Article

Precariousness and Hope: Digital Everyday Life of the Undocumented Migrants Explored Through Collaborative Photography

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Abstract

The article explores the digital everyday life of recently or currently undocumented migrants in times of Covid-19 in Finland. It is based on an empirical case study on a collaborative photographic exhibition and workshop including visual images, diaries, interviews, and discussions. The analysis explores the ways in which a photography exhibition and a workshop may depict meaningful moments in digital everyday life as well as open up an understanding of the various vulnerabilities that emerge in the life of the undocumented, as expressed by themselves. The study demonstrates the fundamental importance of communication rights for people in precarious life situations, expressed by themselves in visual images. The insight produced multidimensionally in images, discussions, and interviews illustrates how digital media environment exposes to coerced visibility and requires constant struggle for communicative rights. These struggles take place on the material infrastructural level of devices, chargers, and access, but also on the level of self-expression and connection on social media platforms. Finally, the article discusses the emancipatory potential of a collaborative exhibition and workshop as a way to encounter and deal with increasingly vulnerable life situations. It points out the relevance of collaborative work as a research method, in providing knowledge from experience as well as space of recognition.

Issue

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1. Introduction

Covid-19 has profoundly affected people's everyday lives with various vulnerabilities, restrictions, and an increased dependency on digital media to manage work, school, and social relations. For undocumented migrants, who already exist in a marginal position in society, Covid-19 has created new obstacles and uncertainties. Due to the lockdown, public places central to the undocumented community, such as cafes and libraries, are rendered inaccessible. These public places offer refuge where one can meet others, use free Wi-Fi to connect with family and friends, and charge mobile phones.

Digital media has become fundamentally important for the undocumented as a tool to manage their lives, yet it also leads to the risk of surveillance and potential detainment (Latonero & Kift, 2018). Lockdown inevitably heightens this dependability and various struggles connected to the digital everyday life of those who live in vulnerable situations.

In this article, we explore the self-representation of the everyday life of recently or currently undocumented migrants in Finland through a photographic exhibition organised in collaboration with photographer Katja Tähjä, the Helinä Rautavaara Museum, and seven participants from the research project. Our focus on everyday life is

informed by the prevalence of digital technologies as an intimate infrastructure (Wilson, 2016) that profoundly organises and shapes daily life. The aim of this article is to explore the ways in which a photography exhibition and workshop may depict meaningful moments in digital everyday life and open understanding of the vulnerabilities that emerge in the lives of the undocumented, as expressed by themselves through images, diary notes, and in an interview and workshop discussions.

Photographic workshops and an exhibition provide a unique source of knowledge production to explore the question of visibility. This article approaches visibility on two levels. First, we refer to visibility in relation to membership or position in society. Visibility in this sense is attuned to ideas of being recognised as a member of society (Ghorashi, 2010). Such visibility is connected in complex ways with media representation, digital media participation, and communication rights (Leurs, 2017; Thomas, 2011). While media representation may produce stereotypical hyper-visibility, the context of digital media produces also coerced visibility (Barassi, 2019). Both of these affect the ability to practice communication rights by particularly vulnerable groups. Second, visibility is discussed as part of the photographic research method, as a way to use visual materials of everyday life to enhance societal visibility and connect experiences with larger social trajectories (Rose, 2012; Schreiber, 2020).

By making visible the life of the undocumented to a larger audience, the aim of the photographic exhibition is to accumulate understanding of the conditions and experiences they face on a daily basis. More than that, the photographic workshop can provide a space for reflection and encounters that may add insight and perspective to one's life situation and its connections to struggles for human rights and the right to live (Thomas, 2011). This article does not aim to suggest that photographic exhibition and a workshop operate as a simple path to belonging, but instead to present it as an opening to explore and reflect on the complex connections of vulnerability, visibility, and invisibility in digital everyday life.

2. Contradictions of Visibility

Visibility is considered a central element in enhancing the emancipation of migrant and minority populations in their struggles to become full members of society. Visibility, to be seen as a member of society, is closely connected to the concept of voice, to be able to narrate one's life and reflect on it (Couldry, 2010; Georgiou, 2018). Visibility then resonates with the concept of a multiethnic public sphere (Husband, 1996) that refers to the recognition of an equal position in a society across differences. However, visibility can also be seen as a trap that essentializes identities and conceals differences within social, gendered, and ethnic groups (Phelan, 1993). As argued by Ghorashi (2010) and Schreiber

(2020) visibility should not be treated as a simple gateway to belonging. The contradictions of visibility become evident in research that shows how migrants are simultaneously hyper-visible and invisible in society. As argued by Collins (2016, p. 1170), migrants remain invisible in terms of their daily lives "yet, at other moments, often associated with various crises, migrants become subject to excessive attention" (see also Nikunen, 2020). In a similar way Saltsman and Majidi (2021, p. 2523) argue that "forced migrants often find themselves in something of a contradiction: by becoming hyper-visible in ways that play into dominant narratives of tragedy, insecurity, or victimhood, they simultaneously experience invisibility and inaudibility in terms of their lived experience." Recent studies on migration in European context have also pointed out the gendered nature of hypervisibility where particularly young men are represented as a potential threat connected to sexual violence and terrorism, whereas women and children are represented more in terms of ideal victims (Mavelli, 2017; Nikunen, 2020).

Digital media technologies have provided new possibilities to gain visibility and to be visibly present. Digital media have become a central area for public gatherings, debates, and social interaction, and therefore also a space of possibility for marginal voices to appear (Nikunen, 2019). Being visible on social media can enhance social life and interaction in ways that increase a sense of social solidarity, recognition, and belonging (Fraser, 1995; Nikunen, 2019). It can provide currency to make claims and raise concerns over social issues. Indeed, the ability to be seen as part of society is deeply entangled with digital media. Digital technologies have become an essential infrastructure in everyday life, not only for the "connected refugees" (Diminescu, 2008) but for people across society. Digital media, such as smartphones, provide information, maps, and tools to navigate and take care of official and everyday errands and operate as a site of imagination, joy, and connectivity. Discussed in terms of intimate infrastructures (Wilson, 2016), digital technologies are immersing in growing areas of everyday practices and experience.

Contradictions of visibility are further embodied in the ways in which being visible on digital media exposes to surveillance and coerced visibility (Barassi, 2019). The current social media platforms are built on infrastructures of data gathering and automated surveillance (Andrejevic, 2020), now normalised in the everyday use of social media and considered essential for the functioning of commercial platforms (Van Dijck, 2014). The vulnerability produced by the traces left by data is often difficult to conceive due to the complex and hidden workings of data-driven platforms. Gangadharan (2012) points out that the ease of tracking personal data can create "non-transparent, asymmetric power relations between the profilers and profiled, in political, social, and economic contexts."

Inspired by Leurs' (2017) research on communication rights as performed through digital media by young

refugees' digital practices, we approach visibility and digital media from the perspective of communication rights. The right to communicate is considered to be fundamentally connected to human rights. All people, regardless of their age, status, ability, or communicative capacity have the right to interact with others, hold opinions, and express themselves. The communicative rights, as discussed by Leurs (2017) emphasize inclusive, participatory understanding of rights as essential for membership in the society. These include for example the right for information, family life, and self-expression. In digital media context, these rights may appear self-evident for many.

However, the undocumented in this study expressed fear for their safety in general terms on social media as a semi-public space that renders them visible to unknown audiences. In this way, surveillance by platforms, peers, governments, officials, and potentially hostile groups add to the complexity of visibility and the multiple levels it operates in digital everyday life. The visibility on datafied platforms produces various challenges to people in vulnerable life situations. Therefore, visibility on digital platforms does not equal communication rights. To clarify the relation between visibility and communication rights, we consider visibility as a loose term to refer to the different ways in which people can be "seen" as members of society. Such visibility can operate as a pathway to recognition in a particular social context (for example within a nation-state), whereas communication rights refer to more concrete rights that every person is entitled to—as part of human wellbeing. Previous migration research has shown that both visibility and the right to communicate may be severely compromised for example on basis of gender or sexuality when women's use of media is controlled by family members or in cases where homosexuality is not accepted and therefore severely affects self-expression (Dhoest & Szulc, 2016; Shield, 2019; Witteborn, 2020).

We argue that, for the undocumented, visibility, invisibility, and digital media form a complex terrain of danger, dependency, and emerging possibilities in daily life. While migrants struggle for more just visibility in society, the undocumented are in a particularly precarious position. Understanding their difficult life situation requires more public attention; however, for the individuals, this creates a substantial threat with the potential discovery and deportation. We explore the ways in which the necessity to remain unidentified and invisible shapes the ability to achieve communicative rights, even if digital technologies of communication are an essential part of everyday life.

3. Participatory Photography Method

Substantial social initiatives, programmes, and research have been devoted to enhancing the possibilities for migrants, asylum seekers, and the undocumented to become more visible in society and to voice their concerns and claims (Georgiou, 2018; Ghorashi, 2010).

The tradition of participatory photography draws on feminist theory, action research, Freire's critical pedagogy, and documentary photography (Pienimäki, 2020) with the aim of centring knowledge from experience and empowering participants through their own identification of the structures of oppression. Saltsman and Majidi (2021) identify increased interest in action research as a way to provide more collaborative framing for research and the ability to "give voice" to migrants. However, they note that too often in action research projects, voice is taken for granted and serves certain frames of suffering, tragedy, and vulnerability, possibly for advocacy purposes, rather than offering a view of the complexities and contradictions of lived experience. Often in these projects, voices are nevertheless produced in unequal settings with substantial power in the hands of researchers, curators, governments, and funders. They emphasise the importance of integrating the value of experience-based knowledge into the research design (Saltsman & Majidi, 2021).

Acknowledging these shortcomings, limitations, and complications of collaborative research, our research project set out to explore the digital everyday life of undocumented migrants with the aim of centring their experience as a source of knowledge. Besides examining the digital everyday life and social media participation, the aim is to discover how photography as a participatory medium can provide new insights and reflections into their everyday lives. This can be considered as a way to counter symbolic immobility of being stuck in a limited representational frame (Smets, 2019).

In this way, the study connects with the visual turn in social sciences to use photography not only as an illustration but as a source of knowledge in the research process (Ball, 2014; Rose, 2012, pp. 298–299). In addition, in this context, being able to express oneself through images rather than through words may carry importance for those who struggle with the language barrier, and therefore offers more open opportunities for self-expression (Brigham et al., 2018; Pienimäki, 2020).

The workshop was situated in the Helinä Rautavaara Museum, which focuses on mobility and diversity (Rastas & Koivunen, 2021). The museum presents itself as an institution that through its "exhibitions, collections and audience work contribute to a culturally diverse Finland and a world in which there is social justice" (Helinä Rautavaara Museum, n.d.). As such, the Helinä Rautavaara Museum connects with a larger shift in the museum sector towards multi-vocal and participatory exhibitions and inclusion of previously marginalised groups, their stories, and perspectives. (Johansson, 2017). Several scholars have used exhibitions as part of the research process, where the exhibitions provide a space for self-expression and a public forum to address issues related to migration and marginalisation in society. (Schreiber, 2020).

The participants were invited to take part in the study in July 2020 via networks and professionals working

with undocumented migrants and asylum seekers: social workers, NGOs, and volunteers, as well as through day centres for undocumented people. Eventually, 15 men and four women joined the research; however, not all were able to take part in it. One of the women was deported shortly after the project began and one of the men was unable to attend the interview due to anxiety and other mental health problems. Most of the participants in our study are men, partly due to the fact that men are overrepresented in the day centers where we recruited participants. There are many reasons why undocumented women are extremely difficult to reach. Finland has only gradually come to realize that women and men need their own special forms of services, and services for women are still in development. This imbalance is reflected in the composition of the participants of this study.

The participants photographed their everyday lives for one week. On the side, they kept a voice or written diary about the digital aspects of their everyday life. After the diaries were completed, the participants were interviewed individually. All participants met individually with the researcher and a translator, who discussed the study setting, aims, and ethics of the research with them. Seven participants wanted to participate in the photography workshop in addition to writing diaries. They met again with the researcher, the photographer, and a translator (if needed). These seven people were in heterogeneous life situations: One had a newly received permanent residence permit but had severe trouble with family re-uniting and another one had a temporary residence permit. The rest were undocumented and hiding from authorities, save for one, who had just been denied asylum and was still living in the reception centre. The ethnic backgrounds of the participants were also diverse: Two were from North Africa, two from Central Africa, one from the Middle East, and three from Central Asia. One African participant gave up the photography workshop after the camera of their mobile phone broke which was particularly unfortunate due to its relevance in the everyday life.

One to three images from each participant were chosen by the participants, photographer Katja Tähjä, and researchers to be presented in a photographic exhibition at the Helinä Rautavaara Museum. The exhibition titled *Unprotected*, with 19 images, was staged beside and as a continuance of the previously set exhibition *Those Who Left* (Lähteneet). *Those Who Left* included photographs and artefacts of people who had fled their home countries and sought refuge in Europe. While *Those Who Left* included images by professional photographers Katja Tähjä and Anna Autio, *Unprotected* continued the theme, this time through the images taken by the undocumented themselves. Before the public opening of the exhibition in October 2020, the participants gathered at the museum with the researchers and Katja Tähjä for the workshop. In the workshop, the participants discussed the images, the process of taking pictures, the

thoughts and feelings they evoked, and the ways in which they connected with digital life and their life situations.

Since we are dealing with a vulnerable group, our research requires particular sensitivity and a sense of trust. We are committed to ethical principles of confidentiality, openness, and doing no harm (Black, 2003). In line with the reciprocal research process, as the participants give their time to our study, we do our best in helping them in their situation and legal cases with information, advice, and help in official hearings if asked for. One researcher in our group is voluntarily working with an association to support undocumented migrants and is therefore well informed and trusted to help with legal issues.

We are aware of the unequal power relations between the participants and the researchers in this research setting. Therefore, we pay particular attention to ethical guidelines of research and possibilities to advance collaborative methods. There is no denying that the researchers have definitional power in research even if the project stems from ideas of collaborative knowledge production. This is something we consider important to acknowledge. We follow the idea of constructing knowledge as a joint effort that forefronts the voice of the undocumented but also "recognises the power relations where they emerged" (Saltsman & Majidi, 2021, p. 4).

To protect the identity of the research participants, we do not use any names or pseudonyms and have removed features that might disclose aspects of their identity. We refer to the sources in the research data with numerical identification (Diary 1, Interview 1, etc.).

The analysis of the data is built around themes that emerged in the photographic exhibition and discussion. These themes are discussed and analysed in juxtaposition with the diary, interview, and workshop data. While our main attention is on the meanings provided by the photographic workshop participants, additional background data is also provided by the whole corpus of the data. In what follows, we introduce the insights from these discussions and those expressed in the interviews and diaries.

4. From Secrecy to the Public: The Undocumented in Finland

A diverse group of people live undocumented in Finland, following a negative asylum or residence permit decision, or the expiry of a visa or residence permit. We use the term "undocumented" which has become established in the use of human rights organizations, human rights experts, and researchers in Finland and is considered to carry a minimal amount of stigma, referring to a situation where there is no document enabling a permitted stay. We acknowledge that one term can hardly capture the different contexts and life situations that people have. The undocumented comprise a heterogeneous group of people. Most people living in Finland

without a residence permit have entered the country completely legally, either as asylum seekers, with a short-term visa, or with a residence permit. Their situations can be varied—They may have applied for a new residence permit, appealed against a negative decision, or simply considered returning too dangerous and stayed. They may not be able to be deported to their state of nationality.

It is impossible to know exactly how many are undocumented in Finland, as they do not appear in the population information system or other registers. The number and backgrounds of the undocumented have changed recently as legalisation of residence has been made more difficult by legislative changes. According to different NGOs, the number of undocumented workers has increased significantly since the end of 2016. By 2020, there were at least 4,000–5,000 undocumented people in Finland, depending on the definition. Many live in the Helsinki metropolitan area, fewer in other large cities and a minority in rural areas and small towns (Jauhiainen & Tedeschi, 2021).

The everyday life of the undocumented is marked by constant uncertainty about the future. Many fear being caught and therefore avoid the authorities. As undocumented people in Finland cannot turn to the authorities for aid in most cases, they are vulnerable to exploitation and various forms of abuse. The undocumented are not part of society's basic services, so they depend completely on their employers, spouses, or other personal networks, and a few services provided by the third sector such as day centres. The pain of having to keep things secret runs throughout the participants' diaries and interviews. They tell stories of life as a permanent struggle against authorities, "being found," and then deported.

The experience of marginalization is emphasized through media representations that tie the undocumented to particular spaces of illegality, such as the border or detention facilities (Canelo, 2020). A photographic exhibition, based on images by the undocumented, may then challenge the dominant representations and hyper-visuality of the undocumented. As argued by Schreiber (2020), a form of agency can be realised when the undocumented speak of their private experiences and choose how they want to portray their lives and themselves. Since our research consists mostly of male participants, it doesn't diversify the existing male-dominated public imagery of the undocumented migrants or shed light in the possible gendered inequalities in digital media use. However, the focus on everyday life can challenge the stereotypical representations of male migrants as dangerous and threatening to society and open up their experienced vulnerabilities to the wider public.

The pandemic formed a special context for the research. Due to the rapid spread of Covid-19 in the spring of 2020, the Finnish government declared a state of emergency and the first three-week lockdown began on March 8 and was extended until mid-June. The lockdown closed schools and daycares and a widespread recommendation for telework came into effect. Restrictions on assembly were imposed, public facilities were closed first, and eventually the regional government agency imposed strict restrictions on private operators as well. These restrictions weakened some services provided for the marginalized and vulnerable groups such as the homeless and the undocumented. By August 2020, online work and the use of facemasks were recommended nationally. The second lockdown started in the autumn of 2020 just after the photography exhibition opened. This time the lockdown did not close primary schools or daycare, but for other groups it was as isolating as the first one. All public spaces were closed, and masks were demanded.

The pictures taken by the undocumented in our research show the ordinariness of everyday life and bring out the complexity of being on the margins of society. Among the pictures, we see mundane moments such as having coffee, a modest birthday celebration with a doughnut, and a joyful picture of hand-picked raspberries. Photos of lakes, woods, and a heart-shaped cloud convey beauty in the everyday but also a sense of longing and loneliness. Some images convey friends or family members, and many depict mobile phones, wires, and screens that maintain connections with the world around them.

In what follows, we focus on three images in particular that convey the central themes that came out of the discussions, diaries, and interviews in connection to digital everyday life. They illustrate the ways in which visibility and invisibility shape everyday life and the vulnerabilities that emerge in this life situation, particularly those connected to digital media and communication rights. These themes are material connectivity, selfies, and non-privacy.

5. Material Connectivity

Figure 1 depicts a white charger in the centre of the image against a soft grey texture that appears to be a bedsheet. The charger is surrounded by a circle of wires and a pair of grey headphones. Together, they form a modest bundle that's a familiar necessity for many. The image is plain, yet intimate. In its simplicity, it displays the presence and relevance of digital infrastructures in daily life. It speaks of the way material conditions of the digital become accentuated in a situation where affordable Wi-Fi, good connections, and access to charging are not always self-evident.

The participant who took this picture is a young North African who has been in Finland for over two years but never applied for a residence permit. The participant is interested in technology and dreams of a job in digital technology. With this particular picture, the participant wanted the viewer to understand how concrete the "small things that matter in life" are (Diary 17). In discussion with the workshop team, the participant also talked about the need to have a mobile phone, charger, and

headphones always available, and this is something that now connects most people, so there was a point in picturing the device that shows us how similar we are despite differences in legal status.

Figure 1. Small things that matter in life.

The relevance of smartphone technology as an everyday infrastructure for people in precarious situations stated in earlier research (Gillespie et al., 2018; Latonero & Kift, 2018; Leurs, 2017; Ponzanesi, 2019) is also present in the outcomes of the photographic workshop. At the moment of fleeing, smartphone apps are used to translate, discover routes and border closures, discern costs, determine the best destinations, find reliable smugglers, avoid the police and the border guards, document journeys, and follow news about migration and policy in Europe. Described as a digital passage, Latonero and Kift (2018) discuss digital media as a new infrastructure of refugee journeys.

The first thing the participants told us they did when they arrived in Finland was to get a SIM card and message their families that they were safe. Sometimes, they looked for their families with their digital devices. Smartphones can help with integration in the host country and, most importantly, maintain ties and support family and friends abroad (Alencar, 2018; Leurs, 2019). For the undocumented, who live in a constant state of uncertainty, smartphones offer a practical way to reduce experiences of anxiety and fear by connecting with someone important. According to the participants in this study, this communication is vital to their sense

of security and well-being. At the same time, the smartphone as a device causes experiences of anxiety and fear, because it reminds them of "things back home" via news and renews worries for their loved ones or reminds them of their traumatic pasts as explained by one of the participants:

> All the time, I could not stop thinking about what I saw on Facebook. For example, people being killed, children being killed. There was one piece of news, a whole village, Taliban, had burned. These kinds of things. I deleted [Facebook] temporarily. I wasn't sure if I would put Facebook back again. But then again, what if my mom and dad [want to] find me. I continue with Facebook, post images, if mom and dad, or big brother see them, that I am here. (Interview 5)

To make digital media use more secure, several tactics are adopted. Some participants simply gave up their phones while travelling due to the fear of being traced or concerns that their data was being interpreted in a wrong way. Some expressed fear of digital surveillance by the authorities in their country of origin, but they also expressed fear that the authorities in Finland may locate and eventually deport them by tracking their smartphones.

Many of the participants knew of the different security features of different apps and used mostly WhatsApp, Telegram, or Signal to secure unmonitored communication. The participants explained how they try to protect themselves by sticking to encrypted apps, using pseudonyms, avoiding open social media groups, and changing SIM cards as often as possible. However, even if using smartphones increases the risk of surveillance, giving up their use seemed impossible. The phone is a pocket archive (Leurs, 2017) that carries everything valuable to them: pictures of family and friends, music, video clips, and copies of important personal documents. Some of the most valuable possessions of undocumented migrants are their personal and legal documents. These documents serve as evidence of their lives before fleeing their country of origin. Some participants in our study used their smartphones also to capture and archive different milestones during the journey: For instance, when making it to another country or getting released from border police custody; moments of fear in the Aegean sea, terror and violence when facing the border patrol in Hungary and Croatia; and moments of joy with friendly people or co-travellers were treasured and saved in phones (Diary 2). On the other hand, some participants expressed fear of documenting anything and even took their SIM cards away occasionally "to be safe" (Interview 5).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, charging phones and finding public places with free Wi-Fi has been a perpetual problem for the undocumented. Free Wi-Fi calls and messages account for one of the main sources of connection to global social networks:

And when they closed malls and libraries and all it was difficult to find a place to charge the phone. The guards didn't let you stop anywhere indoors. It was really awkward, even though there is a wireless network in almost every location in the center. To us, it meant you can only stay home if you want to be somehow connected. If you have a home. I sometimes think about what this means to some of my friends who live seven in one studio apartment. (Diary 4)

Thus, the second lockdown meant increased constant worry about access to the internet and made it difficult for the participants to regularly contact family and friends. This illustrates what has been described as "information precarity" (Wall et al., 2016). The fact that looking for free Wi-Fi was still part of their lives, after several years of arriving in Finland, caused a sense of disappointment and despair. One of the participants described that the pandemic made them realise the totality of exclusion from society and "normal" life.

The experiences of the participants speak of the ways in which a smartphone and digital media as material devices operates as fairway to communication rights. Smartphones are used for essential information to survive, to connect with family, and to find ways to live in a new environment. However, these aspects of communication rights cannot be pursued freely. They are subject of constant material struggles of access, pursued through forced invisibility and therefore partial to start with.

6. Hidden Selfies

Figure 2 depicts a bright summer day by the lake. Most of the image is covered by a medium close-up of a person with curly light brown hair, baseball cap, and mirrored sunglasses. The person looks towards the camera with a faint smile. The image is taken against the light, so it covers most features. Behind the person, who is possibly a woman, we see the clear blue sky and the sun, making a bridge of light to the water. The image conveys a fragile moment of happiness.

The participant who took this image pondered carefully how to take a selfie without being visible. The contrast with the emergence of digital photography and the surge of selfies as a ubiquitous practice is striking. The selfies taken by the undocumented aim at being unrecognisable; however, the pictures can still be full of meaningful details that help interpret how they want to be seen. These selfies are often crafted with lights and shadows. Instead of centring ones' face, images may capture a part of the body, hand, or foot, or a reflection of shadows on the wall. They capture the desire to be part of the social media world and to be connected with others. Selfies operate on multiple levels as technologies of self, identity, and citizenship. They re-narrate identities through a predefined structure, one connected to social connectivity and temporality of presentness (Nikunen,

2018). Selfies are often critiqued as self-centred and individualistic (Cruz & Thornham, 2015); however, as Senft and Baym (2015) argue, selfies can capture and evoke a variety of meanings. Chouliaraki (2017) uses the remediation of migrant and refugee selfies in mainstream news as a case study of symbolic bordering that appropriates, marginalises, or displaces their digital testimonies in Western news media. Nemer and Freeman (2015), who have researched the use of selfies among urban youth in Brazilian favelas, argue that selfies can be a way to assume a voice—or to be seen—for the ones who have only limited access to the public. The simultaneous presence and non-presence illustrate the creativity in assuming a way to use the right to express oneself. A selfie is a documentation of a passing moment and a chance for subjects to show off a special side of themselves. Selfies are intimate because they represent a personal experience that is also social, taken for the purpose of sharing. The participants in the study wanted to share their pictures and moments of their lives just like the celebrities they follow as described below:

Already in the morning I take a picture of me. It starts my day, I tell my friends how I feel. I use different picture frames and effects and edit my pictures if I feel like it. Then I might make a post or an update with a beautifully put-up Arabic saying that describes my feelings. But these are never for public, only for people I know and trust. So, it does not include my ex-husband even, these are very private. (Diary 2)

Figure 2. A hidden selfie.

Selfies also depict what Leurs (2019) has described as transnational affective care work. The participants expressed the need to assure their families that they are OK by sending selfies and messages that convey a sense of ordinary everyday life. The fact that this was done even if it is risky speaks of the importance of the right to be connected with family and friends. This became embodied through the workshop discussion when one participant discussed an image where he poses together with his family and explained the support he gets from his family. Another participant, who came to Finland by herself became extremely emotional and explained that she missed her family deeply. Being in contact with the family was voiced as extremely important, as a form of (self-)care, yet in many ways challenging in the social media context. These examples speak of the relevance of communication rights for family life and the difficulties the undocumented face when pursuing those rights.

As discussed above, the participants use substantial time to control and manage their social media presence by restricting groups to only the closest and by using apps that are considered safe. However, even these efforts may not be enough as datafied social media collapse multiple contexts and audiences in ways that complicate the possibility of managing separate profiles and create a sense of uncontrollability (Marwick & Boyd, 2010). Here, the hidden selfies evidence the precarious life situations that exclude one from society and the underlying deep desire to be connected with others, even from the shadows.

7. Non-Private Everyday

Figure 3 depicts a room with two bunk beds. The top beds seem empty without mattresses. One of them is filled with things—a backpack, clothes, and towels. The lower beds are unmade, and an orange towel hangs on the end of the other bed. Light glances through the window, making shadows on the walls. Beneath the window, there's an empty mattress. A pair of black shoes stand in the middle of the floor. The image conveys a sense of not being there, not belonging. The empty beds, backpacks, white walls, and lonely shoes speak of temporariness. People are not here to stay. They are here, but not present. The generativity of bunk beds reminds us of an institution, a boarding school, a prison, a hospital, or a reception centre, rather than a cosy, private home.

The picture was taken by a participant who had been living in two different reception centres but was undocumented at the moment of the workshop. With this picture, the participant wanted to draw attention to the difficulties of having to live in a reception centre. In the workshop, this participant spoke most vocally about the importance of shedding light on the difficult life situation of the undocumented. Most images taken by this participant reflected a similar sense of melancholy and loneliness, expressed through the aesthetics of quiet non-presence. The images were devoid of people, capturing the silence of buildings and the calm beauty of nature. The participant described the image in these words: "I want to show my moods and they aren't always

Figure 3. I am here alone.

beautiful. I am here alone, and my daily life is gloomy. The reception centre has not been a safe place for me" (Diary 7).

Most participants had been in a reception centre at some point during their journey. Life in the reception centre is characterised by a lack of privacy and the fact that they have to deal with their own emotions and those of others with little privacy: sorrow, depression, disappointment, aggression—but joy and happiness as well. Living with many types of people is described as arduous and challenging. "You have to live in tight spaces and close to unfamiliar people who come from different cultures" described one participant who added that "these strange people are also stressed and emotionally unpredictable, for the future of everyone is uncertain" (workshop discussion). Different symptoms are constantly in the air—for example, tearfulness, ferocity, introversion, or hyperactivity. The transfers from one housing unit to another do not promote a feeling of security—and there is the constant fear of being re-transferred. During the pandemic, reception centres have been risky, as the affection rate of the virus has been exceptionally high in these facilities. One of the participants describes this additional pressure during the pandemic as follows:

> Here in Helsinki, I have some Afghan friends or only two people I can call my friends, but they live in refugee camps, and I cannot meet them because of the corona. The whole camp has been in quarantine, and you cannot go in there. And they are both also very depressed. They have a lot of going, no residence permits and one of them lost his job because of Corona. So, they are my friends, but it is not always good for me to see them. (Diary 9)

Life at the reception centre is also carefully controlled: There is a set of ground rules that residents must follow and that can be demanding for people with emotional stress and trauma. A good example of inflexible rules and rigid control is that the participant who still lived in the reception centre lost his daily allowance because he was participating in the photography workshop instead of taking care of a cleaning shift. No negotiation or alternative arrangement was possible; however, eventually, he was compensated through the research project. Every day is also filled with arguments with residents, loss of temper, shouting, and even abuse of power. In this context, the digital world provides an avenue to escape, connect with friends, or travel to other worlds and imagine different lives. According to the participants, the smartphone is a haven and the only possible place for privacy when living in a reception centre. During the pandemic, as several public places have been closed, the affective space of digital media accumulates its value as an imaginary world where one can follow the life of others, as a space of anticipation, hopes, dreams, and resilience (Gillespie et al., 2018). As Twigt (2018, p. 8) points out

in her research on digital devices among Iraqi refugees in Jordan, digital technologies orient towards hope, to make the current life situation bearable. The participant in our study, who took the picture above, had an active, shielded Instagram profile with many followers. For this participant life on Instagram provided a stark contrast to the confined non-privacy of the reception centre and an opportunity to use the right to express oneself.

8. Conclusions

The world of being undocumented concerns radical experiences of invisibility, dispossession, and disappearance. To be considered illegal, susceptible, and a danger to society affects one's sense of self and trust in the possibilities to change things. The pictures of the undocumented speak of courage to show their joie de vivre, love for the family, and vulnerability in their self-portraits. The images are powerful acts to assume communication rights to humanise the ones who are considered "surplus humanity" (Ticktin, 2010). With the mundane moments of life, they point to a deep desire to live life as ordinary and the impasse of not being able to do that. They suggest a critical awareness attained to a position from which they can speak. Even the process of taking pictures to an assumed audience was felt as meaningful, allowing them to act and to be seen in society, as described by one participant:

> I feel like you're listening to me through pictures. I get energy when the people around me can see what my life is like. It feels like I'm not alone. That's why I don't want to give up but look for solutions so that my new life can begin. (Diary 17)

This study contributes to the research of digital media in the everyday life of undocumented migrants and refugees on several levels. While previous research has explored digital media as a site of participation, drawing mainly on theorizations of participation and citizenship, this study is able to show the contradictions of participation in a datafied media environment. The study confirms the fundamental importance of communication rights— to get information, express oneself, and be in contact with family and friends safely— as central for the survival and wellbeing of people in precarious life situations. However, the study also shows that the necessity to remain constantly cautious and only partially part of the digital social world speaks of the digital bordering of communicative rights, which is intensified by the logic of datafication and surveillance. Visibility on digital platforms then is not a simple pathway to participation and citizenship. Visibility is also coerced through platform infrastructure in ways that can cause uncertainty and danger. While Leurs (2017) points out the ways in which refugees can digitally make claims for their human rights; our study also points out how the digital, datafied media environment operates as a site of constant surveillance

and struggle for communicative rights. These struggles take place on the material level of digital devices, chargers, and access, but also on the level of self-expression on social media platforms. The nuanced understanding of the contradictions of visibility in the context of datafied platforms contributes to the previous research and challenges the field to engage more with the interrelations of datafication and visibility.

Second, this study expands the methodological approach from interviews and observation to more participatory and multimodal forms of knowledge production. The photographic workshop provided a space for countering stereotypical representations as well as offering knowledge from experience through visual artwork and workshop reflections. Such a multidimensional approach opened the complexities and contradictions of lived experience in ways that can contribute to research more than the taken for granted idea of voice (Saltsman & Majidi, 2021).

At the same time, it is worth noticing that participating can require a lot from people in a precarious life situation. Sharing details of one's everyday life to the public can cause anxiety and fear and therefore the voluntariness of participation should be clear throughout the workshop process. Covid-19 has fortified many mechanisms of exclusion in different ways. The second lockdown also affected the exhibition and closed the doors of the museum only five days after the opening. In this way then, the exhibition was only briefly available to the public and Covid-19 severely limited the goals of the exhibition. To make up for this loss, the images will be made available on the project website.

Overall, the photographic exhibition operated as a space of knowledge production, encounter, and reflection in ways that may further imaginative politics for the future. The workshop brought together people in similar life situations, who were scattered in different parts of Finland, some with no other acquaintance with these difficulties. Sharing their stories with others in a similar situation entailed emancipatory power. To see ones' experience in someone else's story showed that one is not alone. These insights and encounters may provide a more longitudinal impact on the life of the participants than the public display of the images. They can potentially create pathways to solidarity struggles in terms of legal rights and status of the undocumented.

Drawing on these reflections, the study challenges the field to develop more participatory, multimodal approaches in ways that enhance collaborative knowledge from experience and provide research that becomes meaningful and supportive for the ones who participate in it.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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