15. Undocumented and Datafied: Anticipation, Borders and Everyday Life

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Abstract
This chapter explores how datafication shapes the bordering practices and lives of undocumented migrants. Datafication involves a temporal shift towards anticipation that focuses on predicting, profiling and pre-empting different forms of migration. The empirical data consists of diaries and interviews, as well as documents and legal cases of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers in Finland. The case studies show that data used on borders is often produced from various sources with inconsistent practices and inherent biases. In addition, datafication has rendered borders ubiquitous: borders follow people in their digital everyday life, causing uncertainty, mistrust and embodied anticipation of surveillance. Overall, the chapter argues that in the anticipatory temporality of datafied borders, humanity itself becomes evaluated and assorted through inconsistent and biased data practices.

Keywords: datafication; data bias; borders; undocumented migrants; anticipation; digital life.

15.1 Introduction: Datafication of Borders

In recent years, datafication has become an increasingly central concept in migration research (Aradau & Tazzioli, 2020; Broeders & Dijstelbom, 2016; Metcalfe & Dencik, 2019). Datafication refers to the continuous gathering of data from everyday life and selling it to third parties or using it for algorithmic profiling, predictive analysis and automated decision-making (Cukier & Mayer-Schoenberger, 2013; van Dijck, 2014). This entails, as José van Dijck (2014) argued, a widespread belief in digital technologies’ objective...
quantification and potential tracking of all kinds of human behaviour and sociality. Thanks to new digital infrastructure, government, military powers, the financial sector, advertisers, tech companies and humanitarian organizations can all conduct surveillance through data (Barassi, 2018; Eubanks, 2018). Data mining, Kennedy and Moss (2015) argued, has become a powerful method for politicians and policymakers to know and capture what the public says and does.

Datafication is often framed as a phenomenon that concerns everyone: in a highly networked digital world, datafication cannot be escaped. However, in recent years, researchers have studied inequalities (Eubanks, 2018; Kennedy et al., 2021), vulnerabilities (Gangadharan, 2012) and algorithms of oppression (Noble, 2018), demonstrating that datafication does not treat everyone in the same way. Automated social sorting, critical data studies have highlighted, is often based on categorizations and assumptions that echo existing social biases and power structures, as well as pervasive and accumulative surveillance of the already marginalized (Gangadharan & Niklas, 2019; Ajana, 2019; Colman, 2016).

In the migration context, datafied surveillance systems are employed to control migration not only on borders but also beyond them. Data-driven technologies have strengthened borders and rendered them ubiquitous: the outside border control has grown increasingly mobile, now able to travel in the migrated bodies as “technologically afforded aura” (Pötsch, 2015, p. 111). Datafication thus exemplifies the intimate power-knowledge and the Foucauldian biopolitics inherent in the mechanisms, technologies and rationalities employed to manage and govern the life of others from fingertips to pocket-archives (Ajana, 2019; Foucault, 1977; Leurs, 2017).

Over the past 15 years, the European Commission has invested more than three billion euros in the research and development of border security, particularly after the refugee crisis between 2015 and 2016, when more than one million people fled the wars in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan to EU countries (Luyten et al., 2020). It is noteworthy that while in 2022 over six million people escaped the war in Ukraine, they have been treated very differently compared to the previous “refugee crisis” in Europe in 2015. For Ukrainian refugees, the EU has established measures to accelerate the process of temporary protection (European Commission, 2022). However, these measures only concern Ukrainian refugees. According to Martin-Mazé and Perret (2021), the EU is adopting “techno-solutionism” to side-line moral considerations when dealing with the complex issue of migration outside Europe. They distinguished three rationalities of power universes that shape the bordering practices at the EU’s external border. The first pertains to the
The universe of the military, drawing from the idea of territory surrounded by walls, even in the form of an electronic surveillance system (Eurosur). The second concerns the police and authorities who work to “manage flows of people and set up a series of filters to sort out licit life and things, from illicit ones” (Martin-Mazé & Perret 2021, p. 281). The third is about the rationality of power, where borders are no longer solid but transformed into data and are thus “gaseous.” The three universes exist simultaneously, but they work in different ways.

In this chapter, we explore how datafication shapes the bordering practices and lives of undocumented migrants in Finland and in Europe in general. Datafication, we argue, changes the temporality of knowledge production to anticipation. This means that datafication enables prediction of migration routes and activities, and pre-emption of unwanted mobility. Moreover, rather than neutral and straightforward knowledge production, datafication involves complex and contradictory practices. Following Aradau and Tazzioli (2020), who argued that “biopolitics multiple” captures the different and uneven ways biopolitics affects people’s lives, we argue that datafication as a concept needs to be closely examined to understand its uneven and processual nature. Datafication, then, is not an uncomplicated force of knowledge production but a complex process, constructed and compiled from various and often contradictory sources, intertwined in the everyday as a form of intimacy and responded to in multiple ways, from anticipation and anxiety to a sense of possibility. To understand the complex, affective and intimate workings of datafication, we explore border practices and the everyday experiences of those who often remain invisible in public but are subjected to and dependent on multiple data-driven services and practices (Hegde, 2019; Latonero & Kift, 2018; Ponzanesi, 2019).

We discuss datafication in two contexts. First, the datafication of borders has become an essential aspect of migration, with its multiple implications for how people become undocumented and how they come into being. The datafied logic of decision-making affect border practices and processes by diminishing the space for negotiation and meaning-making—described by Tazzioli (2018) as the accelerated temporality of identification procedures—that may generate fatal consequences. The second area of exploration concerns the experience of datafication in everyday life. After the borders are crossed, surveillance continues in different forms and leaves traces of mistrust and fear in the everyday lives of the repeatedly monitored. The datafication of the undocumented’s everyday life reveals how borders travel and follow people, even in digital spaces (Broeders & Dijstelbloem, 2016; Witteborn, 2020). Through datafication, we argue, borders have become
more ubiquitous, multi-layered and mundane, operating not only in different spaces but also in time—through anticipation and prediction, through waiting and delay. Borders travel on mobile phones and in leaky combinations of different digital archives, operating as intimate infrastructure of life.

15.2 Research Context: Finland's Undocumented People?

The scale of irregular migration in Europe is based on a set of evaluations and national projects. That undocumented migrants try to avoid authorities means that they are difficult to count, and the counting differs according to country. Research by the Clandestino project (Duvell et al., 2008) estimated that the number of undocumented migrants in the 27 EU member states at the time was between 1.9 and 3.8 million. The so-called refugee crisis in 2015 brought more than one million new asylum seekers to Europe, with some of them ending up undocumented, either in the country where they submitted their applications or elsewhere in Europe. According to the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM), the number of undocumented migrants in Europe, estimated to be between 4.1 and 5.3 million, peaked between 2017 and 2018 (PICUM, 2021).

Most undocumented migrants arrive from the Asia-Pacific region, the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, and European countries that are not part of the EU or EFTA. Most of them enter an EU country without authorization but legally as asylum seekers, overstay their visa, fail to leave after being ordered to do so, or have their deportation temporarily delayed. The undocumented population also includes those born in EU countries to undocumented parents—Finland, like most European countries, does not have birthright citizenship, the so-called jus solis. The European undocumented population also includes asylum seekers who are waiting for a decision, a group that, in 2021, still comprised nearly half a million people and is likely to be the largest such group with an uncertain legal status (Connor & Passel, 2019; PICUM, 2021).

Equally diverse groups of people live as undocumented in Finland. Since they do not appear in the population registers, it is impossible to know exactly how many people are undocumented. However, according to NGOs such as Refugee Advice Center and Amnesty International, the undocumented population has increased significantly since the end of 2016; presently, there are approximately 5,000 to 6,000 undocumented people in Finland, with many of them living in the capital area and also in other large cities (Jauhiainen & Tedeschi, 2021).
The undocumented's everyday life is marked by constant uncertainty about the future and different exclusionary experiences, some of which are intensified through digitalization and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Since the undocumented cannot turn to authorities, they remain extremely vulnerable to exploitation and various forms of abuse, and since they are not part of society's basic services, they are completely dependent on their personal networks.

15.3 Methodological Considerations

Our study focuses on datafication and the experiences of the digital everyday life of currently or recently undocumented migrants in Finland. Since datafication is a complex phenomenon and fairly difficult to explore in the everyday, we contend, that it requires multiple methods and a combination of approaches. Our research includes empirical data collected from diaries and interviews, as well as documents and case observations concerning hearings and legal cases. The diaries and interviews provided the basis for the study and, through these, we expanded exploration to the case studies with documents, case observations and legal cases shared by the participants. We have an on-going connection with the participants of the study with the aim of understanding the complexity of their experiences; this requires time. We acknowledge that researching people in such a vulnerable situation requires a sense of commitment and capacity to make research participation meaningful for the participants (Pittaway et al., 2010; MacKenzie et al., 2007).

The participants were invited to take part in the study in July 2020 through 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, 16 people joined the study; they kept diaries of their daily lives for seven to 10 days. The participants were instructed to tell something about their digital everyday life: a good experience, a barrier to participation, a perceived feeling about a platform, anything that the participant felt was significant. They could keep the diary in the language of their choice, either as an audio or written version. The concept of a diary was not familiar to everyone, so the diaries were very different from each other, and the vulnerable position of the participants was reflected in coping: keeping a diary seemed to require a lot of energy and determination. Along with the diary, participants photographed their digital everyday lives. Through the pictures, we were able
to discuss experiences that were difficult or impossible for participants to write about. After completing the diary, they were interviewed individually, sometimes with the help of a translator. The diaries were used in interviews as providing examples or queries to reflect upon. The diary and interview data were coded thematically (such as emotions, social relationships, self-presentation, surveillance, platforms, digital services) with Atlas.ti software.

Seven participants also joined a photography workshop that included the pictures they had taken documenting their everyday lives (Nikunen & Valtonen, 2022). Even though the study took place during the Covid-19 lockdown, the researchers met each participant personally. To build trust, face-to-face meetings are important, especially for a population living in constant uncertainty. Our research is committed to the ethical principles of confidentiality, openness and doing no harm (Black, 2003). Therefore we disclose only relevant information of the participants to protect their identity. Their citations have been translated and edited for fluency and to ensure they do not convey personal details. In line with the reciprocal research process, as the participants gave their time to our study, we did our best to help them with their situation and legal cases by offering them information, advice and help with official hearings if asked for. One researcher in our group chairs an association to support the undocumented and is thus well trusted to offer help with legal issues. This possibility may raise unreasonable expectations among the participants and therefore we made sure that the participants understood the options that are available in their cases. While for some the legal help was clearly relevant, there were others who were also eager to participate in order to be part of a research that could help the undocumented migrants’ situation in general. Overall it appeared important in terms of trust to be able to give the participants something in return that they determine to be valuable themselves (Pittaway et al. 2010).

As Pittaway and colleagues (2010) argue, ethically unsound research practices can cause distrust and emotional and material harm for people in vulnerable situations. Since we were aware that, in such a research setting, there will be a power imbalance between the participants and the researchers, we paid particular attention to the ethical guidelines of research. These include making sure the participants receive enough information and feedback on the research and that researchers do not simply “fly in and out” of their lives (Pittaway et al., 2010). Our ultimate aim was to find ways to understand the structures and experiences of inequalities and to offer help to our participants through meaningful research.
15.4 Borders, Bones and Fingerprints

A substantial amount of research has focused on how borders have become datafied due to the latest technologies that seek to improve systems of identification and surveillance. Research has highlighted how several datasets in Europe—VIS (Visa Information System), SIS (Schengen Information System) and Eurodac (fingerprints of people over 14 years when they enter Europe)—are used to track people's movements. These border databases and technologies include identification documents, fingerprinting, facial recognition systems, retinal scans, speech detection systems, ground sensors, aerial video surveillance drones, and various automated decision-making processes (Aradau & Tazzioli, 2020; Broeders, 2007; Metcalfe & Dencik, 2019; Scheel et al., 2019). The logics of datafication, we argue, fortifies a temporal shift in migration governance towards pre-emption (Andrejevic, 2020).

Anticipation has become the dominating operational logic in governmental and supranational institutions, with the hope of being able to predict and prevent crises and conflicts. In the migration context, predictions are used to identify people's movements, and this information is used to determine where and when European borders need to be strengthened and, consequently, how to predict and categorize future asylum seekers. In this way, operational logic can strengthen the idea that particular groups are not worthy of asylum and work as racial profiling. Consequently, such groups are pushed back even before they can make an application for asylum. In other words, anticipatory logic influence where and when people can reach refugee status and where and when they are denied this status and become undocumented (Martin-Mazé & Perret, 2021).

As critical data studies scholars have highlighted, datasets are always historical, constructed and laden with political and ethical values (Metcalf & Crawford, 2016). There are several examples of facial recognition systems misrecognizing racialized minorities or the data produced being misinterpreted, thus illustrating the biases that are often overlooked due to the belief that technology is an infallible source of information (Boulamwini & Gerbu, 2018; Browne, 2015). Moreover, the technology of biometric systems cannot register bodies that are not complete; those with injured eyes or fingers, who have speaking impairments, or transgender bodies escape the normative systems of identification. Such a technology does not necessarily grant such bodies freedom from surveillance but instead submits them to further systems of surveillance (Constanza-Shock, 2020; Jacobsen & Rao, 2018).

The inconsistency of biometric data is illustrated by how authorities may interpret data differently according to the situation. A compelling example of
the inconsistent use of biometric data concerns age assessment (Tapaninen, 2018). A minor asylum seeker’s age is verified using a bone density survey method. Age is tested with the consent of the minor and their representative or guardian, but if consent is refused, the person is treated as an adult before the law. Paediatricians, psychologists or social workers are not involved in the assessment. In this way, the body becomes the central object and stage of the exercise of power and the study results are reduced to “tooth age” and “wrist age.” However, the comparative data of age assessment is based on data gathered in the 1930s from upper-middle-class children in Ohio (the so-called “Greulich-Pyle method”). In other words, the data used as a ‘norm’, is originally created for a completely different purpose in a different historical and geographical context. This bias in the database is, however, largely omitted and the age assessment of current asylum seekers in Europe to a great extent relies on this biased data. Moreover, the range of accuracy of the test is set as wide a two years, which offers a window for interpretation that can be used to meet other goals or policies.

A compelling example is an asylum seeker who came to Finland, a few years after his mother and siblings, at the age of 17 and three months. He had a tazkira (an Afghan birth certificate), written by the same imam who had also provided his mother’s and siblings’ certificates before. The mother’s and siblings’ documents and ages had been accepted as genuine by the Finnish authorities. However, the son was assigned to an age test, and based on that, his age was raised by 10 months. As a result, he was declared to be just over 18, which meant he could not obtain a residence permit based on family ties. He thus became an asylum seeker. His age could not be raised further, as then his age would have come too close to the age of his older sister (with less difference than nine months), but it was raised just enough to justify the (negative) decision and expulsion.

Sometimes biometric identifiers, such as fingerprints, cease to be part of the truth or sufficient to identify someone. Even in situations when biometric data is found, for example, in the form of a Eurodac hit, authorities may question its validity. When a Eurodac hit is found, an asylum seeker becomes a Dublin case, and their asylum investigation proceeds under the Dublin Regulation. Often, this means awaiting a decision in a normal reception centre—but not always. If the identification is not considered sufficiently valid and the person does not have a valid travel document, they may be detained for a longer period. This happened to an asylum seeker who arrived in Finland from Latvia in 2021. His expired passport was held by the Latvian police. Even if the Finnish authorities found multiple Eurodac hits, these were not enough to convince the authorities. So instead of a normal
reception centre, the asylum seeker had to wait for his Dublin process at the detention unit for three months. However, the same biometric data and identification were considered sufficient to deport him. Thus, there seems to be some flexibility in how authorities interpret biometric data—the same data can be used as much to verify as to undermine the “truth” of a person’s identity. Such cases reveal that border procedures based on biometric data and how they are negotiated, anticipate the policy goals and political aims to strengthen borders and reduce “pull factors.” While bodies are considered to be the ultimate evidence, digital devices that store documents, images, interactions, relationships and other private information are also increasingly surveilled to verify the identity of those in need of protection.

The mobile phone of an individual who has applied for international protection in Finland is only examined in exceptional situations, but according to the experiences of migrants and asylum seekers, this is not the case everywhere in Europe. The European Commission published a Return Handbook that outlines the standards and procedures in EU member states for returning illegally staying third-country nationals (The Return Handbook, 2017), offering guidance for national authorities competent in conducting return-related tasks, including police, border guards, migration authorities, staff of detention facilities and monitoring bodies. Control over an individual’s mobile phone has been left to the member countries to decide. Therefore, for instance, asylum seekers who do not have valid travel documents or other identity-proving documents can have their mobile phones checked for identification purposes. According to one of our study participants, their son’s mobile phone was investigated in Croatia to verify their itinerary. Moreover, other asylum seekers have also reported, for example, that authorities have gone through the images stored on a mobile phone in other EU member states to investigate, among other things, terrorist risks (Beduschi, 2018; Thuer et al., 2018).

Although mobile phones or other devices are not examined in principle in Finland as part of the asylum procedure, social media accounts are still relevant in defining the need for international protection. Status updates and social media discussions are investigated when it is necessary to assess the extent to which a person is politically prominent and in need of international protection (see Andreassen 2020). Many of our research participants have also tried to verify their cases by presenting social media content as evidence. In most cases, they received threatening messages via social media, both before and after fleeing their countries of origin. However, these messages were not enough to convince the Immigration Service of their personal danger, as the authenticity of the messages, their sender(s), or the sender(s)’s motivation could not be ascertained.
Two participants provided their own social media accounts as evidence of political activity (and thus as a cause of personal persecution). In these cases, social media metrics, the number of followers, likes and comments were studied. According to the Finnish Immigration Service’s interpretation of these cases, political content with few followers, likes or shares does not, in principle, endanger its publisher—the threat must be demonstrated in other ways as well. These estimates rarely consider the different ways in which social media is used in different cultures (see Andreassen 2020). Our research participants explained that, in their home countries, people mostly use social media to “stalk” others (participants 3 and 15) because expressing one’s position by liking or commenting would be too dangerous, both in their country of origin and their country of exile. For example, one participant received a negative protection decision because his political activities were considered private and his social media interaction was low; thus, he was not considered dangerous. However, the politically assertive videos he has been uploading regularly have been viewed thousands of times, although the number of explicit likes is non-existent. Inevitably, these experiences have an impact on the subsequent use of social media and, more generally, on the structures of societal trust.

The examples demonstrate that there are multiple interpretations of data, and these interpretations are often linked to political goals and policies. For example, the introduction to the Finnish government’s proposal to apply age assessment states that the intention is to “reduce certain pull factors.” This is what Tapaninen and Helén (2019) described as ubiquitous suspicion that can “outweigh any form of evidence” (2019, p. 388). These examples illustrate how datafied control and surveillance can reduce judicial and moral questions to technical issues (Korp & Stretmo, 2020).

Increasingly, borders are aligned with various pre-emptive technologies to prevent the arrival of asylum seekers altogether. During the Covid-19 pandemic, for instance, motion-sensor-operated long-range sound cannons were tested at the Greece border, bringing a new dimension to the practice of the audialization of migrant bodies that Weitzell (2018) discussed (see also Chapter 13 by Leix Palumbo on the weaponization of sound). “Sound cannons that shoot out deafening noise are part of a vast array of physical and experimental new digital barriers being installed and tested during the quiet months of the coronavirus pandemic at the Greek-Turkey border to stop people entering the European Union” (Martin-Mazé & Perret, 2021, p. 279). Sound cannons are accompanied by long-range cameras, night vision, and multimodal sensors—all of them collect data to flag suspicious movement using artificial intelligence analysis to have a “pre-border” picture of what is happening (Kouniaki, 2021). The anticipatory automated surveillance
network being built on the Greek–Turkish border aims to detect migrants early and deter them from crossing. Surveillance and verification technology has been created and tested in Greece, Hungary, Latvia and elsewhere along the eastern EU perimeter.

Datafied pre-emptive technologies, according to scholars, have not only contributed to a sense of mistrust towards migrants but have also dehumanized them (Broeders, 2007; Tapaninen & Helén, 2020). A recent UN report stated that the development of digital border technologies has led to experimental, dangerous and even discriminatory practices (UN, 2020). Stateless persons and non-citizens now have fewer rights and legal protection and are thus increasingly subject to human rights violations. This is the result of increasingly strict border control and migration regulations, as well as using digital technologies in ways that are not open for public review and assessment. At the same time, migrants confronted with increased border securitization adopt anticipatory practices to bypass borders, create new forms of migrant-to-migrant protection and assistance and articulate their political voice (Godin & Dona, 2021; Metcalfe, 2021).

The fact that borders have become increasingly datafied instils in migrants' everyday lives a sense of being under constant surveillance. Having to anticipate and submit to various pervasive technologies, followed by uncertainty regarding how exactly their data is being interpreted, leaves them with feelings of mistrust and fear that follow them daily.

15.5 Digital Borders of Everyday Life

This chapter's second empirical section explores migrants' experiences of datafication after crossing borders based on their diaries and interviews. The diary notes and interview discussions conveyed routines of checking the news and practical information, as well as the joy of connecting with friends and family through digital devices. However, the anticipatory sense of being surveilled or being in danger when using digital devices and social media platforms emerged as a common theme in these experiences. Inevitably, experiencing different forms of border surveillance leaves traces of mistrust and fear in the participants' everyday lives.

Our participants' sense of insecurity and uncertainty is complexly intertwined with their digital lives and practices, involving the anticipation and pre-emption of surveillance. Their diary notes and interviews revealed simultaneous dependency and concern regarding the use of digital devices and social media. Digital devices with location tracking, as well as social media with
forced visibility, generate concern over their security and the possibility of being found through these devices, either by officials or other hostile participants on social media. One of the participants explained this as follows:

As an immigrant background [person] I’m really afraid. I’m really afraid to share anything. Whatever. But I share on my Facebook page funny things. (That’s fine). Comedy things. Something nonsense but I really cannot share something that really makes people think that okay this guy is doing something wrong or he’s hiding something behind him. (Interviewee 10)

As the diary and interview data revealed, the participants consider digital media devices—a source of information and a tool to connect with family and friends—extremely important. They help them find not only practical information but also comfort during precarious situations (Gillespie et al., 2018; Latonero & Kift, 2018; Leurs, 2017; Twigt, 2018). This is in line with Twigt (2018), who argued that digital devices help migrants in vulnerable situations to orient themselves towards the future by offering them a space to imagine the future and help them connect with loved ones. In some cases social media may also provide a space for refugee activism and solidarity (Nikunen 2019a; 2019b).

While all the participants talked about the importance of being connected, they also talked about the fear and distress that being connected entailed. These concerns were particularly linked to being too visible to others through digital devices and social media presence:

As a refugee I have to be careful always. When I’m going to post (on social media) and I have to double check what is it. It really affects people. It really affects if people think it is something dangerous, something wrong. Because since I’m living in a different community because, people are different always and you’re different from my … so I have to think before I post anything. And even if I think that I can post something, if I post and I think that might affect or people think it is wrong I will delete it again. (Interviewee 1)

The participants responded to the coerced visibility of social media (Barassi, 2018) with various tactics that helped them hide themselves while being connected. Such anticipatory tactics of invisibility include using different social media profiles to hide their identities or activities that might cause harm to themselves or their far-away family members. A participant describes the sense of constant risk and danger when using social media and being connected to people as follows:
I have friends that I have come to know during these four years in Finland who are also refugees or come from Afghanistan or Iraq or somewhere else. I have told them directly that if someone has asked a picture or sent a picture ... Since we hear every day about the mistakes that immigrants or refugees have made, it is made public easily. So if someone does ... so don’t do it, because you are in a difficult situation here, you are not as free as they are. (Interviewee 9)

Besides using different profiles, the participants also used encrypted communication tools to send messages safely. Sometimes they deleted their mobile phone apps because of the distress they caused or the potential harm they might cause. They avoided enabling location services on their devices and created different ways of expressing themselves through images to avoid being recognized.

No I don't share nothing. Nothing. Even if I put some pictures I don't put my localization or something like that that no one can know where I am, because many people, my friend in my country too, they ask me where are you because we don't see where you are. I say I'm in Finland but I don't explain my situation or anything like that. (Interviewee 3)

These experiences speak of the ambivalence of social media, the embodied sense of mistrust and the attempts to anticipate different forms of digital surveillance. During the Covid-19 pandemic, as societies were increasingly leaning on digital systems and services, these steps towards deeper digitalization also produced new forms of digital borders for the undocumented. Most digital services require an identity number and an existing online banking ID, which are not necessarily available for asylum seekers and the undocumented.

From the interviews, the lack of an identity number emerged as a central problem that exemplified the digital borders of the everyday. While some of the undocumented may receive artificial IDs, they cannot be used to obtain online banking IDs, which are crucial since, as explained by a participant, they are needed to access almost all public and most commercial services:

Yeah. Like five years ago there were so-called virtual courses that I could have studied but because I didn't have the banking online numbers I could not participate and I could not study those virtual courses. Still a lot of people Iraqis and other nationalities who are asylum seekers they don't have those banking numbers. So they cannot log in to study for example
which is really a shame because, of course studying is really important. It’s a very good thing in every aspect. People have to be educated. People have to study of course all the time and read and so on. But I hope maybe someday that they’ve figured out some way to so that everyone can study online using those banking online numbers. Even if it would be like temporary log in or something. Of course when it’s related to work or even when I want to buy something online then I cannot do that. If I need to order something. (Interviewee 4)

Online banking IDs are needed to access various services, such as online shopping, benefits or membership schemes, or to obtain a Covid pass. During the Covid-19 pandemic, without a Covid pass, access to both public and private spaces was radically restricted. During a complete lockdown, even using supermarket toilets became impossible without showing some kind of membership card. When Europe restricted movement with Covid passes, it was the undocumented who, once again, found themselves on the other side of the digital border. These are processes that are fundamentally tied to an understanding of humanity: who is granted access to human rights, basic needs and protection.

15.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we explored how datafication and border practices shape the everyday lives of the undocumented. Datafied borders and migration management, we have argued, highlight a larger shift in the temporal landscape towards anticipation that focuses on predicting, profiling and pre-empting different forms of migration. These systems shape mobility and define how people become asylum seekers or undocumented. Datafication accentuates anticipatory knowledge production; however, anticipation concerns not only the authorities and institutions that seek to manage migration—migrants and asylum seekers participate in various anticipatory practices to avoid, manage and live with systems that monitor, define and regulate their lives.

The undocumented migrants’ constant sense of being surveilled also shapes the use of digital media, which they consider, on the one hand, potentially dangerous but, on the other, a necessary source of information, assistance and connection during precarious situations. While datafied systems are often considered cost-efficient and neutral, our case studies show that data is often produced from various different sources using inconsistent
practices and biases. The data extracted can also be evaluated in light of new policies and political goals. Datafication thus needs to be understood as complex, interpretational and prone to errors.

Moreover, we considered the simultaneous anticipation and delay in bordering practices and experiences as an example of “power chronography,” the multiplicity of temporalities and their connection to power (Sharma, 2015). Power chronography refers to the ways in which power operates as a “biopolitical economy of time” as various institutions, such as border regimes, control and shape people’s experiences of time (Sharma, 2015, p.19). In the digitalized world, borders extend in time, in prolonged waiting, and in anticipation of what is to come. In the temporal landscape of migration, time clearly appears to be more precious for some than for others (Christine et al., 2021). Though several systems are used to quickly predict mobility, extract data and verify identities, acquiring residence permits may still take six years of waiting in uncertainty. The unpredictability of borders and the new digital borders that have emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic create unfairly exclusionary experiences and prolonged waiting—a “delayed pushback” that renders everyday life difficult, even unbearable.

In the anticipatory temporality of datafied borders, humanity itself becomes evaluated and assorted. The way human classifications, categorizations and judgements are produced through data characterizes the drive to know and manage complex realities. Identities are produced through biopolitics, through processes by which “people become migrants, welfare recipients, prisoners, targets, or victims” (Maguire & Rao, 2018, p. 11). As argued by Tapaninen and Helén (2019), increasing the use of technologies in migration management furthers the atmosphere of suspicion and dehumanizes those who are on the move, seeking protection. This is a system of knowledge production that also creates bodies that do not matter (Agamben, 1998)—bodies that are left in waiting.

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