

Data Privacy and Displacement: A Cultural Approach

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Recent research has pointed to the increasing impact of digitally derived data on forced migration processes, including legal mechanisms for accessing social media profiles of asylum seekers. These developments raise the issue of data privacy, specifically how asylum seekers understand data privacy and protect their data. This article pays particular attention to cultural variants of data privacy. Culture, here, refers to a communication culture linked to displacement, with safety as a key code and variant of data privacy. For the asylum seekers and refugees from South(east) Asia, the Middle East and African nations, safety was a concern in daily digital practice. Safety was a relational way of being, exercised through selective contacts and playful presentations of the self. Those presentations were deeply embedded in the logics of social media and stood in contrast to narratives of persecution, potentially posing problems for asylum claim determination in the future. Based on the lack of awareness of asylum seekers about data privacy and safety, a data safety workshop was designed, available on GitHub.

Keywords: communication culture, data and information privacy, forced migration, social media, safety, training

Introduction

Digital footprints have become increasingly important in the aggregation of digital identities, including those of forced migrants. In 2017, Belgium, Denmark and Germany tightened laws, with immigration officers now having the right to access mobile phones and social media profiles of asylum claimants to extract data (Jumpert *et al.* 2018; Meaker 2018). This practice is already in place in the UK and in Norway and serves two main purposes: to verify claimants' identities and as a security background check (Jumpert *et al.* 2018). As early as 2011, Privacy International voiced concerns about data privacy in refugee camps in Malaysia, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya. Lack of transparency about data management and the fact that the UNHCR has to share data with multiparty stakeholders support the concerns of refugees that their

personal data is circulated, with the danger of ending up in the hands of home governments or embassies in the receiving countries. Privacy International further declared that ‘Social media, which can include a wide range of online platforms and applications, can be revealing and sensitive, making any collection or retention highly invasive’ (Privacy International 2018).

In the literature, there is ample evidence of the survival functions of mobile technologies. Mobile phones help the displaced to navigate unknown territory, enable distress calls via GPS, keep and create social networks, help in decision-making and document the journey (Borkert *et al.* 2018; Dekker *et al.* 2018; Gillespie *et al.* 2016; Khorshed and Imran 2015; Witteborn 2012). There is also increasing evidence of technology being a burden and trap for those on the move. Non-human actors reach into the lives of migrants, calling on them with static identity categories, calculating the risks they present for movement and the state, and using the extended screens of border control to rank and sort them (Broeders and Dijkstra 2016; Latonero and Kift 2018; Shah 2019). At the same time, a nuanced discussion of technologies and forced migrants (asylum seekers, refugees, internally displaced people) has emerged, questioning binary narratives of technology as salvation or as a means of surveillance. Most recently, Awad and Tossell (2019) highlighted the discursive loops of depoliticized humanitarianism in discussions about refugees and technology. Their call links to previous studies (e.g. Witteborn, 2011; Alencar 2018; de Genova 2018; Georgiou 2018; Leurs and Smets 2018; Arora 2019, to name only a few), which argued for contextualization of migration studies and politicizing the processes through which migrants are created. The latter includes a shift of research to the Global South—an area with the most numerous migration movements (UN 2019). In the spirit of such an approach, this article probes universal understandings of concepts such as data privacy. Asylum seekers and recognized refugees have a right and need to learn about the consequences of their practices to make decisions about their communication in contexts of uncertainty.

Privacy is understood here as information being ‘beyond the range of others’ five senses and any devices that can enhance, reveal, trace or record human conduct, thought, belief, or emotion’ (Allen 1988: 15). Information and data privacy are sometimes used interchangeably, with data being seen as the raw material to construct information as an entity with meaning. Data and information privacy is also linked to data and information security, although it is not the same (Bertino and Sandhu 2005). Security, as a term of statecraft, generally refers to the mechanisms through which data and information can be protected, e.g. through end-to-end encryption, password control, firewalls and identifying trusted sources (Kitchin 2016). In this article, data privacy and information privacy are used interchangeably.

While there has been a wealth of academic articles and non-governmental organization (NGO) reports on the refugee situation in Europe, research on forced migrants and their technology practices in the Global South is still scarce, despite the fact that 85 per cent of the displaced live there (UNHCR n.d.). There are

important lessons to be learned from places like Hong Kong SAR, which sits at the axis of South–South and South–North migrations. Hong Kong has currently an asylum-seeker population of 9900. The majority are Convention Against Torture (CAT) claimants (<http://www.justicecentre.org.hk>). While China has signed the Geneva Refugee Convention from 1951, it has not extended it to Hong Kong. In 2014, the Unified Screening Mechanism was introduced through which the immigration department selects affirmative refugee cases. Asylum seekers in Hong Kong are not allowed to work. At the time of the research, they received housing assistance directly paid to the landlord (HKD 1500), food stamps (HKD1200) and some transport money. Asylum claimants come from Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, African nations, the Philippines, Indonesia and a few from the Middle East, depending on the geopolitical situation. Asylum recognition is very low (0.8 per cent; www.justicecentre.org.hk/facts/). During the claims process, people live for years without meaningful tasks, making social media an important space for socializing, entertainment and passing time.

Due to the increasing legal importance of social media for making asylum decisions in other countries, including the UK, Norway, Germany and Denmark, digital trails produced by asylum seekers in Hong Kong could also serve as a legal source in the future for refugee status determination in the Special Administrative Region. Having outlined the research problematic, the main questions of this article are the following. How do asylum seekers and refugees in Hong Kong understand and engage with data and information privacy in their digital practices? What are cultural variants of privacy? How can those variants be used to teach displaced populations about the protection of their digital information?

Culture and Data Privacy

Clarke (1997) proposed four privacy categories, including privacy of person, of behaviour, of data and of communication. Wright and Raab (2014: 7) added additional categories, including privacy of location and space, of thoughts and feelings, and of association (including group privacy). Privacy of location refers to the right of an individual to be present in a space without being tracked. Privacy of thought and feeling is linked to the protection of the body and mind. Privacy of association includes the right of people to form social and political relationships at different levels of scale without being monitored. Privacy of personal information means that people do not desire their data to be available for others and ‘to exercise a substantial degree of control over that data and its use’ (Wright and Raab 2014: 6). Other scholars have started collapsing the different variants of privacy into information privacy (Belanger and Crossler 2011; Smith *et al.* 2011; Lancelot Miltgen and Peyrat-Guillard 2014), including data about location, person, behaviour, thought and association.

Functionalist models illustrate that perceived information control and perceived risk mould the perceived privacy of people (Dinev *et al.* 2008, 2009). In

their study on the influence of culture and generation on perceived information privacy, [Lancelot Miltgen and Peyrat-Guillard \(2014\)](#) outline control, protection and regulation, trust and responsibility as factors that influence disclosure of personal data. The study reveals a European divide in relation to personal responsibility for data and trust. Southern Europeans believed in choice, whereas Eastern Europeans believed that they were forced to disclose. There was also a generational difference, with younger people having lower privacy concerns, trusting in legal protection and their own ability to protect their data, even by giving false information. Perceived trust, taking responsibility and perceived risk can thus vary according to generational or national culture.

While functionalist models commonly include culture as one variable shaping perceived information privacy, constructionist models urge to give credit to gaps in cultural translations. [Capurro \(2005\)](#), for example, examined Western and Japanese conceptions of privacy and illustrated how Enlightenment has shaped Western morality and concepts of the self. The notion of a personal self whose dignity and autonomy are untouchable—a moral and ethical notion inscribed in legal systems from Europe to North America and Australia—is different from the Japanese version of the self, which understands the human as coming into being in-between social relations. This in-between, or *aida* (see [Ess 2005](#)), can be seen as an ontology that stands in contrast to Western models of the individual as the vessel of dignity and humanity. [Ess \(2005\)](#) cautioned to translate foundational concepts between different regions, nation states and languages. He argued for incomplete translation and respecting conceptual cultural differences while teasing out commonalities—an idea that [Capurro \(2005\)](#) called an intercultural information ethics.

Following this call for cautious translation and a cultural information ethics, I offer the principles of Speech Codes Theory (SCT) to study cultural variations in data and information privacy. SCT ([Philipsen 1992, 1997](#)) is a development of the Ethnography of Communication (e.g. [Hymes 1972](#)) and aims at identifying the codes that are present in the repertoires of a discursive community, constituting its distinct culture. A speech code is defined as ‘a historically enacted, socially constructed system of terms, meanings, premises, and rules pertaining to communicative conduct’ ([Philipsen 1992: 56](#)). This means that *culture*, through the lens of SCT, refers to the premises, norms and values linked to *communicative conduct* and not to units like nationality or ethnicity. From the perspective of SCT (and related approaches like Cultural Discourse Analysis; see [Carbaugh 2007; Scollo and Milburn 2018](#)), codes are constitutive of the symbolic and material communication culture of groups. There is a shift from understanding culture as bound to territory towards culture as interactional processes.

Speech codes have been researched in different geopolitical and cultural settings. [Philipsen \(1992\)](#), for example, illustrated the importance of the code of honour in a Chicago neighbourhood and the physical consequences of violating this code. [Covarrubias \(2002\)](#) researched speech codes in a Mexican company and showed how those codes create interpersonal intimacy and social distance. [Coutu](#)

(2008) demonstrated how public social dramas were constituted by tensional speech codes in the discourses of and about Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defence under Presidents J. F. Kennedy and L. B. Johnson and a key figure in escalating the Vietnam War. In sum, examining speech codes allows for making statements about the social, political and moral fabric of social groups. Speech codes can also be used to provide design solutions to locally pressing problems (e.g. Leighter *et al.* 2013; Sprain and Boromisza-Habashi 2013; Milburn 2015)—a potential that has been used in this study to design a social media safety training for those seeking asylum.

Speech codes can be researched by examining communicative conduct in all its varieties, as the symbols and premises about this conduct are part of the texture of communication (Proposition 5, SCT; Philipsen *et al.* 2005). If a speech code shapes communicative conduct through coherent use, social legitimacy and occurrence in patterned ways (Proposition 6, SCT), one can deduce that this speech code is shared amongst people. Hymes's (1972) SPEAKING framework is still of good use here as a heuristic frame, as it orients a researcher to how a particular genre (G) is performed in face-to-face, written or digital communication (I = Instrumentalities) by participants (P) in particular settings (S). Communicative acts (A), which can compose entire practices when used consistently across speech situations, are key for understanding speech codes. Furthermore, the frame orients the researcher to norms (N) for performing and interpreting communicative acts. For example, selective self-presentation can be a practice when used in patterned ways 'on Facebook' (speech situation) through repeated acts (e.g. posting photos or using self-labels). Shared norms (e.g. communicating impersonally) point to shared codes, such as *safety* in interpersonal interactions.

In this study, *safety* is identified as a code woven into the digital conduct of people seeking asylum. This code eventually shapes a culture of communication growing out of displacement. The code of safety was analytically deduced from shared communication premises and norms (e.g. choosing contacts carefully, intimate, supportive or impersonal communication). The code was also derived from the term *safe* itself (Philipsen 1992, 1997; Philipsen *et al.* 2005). The term appeared in such phrases as 'WhatsApp is safe as not everybody can join a group' or 'I want my daughter to be safe on Facebook and not talk to others about how she feels about herself'. Both, the technical features of digital platforms and the interactions they enabled were assigned the qualities of selective information disclosure and protection of personal information, which eventually can be translated into privacy.

Data Collection

Data materials were collected from 2016 to 2017 for a larger, funded project exploring forced migrants, technology and urban space.¹ Preliminary pilot interviews were conducted in late 2013 and early 2014, and in 2015.² The corpus is based on 90 personal interviews and 20 participant observations. At the time of

the research, the vast majority of interviewees were in the process of seeking asylum or were Convention Against Torture claimants. Only five had been recognized as refugees. The interviews were conducted in churches and mosques, NGOs and in private apartments of asylum seekers in Hong Kong. Interviewees were contacted through snowball sampling and with the assistance of the Centre for Refugees at the NGO Christian Action in Hong Kong. The researcher accompanied participants during recreational activities during which people checked social media on their phones or during protests where the displaced demanded improved living conditions, amongst other things. The interviewees from South Asia, Southeast Asia and African countries were between the ages of 20 and 56. They were predominantly male, which can be explained by women being occupied with family matters and being afraid of giving interviews. Education ranged from eighth grade to master's degree. The interviews were conducted in English, Cantonese and Urdu. Thirteen asylum seekers agreed for their Facebook pages to become part of the corpus. A dummy page was created for the research. Food coupons and information on health and education were provided as tokens of recognition.

Safe Contacts

The premise of safety was expressed through careful selection of participants on social media platforms. For the participants, this selection was key to protecting the written and visual information they exchanged digitally. WhatsApp was perceived as being secure, as it enabled closed-group communication. Facebook was a favoured platform for communication with friends and family transnationally, for reaching larger groups and for experimenting with digital communication. Nine out of the 13 Facebook profiles were created in Hong Kong. These characteristics suggest that Facebook was an experimental and relatively unfamiliar platform. It was also regarded as semi-public and not suitable for intimate communication. Unlike WhatsApp, which was used with co-nationals, Facebook felt like a 'playground' (25-year-old male from Pakistan) with more functions and integrated communication opportunities, including Facebook messenger, *like* buttons and newsfeeds.

The users divided contacts into (1) family and friends back home, (2) friends in Hong Kong and (3) acquaintances in Hong Kong. WhatsApp was the favoured platform for communication that was described as *intimate*, enabling affectionate, detailed as well as edited exchanges about daily life. Interactions with family and friends back home were described as having those qualities. Participants had daily, and sometimes hourly, exchanges about mundane matters on WhatsApp, ranging from the serious (e.g. illness of a child) to the joyful. Live-streaming of important family events was a common joyful practice, including births of children and celebration of religious holidays. However, limited data packages restricted data-intensive interactions. Feeling safe referred to a state of being co-produced by emotive practices, from spontaneous and happy laughter to crying due to grief. Safety was achieved through shared emotions and being together—a condition

that was not common for many participants due to high stress levels in daily life linked to uncertainty, unemployment and lack of finances.

While sharing emotions was important, being and feeling safe also produced heavily edited texts and visual stories. Those edited stories had the goal of keeping families in the home countries assured that the asylum-seeking family was well. This goal is very similar to other research contexts like Germany (Witteborn 2014). Editing ranged from wearing nice outfits, arranging the background in the home to avoiding talk about the asylum claim and lack of work and money.

Location was a dimension of information privacy that the people wanted to protect. A generalized fear of being identified on Facebook by home governments or monitored by family were reasons. However, very few of the participants knew how to protect their location information. While people hardly ever geolocated themselves, participants posted pictures with landmarks or identifiable scenery in Hong Kong. The reason was that participants were either not aware of location functions or ignored them, trusting that they were turned off. They posted pictures, although few, as they thought the pictures did not reveal any compromising information. The example highlights that the majority of participants in this study did not know about possible legal implications of being locatable in time and space.

Participants predominantly used WhatsApp to connect with asylum seekers with shared backgrounds in Hong Kong (e.g. language, gender, religion). The majority of contacts were described as ‘friends’ and the interaction as supportive. Mothers socialized as their children went to the same school, and they exchanged pictures of themselves and their children on WhatsApp groups. They also shared links to music and videos, as entertainment in the native language was important. The majority of the people could not speak, read or write Chinese. While the norms for interaction for this group were to keep each other company, the communication remained cautious, as personal issues pertaining to asylum were rarely discussed. Unlike Facebook, people had heard that WhatsApp was a ‘safe’ platform, meaning that data would not be shared with or leaked to governments. But, for the vast majority, the technological structure and security settings of the platform remained hearsay. The code of safety was particularly relevant for mothers, with *safe* being a key term in their meta-talk about their children’s digital practices. For the mothers, it was important to monitor the social media behaviour of their children: ‘I need to know what she (daughter) is doing on Facebook. I want her to be safe’ (36-year-old Egyptian mother).

Acquaintances required a different nuance in communicative interactions, especially larger groups on WhatsApp. Co-nationals from Uganda, Kenya or Pakistan formed groups that could also be joined by other nationals if they spoke the same language. The interaction was described as light-hearted in tone. This meant no discussion of political topics and contentious gender issues. Hence, participants exchanged ideas and links on life in Hong Kong and posted jokes in the native language or entertainment updates from the home country. One Ugandan male, for example, stated that his main goal was gaining asylum and

leaving Hong Kong, without spending his already limited physical and mental energy on political debates or on interpersonal feuds. Romantic interests, rejections and the reputation of women were part of those interpersonal feuds that participants avoided when chatting in large groups.

WhatsApp was also used to coordinate social events or for religious communion (sharing prayer links). The norm of light-hearted interaction about mundane topics (norm of interaction) was linked to the norm of interpretation, which was to keep the interaction impersonal. Impersonal interactions promised the protection of personal views, practices, group membership and one's whereabouts (compare [Clarke 1997](#); [Wright and Raab 2014](#)), thus making the communication safe.

The users of WhatsApp and Facebook claimed that their communication was *safe* on both platforms, as they were in control of contacts. People trusted a company like Facebook to protect their data from governments and third parties (despite evidence to the contrary, as in the case of Cambridge Analytica). Safety, thus, did not refer to technical affordances of the platform, such as encryption. In fact, many people did not know what that was. The participants felt in control of their digital practices by tailoring their communication to their audience, from intimate, supportive to impersonal communication. By applying the code of safety, participants imagined themselves as being in control in terms of disclosing their thoughts, feelings and sociocultural networks selectively, thus protecting themselves and their families from unwanted monitoring.

Blending In

The code of safety was also activated through the premise of blending in. The amount and depth of information in Facebook posts, including texts and pictures, were limited. This could be explained by the fact that the majority of the profiles had only been created in Hong Kong. The main communicative acts were posting pictures, likes, repostings, comments on celebrity news, holiday greetings (e.g. Ramadan or Diwali) and life in Hong Kong.

A large body of literature has demonstrated how social media users employ strategic self-presentation to enhance their avowed and ascribed image on Facebook and receive positive feedback, which in turn can enhance self-esteem (e.g. [van Dijck 2013](#); [Ellison *et al.* 2014](#); [Metzler and Scheithauer 2017](#)). Research has also shown that users present themselves not only positively but also in the most authentic fashion ([Yang and Brown 2016](#)). Self-presentation is defined as 'selectively presenting aspects of one's self to others' ([Valkenburg and Peter 2011](#): 122). People seeking asylum are no different than other demographics in this respect, using positive self-presentation to shift out of the role of asylum seeker and into the role of a young person or a family person ([Witteborn 2015](#)).

Facebook was not a site of intimate, professional or daily connectivity for the participants. This phenomenon can be explained by the bias of the 13 pages and

that the people who gave access to those pages did so because they rarely used them. In fact, one could even claim that those who were intense Facebook users did not give access in order to protect their communication (from researchers, for example). The pages revealed an interesting paradox, which could be expected to be amplified by heavy Facebook users. The paradox was that Facebook told a digital narrative that was different from the narrative during interviews. Interview narratives in this study centred on *uncertainty* because of being a person in transit, *social and cultural isolation* and *lack of a meaningful occupation*. The themes of social isolation and uncertainty have also been prominent in other geopolitical refugee settings like Germany (Witteborn 2011). On Facebook, these topics were transformed into positively connoted themes, composing a digital narrative about a socially connected, physically and digitally mobile self.

As socially connected selves, the people shared posts on entertainment from home, the latest music as well as celebrity gossip. Similarly to WhatsApp communication with co-nationals, the posts never addressed painful journeys or the problem of poverty and boredom arising from the inability to work as an asylum seeker. On the contrary, visuals performed the self as a person connected with spouses, children and friends, and as an educationally and economically aspirational self. The reasons were manifold. First, people used Facebook as a stage to experiment with aspirations (compare Witteborn 2019). Physical and social mobility were two of those aspirations. Second, people wanted diversion and Facebook—similar to WhatsApp—provided them with visual and textual engagement that let them forget an existence in loops of waiting. Third, people repeatedly emphasized that they had a daily routine to perform, including sending children to school, keeping appointments with social services, as well as organizing weekend activities. Hence, they did not think of their self-presentation as a lie, but as portraying the positive moments in their lives. Those moments were captured and archived on the platform as a diary of family life that transnational family members could partake in. This insight confirms Lovink's (2011) writings on the presentation of coherent selves on social media. Positive self-presentation helped people to portray a stable self that family at home did not have to worry about. This presentation also served as a reminder of aspirations and represented the hope to lead a regular life.

As such, the code of safety shaped digital narratives through the premise of blending in. This premise is not surprising, given that people became asylum seekers due to standing out: as political activists or members of a minority group. Here is an example of how people blended in, in order to feel safe. Beatrice,³ an asylum seeker from an African country, showed me her Facebook pictures on beaches and her family in front of the church they went to every Sunday. She smiled while pointing to her little daughter playing on the beach, adding that this was one of the happiest memories in the city as the day was sunny and the family could forget for one afternoon the fear of being refused refugee status and the cultural isolation. For Beatrice, Facebook was like a 'family album of happy memories', documenting the story of the family in the city of Hong Kong.

Beatrice described the city as dense and interesting and yet cold at the same time, referring to how people seemed to evade her black body, making her feel unwelcome. Scenes like beaches and churches represent a sense of the ordinary as many Hong Kongers create those scenes on a weekly basis. Becoming part of a setting (beach or church) and psychological scene (relaxation, spirituality) meant that Beatrice was able to perform the ordinary. The ordinary was not only nurturing, as it provided structure to life, happy moments and beauty; it was also safe for people like Beatrice.

Participants performed a visitor persona—an ordinary role again—through consumption of experiences. Posing in nature was one variant; posing in front of global brands in urban spaces was another. Terrence, an asylum seeker in his 20s, liked to portray himself in front of expensive car dealers, Lamborghini and Ferrari in particular, and in front of the skyline of Hong Kong. He said:

I don't post nature pix as I don't like hiking in the heat and I can't swim. I have really nice beaches at home but people don't go there to sunbathe or swim. I'd rather be in the city, walking the streets and looking at stores.

This presentation of urban connectivity and global consumption of experiences was one way of emplacing the self into webs of social and economic relations, with the urban finance hub of Hong Kong as a node. Facebook became an aspirational space in which one could map one's desires, such as being well off and having fun (compare [Witteborn 2019](#)). Those desires are shared by many young people around the world. As such, the presentation of those widely shared desires through photos, likes and emojis becomes a practice that is *safe*. The person blends into a larger pool of like-minded people and imaginations without disclosing detailed personal information.

Overall, the Facebook pictures told the story of young people transgressing the received narrative of the poor, sick and threatening refugee. The analysis of friends' comments on pictures revealed admiration and encouragement, like 'have fun!', 'Hong Kong looks like a good place' or smileys. Ken, dressed in urban fashion and wearing black sunglasses, had posted a short video of himself in a subway station in Hong Kong. While walking along the escalator, showing a hypermodern infrastructure enhanced by glitzy advertisements, he praised himself for getting to know the city. Comments from lady friends read 'Hey brother', 'Miss u' or hearts and smileys. The portrayal of a young, connected self was no different from other Facebook posts of people displaying travel photos. The extraordinary (seeking asylum) was camouflaged by the ordinary (being a visitor and tourist).

Below is a word cloud illustrating the claims even further. It represents the highest-frequency words appearing in all of the collected Facebook posts. Positively connoted adjectives and nouns like *good*, *love*, *day* and *happy* dominate. Terms on the margins like *beautiful*, *sundae*, *baby*, *life*, *friends*, *woman*, *money* and *best* indicate rather positive connotations as well. The words constitute desirable sociality like friendship and romantic relationships. The words also confirm visual

into the camera. Past research on asylum interviews has demonstrated the cultural bias when interpreting flight stories, with linear timelines, exact dates and names being important elements for immigration officers (Blommaert 2001). Even if the law assures that metadata from phones or social media is only accessed to verify flight narratives or for security checks, Facebook data reveals social networks and aspirations. Those can be rather intimate pieces of information, and the extraction of that data by immigration officers can feel compromising to people. There is also a chance that officers misinterpret the Facebook postings as undermining narratives of persecution. These insights warrant the education of the displaced about their digital data practices and the design of a social media safety training, available on GitHub.⁴

Social Media Safety Training

The following findings were used to design the training in form of a workshop. The code of safety growing out of a culture of displacement became the main organizing principle⁵ The workshop was attended by 12 women from Kenya, Egypt, Pakistan and India. It opened with an ice-breaking exercise, with the participants mapping their daily social media use for self-reflection, a brief lecture on data privacy and the variant of safety, and hands-on exercises. As the topic of geolocation was prevalent in the data, it was addressed as well. Linking geolocation and metadata to technical skills, the women were taught how to handle privacy settings on various platforms as well as the security settings on their phones. All of the participants preferred reading the news on Facebook on their phones. Therefore, the session addressed filter bubbles and echo chambers and their consequences (e.g. rumours on 'safe' migration routes, asylum laws and asylum processes). Discussions included the targeted feeding of news and advertisements, and the eventual confirmation of preconceived ideas, including ideas about data safety and protection.

The findings refine the definition of privacy, meaning information being 'beyond the range of others' five senses and any devices (...)' (Allen 1988: 15). Safety as a variant of privacy meant treasuring the ordinary and staying within the range of the five senses and of the expected. The portrayal of the ordinary within a network of known people became the discursive anchor for feeling safe. Hence, the workshop discussed social media logics and positive self-presentation, and the possible discrepancy between those and personal narratives of flight. The goal was not to train participants in narrating their flight stories. The goal was to give people information in order for them to make informed decisions about keeping data private and safe.

Women in particular were concerned about the safety of their children on social media. The majority of the mothers had seen security settings on their phones but they were not aware of their importance or did not know how to change them. In addition to privacy on Facebook, the discussion targeted privacy settings on WhatsApp like profile photos, contact lists, live locations and blocked contacts. The participants also read security-setting messages

about end-to-end encryption on WhatsApp, reiterating the points about encryption and safe messaging.

Overall, the workshop taught the migrants that they are part of an expanding and yet fragmented data infrastructure that defines (im)mobilities and thus the political and economic frameworks in which they can move (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). Avowed identities exist in tandem with digital identification markers, with the latter becoming the legal and socio-economic signposts for including and excluding categories of people from national territories and labour markets (Broeders and Dijkstra 2016; Shah 2019). Knowledge about information production, circulation and consumption in these infrastructures is essential for forced migrants to continue their digital engagement and to feel safe at the same time.

Conclusions

This article is a theoretical and practical call to understand the concept of data and information privacy from the perspective of people who are legally and socially vulnerable. The article argued that forced migrants develop their own logics for data and information privacy through the code of safety. *Safety* is a code growing out of a culture of displacement and of the felt need to protect oneself and family from unwanted harm. The code of safety was relational and structured positive self-presentation, selection of platforms, contacts and styles of communication, from intimate to impersonal. The poor, sick and uneducated asylum seeker was not part of this self-presentation—a shift that challenges common perceptions about the poor migrant from the Global South (Chouliaraki 2013). The discrepancy between positive digital self-presentation and a history of persecution is a finding that highlights the complexity of life on the move. It highlights situated experiences and the right of forced migrants to be playful and joyful beyond the reception of humanitarian aid: to have fun, be stylish and look foolish.

On a theoretical level, the study sharpens the categories of data privacy as suggested by Clarke (1997) and Wright and Raab (2014). *Communication privacy* is not a separate category, but the lens through which privacy of person, behaviour, thought and location can be understood. Communication is not a tool to accomplish things (the transmission model by Shannon and Weaver 1949). Communication is world-creating, referring to relational meaning-making, which can never be complete (Stewart 1996). This notion corresponds to information as emerging potentiality (Simondon 1989). For Simondon, information does not have content, structure or meaning. The transformation of information into form and matter is a process of potentiality, of qualitative changes, giving ‘rise to new operational solidarities that did not exist before, and therefore exceed all prior formalizations’ (Massumi 2012: 32). Data safety and privacy become similar when viewed through this lens, in that they become productive. When information is quantified—that is, clustered, categorized and used for predictive probabilities (Amoore 2011)—the potential of information is restricted, becoming a ‘back-cast shadow’ (Massumi 2012: 33). The desire to selectively disclose oneself can be read

as a response to this restricted and essentializing potential that is always lagging behind and yet has powerful implications for future action (e.g. asylum-claim decisions). Information and communication have incompleteness and potential as a positive notion in common. They enable new constellations of matter, symbols and social life that are expanding life instead of restricting it and making it countable and predictable.

Legal evidence and implications are still anecdotal at the time of writing this article. They could become more pronounced in the future, with technology serving as a key resource in evaluating whether a person can gain access to a national territory and resources or not (Latonero and Kift 2018; Leurs and Smets 2018). This uncertainty raises the question of how to teach safe social media communication to vulnerable populations. This article suggested one way of doing so. Further research can ask what constitutes safety in a social media context. How do collective experiences influence notions of acting safely through technology? It remains to be seen how visual, textual and auditory social media profiles will be linked to digital identities and biometrics in the future, allowing for spatio-temporal tracing and categorization of people seeking asylum as well as other migrants crossing borders.

1. RGC Ref. No.: CUHK 14610915.
2. The time period is due to a lengthy grant preparation and execution cycle, from writing the grant (summer 2014) to having it accepted (July 2015), with a start date in January 2016.
3. All names changed.
4. <https://github.com/hongkonggong/social-media-safety-asylum-seekers>.
5. Due to the needs of the NGO that facilitated the workshop and offered it for the weekly mothers' group, the workshop was tailored towards women, including safe communication for children on social media.

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