Chapter 15
In the Eye of the Beholder? Minority Representation and the Politics of Culture

Tina Magazzini

The debate(s) on the relationship between art, activism and academia is as old as knowledge-production itself. In keeping with this volume's focus on reflexivity and representation, this contribution asks what role filmmakers, curators and artists play as knowledge producers and as knowledge-brokers when working on politicized issues such migration and/or ethnicity. This chapter looks at three European experiences that sit on the seam of curatorial practice, testimony and activism and address the (visual) narratives of minority groups. Exploring the emergence of these initiatives and drawing upon interviews with the curators and artists behind them, this chapter takes stock of ongoing debates on the complex relationship between political and artistic representation on minority groups. Adopting Mitchell's (1995) approach to representation that sees it as always being "of someone, by someone, to someone", particular attention is given to the implications of *what* kind of stories are told, for *whom* they are told, and of *who* does the storytelling.

> [F]rom the moment you are born every stick and stone, every face, is white. Since you have not yet seen a mirror, you suppose you are, too. It comes as a great shock around the age of 5, 6, or 7 to discover that the flag to which you have pledged allegiance, along with everybody else, has not pledged allegiance to you. It comes as a great shock to see Gary Cooper killing off the Indians, and although you are rooting for Gary Cooper, that the Indians are you. It comes as a great shock to discover that the country which is your birthplace and to which you owe your life and your identity has not, in its whole system of reality, evolved any place for you.
>
> James Baldwin, The American Dream and the American Negro, 1965

T. Magazzini (✉)
European University Institute, Fiesole, Italy
e-mail: tina.magazzini@eui.eu

15.1   Introduction: On Representation(s)

The term "representation" can be used in a number of ways and contexts, but two main strands stand out in human and social sciences. One has to do with *political representation*: from traditional theories of electoral representation to feminist scholarship to ethnic and racial studies, sociologists, political scientists and social scientists more broadly have always been concerned with issues of representativeness. Whether centred on comparing substantive representation to descriptive representation (Pitkin, 1972), on debates around electoral quotas (Mansbridge, 1999), or on discussions regarding what constitutes "legitimate" political representation in democratic regimes (Przeworski et al., 1999; Brito Vieira & Runciman, 2008), political representation has to do with someone "acting" for someone else in the political arena. Hanna Pitkin's influential *The Concept of Representation* defined it as the act of making citizens' concerns, preferences, and opinions "present" in public policy making processes: to make the represented "present again" (Pitkin, 1967). Political representation as a concept has become, particularly in the last half a century, the cornerstone of how we think of "representative government", responsiveness, legitimacy and accountability in modern democracies.

A second strand is that of *artistic representation*. In the arts, literature and media studies, whether in the realm of theatre, performance, poetry, cinema, painting, photography or filmmaking, a representation involves the capacity of something or someone to symbolize, to portray, or to "bring to mind by description" (Paulson, 2015, p. 237) something or someone else. C.S. Pierce defined representation in the following terms: "I confine the word *representation* to the operation of a sign or its relation to the object for the interpreter of the representation. […] A representation is that character of a thing by virtue of which, for the production of a certain mental effect, it may stand in place of another thing. The thing having this character I term a *representamen*, the mental effect, or thought, its *interpretant*, the thing for which it stands, its *object*." (Pierce, 1865). Similarly, W. J. T. Mitchell has referred to representation as signs used to express something else: the creation of symbols that stand for or take the place of a concept, an object or a relation (Mitchell, 1995).

What do political and artistic representation have in common, and what happens to representation when an artistic expression aims at capturing, reflecting, or expressing an identity or story (what Pierce called the *object*) that is political? When "representing" and narrating stories and experiences of minorities that have traditionally been silenced or ignored, should the artist or curator strive for some kind of political representation? And if so, how?

Stemming from these questions, this chapter offers an insight into three artistic endeavors that aim at telling the stories of minorities characterized by migration, mobility, opportunity, precarity and resilience in Europe's contemporary cultural (and political) landscape. By delving into these portrayals of ethnic, migrant, mobile individuals, I hope to raise issues that resonate beyond the selected cases analyzed, and that help us reflect on what kind of relationship is possible and desirable between artistic and political representation.

15.2 Context and Case Studies

The issue of representation, and representativeness, of minoritized groups in the arts—particularly in visual storytelling—has become an increasingly prominent one over the past decades. The presence and role of women, and more recently of racialized actors, directors and performers, while it remains subject to constraints and discrimination that still shape the industry, is no longer a taboo (Cortés, 2000). Such developments have emerged alongside or in parallel to civil rights and feminist struggles, and in many ways mirror political claims of political recognition with the acknowledgement that a shift in the arts, media and the entertainment industry is just as urgent.

In 1975, Laura Mulvey coined the term "the male gaze" to describe how the gaze of the movie camera reflected the directors' heterosexual male viewpoint (Mulvey, 1975). Since the 1980s, introduced by an Alison Bechdel comic strip, the Bechdel-Wallace Test—which looks at whether a movie a) has at least two women in it, who b) talk to each other, about c) something other than a man—has become a standard test to assess the gender equality of a fiction work (Garber, 2015). In contemporary Europe, stories and representations of migration and of "othered" minorities such as Roma or Muslims usually are shaped without the participation or active voices of those who are the *object* of such stories, the minorities themselves. This, in turn, fosters a de-humanized and often threatening portrayal of "others" which results in what has been termed elsewhere in this volume a "selective amnesia" (Bacon et al., Chap. 12, in this volume).

In this chapter, in order to get a sense of what kind of minority representations through art, memory and documentary filmmaking are currently taking place in Europe I chose to look at three very different initiatives, and interview the curators, filmmaker and directors directly involved in these projects about their experience.

The reason for choosing the three initiatives detailed in the next sections—and which obviously cannot by any means be representative of the rich and ever-growing cultural landscape on minority representation in contemporary Europe— is three-fold. A departing consideration is a practical one, and has to do with accessibility: these are three initiatives that I came across and followed over the years during which I was doing my PhD, which means I had some connection with the artists, the researchers or curators involved in these projects previously to interviewing them; and based on such encounters I felt they could offer a honest and rich insight into the kind of "representation work" they were involved in.[1]

---

[1] I closely followed the "making-of" of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture, attending workshops, open and closed discussions, and following online forums about its inception, a process which is described in detail in the article *Cultural Institutions as a Combat Sport. Reflections on the European Roma Institute* (Magazzini, 2016). I encountered the Expatriate Archive Centre in The Hague in 2017 at the International Metropolis Conference, a network that has hosted an international conference concerning research and policy on human migration annually since 1996. Regarding the documentary "Bunkers", it was selected among the best documentary short movies for the conference "International Migration, Integration and Social Justice in Europe", which took

Secondly, I was interested in showing radically different means of *objects*: one experience's focus is archival work about expats; another centers on Roma cultural recognition; and a third one is an independent documentary film on asylum seekers' housing condition in Switzerland.

Finally, I wanted to look at different *processes*: at how such representations emerged from very different communities and through different means (or *representamen*). One case—the Expatriate Archive Centre—emerged as the private initiative of a group of Shell employees' wives in the 1990s, who had returned to the Netherlands after spending most of their lives abroad. Another—the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture—is the result of a long and negotiated struggle between Roma activists, artists and intellectuals with governments, private and international organizations, resulting in an institute which is co-sponsored by the Council of Europe and the Open Society Foundations. And a third experience came about through the encounter of an independent filmmaker with images circulated on the internet via an activist network, and that portrayed claustrophobic images of the places in which many asylum seekers were hosted in Geneva following the so-called "refugee crisis".

Overall, all three projects aim to promote a better understanding of the experiences of people on the move or of ethnic minority identity in contemporary Europe, and they all deal—more or less explicitly—with the political nature of their artistic, archival and curatorial work.

15.2.1 The Expatriate Archive Centre

Based in The Hague since 1992, the Expatriate Archive Centre (henceforth EAC) emerged from a collection of hundreds of handwritten stories and reminiscences from around the world in different languages of Shell employees and their family members, the earliest dated 1928. At a time in which the Royal Dutch Petroleum Company was preparing to commemorate its centenary, the (informally called) "Shell Ladies Project" wanted to recognize the contributions, worth and stories of expatriate families, that eventually developed into what is currently an international archival center based in The Hague that engages with artists and academic researchers. Launched thanks to an endowment of Royal Dutch Shell, it is therefore a case of the private sector funding a conservation institute with an artistic and research vocation.

When asked about the history of the Expatriate Archives Centre, the current director explains that it started with the publication of two books in 1993 and 1996, edited by Glenda Lewin and Judy Moody-Stuart. Glenda and Judy were Shell

---

place in Bilbao and that I contributed to co-organize. Its selection for the conference led to the documentary being screened at the "Invisible films" festival in November 2016, to which the filmmaker was invited and held a Q&A session after the screening. The quotes cited in this chapter are not from the Q&A session, but from an interview carried out during the same dates in Bilbao for the Italian magazine WOTS.

employees' wives who found that their stories needed to be told, and heard, about what living abroad had meant for them and their families. That's why they asked colleagues of their husbands and their families to submit their contributions for their book, which was titled *Life on the move*. This first book was a big success, to the point that in 1996 they decided to publish a second book called *Life now*.

The original handwritten material, photographs and objects gathered were stored in a suitcase by Judy Moody-Stuart. When Dewey White, an American social historian, looked at these contributions she suggested that they should be archived as source material for future research, and, according to EAC's director, that was basically how the idea of the archives was born. While the initial idea was to document and acknowledge the contributions of the wives and families to the success of the Shell Company,[2] and it very much focused on the private archives of these families and their stories, such focus slowly shifted to include a more diverse body of work, memories and stories. 2008 was the year in which EAC became an independent foundation—changing its name to "Expatriate Archive Centre" from the original "Shell Outpost Foundation"— and its focus shifted from Shell's employees and their families to whoever is on the move. According to EAC's Director:

> Since 2008, our mission is to collect and preserve the lived stories of expatriates worldwide, regardless of their employer and their employment, for future research. What makes us unique is that you can find archives of expatriates in different archives around the world, but there is no such place that only focuses on expatriates. We do not care about the nationality of who provides the material or the language in which the material is in…what we see is that because of expatriate nature, often in local or national archives there is a tendency to collect materials of people 'of importance' or people who somehow 'matter' for a reason or another because they have lived in a particular area, in a particular time, but people like expatriates fall through the cracks, it seems less obvious to justify why their stories matter. (online interview, 27 March 2019)

15.2.2   The European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture

The idea of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (henceforth ERIAC) was promoted by a group of Romani activists, intellectuals and artists from different countries who got together around the idea of trying to create an institution for Romani arts and culture at the European level. Attempts at creating such an institution dated back to the 1970s, but only in the past half-decade did it gather enough momentum for an "Alliance for the European Roma Institute" to be formed. This alliance became the motor behind the initiative, leading to ERIAC being officially opened in Berlin in 2017. Supported and financed by the Open Society Foundations and the Council of Europe, it represents a rare case of a cultural institute funded directly by an international organization.

---

[2] They also tried to encourage the very few men who were accompanying their wives to share their experiences, but according to EAC's current director they were too shy or did not feel like sharing their experiences.

ERIAC's mission statement is to combat anti-gypsyism through the means of art and culture, history, commemoration, media and knowledge production—which are ERIAC's key areas of competence. According to its founders and directors, ERIAC's establishment emerged from a legacy and history of fighting for an institution that would be independent and work to safeguard and promote Romani cultural heritage, artistic and cultural creations. According to ERIAC's director, it was also paramount that such a project translated into a physical art space:

> there were so many drafts for a museum, for a European space, an institution with doors and windows that does not exist exclusively on a website, on paper or in a framework strategy. ERIAC is not a concept: it is an actual institution, a legitimate space that you can walk into. (online interview, 4 September 2018)

15.2.3   Bunkers

BUNKERS is a 14-minutes-long documentary film that was directed by Anne-Claire Adet, a French Swiss-based filmmaker, between 2015 and 2016, at the height of sensationalist reporting about the so-called "refugee crisis". As the filmmaker recalled on how the idea of the movie came about:

> The movie was built on two encounters, one with the images, and the other with Mohammad Jadallah. I was lucky to find on the internet valuable material from the asylum-seekers collective «StopBunkers»: images filmed by asylum-seekers using their cellphones. Raw images, without any editing or directing, just the bare description of unworthy living conditions. I didn't want to shoot images myself, but I wanted to convey their look. For those who do not speak our language, the picture is the only way to convey the unspeakable. I decided to give a new life to these powerful images, in order to immerse the viewers in these bunkers, with asylum seekers through their eyes. To live the physical experience of the life underground, from the perspective of those, uprooted, who are seeking refuge and security in Europe. (Bilbao, 15 October 2016)

Over the past few years the short documentary received international recognition, has travelled across many countries and has been shown in schools, where it has been used to trigger debates and to raise awareness among students about the conditions in which some asylum seekers (typically single men, "Dublin" cases, dismissals etc.) are hosted in Switzerland. These consist of underground bunkers that were originally built as a war refuge but are not suited for a length of time above 3 weeks for anyone, and certainly is not a space for persons who are reckoning with trauma and experiences of prison and torture. Even though the Federal Supreme Court ruled that the living conditions do not violate human dignity or the right to emergency assistance according to Art. 7 and Art. 12 of the Federal Constitution, the National Commission on the Prevention of Torture concluded in a 2013 report that these military installations should be used only for short-term stays of a maximum 3 weeks. Rather than trying to document the situation firsthand by filming it, by choosing to tell the story through the asylum-seekers images and recollections, the filmmaker engaged in a lengthy and fruitful collaborative process:

I didn't ask myself for the authorization to shoot underground. I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have been given the access, because all my journalist friends were denied it—officially, to preserve the intimacy of the residents. But that was not my reason not to try [to get permission to film in the bunkers where the asylum seekers are hosted]. I really wanted to show the life underground through the eyes of those living there, not to project my own look on it. It was initially a political choice, that later became an aesthetic choice. At first, I thought the fact that the images were vertical was an issue.[3] Then, I took it as a great opportunity to reinforce the feeling of oppression for the viewer, narrowing the space. (Bilbao, 15 October 2016)

## 15.3 Representation "of": Which Stories, and How to Tell Them

The "Representation *of*" is an especially complex dimension, in that it includes both the object/story being represented, as well as the means through which it is represented.

In his proposed framework of a triangular relationship between the person(s) who decide to "make" the representation, the representation itself, and the "public" or the beholder, Mitchell proposes to illustrate the example "*someone* represents a *stone* with a *dab of paint* to *someone* else" with the following scheme (Mitchell, 1995, p. 2) (Fig. 15.1):

While the connecting lines between the "Maker" and the "Beholder" can be seen as an "axis of communication", the connecting lines between the *object* being represented (the stone) and the *representamen* (the dab of paint) is the "axis of representation". The choice of placing this axis of representation as cross-cutting to the axis of communication aims at showing that representation is both a means of communication—the maker needs to go through it, in order to reach the beholder—but also a potential obstacle to it, "presenting the possibility of misunderstanding, error, or downright falsehood" (Mitchell, 1995, p. 2).

When asked about how they went about selecting the stories they selected, and to elaborate on the process of choosing their *object*, the "makers" of EAC, ERIAC and BUNKERS each had a unique story to tell which however invariably pointed at

Fig. 15.1 Representation by W.J.T. Mitchell (1995). In Critical Terms for Literary Study, p. 2. Retrieved from http://www.credoreference.com/entry/uchicagols/representation
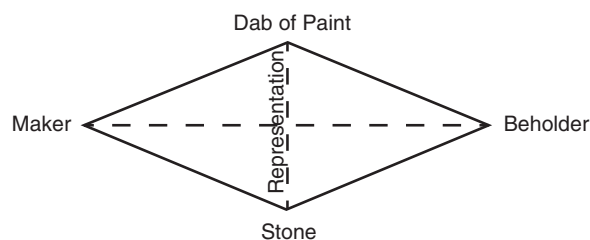
[3] The images circulated by the collective "StopBunkers" had been filmed by an asylum seeker with his smartphone, which is why they are vertical, raw and not framed as they would have by a professional filmmaker.

the conviction of being engaged in representing something "bigger" than the specific *object*-story itself.

EAC's director explained:

> At the beginning of 2000 there was a restructuring, because part of the Shell Outpost Foundation was more focused on providing practical support to Shell families when they moved from one place to another, and that part became a section called "Global Outpost" within Shell. The Archives, instead, took shape in an independent form, with the thought behind them being that these stories are *of* Shell employees, but they are not *the property* of Shell. (online interview, 27 March 2019)

The understanding was that the pictures, objects and diaries of the Shell employees experiencing "life on the move" were shaped not so much by the employment opportunity responsible for their move in the first place, as much as by the moving itself. This, in turn, made for a collection of memories and experiences that transcend the specific national or work-related group. In 2018, for EAC's 10th anniversary since its "emancipation" from the Outpost Foundation, the Centre engaged 10 artists to each produce a piece inspired by something from the archive collection. This resulted in *Saudade: An Intersection of Archive and Art*, a travelling exhibition that is carried around in the original suitcase used by Judy Moody-Stuart, one of EAC's founders. As Aoife Rosenmeyer, an art critique, remarked "The *Saudade* project is a challenge to the uniformity of globalization, a celebration of the specific and an investigation of what foreignness means today. The resulting works do not define the archives they were inspired by, but inform them." (The Expatriate Archive Centre 2018, p. 87) (Fig. 15.2).

Fig. 15.2 The suitcase. (Source: Expatriate Archive Centre)
© Thomas Nondh Jansen

The deputy director of ERIAC, reflecting on the scope and content of the artistic programme and choices made by the newly founded institute, commented:

This is a Roma institute, evidently, so our mandate and our scope are predominantly focused on Roma. There are however a number of issues here: one is that for us it is really important *to show the universality of the Roma struggle*. Many of the things that we as Roma face as minorities are not unique to Roma, but are rather shared by those communities that are kept on the margins. The history and dynamics of both the status quo as well as the struggle against it, the processes of resisting and overcoming, can be very instructive to us as Roma, so looking into experiences of other minority struggles is very informative and very inspiring. (online interview, 10 July 2018)

Within this shared struggle, ERIAC's director stressed the importance of ownership over the type of cultural products and knowledge production that come out of the institute.

We want Romani and non-Romani individuals and organizations to join ERIAC, and then try to discuss together what types of knowledge, debates and topics we could or should deal with. Knowledge production is […] critical for shaping self-crafted narratives on Roma and taking control over images and discourses about us. (online interview, 4 September 2018)

The director of BUNKERS spoke, in response to the question of why and how she decided to make a movie about asylum seekers' shelters, about the layered process of documentary filmmaking, and about how the result had emerged from a combination of direct testimony and powerful imagery:

Mohammad Jadallah, a former Sudanese activist and journalist, gave me his trust and accepted to speak out for those who cannot. He didn't film the images himself, but he spoke about them for his friends in the collective. (Bilbao, 15 October 2016)

The beginning of this process was the discovery of the video images in her email inbox one morning, through the newsletter of a group of activists who are vocal on migrants' rights in Geneva. The link of the images came with two lines saying "beware, claustrophobic content":

As I am a claustrophobic person, I of course watched… and I actually was disappointed because the images were cut where a person would appear, I had to turn my head 90° to watch them fully, and the sound was almost inexistent. I felt there would be something powerful to do with it, so I decided to go back to the source to see what was possible. It is not officially prohibited to film inside the bunkers for the residents, but they all fear that something might happen to their asylum procedure if they do. That's why the faces are blurred. Most of the images [used in the documentary film] are the one I first discovered this day. Some others have been shot later by a friend who is an asylum seeker and was staying in another bunker. […] Those who filmed didn't want their names nor faces to appear nowhere. And it took me many months, and many liters of coffee taken with Mohammad so that he trusted me enough to let me show his face and name on camera. When he first accepted to participate in the project, he wanted his face to be blurred and his voice to be changed…! It would have been a totally different film. (Bilbao, 15 October 2016)

Issues of privacy, and trust between the maker and the object clearly play a crucial role in shaping how the stories are represented across all cases, once they are selected. In the case of EAC, previously to interviewing the center's director I had tried (unsuccessfully) to look for testimonies, images and documentation on the

Archive Centre's website, without realizing that even though donors have to agree upon and to sign a depository agreement in order to donate their materials to EAC, this does not make such materials publicly available on the internet:

> In terms of what EAC claims to do differently from other institutes that address similar topics, this has to do with both the material it collects and the approach it has to it. The type of material collected and organized through the archive software varies—people donate diaries, pictures, films, stamps and tickets— but the main goal is to preserve material for research, rather than displaying objects for a general public. The criteria for the selection of the material take into account what kind of information it provides, the history behind it, and the related intellectual and property rights issues. […] The interesting thing is that now we really see an increase in researchers getting in touch and using the archive, and at the end of the day that is the main goal. That's why you cannot see anything on our website, everything is private, even though we are now working on one project that will be available for the public. From the beginning there was the whole thought of collecting material for research, to give a voice to expat families. Until now the Archives are not really open for public—because of privacy reasons, and it is really focused on academic research. (online interview, 27 March 2019).

15.4   Representation "by": Whose Voices Shape the Narrative

While interlinked to the stories that are represented (the representation "of"), a separate issue has to do with the agency of the "maker"—the persons/institute in charge of the representation in the first place (the representation "by"). While representations of migrants, refugees and minorities more broadly abound in mainstream media, it is not often that the storytellers are the minorities themselves (see also Bacon et al. Chap. 12, in this volume, p. 233–266).

This is why the issue of "whose institute" the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture is, and whose narrative and stories it engages with, is a very sensitive one (Magazzini, 2020). In the words of ERIAC's Executive Director (Fig. 15.3):

> While we will always be a minority, we must understand what being deprived of a voice and of a certain control over identity framing does, and how this directly and indirectly influences policymaking, for example. This is why we felt it was really important to have an institution explicitly by, for and about Roma. […] ERIAC wants to offer a space where we can sit down and discuss and try to come up with assertive, evidence-based and negotiated responses to the questions that academics have been asking for centuries: what does it mean to be Roma and who is "Roma'? I think it is important that we have our own space to discuss how we can unite in the diversity we face; discuss the fact that multiculturalism is our everyday reality and how these issues affect our solidarity, ethnic identifications across countries and groups, dialects and so on. Since we have never had such spaces before, ERIAC can really make a change. This is the first time we have a space to negotiate, reinvent and also to argue: it is not that we are going to come up with one single, "true' answer, but it is important that this is a space to discuss these issues about identity and to provide the ground for plural responses. (online interview, 4 September 2018)

When asked how they identify themselves in relation to the subject of their projects, EAC's director and BUNKERS' director both self-identified as migrants, yet

Fig. 15.3 Source: debate "Preserving and Promoting Roma Cultural Heritage. The role of ERlAC" © Nihad Nino Pušija

as a "different kind' of migrants compared to those whose stories they told through the archive and the documentary:

> Personally, I consider myself a migrant. In June 2019 it will be 6 years that I've been the Director of EAC. I have been living here for many years, and consider The Hague home. […] For an expatriate the issue of 'where is your home' becomes the most painful question. So I think it becomes interesting to see how expats interact with local communities, if they do, and what kind of organizational structure they lack, what they leave behind. What is interesting to see is how people perceive their host country, the longer they stay, and how does it change them or make them more 'national' in their traditions. What we are really interested in is what people do, and how people behave…when they know it's not forever, when they know they will be going somewhere else. The pattern of behavior is different. How do these people perceive their own nationality, what does it do to them? (online interview, 27 March 2019)

In the case of BUNKERS, Adet explained:

> I was born in France from an Italian mother who migrated in the 1960s with her working class parents, looking for better opportunity for her and her three sisters. I grew up and lived in France, but also in Mexico, Togo and now Switzerland. Regularly, I was a foreigner, a stranger. But I always felt relatively welcome. I had papers, a job, and I spoke the language. (Bilbao, 15 October 2016)

Related to the "ownership" and to the shaping of the narratives, the choices in naming, labeling, framing and presenting the material one collects is also an operation that is intimately connected to agency, and it is where some of the risks of misunderstanding or mis-presenting emerge. How does one define who an expat is?

Or who a Romani artist is? In a movie aimed at raising awareness, how does one choose a title for the representation of the Swiss state's claustrophobic oppression and discrimination employed to discourage asylum seekers from coming in the first place? In the last case, the filmmakers' choice was to opt for the title "Bunkers", which symbolize both the hostile environment experienced by asylum seekers upon arrival as well as the feeling of being "locked in" with no opportunity to reach out, to communicate, to make ones voice heard.

In the case of the Expatriate Archive Centre, the choice of the title "Expatriate Archive Centre" was a clear break from the previous explicit connection to the Shell company, and one that signaled an opening and a change of direction in terms of scope and content. Yet, the word "Expatriate" is one that easily leads to controversy. In explaining why this term was chosen and how it is interpreted, EAC's director put it this way:

> Expat is a very negative and loaded word, so we start from the fact that we use our own interpretation of it. For us expatriate is someone who lives outside his or her home country *temporarily*. What we were interested in looking at when we set up the EAC was to understand the mindset of a person when the move is not permanent…if I move, but I'm not going to make home out of the new place because I know I won't stay there forever. To be an expat is really when you know that within some years you will be moving elsewhere. And how many years it doesn't really matter—so for us for example, we consider up to four years. The international student going to study abroad for a year is, to us, an expatriate. And we do look at migration and migrants as such, in the sense that if you move somewhere temporarily, but then you decide to stay, we focus on the first four years of that experience, but then for us that person becomes a migrant. (online interview, 27 March 2019)

In the case of ERIAC, as explained by its Deputy Director, despite the original name of the institute being "European Roma Institute", the arts and culture dimensions were added to the title once the scope and ambitions of the group settled on cultural production as the area of choice. The "Europeanness" of the institute was also debated:

> For me, the 'Global Roma Institute' or something with similar meaning would have been the most accurate name for our institute, because I consider us a global diaspora and we have also received contributions from all around the world, not just Europe. But because of the kind and type of struggle we currently face in Europe, and also because the Council of Europe became one of the founders, the name 'ERIAC', with the 'E' for European, was chosen. (online interview, 10 July 2018)

15.5   Representation "for": Culture and Knowledge for Whom?

As Mitchell points out in his *Representation* essay, the "receiver", or "beholder" of any kind of representation, has to necessarily be a person(s): "We can represent things only to people. […] I can represent a man with stone, or a stone with a man; but it would be very odd to speak of representing either a stone or a man to a stone." (Mitchell, 1995, p. 1).

Representation, in its political as well as in the artistic realm, is deeply embedded in a set of codes and social agreements which make it meaningful and understandable to the "public". Who this public is—or at least who the representation is created for and aimed at reaching according to its maker—can, in turn, help us make sense of the representation itself. Is any institute and documentary movie that tackle issues such as minority identity and migration engaging in political activism, even if implicitly so?

While BUNKERS' images emerged—quite literally—from an activist network, its director claims not to be at ease with the documentary being labelled as an "activist film" (Fig. 15.4):

> The film is not a pamphlet, but an invitation to experience the life of someone else for about 14 minutes. I'd like to go beyond the current crisis and raise the broader question of our relation to the other, the one who is foreign to us.I'm not comfortable with the 'activist-documentary' labeling… In a way, this looks like an activist film. But I come from an activist, or at least committed background, and the format and style of the film don't match the criteria of classic activist film. I'm not sure I would have done the film in the same way if I had only tried to do an activist film. My purpose was more to prompt people to put themselves in the shoes of an asylum-seeker. I was already living in Geneva for 4 years, and I was surprised to hear many Swiss people considering it normal that asylum-seekers could be hosted there. Swiss people are used to these underground spaces and don't necessarily see what's wrong with it. I wanted to tell them that it's not OK to live this way. And I had to show them how other people, those who are actually living there, feel about it. That's why I define the film as a 'sensorial immersion'. It's a documentary, but it's also an essay in a way, because I wanted it to be physical and sensitive more than anything, more than a classic activist film. (Bilbao, 15 October 2016)

For ERIAC's directors, while they chose to stay away from identity politics—a contentious space already occupied by other Romani organizations—, the choice of focusing on Romani arts and culture was seen not as a de-politicised or as an abstract way of promoting a certain kind of artistic production, but rather as one of the few

Fig. 15.4 Picture frame from the documentary BUNKERS, 2016. (Filmmaker: Anne-Claire Adet)

available ways for a minority to attempt to contribute to knowledge-production and shape their own narratives. In the worlds of ERIAC's Executive Director:

Culture has an important dimension of social responsibility. Culture is the only transformative field in the Romani context, because in all the other dominant discourses—such as the major ones about housing, employment, health and education—Roma are primarily contextualized as a 'problem.' It is almost impossible to maneuver in these settings when you want to mobilize any kind of empowerment or inspiration. For the time being then, culture seems to be the only field in which the Roma are contextualized more positively. Particularly when it comes to antigypsyism, culture is actually the transformative field par excellence. Indeed, when Roma finally take ownership over their own image and are able to create counter-arguments, counter-images and counter-propaganda of themselves, the transformative power of arts and culture becomes obvious for everybody. (online interview, 4 September 2018)

In the case of EAC, the "beholder" –most of those who seek access to the archives—are researchers coming from a diverse background in social and human sciences, and which may have different reasons for approaching the centre:

[t]he most obvious connection is history and cultural heritage, but we keep being surprised by different angles that people find our resources useful from different fields…we've had people from linguistic studies, we've had people studying architecture, or photography. Sometimes they're looking for inspiration, sometimes it's about sharpening on deepening their thoughts. We are now issuing a scholarship prize to Master students, to show what is going on in research in this area, and to support those who write on this. The topics are rather broad, and we really mainly want to showcase the research, because one thing is financing the research itself [as universities do]; but more attention can and should also be put into the promotion of the research that has already been written. (online interview, 27 March 2019)

In terms of bridging the work of artists with archival research, one example is the abovementioned *Saudade* project, an exhibition constituted by 10 art pieces that were commissioned for EAC's 10th anniversary.

I thought it would be interesting to work with 5 artists living in the Netherlands and 5 living abroad, people who had experience or interest in using archives to create a piece of art… it took two years for the project to be implemented, and now it's a travelling exhibition. Everything sits in a suitcase, and it can be adapted depending on the size of the place. It's our way to support artists but also to show how daily life writings can inspire people. […] The biggest question we often times get from potential donors is 'How does my diary describing very mundane events helpful, how can it help anyone?' Performance allows us to get in touch with people who are not our usual audience or target group, and the gallery owner where the opening of the *Saudade* exhibition took place said the same regarding the kind of crowds she met and the conversations she had as a result of the project…that the people who came to her gallery to see the exhibition are not her usual clients or the usual people that she would see at an exhibition. (online interview, 27 March 2019)

Art and performance seems to be the answer of choice for ERIAC as well, despite many of its founders and supporters coming from academia:

The thing is that in the academia you see this power struggle over definitions, over the influence in policy-making, over shaping public discourses. You can see that much of it is rooted in scholarship, and there has been a growing critical mass made up of scholars of Romani background who started to speak from Roma positionality, from within it, with a Roma

voice—not necessarily claiming a more legitimate voice, but a very necessary voice that has been marginalized and has not been heard. I think that some of the "establishment", if I may say so, in the academic field, might have misinterpreted this kind of militant voice for self-recognition and self-determination as an attack, instead of as a way of self-emancipating. It is in the field of scholarship that you can see tensions along ethnic lines most clearly, and this is also where most tensions came from, because when you look at other circles, such as Roma activism for example, or if you look at the arts and culture scene, ERIAC has been very much welcomed and supported by both Roma and non-Roma. (online interview, 10 July 2018)

15.6   The Political Responsibility of Arts and Culture

Migration and ethnic minorities are a topic of inquiry that have in recent times received a great deal of media coverage and of political attention; an attention which has been often polarizing and has made an instrumental and/or selective usage of available data (Rigo, 2018). Against this background, there is a general sense that it is important and indeed urgent to move beyond traditional ways of communicating, if not doing, research on migration and ethnicity. The employment of images and artistic expressions as tools for knowledge-production, awareness-raising and advocacy is certainly not new, nor is looking at what kind of spaces, realities and opportunities for collaboration and exchange exist between scholars and the visual, art and cultural production world. Cultural production is increasingly being recognized as a powerful tool—more than printed words alone—in influencing perceptions and attitudes on migration and minorities (see Desille, this volume; Verstappen, this volume), yet the role of artistic representation in contributing to knowledge-production on minorities remains undertheorized and controversial. Experimental contemporary experiences on migrants' and minorities' realities provide a particularly rich opportunity to explore how story-telling on and by traditionally silenced groups can become more "public" and accessible through cultural institutes—or, vice versa, how artistic and archival experience can inform research.

"Representation" in cultural production, as in politics, is the way in which aspects of society, such as gender, age or ethnicity, are presented to audiences. How are the three selected experiences of "representations" different from more traditional cultural institutes or platforms that address migration and ethnic identities? By looking at the cases of the Expatriate Archive Centre, the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture and the movie BUNKERS, what emerge is that they are concerned with using cultural, testimonial or/and archival work as a tool to prevent the logics of forgetting, as spaces to preserve, to reflect upon and to project identities. Since the "object" of narration is shaped by individual voices who choose to salvage and store the stories that reflect other processes, the agency of the people whose experiences inform such spaces tends to be greater than those offered by quantitative analysis or datasets that focus on migration flows (such as IOM's Migration Data Portal). Despite the awareness of the uniqueness and individuality of the stories being represented in a collection of personal diaries, in an art

exhibition or through the footage of a specific asylum centre, what artistic representation allows for—possibly more successfully than political representation—is conveying the universality of the human experience. In analyzing how the selected case studies narrate minority histories, memories and heritage, what emerges is that one of the main drivers for the projects is that of using representation as a tool for empathy.

The soundtrack of the documentary BUNKERS is a good example of this: it is aimed at recreating the oppressive feeling of those who experienced those living conditions, and it does exactly that.

> The soundtrack is made from real bunkers noise only. […] I wanted the sound to be as realistic as possible at the beginning (we used the original sound from the smartphones) and more and more oppressive. The idea was to experience the life in the bunker as an asylum-seeker: you arrive there without really knowing where you are. You are a bit disoriented; you do not receive much information on how long you're going to stay. And then, the nightmare starts… You are anxious, you don't have intimacy, you can't sleep, you feel sick, you are sick… until the rebellion. (Bilbao, 15 October 2016)

Against the current European crisis we are witnessing—which is not a refugee crisis, but rather a humanitarian and political one— by refusing to enter the comparative minefield of what constitutes the "lowest threshold" of treatment for underprivileged minorities, art curators and filmmakers might indeed prove more successful than academic scholarship in producing emphatic and impactful knowledge on politicized topics. As put by BUNKERS' director:

> Some people consider that living underground is better that in the outdoors camps in Paris, Calais, or in the hot spots in Puglia or Greece. I don't want to enter this argument. As Foucault once stated, 'L'inacceptable n'est pas relatif'. (Bilbao, 15 October 2016)

References

Brito Vieira, M., & Runciman, D. (2008). *Representation*. Cambridge, UK/Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Cortés, C. E. (2000). *The children are watching: How the media teach about diversity*. New York: MLA Teachers college press.

Garber, M. (2015). Call It the 'Bechdel-Wallace Test'. *The Atlantic*, August 25, 2015. Accessed on January 15, 2020 at https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/08/call-it-the-bechdel-wallace-test/402259/

Magazzini, T. (2016). Cultural institutions as a combat sport. Reflections on the European Roma Institute. *The Age of Human Rights Journal*, (7), 50–76.

Magazzini, T. (2020). Identity as a weapon of the weak? Understanding the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture. In: van Baar, H. and Kóczé, A. (eds.), *The Roma and their struggle for identity in contemporary Europe*. New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Mansbridge, J. (1999). Clarifying the concept of representation. *The Journal of Politics, 61*(3), 628.

Mitchell, W. J. T. (1995). *Picture theory: Essays on verbal and visual representation*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. *Screen, 16*(3), 6–18.

Paulson, S. J. (2015). Showing seeing across media. The contemporary novel as visual event. In Paulson, S. J. and Malvik A. S. eds. *Literature in Contemporary Media Culture: Technology - Subjectivity- Aesthetics*, pp. 237–260.

Pierce, C. S. (1865). MS 802. Teleogical logic. 76 Definitions of The Sign by C. S. Peirce collected and analyzed by Robert Marty. Available at https://arisbe.sitehost.iu.edu/rsources/76DEFS/76defs.HTM

Pitkin, H. F. (1967). *The concept of representation*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.

Pitkin, H. (1972). *The concept of representation*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Przeworski, A., Stokes, S. C., and Manin, B. eds. (1999). *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation*. Cambridge University Press.

Rigo, E. (2018). Migration, knowledge production and the humanitarian agenda in times of crisis. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies, 23*(4), 507–521.

The Expatriate Archive Centre. (2018). *Saudade. An intersection of archives and art*. The Hague, The Netherlands: The Expatriate Archive Centre.