Chapter 17

Conclusions: “Ways of Representation”: Is a Reflexive Representation Possible?

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In his seminal work, Berger (1972) introduces “ways of seeing” as the ways in which meaning is given to the things which are depicted that stand for something. Image-based ethnography has long been interested in these meaning construction processes, namely representations. The ethnographer, or the researcher – as part of the meaning-making process – produces and/or reproduces ways of representation, along with the research design and the outcome. Then the question arises: is a reflexive representation possible? The three chapters in the fourth section of this volume offer thoughts to provoke answers to this question and evoke a theoretical discussion on the dialectical relation between migration and the representation of it, through research.

In his chapter, Davide Gnes discusses how video, as a visual methodological tool, can complement more conventional qualitative data collection and analysis methods such as in-depth interviews, field notes from participant observation, archival materials and audio data. To that end, he draws on some examples from his fieldwork and, in particular, from his experience in filming the music performances of Los Angeles based immigrant organization, *Jornaleros del Norte*’s. By performing music, the organization brings day workers who have emigrated from Central and South America into contact, organizes protest events in symbolic places such as detention centres and increases awareness for the wider public. Gnes explores the value and the potential of researcher and respondent generated video, along with other visuals/photographs, both as a database and as an analytical tool. Production and compilation of audio-visual content reiterate musical performances, transforming into political mobilization for immigrants’ rights. Gnes’ chapter also reflects on associated ethical problems.

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In the second chapter of this section, with the emphasis on reflexivity and representation, Tina Magazzini, in focusing on politicized issues such as migration and/or ethnicity, asks what role filmmakers, curators and artists play as knowledge producers or agents of recognition. In order to provide answers, she examines three European cases, namely the Expatriate Archive Centre (EAC), the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERAC) and “Bunkers,” a documentary by Anne-Claire Adet, to present ways of challenging conventional modes of representation of migrants and minorities. She examines the ways of representation based on what is portrayed and by whom, showing that the modes of representation are not causal, but rather teleological. Magazzini also traces the encounter between the production and the distribution of knowledge, discussing, for instance, what happens when those actors in charge of knowledge-production are part of this embodied culture.

Finally, in the third chapter, Julius-Cezar MacQuarie addresses a trilogy of films (*Invisible Lives*, *Nocturnal Lives* and *the Nightshift Spitalfields*) as part of his research on migrants working the night shift. He proposes an innovative approach of “nightworkshop” that provides scholars with visual-analytical tools to capture the “not-visible.” What is more provocative in terms of his research design is the collaborative method of film production that he applies. He cooperates with another filmmaker for *Invisible Lives* and with a research participant for the *Nightshift Spitalfields*. His longitudinal research strategy allows him to discuss the phenomenon of an embodied knowledge, as ways of representing migrant bodily experiences, within temporal and spatial dimensions. In addition to filmmaking as a visual methodology, MacQuarie also resorts to sensorial experiences and digital tools to track his bodily inputs as an ethnographer, to reflect on migrant’s experiences. He further discusses the responsibility of the researcher on creating space and focusing on methods that allow co-participants to speak through images to a wider public, and therefore on how migration is depicted.

These three chapters by Gnes, Magazzini and MacQuarie, in the search for migrants’ subjectivity, are exploring the relationship between image and knowledge in ethnographic enquiry, through the lens of representation. In this concluding chapter, we will reflect on key methodological, ethical and theoretical issues connected to the ways of representation and the role of the researcher. To discuss further, let’s first look at their framing of visual methodologies in relation to analytical categories.

17.1 Common Analytical Categories: Visual Storytelling, Opportunities for Co-participation and Reflexivity

The first analytical category in all three chapters is the illustrative capacity of visual storytelling. Migration scholars are increasingly keen to work on visual materials of the everyday, as well as visual materials in the media, or as media. Some of the researchers employ the visual as data resources, such as participant-generated mental maps (Buhr, Chap. 3, in this volume), or use of available photography and videos

(Pink, 2001), while others choose to visualize the data by creating computer-assisted visuals gathered through geospatial technologies (Buckle, 2020); mapping of socio-spatial relations (Awan, 2017; Awan & Langley, 2013); or making films/video essays (Pink, Kürti, & Afonso, 2004; Plambech, 2016). Therefore, researchers gain a methodological tool to generate data by themselves, to gather participant-generated data and to collect already available images through adopting visual methodologies through an integrated approach (Ball & Gilligan, 2010).

While such research equips migration scholars with visual-analytical tools, it also enables the analysis of social interaction, bringing the invisible to a wider audience and providing a visual narrative to the reader when the findings are reported visually. For this reason, visual storytelling is used as a way of reporting the research with footage, infographics, photographs, and even digital visualization techniques to reflect on the corporeality of the research subject, as in MacQuarie’s chapter. Therefore, visual storytelling may well be a research design rather than just a technique. In fact, MacQuarie carries out an ontological discussion that converges the “reel” (for what is represented), into the “real” (for what is there as social reality), through auto-ethnographic encounters. A similar proposition is reflected in Magazzini’s chapter discussing *Bunkers*, the documentary film. Through embodiment of an esthetical understanding (such as using vertical shots by a mobile phone and a narrative asserting the feeling of being trapped) *Bunkers* illustrates *cinéma vérité*, the art of filming to convey candid truth.

Co-participation and reciprocity emerge as the third common analytical category for contributors in this section. Visuals allow a more reciprocal relationship between the researcher and the participants. Gnes, investigating the relationship between what is seen and what is known in ethnographic enquiry, identifies collaborative video-making, ensuring reflexivity for the researcher, as well as an alternative insight for participants, along with rich data. Thus, these collaborative research practices, through employing visual content, “push disciplinary boundaries and help represent populations which otherwise remain silent” (Fedyuk & Zentai, 2018, p. 178). Participatory forms of observatory filmmaking are also discussed in detail in the previous section on participation (please see the third section of this volume and Cantat’s concluding chapter for a detailed commentary). The researchers ensconcing themselves into the field to see through migrant’s gaze is one thing, but what is more intriguing is a migrant herself/himself reflecting her/his position and engaging in the knowledge production process. For example, for her PhD research, Eda Elif Tibet uses documentary filmmaking as a way to codirect and coproduce ethnographic documentaries about, or by, migrants, while at the same time employ participant photography with unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (Tibet, 2017). She codirected *Ballad for Syria* (2017) with Maisa Alhafez, a musician from Syria, and *Refugee Here I Am* (2015) with Enzo Ikah, political refugee and human rights activist from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Collaboration with migrants in research, and in filmmaking specifically, have political potential as they provide a space for their own voices and artistic claims within migrant communities. Visual tools, and especially films, usually reach a wider public than conventional scholarly

outputs. Therefore, researchers/filmmakers may play a mediating role between the migrant and the rest of the world.

This volume shows us the diversity on the use of visual content and has also given authors opportunities to facilitate reflexivity. Reflexivity “required by a dialogical approach may also make clear some of the boundaries of social science conventions” (Ball, 2014, p. 151) as the third common analytical category. There is ample space for reflexivity in accounts of collaborative work between the researcher and the migrant, and the role that images play in disseminating new knowledge. In her chapter, Magazzini frames reflexivity in the role of filmmakers, curators and artists, as knowledge producers and as knowledge-brokers, to reflect on “how artistic and archival experience can inform research” (Magazzini, Chap. 15, in this volume). The organized, but not necessarily institutionalized, circulation of images for political purposes, enables the artist, as well as the researcher, to reach the voice of the subject. This overlaps with MacDougall’s (1998, p. 89) conceptualization of “deep reflexivity,” which fosters the dialogical relationship between the researcher and the image-maker, whether the process is collaborative or not. The film, and many other visual materials for that matter, represent the relationships that are produced in the content. In all three chapters in this section, we can follow the traces of reflexivity as the authors describe the content of the films they made or analysed through and narrates filmmaking experiences that emphasise the subjectivities of the informant (Gnes, Chap. 14, in this volume), of the ethnographer/filmmaker/videomaker (Gnes and MacQuarie, Chaps. 14, and 16, in this volume), of the artist (Magazzini, Chap. 15, in this volume), and of the reader. Collaborative approaches in research and ways of representation are connected with the reflexivity advocated in visual methodologies. This is manifest in Banks’ assertion that “all image production by social researchers in the field – indeed all first-hand social research of any kind – must be collaborative to some extent” because the researcher’s “very presence amongst a group of people is the result of a series of social negotiations” (2001, p. 119). Authors in this volume join collaboratively with their participants in the research process in various ways, specifically in visual practices, by which visual representations are created, including image production activities. This discussion brings us to a wider debate on the ways of representation that link the chapters of this section.

17.2 Lost and Found in Representations

Three chapters in this section, and others in the volume, provoke a discussion that can strip the representation issue from an essentialist standpoint and incorporate migrants’ agency through research. Unfortunately, the main pitfall of major research focusing on the representation of migrants in mediated written texts is ontologically embedded in their units of analysis. Media texts offer very rich research material, but at the same time, they push scholarly work away from the field and the migrants themselves. As they exclude migrant agency, research focusing on representation in

media texts are also inclined to reproduce the existing structural meaning-making strategies and conceptual framework of methodological discrimination, even though they are apt to utilize critical discourse analytical methodologies propounded by van Dijk (1993), Wodak (2013), Wodak and Meyer (2009), Fairclough (1989, 1995) and others. Fortunately, despite their methodological and epistemological differences, the three chapters in this section demonstrate how visual methodologies offer possibilities of incorporating migrants themselves into the representation debate.

However, it is useful to briefly look at the studies investigating the mediated representations of migrants and ethnic minority groups. Since our perceptions of social reality are more and more shaped by media texts, both traditional and new media, the increase in the number of academic studies working on these texts is also inevitable. An important part of this growing literature includes immigrant representations. The migratory movements and mobilities of refugees that took place after the start of civil war in Syria in 2011, has entered into the European academia’s agenda in many contexts as well as in the context of media representations, especially after these migratory movements turn towards Europe. As public discourse and policies are also shaped by these mediated representations, the number of studies on this subject increases with the speed of light (for an overview, see Berry, Inaki Garcia-Blanco, & Moore, 2015, Bozdağ & Smets, 2017, Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017, Smets & Bozdağ, 2018, Smets, Mazzocchi, Gerstman, & Mostmans, 2019). Several studies listed here reveal that media coverage of migrants and refugees, even in different geographical contexts, reiterate troubling dichotomies of “victims” versus “threats,” often accompanied with “illegality” discourses, labelling them as “outsiders”, useful or dangerous, narrate them voiceless, and also “legitimize and delegitimize policies relevant to them” (Smets & Bozdağ, 2018, p. 295). Thus, the rise in mediated anti-immigrant discourse to be transformed into electoral capital, keep migrants consistently marginalized from the public realm and serves growing right-wing populism and racism in Europe by fuelling moral panics (see Critcher, Hughes, Petley, & Rohloff, 2013).

In his commentary, Critcher categorizes immigration as one of the five major topics that constitute moral panic, calling it a “serial moral panic” which is “routinely produced by the popular press” (2015, pp. xxiii–xxiv). According to him, it operates through “accusations against the newcomers” as “they bring alien cultures, so refuse to integrate; that they make excessive demands on systems of welfare, education and housing; and that they are excessively involved in crime” (p. xxiv). Discourses that go back and forth between humanitarianism and securitization are manufactured and operationalized for boundary-making and exclusion. Therefore, this sets “the cruel conditionality that underlies current humanitarian responses within European border regimes” (Holzberg, Kolbe, & Zaborowski, 2018, p. 536), for example in Germany, deciding which immigrant deserves to live.

The year 2015 is marked as the “European crisis” as hundreds of thousands of refugees cross the Mediterranean border, exacerbating the moral panic. As Alan Kurdi’s washed-ashore image on the Turkish coast was circulated globally, a schizoid positionality inaugurated this moral panic, transforming the discourse from securitization to victimization. The flow of Kurdi’s, and similar images, show the

power of visualization and the transformative effect on the perceptions and meaning-making processes. Through objectifying and dehumanizing images, representation of migrants and refugees deploys the victimization discourse that depoliticises and de-historicizes them. Furthermore, those images, including Kurdi's, reproduce the act of crossing borders which legitimizes the "crisis" discourse and moves the focus away from the migrants themselves. While these mechanisms are gaining strength in digital environments, there is also a growing literature on "the potential of voice and agency in the digital new media environment" (Nikunen, 2019, p. 412). Converging diverse means of communication that offer rich visuality, digital media could recall representation in various modes, including self-representation.

Although mediated representations are highly contested in quoted literature, in this volume authors go beyond the description of representations, to discuss, how, despite contextual differences, researchers, artists, filmmakers and migrants themselves profoundly engage with these representations within participatory visual methodologies, in order to produce counter-narratives. Self-representation, the notion that migrants and/or members of ethnic communities reclaim their subjectivity, is one pattern that all three chapters encompass. Gnes (Chap. 14, in this volume) encourages members of the band to reflect on the videos he filmed. Thus, while increasing the reliability of the research through data triangulation, he also enables the participants to produce the voice to represent themselves. MacQuarie goes further in coproducing the film *Nightshift Spitalfields* with a Bulgarian-Turkish migrant co-worker. While he, as a researcher is "totally hidden behind the scenes", his participant, as "the protagonist-turned-filmmaker, experiments with the visual tools in a non-traditional documentarist style" (Chap. 16, in this volume). So, when he activates the power of filmmaking as visual methodology, he steps back and lets the migrants tell their own stories to make the space visible for interpretation with multiple meanings. A similar but slightly different discussion is also made by Magazzini (Chap. 15, in this volume) on filmmaking as self-representation. She, as the researcher, is not the one who filmed Bunkers. Even the director is not an immigrant. The use of shots taken by migrants, the aesthetics and the narrative of the film enables the visual content to transform the tool into a space where refugees in Geneva speak for themselves. Therefore, visual self-representations challenge depoliticised discourses, and dehumanized policies for that matter, and raise claims for visibility and recognition. So, the social reality surrounding migration is constructed in a non-linear path of conflict, between depiction and imagination, where the migrants deliberately contest visual representation and construct the "visual self" to be present in the public sphere.

Representational politics could be realized through institutionalized public spaces such as museums, archives or cultural institutes. Magazzini discusses the collective cultural practice developed around narratives and visual representation of minority groups, examining ongoing discussions about the dialogical relationship between political and artistic representation. She puts "special emphasis on the consequences of which types of stories are told and about whom and who the storyteller" is (Chap. 15, in this volume). While the Expatriate Archive Centre operates as a representational space to re-create social memories, the European Roma

Institute for Arts and Culture serves as a field for linguistic, cultural, and political claims for and about the Roma population in a transnational context. Like museological practice, these collective cultural bodies are “representations to be read and interpreted, and therefore must provide space and presence for the multitude of voices” (Yanes, 2011, p. 28).

Research practices engaging visual methodologies do not only serve as an instrument in varied techniques, but also as innovative forms of epistemological declaration, where the researcher herself/himself employs dynamic representational strategies. As visual methods can be utilized in order to collect data, as well as disseminate it, they provide researchers with a range of tools for constructing a way of representation. We can observe this turning point in MacQuarie’s transformation as a researcher/filmmaker in his trilogy, as he starts to produce with a co-filmmaker and ends up co-producing with a participant. An interesting example of visual methods changing the very essence of scholarship is Nick Sousanis’ (2015) doctoral dissertation in graphic novel form, entitled *Unflattening*, about the relationship between words and pictures. Sousanis is awarded a doctorate in education at Columbia University. His bold attempt to disseminate knowledge in an unconventional visual manner is very encouraging as it signals to disrupt the academy’s stereotypical representations.

The chapters in this section discuss the potential of research-based visual strategies through collaborative practices in an epistemological triad of visual methodologies, ethnography and artistic production, to produce counter-narratives to dominant stereotypes and/or ways of representations within a range of subject matter. This particularly brings us to the ethical stance.

17.3 Ethical Issues

Along with reflexivity and collaboration, ethical issues have emerged as one of the common themes in employing visual approaches to ethnographic research throughout the entire book. Visual techniques such as filmmaking, that we read three examples of in this section, open the space for more diverse representation practices, while at the same time being more prone to ethical violations, both during the research process and also during dissemination after research findings become publicly available. Difficulties in securing participants’ consent, protecting anonymity, protecting the data and unequal distribution of power among participants and the researcher are symptomatic of fundamental ethical problems.

One strategy to avoid these difficulties is obtaining ethical clearance prior to commencing the research, as a rule of thumb. For visual methods, in addition, the reflexive positionality of the researcher and the participants is exclusively important as their relationship will form the knowledge production. For that matter, securing consent is not only getting an approval for participation, but also a contract for common grounds and negotiation between the researcher and the participants on the research process, i.e. research objectives, potential implications of the findings and

participation, duration and terms of participation, negotiations on the skills to be used (such as filmmaking, if applicable) and issues such as privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. Protecting anonymity is harder to maintain as images are profoundly information-rich constructs. More importantly, dissemination of the images beyond the control of the researcher and the participants may have implications in different time periods and spatial contexts (Nikielska-Sekuła, Chap. 2, in this volume). It is also difficult to preserve the privacy and anonymity of the existing bystanders in the frame, while producing images, even if the approval of the participants exists. As Gnes (Chap. 14, in this volume) discusses, videography, for example, documents the undocumented. However, as discussed throughout the chapter, being there could be advocated by the participants as a political position.

We have read examples on how videography and filmmaking, as a form of intervention, are employed in migration research, rather than being merely a methodological practice. This is obviously an ideological positioning to challenge the unequal distribution of power between researcher and researched. Both should engage in a reflexive process in order to help improve ethical practice and determining factors of mutual decision-making, as we have seen in the filmmaking practice of MacQuarie and his co-participants. The reflexivity of the researcher also ensures visuals' trustworthy representation of the interactions and researched phenomena and helps researcher to avoid the "spectacle of migration" (Desille, Chap. 4, in this volume). Therefore, the researcher should be able to act as mediator and interlocutor in this participatory process.

Another ethical issue arises from a technical dimension of visual methods. While digital technologies facilitate the practice of visual methods in migration studies, they also create sheer volume of both social and computational data. The analysis of this size of data can be problematic and if enough precautions are not taken to protect it, the circulation of the data in cyberspace may violate ethical norms. Although it is not always possible, visual methods such as filmmaking should be self-funded to avoid financial contributor's implicit or explicit agenda setting attempts. There is a critical literature growing on funding issues related to migration research (see Cantat, 2020), which criticizes the hypocrisy of funding institutions.

17.4 Commentary

The contribution of this section to the volume is that visual methods such as filmmaking, videography and artistic/cultural productions are not simply useful for representing research, but they constitute a research method in itself. Three modes of inference, namely collaboration, reflexivity and representation are discussed in three chapters and help us to construct an interpretive string, connecting to a theoretical framework. The *modus operandi* of visual methods, as demonstrated by Gnes, Magazzini and MacQuarie, involves the reflexive engagement of researcher and the collaborative practice of research. The epistemological and methodological contributions of visual methodology can be listed as follows: visual data breaks the

boundaries imposed by spatiality and temporality; it enables others, including research participants, to reflect and analyse the data; it is open for participatory techniques; and produces materials possible to be used for educational, cultural and political purposes.

In addition, as Boccagni and Schrooten (2018, p. 211) aptly assert “ethnographers are thus required to also integrate visual aspects of data and to develop a new set of skills”. Gnes and MacQuarie, as ethnographers, integrate visual methods into their research and they accumulate a set of skills of data collection and analysis, as well as dissemination. These new skills transform the researchers into artisans crafting data, a tool to which bits of information can be brought together by collaborators to bring out migrant agency. Not only data collection but also data presentation tools, visual methods make the scholarship available to a mixed audience and a general public. Thus, it reveals misrepresentations. Not only are images everywhere (Pink, 2001), but people are also documenting on a daily basis, bringing those who are invisible and marginalized before our eyes, entailing a reflective space.

Migrants, or any other subjects for that matter, can tell their own narratives through visual storytelling methodologies as our/their lives are wrapped around images and visualization tools. The way we construct meanings through these images, what MacQuarie calls “new representations,” counters widespread stereotypical representations. Visual methodology enables subjectivity to be constituted by images. It is a systematic process locating migrants and marginalized ethnic communities at the very centre of discussions in order to politicize and historicize them. Therefore, it makes it possible that migrants reclaim their subjectivity, as opposed to being scapegoats in anti-immigrant and xenophobic representational mechanisms. This methodology enables us to question the relations of dominance and power imposed by “visual culture(s)”, because visual culture is often more effective and deceitful than written culture in internalizing these power positions. Therefore, as researchers, we need to embrace visual methodologies as a tool that can defeat stereotypical representations of migrants and minority groups stuck between securitization/criminalization and humanitarian discourses. It is a difficult and demanding road ahead, but our authors show that reflexive representations are possible.

Of course, words matter, but images matter more than ever now, as they have the political potential of transforming the very nature of research.

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