applications were submitted – less than half the number submitted (84,132) in the highest year on record, 2002 (p.5).

A claim can lead to one of several ‘successful’ outcomes. Asylum – or refugee status – are granted on the basis of specific threats to individuals. Humanitarian Protection is granted on categorical claims, such as being from a conflict zone. Both offer similar protections, especially the right to reside and work in the UK five years before re-assessment. Nonetheless, according to a knowledgeable Red Cross case worker who I worked alongside at the Evidence Team, many asylum seekers believe that asylum is a preferable status – especially when looking ahead to the evaluation of their claim after five years. Other potential decisions include discretionary leave to remain and limited leave to remain (Right to Remain 2016, Asylum Aid 2018). As all these statuses grant similar rights – particularly in the short term – and other obscure distinctions among them are not further explored in this research. ‘Refugee protection’ and ‘asylum’, as used here, should be understood to refer to them all, while the distinctive status of ‘asylum seeker’ (referring to an individual who has not yet received rights to work) is referred to when it is important to highlight.

The process of asylum applications and appeals are likewise complex and described in detail on the UKBA's website (UKBA 2018) and Campbell (2017). What happens after a claim fails is complex and outlined in the graphic below (Right to Remain 2016).


Negative decision - a refusal
Home Office Refusal
Appeal Right?
Yes
Appeal: First-tier Tribunal
Higher Courts? See Upper-tier and Other Courts sections
Positive Decision
No (Certified)
Positive Decision
Negative Decision
Negative Decision
Status Granted or Case goes back to Home Office for new decision
Judicial Review?
Home Office may appeal decision. If not, status is granted
"APPEAL RIGHTS EXHAUSTED"
Often detained at this point
Removals process
Fresh Claim? See Fresh Claims section
After an asylum or human rights refusal
Judicial Review/ Injunction? See Judicial Review section
Rule 39 application? See Other Courts section

Source: Right to Remain 2016

While they wait for decisions, asylum applicants in the UK are provided with housing. As of 2019 – as Malik and Rafiq did – asylum applicants receive £37.75 per week to cover food and other expenses, with modest increases based on the particularities of circumstance – for example, a pregnant mother receives £3 extra per week (Gov.uk 2018). Schemes for medical care and additional benefits may likewise vary based on demographic factors. Housing conditions are oft-criticized in the press. For example, the *Guardian* described "rats, mould and broken furniture" (Harris 2018). Many clients of the Center (described in Chapter Seven) were seeking asylum and on some variation of asylum benefits. After gaining asylum, refugees lose asylum seeker benefits (including housing) as they transition to more mainstream benefits streams, a sometimes-difficult point.

During their time as asylum applicants – or if they are rejected, but not yet deported – refugees may be required to present themselves periodically at reporting centres. Another journalistic report quoted a recording of a reporting official that it as 'his job' to "piss him off":

> We are not here to make life easy for you. It's a challenging environment we have got to make for people. It's working because it's pissing you off. Am I right? There you go. That's my aim at the end of the day, to make it a challenging environment for you. It's pissing you off. You're telling me it's pissed you off. There you go, I've done my job.

While the UKBA disavowed the quote (Taylor 2018a), the sentiment is in line with general statements then-Home Secretary Theresa May made pubicly Secretary regarding that the aim of policy was to "create here in Britain a really hostile environment for illegal migration" by denying services in the hopes that non-citizens without official status would leave (Kirkup and Winnett 2012).

Processing times for applications and subsequent appeals may take from several months to several years (see Griffiths 2013, Campbell 2017). In one case, processing took 26 years (Verma 2018). In 2017, appeal wait time averaged 52 weeks (May 2018). Applicants often grow frustrated with these waits and mistrust the system (Griffiths 2012). If submitting appeals after refused at the next step – the first tier tribunal – asylum seekers no longer receive benefits. If new evidence can be presented after this refusal, refugees may make a 'fresh claim' (Asylum Aid 2018), and will receive another variation on benefits.

Between 1993 and 2007, a series of law and policy changes made it increasingly difficult for asylum applicants to be accepted (Campbell 2017, p.21-22). Application results show a conflicted system, where early decisions against asylum seekers are often later overturned. 66% of first-round applications were rejected in 2016, between a recent-years high of 88% in 2004 and a low of 44% in 2014. Half of all appeals were successful in 2017 (May 2018), but only a quarter of those lodged (between 2004 and 2016) were allowed to proceed (Hawkins 2018, p.3). The Home Office loses 75% of the appeals it brings against positive asylum decisions (Taylor 2018). Altogether, the end result of known cases withdrawn or refused was 72% in 2004; 42% in 2014; and 36% in 2017. The remaining percentages were granted asylum or other related statuses (Sturge 2019, p.8-9).

32% of asylum applicants in 2018 came from Asia; 29% from Africa; and 10% from Europe (Sturge 2019, p.3; 10-12). 'It is enough to be from Syria' was a sentiment that I heard from asylum seekers, suggesting an impression that Syrians had it the 'easiest' in a difficult system, and were able to bypass waits and hurdles that other asylum seekers faced. Altogether, 23,000 Syrians were granted asylum in the UK from 2011 to 2018, of which 15,000 were resettled, arriving in the UK with status in hand (Sturge 2019 p.11-12). As with Malik's application described above, however, Syrian applicants can nonetheless run into problems. The relative straightforwardness of Syrian claims, amid the country's civil war, serve as a useful standard with which to compare and contextualize other asylum seekers' experiences with the system.

After Syria, the next highest numbers of applicants in recent years have come from Eritrea, Iran, and Sudan (Sturge 2019 p.11-12). In contrast to Syria, Eritrea (for example) is officially not 'in conflict'. Nonetheless, the country ranks near North Korea on various global civil rights indexes. Military conscription is mandatory and often prolonged indefinitely. Imprisonment rates are high (UNHCR 2015c). In March 2015 – after diplomatic discussions with Eritrea, and expressing concerns that high rates of asylum acceptance would encourage more Eritreans to come to the UK – the UKBA issued new guidelines. "As a result of the new guidance the levels of grants of asylum to Eritreans plummeted from 85% to 60%," wrote Taylor (2017), "However, 87% of those refused under the new guidance had their refusals overturned by judges on appeal."

Declined applicants lose asylum seeker benefits and may be told to meet for a deportation flight; otherwise voluntarily leave; or be detained. Unsurprisingly, many declined applicants continue to remain in the UK, living on the street or sheltered by friends, without being able to legally earn income. Which refused asylum seekers are targeted for detention and deportation also remains – as with the application process – a confusing, complex system with many apparent inconsistencies (see Griffiths 2012, 2013). "It's completely random" who gets detained and deported, the same knowledgeable Red Cross caseworker told me, while also suggesting that agencies likely perform an internal calculus as to which refused asylum seekers will be easiest to pursue. Area NGO's did not generally support refused asylum seekers. An exception is the Evidence Team – discussed in this chapter – which works with refused asylum seekers to assess what information might be used to support a fresh claim.

Altogether, outcomes of claims are difficult to predict, as is what happens when they are refused. For refused asylum seekers, legal and social limbo can go on indefinitely until destitute asylum seekers' circumstances otherwise change – such as coming back into contact with social services following a major medical episode, or sudden deportation. By contrast, those who have attained asylum have an easier time moving on with life projects.

The asylum system as bureaucracy

While academic work described in the literature review and this chapter have highlighted the unresponsiveness and questionable decisions of the UKBA, fewer have situated them in the more widely-applied logic of bureaucratic information flows. Bureaucracies use documentation to justify decisions, manage sensitive data, and sort citizens into governable categories. In these systems, attention and scrutiny can be applied variably to exercise power.

In discussions of privacy – such as Nissenbaum's 'contextual integrity' (2011) – clear and careful data management of personal information is held to be a virtue, allowing people to predict how it will flow and the impact it will have. Bureaucracies define clearly expectations for information flows, and often have rules around confidentiality and privacy. Yet mention 'bureaucracy' and adjectives like frustrating, complicated, and futile-seeming come to mind, along with a colorful library of metaphors like *Kafkaesque*, *byzantine*, and *red tape.* Such frustrations – no doubt – would be familiar to many readers of this dissertation.

I see three key themes how bureaucracies operate frustratingly, that apply to refugees' experiences and information management questions: firstly, bureaucracies are both part of and gatekeepers to civic life; secondly, they are oraganized from the top down; and thirdly, attention within can be arbitrarily employed to predetermined ends.

Firstly, these systems function as both matters of – and gatekeepers to – civic life. One of the ways asylum seekers become eligible for protection is that governmental processes have gone extraordinarily wrong in their home countries. Yet, as described above, refugees ostensibly 'protected' through these guarantees find themselves managed by a system. Should they make it over the hurdles to gain long-term protection or citizenship, they find themselves managed through further bureaucratic processes throughout their lives, encountering them through medical care, university applications, and pensions. Individuals who grow accustomed to these systems become better at navigating them. Partially as suggested in Chapter Four, middle-class backgrounds and experience navigating student or work visas provide evidence that can be used to seek asylum, as well as skills at navigating these same systems. Being able to successful navigate bureaucracy, to predict information flows in rigid and abstract systems, thus partially ensures civic rights.

The logic of information flows and assessment within bureaucracies is by nature abstract, and designed with the interests of governance in mind rather than those of individuals. In other words, secondly, as Graeber writes, bureaucracies measure value based on how it looks "from the top":

> For anyone who has ever been a refugee, or for that matter had to fill out the forty-page application required to get one's daughter considered for admission by a London music school, the idea that bureaucracy has anything to do with rationality, let alone efficiency, might seem odd. But this is the way it looks from the top. In fact, from inside the system, the algorithms and mathematical formulae by which the world comes to be assessed become, ultimately, not just measures of value, but the source of value itself. (2015, p. 41 – 42)

The top-down design creates gaps of "imagination" for those who implement the systems, ways to use protocols to avoid using "interpretative labor" while dealing with humans (p.151-152). Heyman (1995) similarly considers American immigration bureaucracies in terms of minimizing "thought-work". In Graeber's view, these manifest further links between violence, the state, and bureaucracy – in Max Weber's sense that the state holds a "monopoly on violence" (1919). Graeber writes that:

> structural violence creates lopsided structures of the imagination. Those on the bottom of the heap have to spend a great deal of imaginative energy trying to understand the social dynamics that surround them—including having to imagine the perspectives of those on top—while the latter can wander about largely oblivious to much of what is going on around them…. Why does this happen? Because even the most benevolent bureaucracies are really just taking the highly schematized, minimal, blinkered perspectives typical of the powerful, turning them into ways of limiting that power or ameliorating its most pernicious effects. (p.82)

Similar critiques on how standardizing evaluative practices entrenches existing power structures and assumptions have been voiced regarding medicine (Bowker and Starr 1999), academia (Strathern 2000), and with NGOs that work with refugees (Voigts and Watne 2018). For refugees – or others subject to the systems – the consequences can be severe.

Thirdly, the internal workings of bureaucracies are difficult to observe from the outside, which allows actors within to use layers of mediation and interpretation to their advantage. As described above, UKBA assessors find reasons to doubt based on evidence or absence thereof. At the same time, this obliqueness allows individual actors within the system to escape individual responsibility while providing the image of impartiality. While attention is often held to threatened privacy, within a bureaucracy it can be good or bad. Attention can get applications evaluated, and 'keeps the ball moving'. Enough scrutiny, however, could break even credible applications, and seemingly arbitrary whims can be used to dismiss them.

This is collectively to say that rigid information systems tend to have ostensibly clear procedures designed to preserve the status quo, 'from the top'. Unlike privacy, they are not individually-oriented. If the will of the system's goals is strong enough, careful information management on the part of individuals is not necessarily effective at creating desired impressions. These factors all are present in the UK asylum process, described in the following section.

Information in the UK asylum system

This section covers what evidence is considered credible to attain asylum. The evidence presented in the asylum process helps to gauge the practical accessibility of 'private' information. The information produced is often highly 'personal' and sensitive – often involving torture, sexual orientation, health histories, religion, and other stigmatized characteristics. It is assumed that it is advantageous for the asylum seeker to produce whatever evidence they can. The question could be, quite literally, could you prove you are (from your hometown, threatened on grounds of your sexual orientation, were tortured…) to save your life? Yet for many applicants, despite the alleged abundance of data in the digital era, producing credible information is a more immediate concern than protecting it.

The asylum system places a high value on officially-validated documentation that would be formally tied to individuals' specific, legal identities. As Cwener notes, "legislation puts an onus on the asylum seeker to prove his/her well founded fear of persecution" (2004, p.80 – 81) – that is, to provide evidence. Other European countries have been more forceful about demanding data. Germany and Demark passed laws in 2017 enabling immigration officials them to take phone data from refugees though reports do not indicate how this data was used. In 2017, Germany used phone content from refugees to deport 7,000 refugees under Dublin regulation (Meaker 2018).

Home Office documentation states that "Evidence to be considered" (2015, Section 4.2, p. 8) for asylum applications – in addition to those produced during interviews and the process itself, described below – includes "Other evidence submitted by the claimant, e.g. written statements, newspaper or internet articles, witness statements from family or associates, police or medical reports, political party membership cards", "Country of origin information (COI)" [explained below], "Medical reports," "Other expert evidence", "passports", and "Language analysis". These items roughly fall into three categories: material produced in asylum applicants' home countries; evidence created or documented by asylum seekers; and evidence connected with the asylum process itself. The first and third categories pertain to documentation produced by official sources, such as governments, medical professionals, or mass media. The second refers to what refugees can produce themselves. Some applicants can readily produce credible evidence to substantiate their claims. Others, with less evidence, may find their stories doubted.

Documentation from home countries, such as passports or birth records, may not have ever been issued or may have been lost to conflict. Asylum seekers may have left home in a hurry in danger, or lost or destroyed travel documents, passports, or academic degrees along the way at different points on often clandestine journeys. In Germany in 2016, for example, only 40% of asylum applicants had official documentation (Meaker 2018). Taylor notes that asylum seekers lacking documentation are seen by the UKBA as lacking credibility (2017, p.21).

Asylum seekers may submit evidence they have created themselves, though this, too, is often difficult to come by. There is no explicit mention of personal communication in the UKBA's submission guidelines. In addition to the conservative posting culture discussed in Chapter Five, individuals do not necessarily record threats to themselves digitally, or refer to them obliquely. Literacy issues may make written communication difficult. According to Evidence Team discussions, mailed items are considered to have more value – with envelopes and date and place stamps to demonstrate their origins.

In some cases, organizations or individuals may legitimately document events or aspects of their lives to provide evidence for submission. Pride Without Borders – for example – is a charity group whose website states it helps asylum seekers attend "Gay Pride Parades and other LGBT+ events that help members build up vital evidence" for claims.

Further information may be produced within the UK as part of the case. Some of this may be classified as 'evidence': for example, medical cases are not often accepted, according to the same experienced Red Cross caseworker cited above, as they require the applicant to demonstrate they could not receive treatment in their home countries. However, refugees who claim torture may receive specialist doctor assessments for physical evidence.

The key piece of documentation that is produced in the asylum process are interviews (and translations thereof) conducted by the UKBA with the asylum seekers. This is considered as supportive evidence as well as the primary account of an applicant's case for UKBA assessors to evaluate for credibility as described in the following section. In the back-and-forth between asylum seekers, their lawyers, and UKBA assessors, individual claims within the overall case are documented as either disputed or accepted. For example, an asylum applicant may be believed to be from a particular town, but *not believed* to face persecution there. Claims may also be believed, but not considered to meet the standard needed to claim asylum. Each 'layering' of interpretations creates an opportunity for information to be lost, disputed, or re-interpreted.

Related directly to asylum claims, I have observed:

- Transcripts of interviews with the applicant through a translator, explaining why s/he is applying for asylum
- Similar 'narrative' versions of these, submitted by the applicant's lawyer
- Official decisions letters with explanation from the UKBA, with reference to events discussed in the above
- Requests for appeals regarding mistakes or procedural grounds in the UKBA's letter
- Subsequent letters back and forth

In addition to documents related directly to claims assessment, solicitors, the housing contractors GS4 and NASS, and various benefits-related organizations would mail letters to applicants. These may further detail in-person meeting requirements; when an asylum applicant has lost or gained particular benefits packages; and/or requests for form submissions. Anderson et al. (2014) describe sets of legal documents like this as a "bundle" (p.10-11). They note the difficulty of keeping them straight, and how it serves to reduce the nature of the case for processing in a courtroom. Darling (2014) describes asylum applicants' physical attachment to the letters in further detail. In one case, I observed comment from UKBA assessors on the lack of organization in the files the asylum applicant had submitted.

These documents are generally written in British bureaucratic English. Deciphering these letters and communicating their contents to their recipients is a frequent job of the Center's General Guidance (discussed in Chapter Seven). In contrast to refugees' communications – which were almost entirely digital – data sharing in the asylum system was almost entirely paper-based, and only written in English**.** These files are composed on computers (and thus exist in digital copies), though are mailed physically to asylum seekers similar as are – to be discussed below – other documents within the asylum system.

If we view these documents as forms of contextual self-presentation – as privacy is concerned with – it is logical that asylum seekers (with the help of their lawyers) would 'write to the forms' to present the best possible cases that they meet the standards for asylum. However, the technicalities can be difficult for asylum seekers to understand. Griffiths wrote that:

> A surprising number [of asylum seekers] did not even know if they had a solicitor or not. For example, Iranian Amir spoke no English but told me through a translating fellow detainee that he thought he had legal representation after a solicitor visited him five months previously and asked him to sign something. He showed me the paperwork and I had to explain that the document he signed stated that they were not taking his case on and that he had therefore wasted the last five months waiting for someone to help him. (2013, p.273)

Furthermore, the more information one presents, the more opportunities the UKBA has for finding inconsistencies. These can, as discussed below, be a result of misunderstandings of the on-ground situation, or they can come from within the asylum seekers' accounts themselves. Recall is difficult, particularly regarding traumatic or complicated events and their timelines. Herlihy, Scragg, and Turner (2002) describe how discrepancies in refugees' accounts are common between different interviews – increasing with length of time for recall of traumatic events – and argue they shouldn't be taken as a sign of lack of credibility.

Summary

The information gathered in the asylum process is personal in that it pertains to specific, identifying details about individuals' lives. It is compiled and presented to establish details about their pasts, to prove that they have lived somewhere and undergone challenging, often traumatic events that may relate to stigmatized identity traits. Yet unlike many concerns voiced in discussions of ‘privacy’, challenges individuals face are often less focused on protecting information than producing it. The below section contrasts the UKBA’s practices in assessing credibility of this information with the performative ‘belief’ of the Evidence Team, an NGO that works with rejected asylum seekers to find more information to fill evidentiary gaps.

III. Credibility and evidence in application evaluation

This section contrasts how information and its absence are treated in two different ‘cultures’ of credibility: the Evidence Team’s culture of performative ‘belief’ and the UKBA’s culture of ‘disbelief’ with regard to the evidence asylum seekers submit. From my experience working with the Evidence Team, applications were often rejected on grounds that assessors disbelieved that asylum applications were telling the truth, or disagreed that their claims met grounds for protection. This ‘culture of disbelief’ (the internal processes of which have been documented by other writers) complicates presenter-focused emphases on self-presentation in that it shows how effective performances require that audiences grant actors credibility – here, that the UKBA accepts that refugees are telling the truth about their experiences. It is further difficult to act strategically with regard to the ‘norms’ of the asylum system, which are complex, difficult-to-understand, frequently changing, and not necessarily intuitive. The cause-and-effect relationship between information is difficult to predict. Within the Evidence Team, while caseworkers make personal judgements about clients’ credibility, ‘belief’ is performatively granted in interactions with clients for the practicality of information elicitation and to judge whether evidence meets UKBA standards.

The Evidence Team: ‘reading the files’ in a culture of belief

Most interpersonal relationships are implicitly ‘cultures of belief’. ‘Presentation of the self’ – as discussed by Goffman (1956) and applied to privacy by Westin (1967) – assumes that people grant each other enough credibility (or at least, suspension of disbelief) to keep interpersonal interactions moving. The Evidence Team, which works with rejected asylum seekers planning fresh submissions, implicitly believes asylum seekers while focusing on whether presentable evidence could be used to substantiate a claim with the UKBA. Evidence Team caseworkers put careful effort into assessing what is known, unknown, believed, and disbelieved in cases, which would be discussed as a group in monthly caseworker meetings. At the same time, the focus on UKBA standard enables volunteers to avoid making personal assessments themselves.

The cases that come to the Evidence Team have been rejected and screened by Red Cross workers for a reasonable potential to be re-evaluated. UKBA assessors have thus sorted and interpreted claims and evidence refugees have presented according to discrete categories, providing a framework as to which claims have been made, addressed, accepted and disbelieved. They have also been seen by more sympathetic evaluators to have some merit. Team caseworkers could identity discrepancies or mistakes within these categories; try to find new evidence to support doubted claims; or look for items unaddressed altogether. Team volunteers learned to read these claims and other documents to look for 'gaps', and to treat discrepancies or lack of information as a potential sign of misunderstanding or mis-documentation on the part of the Home Office, the clients' own lawyers, or translators. While many volunteers were law students, volunteers were not lawyers. Thus the service provided was not legal advice – rather, the goal was to gather information and evidence (and assist clients with doing the same) which could be presented to a solicitor for use in a fresh claim. For the production of our own records regarding the case, we were instructed to write as if we were 'writing for ourselves in two years' time' for clarity (also good practice for anthropological field notes). Given the university student volunteer pool and case processing time, documents derived from these notes might be passed to further Team caseworkers.

Establishing evidence for a new claim could last years, during which clients might come in and out of contact with the Evidence Team. Sometimes clients would re-appear after long absences and try and submit a new claim – at which point, the old files would be a starting point for establishing what was known, not known, accepted and disputed. Acquiring case files from the government and solicitors could be a lengthy process, with no guarantees that the other parties had kept or were sending all potential information. If solicitors had archived the information or outsourced their data storage, subject access requests could take even longer. Thus, data protection measures only store data for 'as long as needed' were viewed as being potentially against client interests.

The process of information gathering – in which two or three Team caseworkers would meet with an individual client for informal conversations – further provided lessons in how ambiguities and misinformation come to be documented. We were advised in training not to assume that *we* had misunderstood, but to clarify discrepancies. "What is obvious to you isn't obvious to them [and vice versa]" advised the group's deputy leader. It was further noted how cultural differences could lead to assumptions that created the appearances of gaps – such as the difficulty, distance, or road conditions between villages. In this sense, casework was not unlike anthropology in its emphasis on self-reflective probing of one's own assumptions lest – in assuming similarities of lifestyle, method or belief – fundamental differences could be missed. It further, methodologically, emphasized the value of extended and informal conversation in bringing to light new information that clients may not have understood was valuable or had not been clearly communicated.

Sometimes – if the client's English was not good – the client would bring a friend to help translate, which further brought to light how layers of mediation could obscure asylum seekers' stories. It would be unclear if the client was self-censoring in light of their friend's presence. Sometimes the friend-translators would answer questions without involving the client. The Center (and other groups larger in size) worked with trained, professional translators in part to avoid issues like this, which were beyond the scope and budget of an organization like the Evidence Team.

Many conversations with clients were relatively straightforward – consistent stories were communicated, and the problem points between the stories, evidence, law, and UKBA decisions were easily identified. Other conversations provoked further questions and brought to light ambiguities in clients' actions. These had variable relevance to asylum claims, and sometimes suggested more or less personally sympathetic actions on the part of clients. While caseworkers and clients frequently would meet multiple times to disambiguate, in between group discussions at caseworker meetings, these attempts were not always successful. Generalized examples of these mysteries include:

> A woman is basing her claim around the threat her abusive family would pose if she were forcibly returned to her home country. She is in regular WhatsApp communication with them.
>
> A client is missing an organ, she claims as a result of torture. This was not mentioned in her application. It is further unclear if is worth pursuing as evidence, as a missing organ does not necessarily imply abuse or torture.
>
> A man has several children in his home country. He has made no effort whatsoever to contact them since he left.

On the one hand, empathy was a powerful tool and motivator for caseworkers. At the same time, the key Evidence Team question of 'what can we prove' versus 'do I personally believe this story?' helped mitigate emotional responses and retain focus on the practicalities of case-building. In one meeting, the discussion of whether a client was 'deserving' prompted the leader to clarify:

> If we ask 'why do you want to go back', and they say 'now there's no reason', we can't help then… We don't assess whether the claims are true or false. We say what evidence would be required to substantiate a claim.

Caseworkers did not often voice concerns that clients were lying (it is difficult to build an internally consistent fiction about one's own life) but rather – as with the above examples – that either they were omitting potentially stigmatized information or did not meet criteria for protection, regardless of how sympathetic their cases might be. For those clients with little grounds for making a successful claim, we were advised to 'manage expectations' – to help them see that returning home might be the better option, even if it was not clients' preferred options. Merely 'wanting to stay' – sometimes after years of being in the UK, often without legal status – was not grounds for a claim, even if it was sympathetic.

For such asylum seekers, too, fresh digital data was often difficult to produce. Many were not in active contact with friends and family in their home countries. They did not have access to mobile phones or social media accounts that they actively used in their home countries.

Altogether, the focus on how to find evidence to substantiate a claim allowed the group to maintain focus. Central to this was a performative sense of belief in interactions with and discussions about clients, as well as a tool for managing positive and sometimes negative feelings associated with the process. Through this, 'gaps' in information were considered a sign of missing details, rather than dishonesty on the part of clients.

UKBA evaluations: a 'culture of disbelief'

In contrast to the implicit *belief* granted by Evidence Team caseworkers, different levels of the UK asylum system have been described with variations on the term 'culture of disbelief' (Souter 2011, Madziva and Loundes 2018, Anderson et al. 2014). Evidence from academics and journalists who have studied the UKBA, as well as the results of claims, suggest an evaluative process that sometimes capriciously evaluates applications. These assessments demonstrate how agentive self-presentation, a central element of informationally-focused views of privacy, relies on the assumption that information will be received credibly or in good faith. It further suggests that assessors do not seek information about individual applicants of the sort that careful online privacy and security practices might protect.

The UKBA 2015 guidelines suggest that it employs a standard of “reasonable degree of likelihood”, and that claims are evaluated with a sensitivity to lack of evidence and erring on the side of caution (Section 5.2, p. 11 – 12):

> The level of proof needed to establish the material facts is a relatively low one – a reasonable degree of likelihood – and must be borne in mind throughout the process. It is low because of what is potentially at stake – the individual’s life or liberty - and because asylum seekers are unlikely to be able to compile and carry dossiers of evidence out of the country of persecution.
>
> ‘Reasonable degree of likelihood’ is a long way below the criminal standard of ‘beyond reasonable doubt’, and it is less than the civil standard of ‘the balance of probabilities’ (i.e. ‘more likely than not’)… A caseworker does not need to be ‘certain’, ‘convinced’, or even ‘satisfied’ of the truth of the account – that sets too high a standard of proof. It is enough that it can be ‘accepted’.

Research by academics, activists and journalists on the system’s results, however, suggests standards of believability are often applied much more strictly than the official guide suggests. Robinson (1999) is the earliest citation I found to use the term ‘culture of disbelief’ in relation to the asylum system in a paper titled “cultures of ignorance, disbelief and denial”. His words there specifically referred to the Welsh Refugee Council “trying to plan and operate within an informational vacuum and a UK-wide 'culture of ignorance'” by denying the extent of challenges faced in addressing asylum seekers by deliberating keeping limited statistics and other information (p.78). Other variations on the term recur throughout the literature. Souter (2011) prefers the term “denial” rather than ‘disbelief’ on the grounds that ‘denial’ allows that refugees might be refused in spite of assessors’ belief in them (p.56). A sense of ‘denial’ is also described by Anderson et al. (2014) in reference to claims at asylum hearings that not enough information exists to render positive judgements. In these cases, claims of un-credible evidence or a lack of information are used to deny. As Thomas 2006 describes, “As the rules state, if the decision-maker ‘concludes for these or any other reasons that an asylum applicant’s account is not credible, the claim will be refused’,“ citing Immigration Rules (1994 HC 395), rule 341 (p. 92). A news report described quotas and leaderboards for rejections among case assessors – practices which the UKBA had initially denied happened (Lyons and Brewer 2018) and which would suggest that an imperative to reject cases can outweigh earnest assessments on their individual merits.

Jubany (2011) provides the most extensive ethnographic account – drawn from six months' participant observation and 80 interviews – of training courses for UKBA agents tasked with assessing claims. In her telling, assessors skeptically evaluate the believability of claims submitted to them, based off their assumptions and understanding of what's 'plausible' and ideas about how certain cultures 'behave'. They are – as a section heading describes – "trained to disbelieve" (p.81).The officers do not seek information about individual applicants.

Assessors may draw on Country of Origin Information (COI) or "Country Policy and Information Notes", information produced for the UKBA and available online at gov.uk. It describes basic demographic facts about a country and events therein relevant to asylum claims. Within the Evidence Team, such information was routinely described as being outdated. Pettitt (2009) similarly described the information's frequent inaccuracy, as well as a high level of variability among caseworkers in decision-making rationales regarding it. "Initial decision makers regularly make use of speculative argument, without reference to COI, to dismiss aspects of a claimant's account and credibility or the claim in its entirety," he wrote (p.7-8).

These discrepancies may pose problems for evidencing. Madziva and Loundes (2018) found that COI information regarding religious persecution in Pakistan differed dramatically from the ground situation that asylum seekers reported. This posted a problem for evidencing, as the files suggested that persecution was tied to one's public actions, whereas the women in the study reported that "Christians, regardless of their religious profile, face persecution in a country where there is limited state protection" (p.85-86). In the authors' research, the UKBA thus both requires evidence that applicants have practiced their faith in their home countries and faced persecution for it, while underestimating or disbelieving accounts of persecution for practicing that faith.

Assessors' cultural and personal expectations of what one might do, see, and reveal in a given situation figure heavily into their decisions. As described by Thomas (2006):

> Perhaps the most intractable issue in the assessment of credibility arises from the decision-makers' own presence of self, the values

> which they inevitably bring to the task of deciding whether the claimant's story is credible. Asylum claimant populations are often highly diverse – the UK, for instance, receives asylum claims from 146 different nationalities (p.84)

Thomas (2006) defines "three principal categories" for denial on grounds of credibility: "internal inconsistencies in the claimant's story"; "external inconsistencies" between recorded information and claimant's accounts; and "assessment of the plausibility or apparent reasonableness or truthfulness of their claim" (p.81).

In my familiarity with decision results, assessors tended to dispute either applicants' personal credibility on these logics, or argued that the events described did not prohibit the possibility of return. Reasons for apparent "internal inconsistences" have been discussed throughout the above. "External inconsistencies" were constrained by available information, such as outdated Country of Origin information. In one example recounted to me by an Evidence Team caseworker, the existence of an applicant's village was disputed because it was not on a low-resolution map which the decision referenced. As further described, "reasonableness" is subject to assessors' subjectivities.

Assessments that argued for the possibility of return would often suggest that applicants could relocate to other parts of their home country. Claims made on medical grounds were similarly liable to the rejoinder that applicants could seek care in their home countries, without regard for its quality or hardships of travel in locations where hospitals might be distant. Assessors would further weigh applicants' apparent competencies against their need for protection, as in words – quoted by an asylum applicant online – that I had read near-verbatim in other decisions:

> You have already demonstrated considerable personal fortitude in relocating to the UK and attempting to establish a life here and you have offered no explanation why you could not demonstrate the same resolve to reestablish your life in [your home country]. (CEMB 2019)

This altogether further fits with many asylum seekers' expressed views that decisions are not connected to the information they submit or their compliance with the system, and designed to frustrate them into leaving (Griffiths 2013, p.277). In short, as described by Griffiths:

> The British asylum and detention system portrays itself as consistent and impartial, with UKBA representatives presenting the system to me as fair and effective. Whilst non-UKBA experts in the field tend to acknowledge the inconsistency and irrationality, the most a UKBA representative conceded to me was that chance played a role in immigration decisions, with outcomes depending upon the individual UKBA caseworker, and that 'caseworkers can be a bit of a lottery'. (p.279)

Altogether, journalists, asylum applicants, and academics paint a consistent picture that assessors make decisions based on their own assumptions about how applicants would behave, tied to what evidence they have readily available. As described in previous sections, they evaluate information from interviews, their translations, and other files that have possibilities for error. Their assessments are not grounded in knowledge of particular on-the-ground situations or cultural factors. Moreover, they appear to be under significant structural and direct impetus to deny applicants. Following UKBA rules or submitting to its claimed or practical 'norms' around information flows is thus difficult, as is self-presenting to their expectations even when applicants have legitimate need of protection. Information cannot have an impact if it is ruled not to be credible, and it may be ruled not credible if there are systematic imperatives to do so.

IV. Conclusion

Asylum promises to protect individual rights to expression by providing safe refuge to those whose lives are threatened for their identities or views. At the same time, the asylum system's existence serves to carefully manage and restrict the civic participation and economic security of applicants – their capacities to build 'private life'. While refugees still communicate with distant family and friends, material restrictions effect difficulties in establish local life. Without civic rights, being 'let alone' can feel less a beneficial right than a means of neglect in the hopes one will leave.

Discussions of privacy generally emphasize the threats information can pose. In the asylum application process, the scarcity of information is used to support 'cultures of doubt' and 'denial' that deny the credibility of asylum applicants' stories. For those caught in the system, with limited evidence and denied credibility, self-presentations and information do not easily overcome the system's impulses to deny them. Organizations that seek to help rejected asylum seekers procure data for use in fresh claims grant a performative credibility to clients to elicit (and encourage thoughts around) gathering evidence, while keeping in mind the UKBA standard is what the evidence will be judged against. The role of ‘confidentiality’ in managing data in organizations such as these will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 7: Confidentiality in a refugee service organization

I. Introduction

This chapter deals with how organizational volunteers use refugees' and asylum applicants' personal information in their interactions and work, drawing from ethnographic research at the Center. The Center is situated in an ecosystem of organizations and volunteers (described in the Methodology Chapter) that assist refugees and asylum seekers, especially when they are in the 'civic limbo' described in Chapter Six.

The Center's 'General Guidance' is a drop-in service that connects refugees to other services and organizations. This is a key medium of interaction with the asylum system, often deciphering Home Office letters and connecting them to other services internal and external to the Center itself. In this environment, information and the outcomes of its transmission are tightly managed. As with the Evidence Team, credibility in interpersonal communication is maintained, but – as with the UKBA – refugees' self-expression is still limited to steer conversations toward pre-determined outcomes. These small-scale interactions help within a limited scope.

The interactions at the Center and the information produced help conceptualize differences between *privacy* and *confidentiality*. The personal data collected at the Center is governed by an ethos of confidentiality, which prohibits volunteers from sharing information outside the organizational setting. In confidentiality, sensitive data flows are clearly governed by policy and law – which is in part made possible because the situations to which they apply are distinct from everyday, ongoing social interactions. While shared norms are often held to support self-expression and privacy, defined rules in these interactions are designed to narrow the range of outcomes. In these situations confidentiality is high yet privacy is relatively low in that sense that refugees share highly personal information, which they have limited options to shape. This system of privacy and confidentiality serves to support the status quo, preventing stigmatized information from entering refugees' social interactions while also working within the existing UK benefits and asylum systems.

II. Information and General Guidance

This section ethnographically describes the work of the Center's General Guidance, with attention to the often painstaking process of how volunteers work with clients to learn what issues they are having and how others might address them. It establishes the boundaries of advisors in the General Guidance division's goal-oriented, connective work, and demonstrates how the clarity in personal boundaries and data flows supports the organization's functioning by limiting the context and potential outcomes of consultations. The immediate interaction at the Center exist within the context of the asylum application process discussed in Chapter Six, though application concerns are not often directly discussed between clients and volunteers. As it pertains to privacy, information is 'protected' while attempts at self-expression that challenge the parameters of the encounter are met with resistance. As it pertains to privacy, this describes the limits of personal expression allowed in sensitive, high-confidentiality situations.

Organization layout

The Center is located in a converted elementary school in a working class neighborhood. It provides several services in-house, including English classes, legal advice, and immediate material assistance. One of its key services – and the first point of contact for clients 'dropping in' without otherwise specified appointments – is 'General Guidance', located in the old gymnasium, subdivided by office cubicle walls. In the middle are tables where the pool of professional translators sit – some of whom are refugees themselves – and go to the individual conversations where they are requested. On the above floors and in other buildings in the complex are administrative offices. Nearby is a newer gym building used for community events.

I estimated around 40 clients were seen per day. In the 'café' – the school's old cafeteria - clients wait for their numbers to be called. It has a small play area for small children in the corner, wi-fi, a bookshelf I never saw being perused, and a TV turned to news or daytime television. The serving counter has a line of heaters of hot water for tea and instant coffee, biscuits, milk and sugar – and free cafeteria lunches for clients and volunteers. Around 9:00 in the morning, the café would start to fill, volunteers and employees would begin work, starting with triage to sort the order in which General Guidance would see clients. They would also take notes for the General Guidance volunteers, so they would be able to pull up a client's file (discussed later) before the meeting. People waiting sometimes chatted with friends, but were often otherwise quiet or using their phones. The atmosphere is intermittently friendly and subdued. The same room was also used for more lively social events at other times. Over the early afternoon, between 13:00 and 15:00, the café would empty.

The work of General Guidance

'General Guidance' connects clients – refugees and asylum seekers – to other organizational services and service organizations, including solicitors and organizations that provide different forms of material assistance such as housing and second-hand household items. It is a key local port of call for asylum applicants, many of whom have limited English skills and seek help deciphering letters from the UK Border Association (UKBA) and related agencies. These letters often inform seekers of a changes in benefits, asylum decisions, or urgent appointment times, all written in a bureaucratic English that may be difficult to understand, especially to persons with a limited understanding of English. In summary, clients usually arrive at General Guidance appointments for a variety of obscure reasons involving the confusing asylum bureaucracy (discussed further in Chapter Six). Given the modesty of official support they receive, many asylum seekers are also beneficiaries of some forms of material support from charities.

Generalized examples of the diversity of issues that came up include: difficulties with housemates (the province of the housing provider); seeking help with filling out forms; seeking help with family reunification; and difficulties pertaining to a name that has been spelled differently on the UKBA by different documents.

While there is a labelling system within the Center's database (discussed in the following section), 'easily definable' cases were in the minority of reasons clients came to the Center. Thus, the vast majority of cases wound up classified under the heading "other" and – in any sense, have little bearing on the work of General Guidance. Nonetheless, the interactions at General Guidance are heavily based on classification. Clients are in particular stages of the asylum process, have particular legal statuses, and fit particular demographics that make them eligible or ineligible for different services. In terms of effect, some asylum seekers receive help and benefits from the UK government or local charities, while others are classified such that they do not wind up meeting any requirements. Yet, while volunteers may take empathetic stances with clients, they make few evaluative choices of their own that determine access to services, nor do clients' selective withholding or presentation of information necessarily effect desired results or 'impressions'.

Darling (2011) discusses the power dynamics of providers ‘giving’ one-way help at a drop-in centre (coincidentally, also in Nottingham), and the limits of care for both providers and recipients, “a site of complex relations through which ideas of care were performed and momentary feelings of welcome articulated” (p.415) through which asylum seekers received emotional support while also allowing providers to see themselves as compassionate citizens. I follow on these ideas in the following sections, while elaborating on the relationship between information and response in the prearranged setting.

Most volunteers are white British, middle-class retirees who have time and patience but not necessarily any specialized knowledge related to asylum. Other volunteers are from Africa and Eastern Europe. Translators – who have the language skills necessary for the work – are often young and sometimes refugees themselves, or from countries from which other asylum applicants come. The supervisors are professionals, from diverse international backgrounds in Europe and Africa. While the volunteers with whom I spoke stated that they found the work fulfilling, it is also worth noting that some employees and volunteers grew frustrated with the limits and format of what the Center provided and opted to work or volunteer with other local refugee service organizations. As discussed in more detail in the Methodology chapter, I was first positioned ‘job shadowing’ as a trainee volunteer might, and later as an ‘independent researcher’ at a table of my own.

After taking a client’s triage number, a volunteer would pull up and scan their record through the Center’s database. Many of the retiree volunteers were also not confident with computers in general, and were hunt-and-peck typists. They often remarked on my apparent, youthfully-attributed skill before I had even touched a keyboard. Throughout consultations, volunteers would frequently get up from their desks to leave clients, to consult with their supervisors on courses of action as new items of information came to light. Thus volunteers’ primary role was to elicit information, while consulting with a professional with specialized knowledge. Consultations were typically followed by a short discussion between myself and the volunteer as we assessed what had happened. Not much context is discussed in the sessions beyond the immediate topic at hand. Volunteers do not see how or if clients’ issues are eventually resolved.

Laws state that only solicitors can give legal advice and – in any sense – for both volunteers and refugees, these systems are complex, frequently changing and questionably understood. Thus, General Guidance is primarily charged with acquiring and interpreting information. At the time of my research, General Guidance had also ceased to help clients with the time-consuming tasks of filling out documents – though volunteers occasionally still did. As mentioned above, cases are both unique and routine: clients have highly specific bureaucratic issue to be sorted that are nonetheless generic in that they require sorting through some technicality. Sometimes this required phone calls, sometimes it required data entry – which usually lead to the volunteer being absorbed in the task, and silence that was occasionally interspersed by small talk to the volunteer's predisposition.

Consultations would often take around an hour as volunteers – taking on an empathetic role – would figure out what the clients' issues are and where to direct them. A volunteer might be good at using humor to diffuse situations and keeping the script moving. For example, one volunteer – when his client said she wanted to return to Saudi Arabia to be a teacher – joked that 'you can drive there now!' (a reference to recent law changes) – which he followed up with assurances that he could be more formal if she preferred.

General Guidance does not have the pressure of pretension of resolving the system itself, or that it will achieve goals fast. The limbo of a day at the Center is one of many waits in the overall limbo of the system. The graduate volunteer framed the time politically, as I spoke to him following two hours spent on the phone on behalf of a client. They had partially spent the time joking back and forth about the hold music:

> It's not about how fast you get through the clients. There's so much pressure in capitalism to do things fast. It's about drilling down into the issue and finding about what their needs are.

While the issues that come up in meetings are extremely specified and difficult to predict, the meetings are formal and ordered. Clients come with a particular issue, and volunteers attempt to find the appropriate classification to refer the client onward. While these tasks generally involved sensitive information, such as immigration statuses and medical issues, little sensitive or in-depth information is *sought* in these specific interactions. Given these parameters, volunteers generally adopt a friendly, empathetic persona to elicit information and keep the interaction moving.

Clients adopted friendly or sympathetic personas in the hopes of communicating relevant information, and ideally, getting their issues one step closer to resolution. While refugees often expressed positivity at the possibilities for help and resolution, at times they grew frustrated. I received a particularly witty quip with regard to the asylum system overall: "I can understand England, but I can't understand the English"." Another client, on being one being told bad news, let loose with frustration: "Everyone says what can I do for you, but no one is able to do anything for you. No one helps me."

While occasionally clients would attempt to press for more help in the General Guidance appointments, this did not lead to practical resolution. As mentioned, volunteers could not grant access to resources unto themselves. In breaking the bad news that no help could be given, volunteers could react on a spectrum between brutal honesty and false hope, the latter effectively outsourcing the bad news to someone else or the indeterminacy of time. One volunteer – ushering a client who had broken down after she delivered such news, said that "in England, we always say you can get a cup of tea", a small bit of encouragement and material comfort she could provide.

A manager expressed hope to me that the Center could "be the good guys" to their clients amid the Home Office's hostility. She identified issues in trust-building that effected both sides. The Center often felt that refugees were not providing all the details they could, sometimes on the advice of their friends who encouraged them to strategically 'game' the system. Clients further sometimes had mistaken impressions that the Center was directly a part of the government and the restrictive asylum regime.

There were, of course, many reasons why clients could seem unresponsive beyond dishonesty or misjudged self-presentation. These include the complexity of the asylum system and language barriers, both between clients and volunteers and the clients and the documents they received. These letters, brought to the Center, often requested various further bureaucratic submissions, presence at particular times and places, and sometimes simply stated they no longer would receive particular benefits. Missed compliances manifested in case files and subsequent letters, however, without other explanation.

How to regard gaps in information is difficult in for people trying to help. Kohli (2006), similarly, describes how social workers regard the 'silence' of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum, and how little the workers who he studied knew about their clients' everyday lives:

> In comparison with this lack of detail about the ordinary aspects of their past lives, social workers knew comparatively more about the extraordinary nature of events leading to the flight from home. About one in five of the young people's stories were recorded in great detail via copies of the statements that had been made to the UKBA in the

> asylum applications. Another fifth were sketched out. Social workers knew from another one-third of the young people that they had not witnessed traumatic events or been personally subject to torture. For the rest of the young people, the trigger events were unknown (p.715)

Applying theory from anthropology, Kohli frames these stories as lacking Geertz' 'thick description' (1973) of action in context. For Kohli's social workers, this thick context would be relevant to their work of helping clients; for General Guidance, such questions are largely outside the scope of the immediacy of the interaction. The limited 'performance' of both volunteer and client is challenging for both, even as it enables the connective work of General Guidance to function. It is assumed that asylum seekers will present information that could lead to them receiving benefits, rather than downplaying or withholding these factors. Yet, leadership also fears that clients may use their proscribed agency and choose the 'wrong' performance.

Overall, the Center's General Guidance connects refugees with services from other organizations. Volunteers in General Guidance do not have many interpretative options, but can choose how to respond to challenging situations. This functions through limiting self-presentation toward pre-defined goals.

III. Privacy and confidentiality

The above section describes the self-presentation that occurs in the course of General Guidance meetings, and how the parameters of General Guidance interactions are designed to organize it to predefined categorizations relevant to demographics and benefits. A key way in which the Center frames its governance of information produced and documented in these meetings is 'confidentiality' – roughly, a codified prohibition on sharing identifiable details from meetings outside their intended context. Confidentiality is common in organizations in the governance of such records. This section provides a theoretical contribution to how – in light of the interactions and records kept at the Center – *confidentiality* is able to clearly define data flows and management practices because of how the situations it governs are defined and limited from ordinary life. Privacy, by contrast, remains embedded in people's ongoing lives, existing within multiple contexts, and involving much greater ambiguities.

Center records

General Guidance keeps two main types of files related to its clients:

- Personal contact and demographic information including name, address, and nationality
- A case note entry for each visit describing the background, reason for visit, and action taken on behalf of the Center and what the client was advised to do

General Guidance volunteers would consult existing records before meeting with clients, and proceed to update them at the start of their meetings. Case note entries would stretch back to the client's first encounter with the Center, filled in after each meeting. Revising personal information replaces the old, however, so there are no kept records of past addresses or phone numbers. Email was also not typically asked about (on the belief that clients didn't have one), which was usually borne out when I prompted the question.

Privacy vs. confidentiality

Definitions of confidentiality cited in the academic articles tend to be 'text book'. For example: "Confidentiality may be taken as an exhortation to keep secret both written and verbal communications from clients. . . . It is expected that social workers will not divulge this information to others except in certain specified circumstances" (Shardlow 1995, pp. 66–7). The term is not – to my knowledge – associated with theorizing and conflict over definition as much as privacy is, even as articles (such as Clark 2006) debate the practicality and consistent practice of keeping sensitive information secret. Some articles (such as those cited here) use the terms 'privacy' and 'confidentiality' interchangeably. One volunteer similarly verbally reframed my study of "privacy" as "confidentiality" several times in one conversation.

The new volunteer documentation packet I was given emphasized the importance of "professional" and "personal boundaries" for defining the interaction, protecting the volunteer, and preserving "your purpose and mission". It defined "confidential information [as]… that which is regarded as 'personal' and not meant for public or general knowledge," including "any information…which may be traced back to the individual by identifying them or anyone else involved with them." It placed the boundary on revealing it as "outside those within [the Center] who need to know in order to resolve the client's issue."

Changes to the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation – announced in 2016, effective 25 May 2018 – while more a security than a confidentiality concern, were also a related topic of discussion during my NGO-based fieldwork. The regulation governed how businesses, NGOs and other organizations handled personal data, and imposed steep fines for violation. The law applied to data processed in the EU and pertaining to EU citizens, and thus would affect anyone with dealings with the EU. Organizations with which I worked were uncertain as to practicalities of implementation, and most had neither the size nor budget to consult a lawyer for compliance. The result was that – whatever internal changes happened – organizations sent emails asking individuals on mailing lists to re-affirm their consent. Larger websites added click-through pages explaining what data they collected and asking for consent, with varying levels of detail and possibilities to decline before continuing.

In her book *Secrets,* Sissela Bok devotes a chapter to confidentiality (p.116 – 135) as a professional code of conduct that enables patients and clients to talk freely with – for example – doctors and lawyers. Its content is sometimes, though not always, personal, sensitive, or 'private'. She writes:

> Confidentiality refers to the boundaries surrounding shared secrets and to the process of guarding those boundaries… personal secrets lie at its core…. Such secrecy is sometimes mistakenly confused with privacy, yet it can concern many matters in no way private, but that someone wishes to keep from the knowledge of third parties. (p.199)

In this sense, it also covers business and legal secrets, spousal privilege against required testimony in court, and religious traditions like the Catholic confessional. Bok discusses how confidentiality's boundaries are nonetheless sometimes permeable and superseded by other concerns. Vulnerable persons in medical care, for example, might have serious personal issues that are nonetheless discussed openly with family members, or a psychiatrist may commit a patient who is danger to himself or others. The hospital, likewise, remains a situation with high 'confidentiality' concerns regarding treatment within and records thereof, but within the space of which 'privacy' effectively does not exist with regard to personal space and bodily functions (Woogara 2005).

Confidentiality is therefore not perfectly or absolutely practiced, though it has several key features which make it relatively straightforward in ways privacy is not. Informational management strategies like ‘contextual integrity’ (2011) call for clarifying and managing information flows to preserve ‘privacy’. Confidentiality governs information flows, though demonstrates the clarifications and restrictions that must be placed on context in order for these rules to be clear, plausible, and relatively non-controversial. That extreme control of context differs significantly from most people’s ordinary social life.

Firstly, confidentiality is a defined code of conduct for limited, specified contexts. While it may be imperfectly practiced, confidentiality describes the parameters of the situation to which it applies and specifies that information gathered within should not be shared outside of it, except under certain, clarified circumstances. This differs from everyday life, in which a greater number of contextual claims or implicit social rules could pertain to any given social situation.

Secondly, the situations confidentiality governs tend to be relatively distinct from the everyday social life described in Chapters 4, 5, and 8. Refugees do not generally interact with General Guidance volunteers in everyday social situations who are not themselves refugees. In fact, official policy encourages the maintenance of boundaries. To the extent that volunteers and clients might know each other (as you might, for example, know your doctor socially if you live in a small town), the purpose of the visit is not directly connected to your social relations. Confidentiality helps to keep the sensitive appointment separate from social life. These protections in part exist because situations they govern are likely to necessitate the sharing of information between people of unequal power relations with respect to the topic at hand. Center volunteers are one part of a chain of resources to which they are a conduit for clients to access.

Thirdly, the ‘professional’ or ‘volunteer’ employs ‘self-presentation’ to guide these situations to a conclusion within limited, predetermined parameters, and may see the client’s ‘self-presentation’ as a hindrance to this goal. To General Guidance volunteers, clients are to be classified according to the system’s terms, not how they see themselves. Similarly, medical doctors less directly assist with clients’ hopes, fears, and senses of identity as much as they diagnose their symptoms according to the predetermined criteria of medical knowledge. This is not necessarily sinister; the ‘professional’ is sought by the client for his or her power or expertise, and access to benefits or a meaningful diagnosis requires the individual to be legibly classified according to existing bureaucratic terms or medical knowledge.

Confidentiality, then, exists to separate an act of information sharing, often pertaining to private information, from being unexpectedly or unfortunately revealed to a client's ordinary social relations. In order to function, it carefully defines context and the interpretation of self-presentation within that context. The context and content of interactions in ordinary social life, by nature, cannot be so cleanly defined.

As described in previous chapters, however, the legal parameters of refugee protection are not particularly well-suited to present day migration and – as described in Chapter Six – these differences, along with the asylum system's own gaps and inconsistencies, justify making asylum applicants wait and denying them benefits. In this sense, as well, clarifying information flows helps asylum seekers within the system, even as it does not – in and of itself – challenge the system.

IV. Conclusion

Organizations that connect refugees with benefits must elicit and carefully manage sensitive, personal data about their clients' lives. Codes of confidentiality define how this information is managed, and limit the circumstances under which it can be shared outside of the context in which it is gathered. This further delineates the responsibilities of individuals within the myriad NGOs and governmental organizations which support refugees and/or manage their presence. This helps to quarantine this information from potential negative impact in refugees' lives. The confidentiality that manage this differ from privacy as discussed in that they define and limit both context and content, and in doing so carefully proscribes self-presentation toward focused goals. With support in hand, however, refugees are able to pursue longer-term career goals, family development and personal actualization, as described in Chapter Eight.

Chapter Eight: Negotiating privacy in the ‘close life’

I. Introduction

This chapter discusses how refugees negotiate more widely-visible locally-minded identities on social media that are suitable for viewing in both their ‘close lives’ in Europe and maintaining continuities with relationships developed in their ‘far’ lives.

The chapter first discusses how, as refugees’ fears of threats become less immediate, they use social media to more actively pursue personal interests and social lives offline. Some participants find that having an identifiable name on social media has personal, professional and social utility. Following the ‘conservative’ norms discussed in Chapter Five, however, which aspects of themselves they display online remain selective. For Jamal, a critical theory PhD, social media afforded an opportunity to pursue personalized interests online while raising a family, and share creative photos of them online. For Firash, the translator, the Internet helped him explore changing religious beliefs he did not discuss via social media with his conservative family in his home country. Throughout this, participants continued using relatively private channels of communication like WhatsApp to maintain individuated relationships.

The chapter then discusses how refugees use social media to pursue local social lives. Benyamin, who left Iran after participating protests, initially found it challenging to understand how the relatively liberal public norms of Europe translated to crafting an online profile. Hakam, the engineer, became more open about building a Facebook profile he had initially expanded to pursue an interest in dancing. Throughout this, for the resettled Najjar family and others, social media remains a storehouse of information in which personal memories are shared in ephemeral threads and images and videos uploaded by strangers to sites like YouTube become socially-sharable records of places and practices no longer existing or accessible.

The civic foundation of refugee status –challenges around which were discussed in Chapters Six and Seven – helps refugees to establish what is described above: consistent places to live, pursue education and careers, and raise families. As refugees continue to live in the UK, they negotiate how they situate the label of refugee within their ongoing lives. It can become a part of their personal stories, a hard-won point of pride, or a stigmatized ascription. The three key benefits of privacy discussed in the literature review – self-actualization, selective social presentation, and civic life – are thus intertwined as refugees navigate changing senses of self and relationships.

II. Changing as individuals, on and offline

Refugees maintain the existing relationships described in Chapter Five while also negotiating and establishing their 'close lives' – their immediate offline social context in Europe. The close life brings relative physical safety, newfound offline expressive freedoms, and – with refugee status – rights to work and engage with mainstream benefits systems to materially support their homes and families. Refugees' fears of violence may become more abstract and distant, while their beliefs and preferences change – the former demonstrated by Emir's reflections while developing his arts career, and Firash's apostasy from Islam. Emir and others developed online public-facing social media accounts to help their professional and offline social lives, even as, like Firash, they largely still keep controversial material offline. For Jamal – a PhD graduate – the UK afforded the offline foundations to raise a family, which social media allowed him to pursue personalized interests.

Identity and self-expression

The relative offline safety of Europe allows refugees opportunities to express and identify themselves online without fear of immediate physical threats, and to materially support their lives. For refugees who have lived in Europe for extended periods of time, fear may recede along with the desire to maintain a more visible, identifiable identity online for personal, social, and career-related reasons. These refugees may increasingly use social media to pursue personal interests, while continuing to be qualified about how they share their opinions and developing senses of self with their long-standing relations.

When Tariq was released from jail in Syria in 2014, he felt what he described as an urge to be "really me" online. This partially meant using his real name on Facebook and his social media profiles. Previously, as discussed in Chapter Five, he had utilized multiple profiles and extensive security measures as an activist. While he doesn't consider himself a professional photographer, his credits with international news services are under his real name and possible to find via search engine. When prompted in our interview, he described his relative online visibility as something he felt compelled, to do to mark the emotional change that came with offline freedom – for him, release from literal imprisonment. The opportunity to claim his name also came with the physical safety of Europe. He is now studying at a university in Germany, and most of his family has left Syria – except his father, who remains in prison. He does not fear that his online activity have an immediate effect on any of their circumstances.

As Tariq developed his public profile, however, he remains active on messaging services. His WhatsApp profile picture – visible to his contacts – is further coded with messages. On the day in which we talked over the phone in November 2017, it was an image of a toddler pinching another child's cheeks. He intended it as a message to a girl who he liked, casting himself as the cheek-pincher and sending a message of happiness. He said he changed the image "almost daily"; I've since seen a variety of images surface there, including hearts and (what I assume is) his real face. Even as Tariq pursues an identifiable public identity, he utilizes the affordances of platforms to selectively express himself to closer audiences. These personal messages are hidden in plain sight.

Emir – the Iranian artist, whose fears were discussed in Chapter Five – similarly narrated an online and offline journey toward qualified visibility. During his early years in the UK, his privacy settings were tight. If you were not on his 'friend list' his profile 'photo' would show an abstract image from his travels. It took several years before he uploaded his first image of his face. For some time, he experimented with having two Facebook accounts: one for his friends in the UK, and another for his Iranian friends though he found it difficult to keep the accounts straight (including navigating the overlap between them) and to decide what to share with one group or another. He compromised with a time delay: "I try to not send pictures or anything about what I'm up to until its two or three weeks after," he said. He retains old friends who he went to school with, and whose contact he values: "The memories of friends, and the connection with friends, that was important to me and that still is."

Overall, he remains conflicted about establishing a public identity, which is partially required by his developing career. For him, using his relatively unique given name and a made-up family name was a compromise (even if one that's not well-communicated by his pseudonym in this dissertation):

> I was thinking, ok, you want to be [an artist], and because of that you might be famous. Who's a famous person? Is it a man, or is it a real family name? Then I was thinking, if I take another name, I don't feel it would be me. When people asked me what name I wanted to use for credit, I said to use my given name, but not my family name.

> That’s the fun part, though – my name is kind of rare. You don’t find many Iranian people with that name.

He now posts occasionally about new art he is producing, in Arabic and English. He can be found publicly, and has a singular professional identity, but has selectively used his ‘name’ in a way that maintains some separation from the dangers of his home country. When we spoke over WhatsApp, he further questioned the extent that his own actions effect if he can be found:

> It’s very difficult to hide an identity anymore. At the moment, I’m feeling I have to just go for it. I’m here. Nothing is going to happen. Being discrete doesn’t work. You cannot hide. You are already out there. After all these years, I feel safer. It’s like you forget. Now, after 10 years, you wouldn’t even recognize me. People around you are your friends**.** Sometimes you ignore what could happen. Even now if I post a picture, I feel – did I have to do it? Then I think, I’ve done it once and nothing happened, so I can do it again.

Emir was direct about how acute his fear had been. Yet after having lived in the UK for several years, he felt he had the emotional safety and physical security to advance a public persona. Even so – as he told me – I, as a researcher, was the first person he opened up to about the fears he had experienced online.

Other refugees contextualized their relative freedom on and offline with a sympathetic contrast toward friends and family back home. Amira, the PhD student in education, noted the possibilities for directly expressing opinions about the conflict came as luxury to international Syrians:

> Syrians who were abroad when [the revolution] happened were more blunt. It was very easy for them to say anything they want, against the government, they’re easily sharing pictures, blaming the government for it. And then you could also see on the other side, people posting pictures about the Syrian army, how they’re suffering.

Later, I saw Amira on the picket line at the University strike in February and March 2018 over academic pensions. While her career was not directly affected, she said it was important to get involved when others are standing up for their rights. While she did not want to overtly, publicly wade into the morass of Syrian politics online, she spoke out offline about issues affecting her new locality.

Rami – the Kurdish draftee – linked the offline freedoms of “privacy” to informational ones in the UK:

> Here, they care about your privacy. They don't share your information without your permission. But in Syria – they will share my information to all departments of the government. They will share it without your consent to everyone. Independence in your choice. The freedom to talk or not.

For Rami, offline freedom allowed him the discretion to "talk or not". In line with the 'conservatism' discussed in Chapter Five, this did not necessarily come with a desire *to* express oneself, but the sense of presentational choice that offline security allowed.

Safety wasn't the only material circumstance that changed for participants that enabled them to build 'private' lives. Refugee status granted Rami and Amira the capacity to pursue advanced studies. For Kareem, a young Sudanese man, it meant demanding employment: 52 hours a week at an international buffet during the busy holiday times. He was nonetheless positive, when we spoke in casual English practice at the Center. He can save money and hopes to start a family. Nabil – who arrived as part of the Syrian Resettlement Programme, discussed in Chapter Four – held hope that learning English would help him to find work. He held even more hope that his young children, who already spoke with near fluency, would have a relatively easy time building their own careers in Britain when the time came. Luizia – from Chad, discussed in Chapter Five – used social media to help stock and decorate her new home after she got refugee status. In late summer 2018, sometime after our first interview, she proudly showed me her new apartment decorated with second-hand dorm furnishings bought through Facebook marketplace.

Jamal – a PhD in critical theory, from Homs, Syria – used social media to pursue personal interests in photography and motorcycles while raising a family, which a variety of legal statuses in the UK had allowed him to do. In 2010, Jamal left Syria to study for his master's degree in the UK on a student visa, with the aim of becoming an academic. We were both born the same year. Just as I was arriving in London to start my masters' – discussed in the Methodology chapter – he was finishing his as he watched a revolution escalate in his homeland.

In the early days of the conflict, he looked to Facebook as a news source – as did many refugees, discussed in Chapter Five. When his family lost connection, he'd worry about them. If a Facebook group wasn't active for some time, it could mean the area to which it referred was being bombed. This abruptly changed a year into the conflict. Due to the stress, he decided he didn’t watch anything about Syria, and stopped looking to social media for news for a period. As with other refugees discussed, he used Facebook as a medium to acquire information. He also not only selectively expressed himself through it, but selectively engaged with it in connection with his own emotional response.

Still a student, in fall 2015, he returned to Syria – briefly – to get married, a visit which his later refugee status would have precluded. The stress of what was happening to his homeland – and complexities regarding his visa status – came along with the challenges of writing up his dissertation. He also became a father. Near the end of submitting his corrections, he transitioned to refugee status. It was approved two days after his interview – the quickest he knew for anyone. He had, over several years, earned a doctorate, started a family, and become a refugee. He is currently looking for an academic position, in what he knows is a challenging market as he teaches part time at an Arabic school. He loves to teach, and considers it the only career he ever really wanted to pursue.

At the same time that the security of his offline circumstances enabled him to build a family and pursue a career, online and offline, he developed an interest in motorcycles. He would seek old bikes online and post pictures as he repaired them, telling the stories on Facebook groups. When one was stolen, he used Facebook to help track it down. This further dovetailed with a developing interest in photography, and he shared pictures of outdoor walks and his family on Instagram and through Facebook. He did not seek a larger audience, but saw the posting in part as a way to pursue his own interests while keeping up with his distant family.

Negotiating apostasy on and offline

In Europe, religion is largely a personal or ‘private’ choice the individual may make for him and herself, although the appropriate influence of religion on the public sphere has been debated throughout modernity (Bejan 2017, Roper 2012). In some Islamic refugees’ home countries, however, leaving Islam is officially punishable by death and could result in the harassment of refugees’ family members. Even if refugees are ‘safely’ in Europe – or from countries without legal penalties – discussing changes of religious faith can further strain relations with more devout family and friends. Apostasy is thus a highly personal matter of belief with notable public, social and security implications.

With this in mind, practices and laws differ from place to place, and it is important to not play into stereotypes about a civilization clash between an Enlightenment-friendly West and a hostile East. In Europe, as Chapters Six and Seven have described, self-expressive values are tightly managed within an asylum system ostensibly designed to protect them. Many Syrian respondents, in particular, painted a picture of heretofore friendly co-existence in their homelands among different Islamic groups, Christians, and Jews. Amira discussed an ambiguous relationship toward religion in her own household:

> Syrian people, recognize not having the guilt of leaving religion. We never had it, so we don't have it. But others believed, they feel guilty. They cannot drink in front of their families. It's not easy to introduce their families. I never had a problem with families in front. The only thing I wouldn't tell my dad to his face is that I'm not sure that God exists. Not following religion? He doesn't care. Not believing in God is where he might draw the line. Certain honesties don't benefit anyone.

Amira's quote expresses the gap between personal belief and public expression. To express doubts about God's existence out loud to her Damascene academic family would provoke needless conflict, however otherwise 'open' she considers her views. As per Taussig's 'public secret' (1999), discussed in the literature review, there is no hard way to know what others know – but discussing taboo topics openly (including online) would create a need to address them which could otherwise be avoided. In this way, apostate refugees differed sharply from the ex-Christian Americans with whom I conducted previous ethnographic research (Voigts 2012), who routinely posted pro-atheist, 'reason', and anti-Christian content through Facebook and – while they did not face physical violence – often had experienced considerable upheaval in their social circles prompted by expressing their changes in belief.

It was through online atheism, however, that Firash – the translator whose long journey from Iran to Europe is discussed in Chapter Four – became a Christian. This factored into his asylum claim. Firash attributes his doubts to discovering evolution through nature documentaries. Iranian government propaganda, he came to believe, had misled him about both what atheism and nature were – as later, he would came to believe it had with Christianity. From there, he sought out literature about atheism. At the time he identified as an atheist, and while he was an asylum seeker, he was given a Farsi-language Bible. He first read it because he missed the language, and so as not to disappoint his friend. He described his faith in Islam as "blind", though he found in the Bible (and its history and proverbs) something to believe in and practical value in "how to live a good life". Love your enemy is "better than revenge," he said. "Practicing it has made my life better."

Yet it also is a factor in his family relations. His brother doesn't talk to him, stating that he thinks the conversion disrespects their father, who was a mullah. His family doesn't understand his conversion 'was a choice', he says. They think "I went to Europe and they paid me to become a Christian, or my wife converted me, but it was the other way around."

Firsah described his change of belief in personal terms, as he readily discussed them with me. However he did not incorporate them into his online persona – where his beliefs are already a flashpoint with his Muslim family. Nonetheless, many – he suspects – *know* more than they discuss. Thus, the relative freedoms of European life regarding belief – and distance from home countries – allow refugees to more easily explore and alter features of identity like their religious beliefs and identification. At the same time, keeping such changes offline allows these to remain non-controversial with distant family members.

Summary

Altogether, the civic status of refugee enabled participants to feel safe in their 'close' lives, and pursue the material grounds to private life via work and family life. The offline safety of Europe, along with its professional requirements, enabled and encouraged them to them to increase their indefinable visibility online. They did so with less fear of long-term negative consequences as they still exercised selective expressive discretion about their offline actions and personal changes in belief. Altogether, Facebook remained most often used as a means to acquire resources and information – including to pursue personal interests – while navigating the challenges of local life. These online actions happen at the intersection of personal changes and social life, the latter of which the following section explores with more detailed attention.

III. Socializing with social media: close and far lives

As described above, refugees use social media for self-exploration and establishing a local social life, while still making often-conservative choices about what to share with family and friends back home. This section further describes how refugees use social media to relate and connect both 'close' and ‘far’ lives. The ephemeral, the lost, and the seemingly all-accessible exist on social media. Personal photos from the past become a part of ongoing message threads, and – as demonstrated through an evening at the Najjar family’s home – mass-distributed media becomes a tool of socializing and a means to recall and share the far life in and for the close one.

Personal and cultural memories in social life

Digital technologies afford the chance to preserve and share memories of significant events. As discussed, whether to individuals’ benefit or detriment, social media connects the past and an imagined future. Through these channels, significant memories marked for preservation are interspersed with everyday conversational ephemera in WhatsApp message chains. Other material for wide audiences – as in YouTube videos – may become the main records of everyday life or once well-known places or event.

Sometimes, significant memories are shared online amid ephemera. As Firash – the Iranian translator –showed me his phone, his brother living in Iran sent him some photos he had requested that showed him as a child, and one of his dad and his dad’s colleague. They were uploaded, interspersed between the ephemeral chats where he is trying to arrange for his mom to visit – an ongoing process that ideally will lead to a significant event. He hasn’t seen her in person since he left Iran in 2001; they communicate with voice messages, as she is not literate while he audio calls his sisters – who live near her – weekly. WhatsApp – as a versitale medium – enables these diverse written and audio communicaitons.

The overall mixture of different media was demonstrated by my visit with the Najjar family, three generations of whom arrived as part of the Syrian Resettlement Programme discussed in Chapter Four. The father, Wasim, was keen that his teenage son, Yamen, have some English practice as he submitted college applications, which in part occasioned my visit. In the household, ‘old’ media – the television – served as a background while they use social media to contact family members, and online videos to show their ‘far’ lives to the researcher.

The dinner followed common practices common with Islamic families and families from the Levant and Gulf (see Abokhodair et al. 2016) as Qamar – Wasim’s wife, who had prepared the food – retired to the sitting room with Wasim’s elderly mother to watch television and make long-distance contacts on her phone while I ate with Wasim and Yamen. After dinner, we joined the women in the living room, as both parents channel surfed among news channels. Yamen, who along with Qamar, had conversational English skills – was enthusiastic to talk with the guest – particularly about media, pop culture, music, and the anime TV show *Detective Conan*, which he watched with Arabic subtitles.

During my visit, Sunday was a time for catching up with distant family. Throughout this evening, Qamar received phone calls from her older sons (who had their own families, and left Syria at different times) and distant relatives throughout Europe, as she said she did weekly. O'Hara et al (2014) described similar behavior as 'everyday dwelling', where social media enables casual and active co-presence across distance. At the same time, the evening was suffused with a backdrop of global mass media, as a social topic of conversation with Qamar.

Being a guest also occasioned bringing forth more significant memories, as one might pull out a family album, which came via digital media through digital media, for conversation and illustrative purposes. The Najjar's showed me a family wedding video from years prior, uploaded by a relative, accessible for family members who knew the link. They eagerly identified the people within the video, with mention of the diverse places around the world where they now lived. They also showed me a video with drone footage of the ruins of Palmyra, as they had appeared not many years ago, as Wasim told me about his own father taking the family to visit the ancient city when he was a child. No word passed among us that ISIL had since finished off many of the place's significant features in 2017. They had lasted 5,000 years.

That evening wedding videos held personal significance, and were used to explain relationships, connected with links that rendered them most accessible to the people depicted in them. More general videos made by strangers could illustrate famous places that connected to innumerable individuals' personal memories. The digital 'cloud' connected individual devices to all this content, even as the world that produced them had changed significantly.

Such personal memories, too, can become part of the general collective – as when Jamal dug up videos on YouTube to illustrate the specific local wedding traditions in his hometown of Homs. One evening, over a beverage, he eagerly turned to YouTube to provide examples of chants and sword dancing practiced in his hometown – uploaded by a person he did not know but tagged so as to be accessible. In these cases, the refugees with whom I spoke were speaking fondly of their homelands and wanted to show those parts with me. I do not know the intentions of whoever uploaded the videos –

what personal memories they held, or if they were meant to be private – but for Jamal, they could show me something of an event, a practice, that he could not show me in person.

I recalled Benyamin – whose experiences are discussed below – said to me, ‘You should visit Iran – just not now.’

Nabil – who was also resettled – said “I love my country”, then paused, and laughed.

Malik – the engineer, trapped in application limbo, said many times we spoke that he hopes someday to host me in his home in Syria. It was perhaps somewhere between hospitality, a pleasantry, and a wish. Indeed, I was a guest in the home he made in asylum seeker housing during our talks.

He knew, of course, that his physical home no longer existed. The rockets had been destroying the Syrian suburbs where he lived. He had also shown me videos, found online. He had pointed out his home on Google Maps. He was in touch with family who still lived in the area, and he knew which buildings still stood and which were rubble. He knew where to find videos of dead people pulled from rubble, and who among those on media reports lived and who had since died. The places and people who he knew had become news, and knew who to personally message to find out if news reports were true. On the Internet, he knew how to find extensive information on how his home was being destroyed, as he waited for clearance from the UKBA to reunite with his family and work in the place that was for now his home.

Socializing, reluctantly

Hakam the engineer – whose journey to the UK is discussed in Chapter Four – uses social media, as he always has, less for long-distance connection than as a means to organize his local social life. “I used to be an introvert”, he told me. He was not comfortable with large gatherings, and had a small group of friends. Then he took salsa dancing to help overcome his shyness. Why salsa dancing, of all things? It was a way to get to know people, particularly of the opposite gender. He still does not believe in ‘profile building’ online, but considers the affordances of Facebook as a way to keep up-to-date in ongoing happenings:

> Normally I would have deleted somebody who isn’t interacting with me. But I don’t look at Facebook now the same way as I did. It’s not a way to build a profile. The only reason I did this was to follow up with salsa. It was the main way of knowing what my salsa peeps were up

> to…. Facebook acted as a medium to streamline many things at once. Facebook is not a means for socializing, it's a means for knowing what's going on. Without Facebook, you don't know where salsa is.

Hakam's entry into the world of salsa dancing was in part a personal pursuit – like Jamal's interest in motorcycles, discussed in Section II – conducted through 'interest based community' (Ito 2010). In contrast to kinship or 'friend' based networks, these communities are formed by people seeking out others to interact around a topic or action. For Jamal, the socializing that resulted mainly occurred online. For Hakam, online activity was a means to connect with people to meet offline. Salsa is organized through Messenger and a private Facebook group. He still doesn't develop his profile – the whole Facebook structure serves him as a contact list which he can use to send selective messages. He has further leveraged the norms of profile visibility as a social "buffer":

> I didn't care if I gave my profile to everyone. Facebook acted as a buffer. I would add people who were acquaintances and accept invites from friends I didn't know. But moving to text, and it feels more personal.

The first time I interviewed Hakam – in 2017, as he was finishing his PhD – he had suggested he might clear his contact list when he left Nottingham, as he had when he left his first job in Saudi Arabia. When we subsequently spoke in 2019, he had recently moved to accept a job at a start-up. Yet he had not purged his Facebook account. He viewed it – however invisible the record it left was to others – as a reflection of who he was, developing in the moment.

"I'm on an adventure," he said. "Every year I have different interests. I change and mature."

Depicting offline life online

How do you interpret newfound local freedoms, both for yourself and for friends and family back home? These were challenge Benyamin encountered (and sometimes, embarrassingly negotiated) in adapting to life as a single man in the UK. At the same time, he endeavors to share a balanced picture of offline life with his friends in the 'far' life. His story illustrates the challenges of interpreting the implications of offline activity for social media spaces.

As discussed in Chapter Four, Benyamin left Iran following protests in 2009. He was 28, and his application was processed relatively quickly. As he adjusted to local life, he wanted to meet women:

> Like a lot of guys in similar situations, I would go out every night. I would earn money from putting leaflets on the door, and go and spend it every night on drinks. I would see these familiar faces, and these girls I would hit on would say are you on Facebook, and they would say 'everyone's on Facebook!' It was 2010, and I had only been in the UK for three months. I asked these Iranian dudes, please can you make me one bloody Facebook.
>
> What kind of pictures do you put on it?
>
> They said, whatever.

They knew they were in a difficult culture, with more public freedoms regarding self-expression and sexuality. They also understood this was bound up in a new online culture. And so, after his friend complimented his physique, Benyamin told the man "why not? Take some pictures of my six pack."

As we spoke, at a scheduled interview at the Tuesday Night Welcome Event, he used his new Facebook account to surf back to his old profile from 2010. He had long-since forgotten the password for it, but scan still present to me, with a shrugging embarrassment, an image of his naturally muscular body, in white briefs, in front of a Christmas tree. He regrets at that time that he probably appeared naively strange to others when he first arrived.

This was one among many social media decisions he made, sometimes employing trial and error, while coming to understand its new role in his offline life. It was advantageous to get a Facebook account, so he got one. Still, he only recently got a smart phone, when he went to university. Today, online, people add him and he accepts them, "A range of so many people" from "different contexts." Today he is disinterested in posting on Facebook, though – as with Jamal – he uploads artistically-minded photos to Instagram. He has no idea how he gets followers – he doesn't hashtag anything – and doesn't seem to care one way or the other who views what he shares. He has had a girlfriend now for more than a year; he took a call from her as we spoke.

Benyamin also tries hard to give an accurate picture of the challenges and freedoms of life in the UK to his friends in Iran:

> Whenever I'm asked, I try to be as accurate as honest. It isn't that once you're out of Iran you're going to be doing well. A lot of people here are depressed, feeling unsuccessful, and regretting their life. But

> in Iran, they don’t know this. Their picture is heaven. They don’t know about Calais, people waiting for months and sleeping in the streets.

He aims for balance among friends who earnestly ask him what life is like. While he acknowledges the challenges he (and others) face in Europe, he also credits the rule of law with promoting the capacities of individual people to pursue their lives.

> I tell them the good things as well. Everything is working. Laws are above everything. Everything is in order, based on consideration with humanity for human rights. Even here, the lowest person, like a homeless person, has equal rights in front of the law. There are hungry people, depressed people, and super happy people. The only difference is the country is run by law, and the general culture is based massively on tolerance because so many people with different ideas live in a small place with maximum safety.

Benyamin – without my prompting – had broadly described a liberal ideal of private life: all being equal before the law, free to pursue happiness, with – as Bejun (2017) described in varied forms – tolerant public norms that enable people with differing ideas might live together safely. He was ‘let alone’ to pursue their own, personal interests, despite challenges. Yet, unlike the ideal ‘privacy’ of Warren and Brandeis (1890), these pursuits were enacted in public and grounded by values from the public sphere – refugees’ views on and connections to which are discussed in the following section.

The label of refugee in everyday life

Civic rights have been broadly discussed in this dissertation as the rights to legally live and work in Europe that come with refugee protection and other legal status. This sub-section describes how refugees reflected on the label and concept of refugee-ness in the context of the lives their current lives. As they settle into domestic life, some people are happy to play ‘the refugee’ while others grow frustrated with the label that is both sought and stigmatized.

At an eid celebration in September 2017, the Syrian Society had rented an ‘inflatable’ for the children to play in. Half-jokingly, Abdul Qadir, who originally came on a work visa, said to observe. The British-raised children were patiently queuing wait to wait their turn. The Syrian-raised ones would go straight into the inflatable. He was amused by the difference he observed, as if it had brought him back, for a bit, to an older life. I wondered about how the kids – and parents like him – would think in the future on the small differences in time, when and how they left Syria and arrived in the UK, that had made big differences in their experiences.

Firash, the translator, happily gave interviews to local media as a representative refugee in print and video. Once, local media stopped by the Center looking for someone to speak with, and he volunteered to speak so as to leave the clients undisturbed. His only regret from the conversation – he said – was one that spoke to how he understood UK life in relation to life elsewhere. He had described the UK as 'free and safe'. If he could do it again – he would qualify it as 'free-er and safe-er' – than other places he's been. He does not, however, consider this difference to be major. The story for which he reported also shot more footage of him with his family; the story was his, but they, too, contextualized it within his family life in the UK.

Early on in my research, in Malta, I attended an evening of films by and about refugees. One filmmaker spoke to me, and said one of the frustrating parts about being a refugee and a professional was that 'no one asks what you're doing now.' He was producing work he was proud of, and yet others wanted to hear the same stories about the past, not the present. When I first met Nabil, similarly, at a social event, a British interlocutor started off a conversation with him – "Its better here, right? No more bombs?" – To which Nabil replied, "yes, no more bombs," as if shrugging off a conversation that he had before and that he may not have wanted to have again.

For Jamal – and other Syrians – it was unavoidable in conversation, something that *as* the label – could be skipped over if needed, but that nonetheless implied a particular experience that evoked bland sympathy among people who previously would have had no interest in his country. "You know they're going to talk about the one thing you don't want to talk about," he said. He wanted people to ask more about his life, and had been disappointed when he first arrived in the UK study at the incuriosity of others. He wanted them to ask about other parts of his life, not just those that led to him becoming a refugee.

Even still, Jamal resisted how I related my own home and story to global movement as I conversed with him at my own home in Nottingham, where I rent a room, in July 2019. When I tried to explain my work, and spoke about how my family immigrated from Germany to America, 154 years ago (discussed in Chapter Three), he partially considered my framing as one of Western obsessions with heritage. Back in Syria, he said, people could move from abroad, and just become local – citing a Polish family he knew that had moved several generations back and were accepted and integrated as anyone else he knew. In Europe or America, everyone had to be *from somewhere.* Being *from somewhere* was valued by and ascribed to Jamal, in varying ways, in his present life. To me, being *from somewhere* could be an interesting story from the past that informed the present.

Amira, too, expressed frustration with how the 'label' of refugee shapes the conversation:

> Some of us are educated, some of us are religious, some of us are ugly. People often forget that we're all people. People want us to be victims or success stories. There's no place for normal. It's not healthy. The majority of people are normal. Not everyone is very successful, or very open minded, or culturally aware. We're not all engineers. Some people are just people. If you're of a different nationality, you're allowed to be normal.

She found looking for a job more challenging than she expected. She felt condescended to by landlords who were surprised she spoke English.

> When I went to rent a flat, it was really nice and modern, one of the best looking flats that I've lived in, in the UK. So we went there, and the estate agent was showing us around, he said it's really small. He said, where are you from? My husband doesn't like to say, but I don't care. I'm from Syria. And the estate agent says, 'ah it must be better.' And I said, 'in Syria we don't have these little rooms'. My husband was very angry. He said, "ah, we had it way better in Syria!"

Even while literally looking for a home – a place to live – Amria felt she had to constantly "justify" herself to everyone around her. Life in the UK had brought protection, but was not comparable to what she had lost, materially or socially. Her life trajectory was much more complicated than she had envisioned for herself. She could not simply be "normal" in public. Even in a cosmopolitan society, others assumptively linked her past to her present. She had limits on how, in the privacy of her mind, she was able to choose performances for the small talk of everyday life.

Summary

As refugees live longer in Europe, social media becomes more important to organizing their local social lives. Personal and broadly-distributed online content can be employed by refugees to portray their 'close' lives to people in their 'far' ones, and their 'far' lives to people in their 'close' ones. Limiting profile building continues to be an effective tool of selective self-presentation and configure social distances. While the record social media leaves is often of concern to privacy, that record – including images, videos, and contact lists – can also be called forth to enact ongoing relationships and recall content about people and places that are distant or lost. The overall capacity to do this – including offline safety and relatively tolerant norms to ‘private’ matters like religion or dating – is associated with the public sphere and its civic groundings, as discussed throughout this chapter. The following section briefly discusses how refugees negotiate the label of ‘refugee’ itself, which granted them qualified civic rights, is part of their personal stories, and yet sometimes defines them in ways they would like to move beyond.

IV. Conclusion

The final two examples above – from Jamal and Amira – respectively situate the experience of being (and being labeled) a refugee within the private space of the home, and privacy within the larger trajectory of history. Informational privacy promises, in part, to provide us agency to negotiate our pasts in the present. The meanings we make from that information are constructed and enacted situationally. For those who have power in relation to us, these beliefs and assumptions can extend to how we build the physical space of home – as Amira’s interaction with the realtor showed. The notion that we might have or deserve a level of fine-grained control in our everyday lives is itself historically and culturally situated, as Jamal (somewhat ironically) reminded me, and unequally experienced. Even still, the norms that grew from these values of privacy and private life, if shared, allow us to work to connect our presents to imagined futures.

Refugees are faced with the challenge of maintaining ongoing social relations with distant friends and family who still live under authoritarian governments (or are in other challenging situations), even as they see their own material security and opportunities for self-expression expand on and offline. They develop Facebook and other social media profiles with locally-relevant content that can still be viewed without challenging norms in their home countries. Even as they change internally, they qualify how they express themselves online amid the freedoms and challenges of building a life in the UK. The civic rights with which privacy is associated require a foundation of legal and social equality, which some refugees felt more than others as they used selective presentation to negotiate their pasts with their presents and imagined futures.

Chapter 9: Qualifying privacy

I. Original contributions

This dissertation applied digital anthropology methods to explore how refugees' experiences and practices connected with concerns related to digital privacy. The research questions asked:

> How do refugees and asylum seekers exercise 'privacy' as they use social media? Are information revelation and discretion effective tools for social self-presentation?
>
> Does privacy – as it has been held to do – support individuals' personal, social and civic agency? What preconditions would be necessary for privacy to function as it's been held to?
>
> How can the experiences and practices of refugees and asylum seekers inform an understanding of privacy?

This introduction to the final chapter situates the dissertation's findings within traditions of privacy research, existential anthropology, and digital anthropology. Section II returns to these questions to better synthesize the theoretical concerns explored in the literature review with the empirical research from the Chapters Four through Eight. Section III applies these insights – per the imperatives of anthropology to reconsider our 'own' cultures – to aim to simplify privacy terminology and better situate these discussions within concerns of Western modernity, including tensions between definition and flexibility, and the self as immutable or performed. The fourth section reflects on the process of writing the dissertation, including ethnographic surprises, limitations, and potential future directions for research.

Empirical research is, in itself, a contribution to academic discussions of privacy, which has been rooted in law and technologically-minded literatures. While concerned with the social consequences of information, they have often considered social interaction idealistically, without incorporating the complexities that ethnography and other social sciences address. In turn, these nuanced (if idealized) theoretical discussions of privacy and informed concerns around digital data contribute to digital anthropology and emerging multi-disciplinary literature on refugees' social media use. Thus an 'ethnography of privacy' is a contribution to both theories of privacy and digital anthropology.

When research began in 2015, millions of asylum seekers were arriving in Europe as part of what the press called “the refugee crisis”. Two years previously, Edward Snowden had revealed that five English-language speaking countries had been covertly gathering large amounts of digital data on their (and the world’s) citizens. The two stories of information and people’s movements – and governmental attempts to monitor and control both – coincided globally. Refugees were reported to be using smartphones, and have pronounced – sometimes life-or-death – stakes in defending their data from hostile actors and evidencing asylum claims. Yet the idealized ‘private citizen’ invoked in discussions of privacy often was – as it had historically been – a settled European head of household, with authority at home and status outside of it. Outside their home countries and unable to return, they still manage personal, digital data. While ‘data security’ was held to protect privacy, ‘border security’ was employed to restrict migrants’ movements. Their capacities to have a home, job, and live with their families are materially restricted by the asylum system. Thus the project aimed to document refugees’ privacy practices on their own terms, and to use their concerns and practices to better qualify privacy’s relationship to personal, social and civic benefits with which it is associated: especially the ability to rest and self-actualize away from public pressures; to present oneself differently, in different social situations; and to participate in society.

To justify this multi-disciplinary engagement between theory and empirical work – and between theory largely developed in America and Europe and multiple cultures – I employed existential anthropology. By looking to the contrasts between the ideals of privacy and its more contingent practice by people from different cultures, we can come to understand where oversights and unexpected connections may lie. Digital anthropology has concerned itself with situating different cultures’ digital norms and activities globally. This dissertation adopts those concerns and contributes another community of study to digital anthropology. It provides support for Costa (2018) and Miller et al. (2016)’s assertions that people from many cultures often employ the affordances of social media platforms to render a desired level of social visibility to different social relations. I further linked the Islamic concept of *khososyah* – which governs gendered modesty and separates the private home from the public – as a component of norms of public display present in many refugees’ online social media use.

Linking the material with theoretical concerns, the research finds that individuals’ information management practices are strategically employed socially, but – unto themselves – do not necessarily alleviate the material factors of ‘private life’ which European legal processes employ to restrict asylum seekers. These include capacities to reside, work, and be reunited with family members. The social credibility assumed by models of privacy – in which interlocutors performativity 'believe' others – is often employed harshly or suspended for asylum claimants. At the same time, even people whose lives are in danger move in part because they can envision not just limited short-term safety, but the chance to realize long-term plans for themselves, their families and their careers. The asylum system promises to help those whose expression, identity, and general capacity to build 'private life' are threatened in their home countries, but in practice can restrict these very things by denying credibility to refugees' social performances.

II. (Re-)considering privacy theory in light of empirical research with refugees

Introduction

Drawing especially from Westin's *Privacy and Freedom* (1967), the literature review identified three key benefits that privacy has been held to support: self-actualization, social self-presentation, and civic participation. The dissertation applied existential anthropology to address these connections through empirical research with refugees. Broadly, the research found that 'private life' – as associated with home, job, and family – is often materially restricted for asylum seekers, through law and other 'civic' or legal processes. Even though refugees are legally expected to move by the necessity of threats to their lives, even when these threats are present they often make decisions in part to realize these 'private' factors of their lives. Without good faith on the part of asylum assessors, refugees' choices to reveal or conceal information do not necessarily impact their asylum decisions. Within given constraints and cultural conservatisms of the public sphere, refugees use technological affordances to selectively self-present to established social relations. As they settle into life in Europe with legal security, they employ social media in more diverse ways that respect the cultural norms of their old and new homes.

Privacy and self-actualization

Warren and Brandies' influential 'right to be let alone' (1896) articulated a legal right to be free from intrusions in the domestic space, from the perspective of the head of household. Westin (1967) built on this to situate one's mental interiority in a social world. Within both visions – and the larger scope of modernity – the home is a space of refuge and self-actualization to develop oneself and one’s interests away from the pressures of the outside world. Refugees, however, often do not easily fit with this ‘head of the household’ archetype. They have left their homes, and – as asylum seekers – may have their rights to work and be reunited with family restricted. They are provided with modest housing that they share with strangers, and from which they will be removed if their claims fail. Many rejected asylum seekers, or those who have waited long periods of time for decisions – discussed in Chapter Six and Seven – find their offline lives restricted at these underlying material levels, even as privacy discussions often consider ‘self-actualization’ in more psychological terms. Yet, as discussed in Chapter Four, refugees move envisioning futures for themselves, their careers and families. This is true even for those whose lives are threatened and who easily meet legal grounds for protection.

Refugees pursue their interests in the context of Europe’s relatively relaxed social norms, especially concerning religion and gender. For example, Amsale, the Eritrean described in Chapter Five, found the online norms of UK life less judgmental than in Saudi Arabia, where she grew up, and was happy to have more opportunities – as a woman with refugee status, rather than a guest worker – to pursue her chosen career path. Social media allows engagement with personal pursuits, their selective incorporation into ongoing relationships, and the opportunity to connect with local people and pursue personal interests on and offline. As discussed in Chapter Eight, Jamal used social media to pursue an interest in photography while raising a family, and Benyamin used social media (sometimes haphazardly) as part of his dating life.

Impression management

Westin discussed privacy as a tool for managing interpersonal relations through ‘impression management’. By selectively presenting and withholding ‘information’, we create impressions and build identities relevant to particular social situations. This builds on Goffman’s ‘presentation of the self’ (1959) which used theatrical metaphors, with the ‘public’ roughly corresponding to the ‘front stage’ from which an individual may draw ‘props’ and ‘lines’ from the ‘backstage’ to create an impression. Digital anthropology has, in turn, been concerned with what the conspicuous mediation of the Internet might reveal about how communication and relationships are mediated more generally (Miller and Horst 2012) – such as through the selective self-presentation Goffman described. In the digital era, much of our information is stored digitally in infrastructures over which we have varying levels of control. I added a third agent to the metaphor: ‘ticket scalpers’, businesses and other interlopers who were not directly involved with the performance but who nonetheless collect data from it.

Social media can help to mediate refugees' relationships with their 'far lives' in ways they experience as positive or negative. For refugees, life in Europe brings relative protection from the dangers of home, along with new proscriptions on how they can live and work. At the same time, the limited window social media offers on the changing world they left behind may render visible the limits of their influence on these old lives. Emir, as described in Chapter Five, described himself as like a "ghost" watching Iran through social media but unable to affect it. Jamal – as described in Chapter Eight – consciously chose to limit his own social media intake, to regulate his stress by restricting how much of the Syrian conflict he could observe during the challenges of his academic studies. Others, such as Hakam the engineer (discussed in Chapters Four and Eight), enjoyed the opportunity to reinvent himself as he moved between countries. He considered the public realm of the Facebook wall an effective "buffer" that he could make use of by avoiding. Refugees thus use the affordances, norms, and mediated nature of social media to agentively calibrate their relationships to a world in which they – as we all – have limited influence.

This altogether supports other digital anthropologists' (Miller et al. 2016, UCL 2016b) assertions that social media 'increases' privacy by allowing people individuated control of self-presentation that they may lack offline – particularly in close living situations. This capacity to make agentive online decisions holds even as refugees' offline agency is complicated, as shown in Chapter Eight through the story of Malik, the middle-aged engineer living in asylum seeker housing with flatmates half his age. He can maintain relationships with his family, but cannot reunite with them or work to earn money beyond his modest asylum seeker allowance.

While participants were concerned about how the things they said and did online could affect them, most of this was framed in terms of the 'front' stage. Facebook remains governed by norms like a 'conservative' public space (as Miller et al. [2016] use the term), which I found is often agentively managed by withholding information more than sharing it. WhatsApp was used for small group and individuated conversation. While self-development (as described above) can be pursued on and offline, social media was more often used to maintain continuities in relationships amid other changes in life. The refugee experience is often considered as a journey from danger to safety, from a worse place to a better place. Yet people do not 'give up' their lives back home. They stay in touch with family and friends. They miss home, including good and bad things about it. Limiting the expression of opinions and life experiences offline can sometimes facilitate maintaining these relationships more than more open self-expression does.

This emphasis on conservatism and continuities is not necessarily exclusive to refugees or Islamic cultures. As I discussed my ideas with friends during the writing process, some said ‘I use social media like a refugee’ – that is, they posted minimal amounts to their Facebook feeds while still using the platform for other features, including individuated messaging and information gathering.

This does not absolve technology companies from their ‘backstage’ and ‘ticket scalping’-related practices. As I argued in the literature review, a supply-side focus on extensively regulating what information we ‘give up’ may not be technically feasible at the present moment. Yet these strategies do not necessarily hold socially, either – as the ‘audiences’ of these social actors have latitude to grant or deny them credibility. As described above, this can be performativity used by friends and family members to facilitate social continuities. Yet in the asylum system – discussed in Chapter Six – selective scrutiny can be applied to disbelieve asylum claims, and find doubts and inconsistencies in stories that more sympathetic interlocutors might find externally and internally consistent.

This is perhaps exacerbated by the assumption that in the digital era, all information is available, or could be eventually found. The UK Border Association expects data to come to it in the form of the asylum claims it assesses; it does not extensively seek information against which to judge claims. It furthermore largely communicates with asylum seekers through English-language, bureaucratic print. Many who are stalled in the system can produce neither digital nor analogue evidence. Further research could better seek to assess how digital data and meta-data might be more extensively incorporated into asylum claims on behalf of applicants, as well as what evidence has been declared credible in successful claims.

This further challenges visions of privacy rooted in information management. Claims to ‘context’ or ‘norms’ – such as such as Nissenbaum’s contextual integrity (2004, 2010, 2011) – often assume individuals widely share and understand these factors, whereas the asylum system provides a pronounced example of a situation in which analysts and applicants often *do not* share expectations. Within the bureaucracies of asylum application and support, discussed in Chapters Six and Seven, information is organized from ‘top down’ views in ways that significantly limit expressive outcomes of individuals toward the predetermined ends of the system. Clearly defined codes of information conduct – particularly confidentiality – work to isolate information shared from being unfortunately revealed elsewhere. Yet these systems can be governed by clear rules, directly articulated, in part because of how limited the interactions they govern are in scope and purpose. In social life, any number of factors, concerns, competing interests or codes of conduct may relate to any given situation. As discussed below, an underlying philosophy (or context) of greater support for human rights to live would better support the underlying credibility of privacy for refugees.

Civic life

Westin idenfied privacy's value for allowing individuals to participate in political process without fear of reprisal – for example, the privacy of the voting booth. Other writers discuss 'political' rights in a broader sense, as discussed in the literature review. Agamben (1998) pointed out that what today is commonly called 'life' (as in, the right to live) was to the Romans two different concepts, *bios* and *zoe,* respectively biological 'bare life' and 'political' or public life. Meeting the UNHCR definition of refugee requires threats to both *zoe* and *bios*, which in practice the asylum system also works to restrict and manage. Refugees thus become doubly abnormal with respect to public life: expected to be marginalized or threatened within their own culture but marked as not 'full' citizens.

Many refugees were born and have lived in countries with non-democratic governments. In Europe, their lack of 'civic status' or legal presence serves to manage their pursuits of 'private life': where they live, if they can work, how much they can spend and where, if they can be reunited with family members. The right to vote is one of many rights that is not necessarily afforded to non-citizens, and overcoming these restrictions is difficult through better information management – and, in fact, these restrictions are often enforced through the seemingly impersonal, calibrated information management practices of bureaucracy.

In terms of data management, citizenship further affects what data authorities may gather about individuals. The EU GDPR applies to all EU citizens and people who live within the EU, even if their data is processed by entities outside the Union (Article 3, Points 1 -3). In autumn 2019, Ismail Ajjawi – a Palestinian student admitted to Harvard, who was a refugee in Lebanon – was initially denied entry to the US due to his friends' social media postings when border guards searched his laptop and phone (Hartocollis 2019). The extent of this data gathering is not yet well-reported – it could involve anything from border guards unsystematically glancing at recent photos and social media use, the installation of covert software, downloading data or acquiring account access.

Miller (2008) associated – contrary to a certain popular image – material abundance with social abundance; that is, in Western societies, possessing objects often speaks to healthy social relations. While the asylum seekers who I met had left their homes (and possessions) behind, a smart phone was often one of the few things they took with them. As described, many used it to stay in touch with friends and family. The rejected applicants with which I became familiar through the Evidence Team (described in Chapter Seven) were sometimes more fraught – many had more limited contact with family and friends, for reasons that included interpersonal conflict and literacy issues. These rejected seekers were often unable to produce new evidence they were in need despite having limited access to social or material resources – the lack of social and material 'abundance' making it more difficult to *evidence* their need. Some stayed with friends and attended mosque, indicating they had established local social relations, despite fears of deportation and a lack of rights to work. Many asylum seekers who I worked with, nonetheless, voiced optimism in our conversations, or vocalized that – whatever restrictions on their life to live above board or work – it was safer where they were than to return.

Ironically, then, many refugees who came as overtly economic migrants – on work or student visas – find it easier to transition to refugee status or find other visas on which to remain, in part supported through their knowledge of bureaucracy and the paper trails they have already established. Non-citizens who – already within the UK's borders – arrive seeking asylum with few papers, and little money or formal education cannot demonstrate their 'need' as defined by the asylum system. Thus, a subtext of the asylum process is that it values people for their potential to contribute to society and its economic life, and those who have 'need' but cannot otherwise contribute may be denied. Yet, as mentioned above, even refugees whose lives are threatened move in part for 'better lives' for themselves and their families. Both refugees and the system thus tie their presence to *zoe,* and the UNHCR definition of privacy (1967) promises that people should be protected in order to express their beliefs, political opinions, and other facets of their identities. The language of the asylum system, however, demands proof of 'need' at the level of physical danger in one's homeland, which can be employed to exclude those who meet more plain-language definitions of the term. This is to say, if asylum applicants do not 'need' physical protection, the UKBA can deem that they also do not 'need' to stay, work, earn an education, or be reunited with their families within the UK.

For the traveler who has arrived, after years on the road and innumerable hardships, is not his or her need readily apparent? What more information – *not already available* – could be presented of material need, or to demonstrate worthiness of respect enough to pursue private and public life?

With respect to these factors, bureaucracies are top-down institutions. They could be rooted in a broader, consistent respect that individuals acting in good faith have grounds to live, work, contribute to and receive support. The existence of the Syrian Resettlement Programme, discussed in Chapter Four shows that individuals can be brought to the UK with protections and material support in place. Without civic respect, however, logic can work to deny need, regardless of specifics.

There are at least four logics that can readily be employed, regardless of the specifics of information. The first, as described, is creating distinct categories between forced and economic migration that allow people to be dismissed as the latter, especially if they demonstrate agency. Other ways, however, allow for excluding despite openly acknowledging need. A second way to exclude, is to suggest that among refugees – whatever their need – are dangerous infiltrators. Donald Trump, Jr. – son of (and advisor to) the US President – used this logic when he posted an image to Twitter of a bowl of Skittles, suggesting that if one candy was poisoned people wouldn't risk eating them – a metaphor for refugees and terrorists. The photo which he appropriated had been taken by a refugee who did not grant permission for, nor approve of its use (Evans 2016). A third logic is to argue that while asylum seekers are in danger, wealthy Western countries do not have the resources to assist. I would call this the 'I don't care' position, or in UK slang for selfishness in situations where someone could help a disadvantaged person with minimal effort, the 'I'm alright, Jack' position. A fourth, is to suggest helping refugees would bring about the collapse of civilization itself. This view was, for example, posed by former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (a refugee as a youth from Nazi Germany and 1973 Nobel Peace Prize recipient), at a dinner hosted by current German Chancellor Angela Merkel:

> he could admire the humanitarian impulse to save one person, but a million? That would change "German civilization." It would be, Kissinger said, like the Romans allowing the barbarians inside the city gates. (Packer 2018)

There are, no doubt, more justifications that can be made to exclude people in need. Specifics can be rendered irrelevant – indeed presented in plain sight – because information is subject to the underlying norms, context, and philosophy that govern it. Yet also bureaucracy demonstrates the power of structure to restrict outcomes. With the will, the asylum system could perhaps be made to better support individuals' pursuits of private and public life, if grounded in broader respect such that details cannot capriciously be used against individuals. Details can always escape context – but if good faith respect and interpersonal credibility exist, privacy might function closer to how it has been described.

III. Privacy and the challenges of definitions

The previous section revisited discussions of the values and benefits privacy supports in light of refugees' experiences. With that critical research in mind, this section takes a closer look at simplifying and clarifying privacy-related terms for practical use in multi-disciplinary discussions, as well as a step back to reflect back on underlying themes and tensions revealed in privacy and present in modernity. As stated in the introductory chapter, applying knowledge of diverse cultures and practices to better understand our 'own' culture's assumptions has been a key part of the anthropological mission from the early 20th century onward (Born 2019, King 2019 [referenced in Menand 2019]). The term 'privacy' has diverse cultural connotations, is often invoked contextually and implicitly, and is heavily bound to individuals' subjective assessments of their own selves. It cannot always or for all people support the weight of values attached to it. The public remains a realm where personal ideals come into contact with many interpersonal conditionalities. By contrast, the related terms *security* – technical affordances – and *confidentiality* – a code of conduct – related to information transmission can be defined less controversially and with greater technical accuracy. *Definition* itself remains a challenge around privacy in part because it conceptually preserves flexibility among people, in part by governing what is observed and hidden. A similar tension around flexibility exists in underlying suggestions within invocations to 'privacy' that it protects a 'true' self – immutable, singular, authentic – or affords one the right to contextually 'perform' relevant to individual situations.

Throughout this dissertation, I have considered historic and present-day discussions of privacy in light of refugees' and NGOs' information management practices and how they relate to their social lives and experiences with the asylum system. I examined how the benefits associated with 'privacy' – to work, self-actualize, temporarily retire from public and selectively express oneself – are often complicated by how material factors of 'private life' of home and family are restricted. The section seeks to simplify terminology while elaborating on unresolved tensions in the concept – particularly between individuals' subjective experiences within their homes and minds, and more contingent social realties, as well as the tension between definition and flexibility. The terms *security* and *confidentiality* – respectively, referring to technical affordances of information systems and a code of conduct related to sharing information – can often be employed with more technical accuracy instead of privacy.

To describe what privacy 'is' remains complicated, as evidenced by the proceeding few hundred page and citation of sources that follows. The term is often applied flexibly, in specific situations – as Geerty (1977) puts it, a topic that can be "all things to all lawyers". The quote also reflects the heritage of privacy discussions in law and technology, and the disciplinary and cultural concerns that come with those traditions. These heritages tend to favor broad applicability of terms, at least rhetorically. Laws must apply to all citizens, and human rights to all people. Nissenbaum's (2010) call to root informational privacy in 'norms' assumes that norms are shared. Clear rules are supposed to begat clear expectations – of what information might be concealed, and what must be brought forth to substantiate a claim. Yet, as discussed in Chapter Six, bureaucracies – used to implement law – promise a clear set of rules that often flusters supplicants in practice. Thus the rhetoric of privacy is often associated with clear sets of rules which are – in practice – flustered, and many conversations about privacy are *ex post facto.* When something unexpected is revealed, the question comes forth – did *that* violate privacy?

At the same time, privacy *protects* a level of flexibility – a space where the individual might seek temporary rest from accountability to social life, with its pressures of different performance and their often-contradictory demands. Privacy is spoken of in this way by – among others – Westin (1967), Warren & Brandeis (1890), and Etzioni (1999). Too tightly proscribing what privacy does and doesn't do – if the goal is to *support* flexibility – can quickly descend into an elaborate morass of scenarios (such as those described by Marmor 2015). In these senses, privacy need not be a *defined code of behaviors* in and of itself, but may sometimes be the *idea* of one, invoked to claim authority over space (primarily the home) and personal identity. Privacy then suggests a set of social norms of what it is proper to pay attention to, which may vary from culture to culture. As Taussig (1999) describes in his discussion of this, these taboo factors are not necessarily 'unknown' – but they can be brought to attention or conveniently ignored. When they are brought to attention, the loss of privacy is invoked *post facto* as having been 'lost'. Privacy delineates that which might be considered publicly, from that which ought to be off-limits. In this respect, it is somewhat different from *khososyah* – discussed in the literature review –

which outlines more specifically delineations related to gender, the home, relationships and public space.

What privacy ultimately describes and protects can be materially impactful – governing options in life, the home, family, or the capacity to wear one's natural hairstyle while at work. Privacy may also protect personal ideas about our own identities, keeping them safe from the contested, messier, contingent space of inter-personal relations. The ideal of privacy promises, in part, that you might be yourself as you imagine yourself to be; the public is where that idealized conception meets others.

Underlying this conflict, furthermore, were questions about private identity that stretched back to Warren and Brandeis' 1890 "right to be let alone", which suggested an almost sacred sense of self, imbued with immutable qualities, over which the individual had private dominion. Westin, by contrast, emphasized how the self could be contextually performed – a view more generally in line with contemporary social science. Yet the former also remains a powerful, recurrent myth throughout modernity and postmodernity. In the present moment many people are questioning how people's past actions might define themselves, and the control the individual or society should have in determining that. Many of the authors I cited in my literature review, including Solove (2007) and Ronson (2016), had been concerned about people facing negative consequences for incidental, minor, or otherwise ephemeral online postings from years before. Since the 2017 "MeToo" revelations, sparked by credible accusations of sexual abuse by prominent public figures, many discussions have been animated by the promise to rectify disjunctions between public image and unacceptable private action, and to serve as a corrective to imbalanced social power structures. These tensions between reserve and revelation force us to ask difficult questions about if and how individuals (and society) can change, and which old sins might be forgiven and which held to account.

Within the scope of concluding this PhD, however, clarity is important for the practicalities of data sharing. It is fortunate, then, that many terms associated with privacy have (or could have) more specific definitions that enable us to sidestep many of the complexities of this conversation: in particular, *privacy* and *confidentiality.*

Confidentiality is an applied set of rules that clearly states under what circumstances one may reveal information or not (as discussed in Chapter Seven). It is a code of conduct. As discussed in Chapter Seven, however, it governs highly specified, often professional situations (such as client meetings with doctors, religious confession, legal counsel) that often are *somewhat distinct from everyday life.* Confidentiality aims to maintain those distinctions.

Security is associated with technical affordances, safety and risk. I propose consistently using *security* to refer to the *technical features* that may allow data to flow or not. It divides the safe from the unsafe. It can be employed to protect data, and in service of policy that seeks to exclude people declared dangerous and undesirable. What is protected or restricted depends on what side of the divide you are on, hence how it is employed against migrants.

In one metaphor, then, security is the door lock. Privacy is the curtains. Wilk (2018) uses an example of Dutch homes traditionally having large windows with no curtains, on the understanding that to look inside would be rude. There is, of course, nothing technical about the window that prevents looking in – but a combination of social and cultural factors dissuades others from looking (as in Westin 1967 and Taussig 1999).

Privacy, confidentiality, and security are also performances: the former often most relevant to close relations, the latter for distant or formulistic ones. In distant, professional or bureaucratic relationships, security and confidentiality can be displayed to demonstrate trust. These also often govern the sorts of personal information we do not want shared capriciously. Within close relationships, however, such overt displays of security do not facilitate trust, and if employed demonstrate social distance. The dorm room in which I lived during my first year of studies was near a high-traffic hallway, and I did not know my flatmates well. Hence, it was a norm to lock my door. If I were to frequently lock the study in my present house, however, it would provoke suspicion from my partner and my landlords with whom we lodge. It would further be an impractical performance, as they would be within their legal and practical rights and capabilities to enter my room. In these relationships – which involve relatively easy-to-understand contextual expectations – privacy supports mutual trust around visibility and scrutiny.

Privacy, security, and confidentiality are – in varying senses – *conservative,* at least in the short term. The capacity to act free from public scrutiny allows that we might liberalize practices and opinions in ‘private’ – and act in ways that may, in the future, be publicly accepted. But in the short term, the divides that privacy, security and confidentiality support often aim to keep the status quo in society, for better or worse.

IV. Reflections

Ethnographic surprises and reflections

In part what led me to take my particular research approach was how much had been written about privacy, and yet how idealized the private citizen remained; how little effort there had been to get beyond the 'king' whose home is a 'castle'. I expected that what I observed would not necessarily fit the ideal. It is nonetheless difficult to return to the process of learning to discuss what 'surprised me' at the time. There weren't necessarily big 'a-ha' moments where my understanding of the topic suddenly, abruptly pivoted.

I was, however, pleasantly surprised when I realized the stories I heard fit a pattern – when 'I don't use social media that much' became something I learned to anticipate, even to participants' surprise. As I tentatively shared my developing ideas with friends and participants, no one ever told me that I had 'gotten it wrong'. More often I received polite curiosity, and sometimes an enthusiastic affirmation when I hit on something that resonated.

Initially, I was worried about asking people to remember challenging, potentially traumatizing memories which they may have been eager to move beyond. As discussed in the methodology chapter, I frequently found that many interviewees were apt to go toward more dramatic details. I was surprised at how forthcoming those who spoke were, and humbled by their generosity in trusting me to speak. I do not, of course, know the details from what people refrained from saying, or may have wanted to express but could not. I don't know how many bodies people saw first-hand, their worst memories, deepest embarrassments, or deeply hidden thoughts or repressed memories. Participants' freedom to select what they told me helped the research remain ethical – to respect their 'privacy' to select what details to discuss with me.

Puvimanasinghe et. al (2014) discuss how Sierra Leone refugees avoid discussing the difficult-to-describe violent details of their experience. In contrast, some participants at time spoke frankly to me – Nabil describing how his friend was burned alive, for example. In most participants' stories of Syria, violence was always a part of the backdrop even if it wasn't detailed. I was forwarded images that showed the dead in ways Western media would consider upsetting. 'Dramatic' is not necessarily 'traumatic', however – or at least, too traumatic to discuss. At the same time, given the chance, many participants also spoke well of their homelands. The 'asylum narrative' in the media goes for the visceral – the drama of leaving, or (in the right-wing press) the dangers posed by people in need. The Home Office asks for stories that meet a certain threshold of criteria, in whatever good faith or not they receive it. The level of freedom I allowed the discussions resulted in the reflections and emotional content that is often excluded from other accounts, and to situate dramatic circumstances in the ongoing stories of lives. The interpersonal credibility I granted – central to privacy – allowed them to present themselves as they wished in this context – and granted flexibility that the pre-determined criteria of other versions of the 'refugee story' do not necessarily allow.

My interests, however, more often concerned how refugees approached sharing than the particulars of sensitive details. As I hope is clear through the analysis, many were more forthcoming in speaking with me than they were explicit online. Given the relatively 'conservative' norms of online posting compared to offline conversation, discussion generated insights, context and motivations that could not have been gleaned through observing Facebook walls alone. This too was a surprise: I did not necessarily expect that people would be as guarded online and open in person. I came, as a researcher, with many concerns and technicalities. It was refreshing to meet participants who didn't have quite the same neurotic relationship to the material.

Limitations and future research opportunities

I came to this research with a background in anthropology and an interest in privacy. However, in other respects my approach was limited. I learned about the refugee experience as I went. I (still) do not speak Arabic, or any other first language of my participants. I did not travel to participants' home countries, and largely gleaned an understanding of those cultural contexts through them. I don't know the sights and smells of these countries. Of all people, what did *I* have to contribute?

I was relieved that my participants were reassuringly open to my interest in our conversations, including my fellow Syrian researchers. My own 'contribution to knowledge' is specialized – regarding privacy – and took as a starting point literature that (as I have explored throughout this dissertation) relied on idealizations more than the messier in-definition of culture and practice. Other researchers who have that knowledge on which I did not lean, and those who are 'experts by experience', I hope will continue to write, and challenge my work if they believe it to be mistaken.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, I believe the narratives I included convey a great many details on participants' experiences and their relationships to 'traditional' demographic factors – gender, class, wealth, etc. I wanted to convey in these stories how individuals from different backgrounds understood the scope of the options available to them throughout their lives and at the points of crisis that led to them seeking international protection. Yet while I have chosen to encode these socio-economic factors in narrative, I largely did not systematically analyze them.

A key exception to this, as I have discussed, is that asylum seekers with more financial and social resources found it easier to evidence their (also deserved) ‘need’ for asylum. This included asylum seekers who had experience with bureaucracy in everyday life and/or initially arrived on student or work visas (that is, for explicitly economic reasons). By contrast, asylum seekers who arrived with few resources sometimes found it difficult to evidence their ‘need’, despite (in a more plain-language definition) its ready appearance.

I had also written a longer framing device for Chapter Four that interpreted the young, male asylum seekers’ travel stories in terms of ‘adventure’ literature: they were action-and-plot oriented dramatic tales of obstacles overcome, told from a position of safety. Refugees who arrived by other means more often reflected on the emotional experience of travel. While I may develop this for another piece, at present I don’t necessarily feel like I had a large enough sample size to make these claims and comparisons.

The study is further biased toward participants articulate in English, which is somewhat mitigated by how (as discussed) many participants of all ages were in the process of learning English if they did not already know it.

A large oversight, however, is that – inasmuch as I’ve critiqued the ‘head of the household’ archetype in privacy literature – my research did not address family and gender dynamics and power structures within the household. The individuated nature of the stories did not offer much detail on these dynamics. Other studies, I hope, will address privacy in context of the multi-occupant home.

Despite research areas left uncovered in this text, I am confident in this dissertation and proud of what I achieved with it. My empirical work suggests that refugees carefully configure different public identities, with available and apparent affordances of social media, to enact the self in public and private. Looking to them – and how they negotiate offline freedoms and online mediation – helps render more visible the social, personal and civic values that privacy supports, beyond ideals that can only be realized in individual minds.

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Appendix 1: How Facebook and WhatsApp work

Facebook and WhatsApp were participants most widely-used social media programs, along with Imo and Viber, two services similar in functionality and interface to WhatsApp but more readily available in different regions. While Facebook acquired WhatsApp in 2014 (Hamburger 2014), Facebook and WhatsApp have relatively polar philosophies (and practical functionality) with respect to privacy, and represent something of archetypal 'public' and 'private' social media even as discussed throughout this dissertation (particularly in Chapter Five) participants readily configured the various functionalities of the programs to

Facebook is oriented around the user displaying a 'singular' identity, communicating to broad groups of friends and family. Users can display personal information (including their locations, birthdays, sexual orientations, and political beliefs), their lists of 'friends' (fellow users), as well as post photos, links and other items on their personal or others' 'walls'. This lends itself to a variety of activities being visible to all a user's 'friends', even as many users engage with the site by scrolling a personalized 'news feed' that displays a selection of posts from a user's friends, curated by the site's proprietary algorithms. Users can also join 'groups' that have walls geared toward members' discussions or post on 'pages'. Privacy settings (and creating multiple accounts), nonetheless, allow users to make some posts visible to some people and not others. Facebook also has a messaging service – Facebook Messenger – that allows users to send individuated or group messages to users on their friend lists.

WhatsApp is a messaging service designed around communication between individuals and small groups, where messages in each person-to-person or 'group' conversation displayed in a long string (most recent first). Messages are sent via phone numbers, and individuals can chose profile pictures for themselves – however, it is up to message recipients to identify these numbers with a name. Unlike services like Facebook, messages are not stored in central servers or a 'cloud', but are transmitted encrypted end-to-end to the individual devices involved (though an individual WhatsApp account's entire set of messages can also be backed up to Google Drive). This decentralization and encryption have contributed to WhatsApp's reputation as having strong data security, though participants largely did not explicitly discuss these technical merits as contributing to their use.

Both Facebook and WhatsApp are designed and used primarily for ongoing communications and not to produce an accessible record for posterity. However, on Facebook, ‘friends’ (in the default privacy settings) can access other users’ older posts by searches or scrolling through wall timelines. In WhatsApp, involved users can scroll through their old message threads.

Appendix 2: List of named participants

- **Abdul Qadir,** a fellow academic (Chapter 8). I met him at a Syrian community gathering.

- **Ali,** the Eritrean who enthusiastically told the stories of his travels (Chapter 4). Volunteers at an NGO referred Ali to me when I was seeking participants; he had wanted to tell me his story.

- **Amira**, a reflective PhD student in education from Damascus, who was experienced with living abroad surprised but was surprised find herself a refugee (Chapters 4, 5, and 8). I was introduced to Amria through another participant.

- **Amsale,** the Eritrean, who enjoys the offline freedom of UK life compared to the social judgement she experienced on and offline while growing up in Saudi Arabia (Chapter 5). I met her through the NGO's with which I volunteered.

- **Benyamin,** who left Iran following participation in protests, and used social media (sometimes unsuccessfully) to better understand UK life (Chapters 4 and 8). I met Benyamin while volunteering at an NGO.

- **Emir,** the Iranian artist, who grew less fearful of posting online as his career required a greater local public presence (Chapter 5 and 8). I spoke with Emir over the phone; he is a friend of a friend who was willing to speak for my research.

- **Firash,** the Afghani who grew up in Iran and negotiates expressing Christianity with his Islamic family (Chapters 4 and 8). I met through volunteering with an NGO where he works as a translator.

- **Hakam,** the engineer and reluctant socializer, who spent time as guest worker in Saudi Arabia before and after returning to his parents' hometown of Homs for school (Chapter 4, 5, and 8). I had known Hakam through mutual international friends prior to beginning this research.

- **Imad,** the politically-active researcher from a Damascene academic family and living in Budapest (Chapter 5). I was introduced through mutual friends.

- **Jamal,** the PhD graduate raising a family while he pursues interests in photography and motorcycles online (Chapter 8). I met him while we were jointly volunteering at the same NGO. We initially bonded over our interest in photography and became friends.

- **Kareem,** a Sudanese refugee who works long hours (Chapter 8). I met him while seeking participants at an NGO.

- **Luiza,** the enthusiastic social media user from Chad, who eagerly joined a variety of platforms to communicate with friends while carefully controlling the visibility of her posts (Chapter 5). She attended several meetings related to starting the local chapter of a national UK refugee advocacy organization.

- **Malik,** the middle-aged engineer from outer Damascus, who was stuck in asylum limbo after registering in multiple countries (Chapters 6 and 8). I met him at Syrian community gatherings and visited him several times at his asylum seeker housing, where he has been a generous host.

- **Masoud,** the undergraduate from Damascus living in Berlin (Chapter 5). I met him through mutual friends.

- **Nabil,** whose family came through the Syrian resettlement programme (Chapters 4 and 8). I had met Nabil at several Syrian gatherings. Late in the writing-up period, he was driving past me while I was on a walk, stopped, chatted, and invited me to his house so I could interview him for the project.

- The four members of the **Najjar family** – Wasim, his wife Qamar, their son Yamen, and Wasim's elderly mother – who arrived as part of the official resettlement program (Chapter 8). I met through the Syrian community group.

- **Omar,** the economic migrant who arrived before the Syrian conflict (Chapter 5). I met him through the Syrian community gatherings.

- **Rafiq,** a Syrian asylum seeker who had not yet gained refugee status (Chapter 6). I met him through volunteering with NGO's.

- **Rami,** the military draftee, a PhD student in finance from the Kurdish region of Syria (Chapter 5). I met him through NGO work, where he came to volunteer and socialize.

- **Tariq,** the activist, who was imprisoned for documenting and sharing evidence of the Syrian government’s violence online (Chapter 5). I was introduced by a fellow researcher.