Chapter 5
The Crisis of Representation and the Reflexive Turn in Migration Studies

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5.1 Introduction

In a newspaper review of the first issue of the German *Zeitschrift für Migrationsforschung / Journal of Migration Studies* published in 2021, the journalist Gerald Wagner (2021) expressed his bewilderment about the state of debate in migration studies: "Reading the recently published first issue reveals a discipline whose tolerance of the heterogeneity of its approaches must be perceived as an irreconcilable discord […] If one article still […] wants to hold on to terms that are firmly established in the discipline, in politics, and in society, the very same terms are pounded into the ground in the next article."[1] Without overgeneralising this comment in a German newspaper, the expression of bewilderment points to complications in the field of migration studies. What Wagner interprets as "irreconcilable discord", we argue, is indicative of a crisis of representation that has been simmering in European migration studies for some time, but has gained momentum in recent years. With crisis of representation, we are referring to insecurities and unease that result from a delegitimisation of established forms of academic authority to speak and write about 'discriminable subjects' in general and migrants and their descendants in particular. In doing so, we draw on an understanding of representation that was formulated in science and technology studies (Latour, 1987, p. 72). It merges a political conception of representation as "delegation of authority to speak and act on behalf of others" with "a semiotic conception of a sign that

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[1] Translated from German to English by the authors.

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'speaks' on behalf of its object" (Lynch, 1994, p. 140). Lynch further argues that "this theoretical move […] encourages […] analysts to interrogate various 'representatives' and 'representations' in, of, and around science in order to unravel lines and networks of power" (ibid.).

The suspicion that academic representations are involved in the reproduction of unjust power structures concerns key terms of migration studies, such as integration, culture, migrant, identity or society, which have shaped academic and public discourses for decades and are still influential. These developments were encouraged by a new wave of critical scholarship that aims at "problematising dominant discourses within and outside of academia" (Vacchelli, 2018, p. 73). The crisis of representation is a constant reinstantiation of Wilhelm Schinkel's (2019, p. 8) sceptical question: "But what if the alternative is just another form of imposition that constitutes migration studies?"

At the centre of the crisis of representation are two aspects: First, the critique of linguistic forms of representations, which are suspected to reinforce and to reify negative representations of migration and migrants. Secondly, the question of who can or should have the authority to speak in the name of science about migrants and migrations. This also concerns questions of positionality and the embodiment of these power relations. Recent debates about new racism, critical race theory (e.g. Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Raghuram, 2022) and decoloniality (e.g. de Sousa Santos, 2018; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) have raised questions about who should have the legitimation to represent groups that are seen as vulnerable to discrimination and devaluation, such as migrants and/or non-white segments of the population. This criticism implies the suspicion that persons who do not share a specific set of experiences—like being made the object of racism or sexism— could be more likely to affirm pre-existing structures of inequality.

Although these critiques have raised a sense of uncertainty about academic authority, it is not so clear what concretely should follow from them (Marguin et al., 2021): Which forms of representation of 'migrant others' are il/legitimate? What are the normative standards by which it is evaluated? Shall scientific representations distinguish themselves from political self-representations of marginalised groups? In how far do methodologies or theories matter for making knowledge production less dependent on personal experiences?

In order to unfold our argument, we will first take a closer look at the crisis of representation in anthropology in the 1980s and 1990s. This will help us to develop what we call the *paradigm of reflexivity*. While the first part of the paper deals with more general aspects of the nexus of reflexivity and representation, the second part will be concerned more specifically with migration studies. In the concluding remarks, we will make suggestions on how the relation between the paradigm of reflexivity and the pluralism within migration studies, which was the object of Gerald Wagner's bewilderment, can be better understood and organised. As the literature already cited indicates, our article is situated at the intersection of a German and English-speaking field of Western European migration studies. This is the social position from where we speak. However, we hope that some of the ideas that will be presented are useful beyond this context.

This article is an exercise in reflexive theory building about reflexivity. It does not aim to develop a specific understanding of reflexivity within a particular theoretical paradigm, but rather asks what reflexivity can mean if a paradigmatic diversity of approaches to reflexivity is taken into account. As modality of dealing with epistemic diversity, the article develops a reflexive meta-theory within which the plurality of reflexivity approaches can be better understood and put into a meaningful relationship.

5.2   The Crisis of Representation[2] in Anthropology

In a first step, we want to explore how what we call crisis of representation relates to calls to "push forward a reflexive (and self-reflexive) perspective within migration studies", as it is formulated on the webpage of the IMISCOE Standing Committee for Reflexivities in Migration Study.[3] To this end, we make a short detour to the name-giving crisis of representation in social and cultural anthropology that unsettled the discipline especially in the 1980s and 1990s. In this context, the volume "Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography" (Clifford & Marcus, 1986) was most influential. It presented a "metareflection" (Rabinow, 1986, p. 251) of ethical, political and epistemological considerations and problems from which a crisis of representation was concluded. Although on a closer reading the volume "covered a quite broad and at times contradictory spectrum of positions" (Zenker & Kumoll, 2010, p. 17), it left a deep mark on anthropology as a discipline. Particularly influential was James Clifford's (1986) contribution that drew on postmodern literary theory in order to deconstruct the stylistic devices and tropes of the genre of ethnographic realism. Other authors criticised the text-centredness of this approach (Asad, 1986, p. 164) and its "obsession with epistemology" (Rabinow, 1986, p. 242). They emphasised the importance of political economy for understanding anthropological representations as a situated practice. James, Hockney and Dawson (1997, p. 2) concluded retrospectively that the main contribution of the Writing Culture debate was to become a magnifying glass for the "uncertainties about anthropology's subject matter (traditionally 'the other'), its method (traditionally participant observation), its medium (traditionally a monograph), and its intent (traditionally information rather than practice)". These cracks in the realistic foundation of anthropological knowledge production contributed significantly to the rise of the concept of reflexivity. It allowed to speak of a "reflexive turn" (McCarthy, 1992, p. 636) already in the early 1990s. The "paradigm of reflexivity" (Willerslev, 2016, p. X) promised to offer an epistemological stance from which canonic

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[2] When we speak of a crisis of representation, we do not mean a singular event; instead we mean to use the term to draw attention to intellectual developments in a larger temporal framework that have led to periodic climaxes since the 1980s.

[3] Cf. https://www.imiscoe.org/research/standing-committees/927-reflexive-migration-studies, retrieved February 28, 2025.

knowledge and established power relations could be challenged and "alternatives to realist epistemology" (Woolgar, 1988, p. 302) be explored.

5.3   The Reflexive Triad

The reflexive turn within the social sciences can be abstractly described as *a shift towards the immanence of academic knowledge production* that is, that scientific knowledge cannot be separated from the social processes and power relations within which it is produced. Or in other words: Immanence means migration studies operate within the realms of society, politics, morality and history and not outside from them. It is based on the idea that the "real is relational" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 3). Relational epistemologies rely on the presumption that 'reality' can neither be reduced to the qualities of the objects of observation nor to the consciousness of a subject or their theoretical apparatus. It is rather conceived as an effect which emerges from a net of social relations that connect objects and subjects with each other. Knowledge is produced and mobilised through practices like observing, listening, reading, analysing or writing that transcend the binary divide between subjects and objects of research and connect them in specific ways and under specific circumstances. Reflexivity is the attempt to explore and account for the social relations (re-)produced in these practices as these are the conditions of a possibility of knowing. In this understanding, the main fallacy of positivism or realism is to "produce [epistemic] objects in which the relation of the analyst to the object is" not reflected but "unwittingly projected" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 42).

Following this argumentation, reflexivity is crucial for the epistemic validations of knowledge in post-positivist thinking. It signifies the "recursive process"[4] (Lynch, 2000, p. 27) by which observers acquire knowledge about the constitutive relations of knowing which otherwise would be projected onto its objects. Reflexivity is an epistemological imperative that follows from the assumption of the relationality of epistemic practices. *Relationality* and *reflexivity* are closely connected to questions of *positionality* or standpoint (Haraway, 1988, p. 578). Relations can only exist if there are positions that can be related and from where it can be reflected upon these relations. In this sense, reflexive epistemologies reject the subject-object dualism of realist epistemologies and are instead based on the conceptual triad of reflexivity, relationality and positionality. However, the reflexive triad does not specify *what* should be reflected upon and *which* types of positions and relations should receive attention. These questions will be explored in the following.

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[4] The literal meaning of the Latin word reflectere is to bend back.

5.4 Reflecting About What?

In order to specify objects and modalities of reflexivity, we will cursorily discuss aspects of the works of some iconic authors. It is, above all, considered a didactic means to look briefly at some key intellectual problems of reflexivity.[5]

Probably the most influential author of the reflexive turn is Michel Foucault. His philosophy of knowledge has made the relationship between power and knowledge its main epistemic object. Foucault (1978, p. 83) criticised the "promise of a liberation" that is implied in the modernist understanding of scientific progress and enlightenment. Truth and knowledge, so Foucault, are not emancipatory weapons against (traditional) structures of domination but manifestations of power: "The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power" (ibid.). Starting from there, Foucault deconstructed key concepts of modern thinking and showed how they were instrumental for constructing and governing marginalised and stigmatised groups (Foucault, 1971, 1978, pp. 43–47). Foucault's work is a conceptual framework to closer examine the links between the "establishment of a biological caesura between [..] subgroups […] of the human species" (Mbembe, 2019 [2016], p. 71) and the exertion of control, domination and violence. Judith Butler (1999 [1990]) developed Foucault's thinking further and showed how the gender binary and the knowledge and practices that are articulated to it have become a central disciplining power over the body.

For the reflexive turn of migration studies, two Foucauldian ideas are of particular importance. First, in contemporary societies there exists a close relationship between questions of (true) knowledge on the one hand and questions of power over bodies, lives, identities and mobilities on the other hand. Second, the epistemic "power to define others" (Sarup, 1993, p. 67) associated with medical or administrative categorisations contributes significantly to the inequality between different modes of being. From this perspective it can be concluded that what appears as migration or who appears as a migrant cannot be separated from the authorities' will to know, to control and to let live and die. Since migration studies are involved in the production of categories and knowledge about migrants and migrations, it has to be asked how their involvement in the governing of migration and populations has to be understood and evaluated (Robertson, 2019; Dahinden et al., 2021; Amelina, 2022).

Pierre Bourdieu's work was another important contribution to the reflexive turn. He argued that socialisation in a particular socioeconomic class context shapes the formation of a person's largely unconscious but relatively stable action-guiding habitus. Habitus functions as grammar of practice and thereby contributes to the

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[5] Several proposals on distinguishing dimensions or versions of reflexivity have, of course, already been made. Michael Lynch (2000), for example, distinguishes 20 different academic uses of the term reflexivity in order to illustrate its fuzziness. Marguin et al. (2021) differentiate three dimensions that address different scales of sociality as epistemic object of reflexivity (biography, interaction and social field). Although we in part echo the thoughts of these authors, our typology of four modalities takes a different starting point with the reflexive triad, which entails other distinctions.

reproduction of larger structures of inequality through individuals' activities (Bourdieu, 1979). Because "the art of applying knowledge" is "inseparable from a habitus" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53), it also affects academic practice. In his later work, Bourdieu increasingly focused on exploring the operational logics of medium-scale analytical entities which he called social fields. In this framework he emphasised the importance of "the position that the analyst occupies, not in the broader social structure, but in the microcosm of the academic field, that is, in the objective space of possible intellectual positions offered to him or her at a given moment" (Wacquant, 1992, p. 39). Bourdieu distinguished between "narcissistic reflexivity" that focusses on the individual researcher and their personal experiences and sensitivities in the research process and scientific reflexivity, which according to him should involve a sociological analysis of the specific field of knowledge production in which the researchers are situated (Bourdieu, 1993). The key difference between these two forms is that scientific reflexivity serves the goal of improving scientific knowledge, whereas narcissistic reflexivity is understood as an "introspective confessionalism" that turns self-humiliation into self-heroisation (Emirbayer & Desmond, 2012, pp. 590–591).

Especially ethnographers (Breidenstein et al., 2020) added to this discussion that social scientists are not only situated in an academic field but also in their respective fields of study. In this respect, for instance context, situational relevancies (Werbner, 1996; Nieswand, 2017) and the proximity to specific groups of participants in the field of study (de Sousa Santos, 2018) matter in terms of what can be known about a social field.

Three points can be taken from both Bourdieu and the ethnographers. First, the habitus as incorporated class position influences how people learn, what they know and how they deal with acquired knowledge. Second, the position within an academic field with its internal differentiation (e.g. quantitative vs. qualitative methodologies) shapes the scope and the modality of what can be known and represented. Third, situational relations and positions within the field of study matter in terms of knowledge production. Reflexivity in the Bourdieusian sense is epistemological work that aims at explicating, understanding and explaining the tacit and unconscious effects of social relations and positionalities at different scales of sociality for the production and application of knowledge.

Edward Said's work on Orientalism is a good example to illustrate the postcolonial path of reflexivity. In his critique of Western practices of knowledge production (1979, p. 205), Said argued that the Orient was manufactured as an "epistemic object" through academic and literary writing since the eighteenth century. In Western discourses 'the Orient' was represented as the fundamental Other of the Occident. He emphasised that the academic writings that depicted 'Oriental Others' as inferior and fundamentally different from Europeans were "instruments of conquest" (Said, 1979, p. 309). Consequently, overcoming colonial entanglements means to critically question and re-work Western epistemologies in order to facilitate more symmetrical ways of understanding and representing others. Reflexivity means for Said above all to become aware that "the study of human experience usually has an ethical, to say nothing of a political consequence" (1979, p. 327) and

that scholars should take these consequences into account when they engage in epistemic practices.

The postcolonial and de-colonial critique of hegemonic forms of knowledge production put forward by Said and many others (i.e. Chakrabarty, 2009; de Sousa Santos, 2015; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018) entailed that scientific representations of groups of 'Others', including "migrant Others" (Mecheril, 2005) and subalterns (Spivak, 2003), had to take into account the suspicion that they might contribute to the reproduction of racism and colonialism (Mayblin & Turner, 2021). This also applies to the field of migration research in Western Europe.

The last two authors we want to draw attention to are Sandra Harding (1986) and Donna Haraway (1988). They explored from a feminist perspective how engaging with questions of positionality and situatedness could lead to a reflexive mode of knowledge production they called standpoint epistemology. Sandra Harding (1986, p. 9) argued against the modernist idea that questions of scientific knowledge could be separated from political questions of domination. Donna Haraway in turn prominently criticised what she called "the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere", which for her implies that white male European and US-American perspectives are taken as a neutral universal standard, while female, non-white and non-Western perspectives were considered particularistic and deviant (see also Dutta & Basu, 2021). Haraway concluded that the word "objectivity" sounds "nasty […] to feminist ears" (1988, p. 581) because it implies the refusal to reflect on positionality and its consequences for knowledge production. Moreover, Haraway, Harding and other feminist scholars emphasised the importance of social movements and their struggles for challenging dominant forms of knowledge. Practices of resistance bear the potential to think about social relations in a non-hegemonic way and can therefore act as impulses for the development of new, more emancipative epistemologies.

We can take away three points from the feminist epistemologies on the question of reflexivity. First, positionalities matter for the production of knowledge. Second, positionalities are intersections of inequalities constituted by larger regimes or systems of oppression and domination such as patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism and racism. Third, social movements which resist and criticise experienced forms of domination have a strategic role for identifying power relations that require reflexivity.

5.5   Making Sense of the Plurality of Reflexivity Discourses

This short review was meant to prepare the theoretical ground for developing a typology of modalities of reflexivity. Generally, we understand reflexivity as a "recursive process" (Lynch, 2000, p. 27) by which academic observers and 'representers' of social reality inquire into the epistemically relevant relations and positions in which they are involved and which they would otherwise project onto the objects of knowledge. The promise of reflexivity is that taking into account relationality and positionality contributes to a better understanding and challenging of

hegemonic forms of knowledge. But how are positions identified that need to be made the epistemic object of reflexivity? One method is what Mari Matsuda called asking "the other question": "When I see something that looks racist, I ask, 'Where is the patriarchy in this?' When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, 'Where is the heterosexism in this?' When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, 'Where are the class interests in this?'" (1991, p. 1189). Matsuda's method suggests that epistemic objects of reflexivity can be identified by applying a limited number of theoretically selected questions. Analytically, these questions refer to a triad built out of dimensions of social inequality, large-scale regimes of domination and systems of classification (race, class, gender, sexual orientation).

An alternative approach to reflexivity can be found in parts of the qualitative methods literature. Drawing on theoretical traditions such as phenomenology, pragmatism and ethnomethodology, some qualitative scholars have argued that especially standardised quantitative methods and different kinds of grand social theories might be suspected of lacking reflexivity in regard to their theoretical impositions. As a corrective, it was demanded that researchers applying quantitative methodologies be empirically more sensitive to the specificities of social fields and the perspectives of participants: "Openness" and context sensitivity in this framework "means not simply to confront an empirical phenomenon with sociological questions, but to expect from its exploration the emergence of those questions with which it can be opened up from within"[6] (Strübing et al., 2018). Georg Breidenstein and Helga Kelle (1998, pp. 54–55) present a vignette from a school ethnography that illustrates what it means to raise research questions from within: "When I came into the room at 12:50, Karin (the teacher) and a group of boys were sitting on the carpet. I […] said: 'Ah, you have boys' conference, I'll leave.' But the group contradicted me […] According to the timetable, it was remedial teaching."[7] What Breidenstein and Kelle highlight is that it was the ethnographer's preoccupation with gender relations that made her see a group of boys instead of a group of individuals with spelling difficulties attending a remedial teaching class. Becoming reflexive in this context means challenging one's own cognitive categories and theoretical presumptions.

According to Matsuda, reflexivity is a theoretically informed intervention that will reveal underlying political and socio-economic power structures and inequalities in empirical research that might not be visible otherwise. In contrast, Breidenstein and Kelle see reflexivity as a corrective to the epistemic power of categorical predecisions and grand theoretical narratives, which includes Matsuda's theoretically founded demand that "the other question" be asked. Even on the basis of these two methods of reflexivity alone, without looking for any others, it becomes clear that reflexivity is not 'one thing' but rather adds a new layer of complexity to academic knowledge production. It remains true that "in a world without gods or absolutes,

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[6] Translation from German to English by the authors.

[7] Translation from German to English by the authors.

attempting to be reflexive takes one no closer to a central source of illumination than attempting to be objective" (Lynch, 2000, p. 47).

But if reflexivity does not help to solve the epistemic problems raised by the crisis of representation, what is it good for? We suggest that reflexivity's main contribution is not to restore unambiguous academic authority over epistemic objects by replacing objectivity by reflexivity but to offer ways to better deal with the contingency of claims to truth implied in the epistemological and 'methodological pluralism' (Mitchell, 2009) of migration studies. In a different context, Niklas Luhmann highlighted that one of the most important contributions of reflexivity to the development of Christian theology was that Christians at one point came to understand "that pagans … [were] not pagans for themselves" (Luhmann, 1995, p. 457) but only for Christians. This reflexive 'discovery' made it possible for Christians to at least try to understand these 'pagan others' in their own terms and thereby created a basis for building relations to them beyond destruction, exclusion or proselytisation. The equivalent to what 'pagans' are to Christians in the case of migration studies are not the 'migrants', but those social scientists who work on the basis of different epistemological, methodological or theoretical grounds. In this sense, it can be argued that reflexivity unfolds its epistemic potential as a means of self-relativisation through attempts to understand 'epistemic others' in their own terms. Reflexivity is a recursive process that becomes progressive, i.e. that reaches out to the world.[8]

5.6 Four Modalities of Reflexivity

Our arguments above have identified the intended epistemic status of the four modalities of reflexivity we want to present in the following: Each modality is supposed to offer a different pathway to select relations/positions that can constitute an epistemic object of reflexivity. They are neither exclusive nor exhaustive. Nevertheless, each of them is located differently in the theoretical landscape of the social sciences. Readers who are used to thinking within a global political economy or a feminist-intersectional framework will probably tend to find Modality 1 (see below) to be most relevant, interactionists Modality 2 and activist scholars Modality 4. Our own position is shaped by Modality 3. However, if we understand reflexivity as an attempt to practice self-relativisation through epistemic agility, we should refrain from subsuming dimensions under one dominant framework but explore the epistemic potentials that arise from using different modalities of reflexivity in their own terms. That said, reflexive capacities are also not free from external constraints. Some modalities of reflexivity might rely on specific personal experiences of discrimination, others on access to academic methods or theory courses. Nevertheless, since the paradigm of reflexivity presumes that everybody is capable of making

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[8] In this context it has also to be taken into consideration that the overall relevance of the social sciences or migration studies for the (re)production of global inequalities is relatively marginal.

attempts to engage with different reflexive modalities on their own terms, nobody can be reduced to a single position or set of relations. This does not contradict the presumption that global social inequalities have an impact on them. However, their predictive power is higher with respect to spheres of exclusion than in respect to spheres of inclusion. While it is highly contingent what kind of research individuals classified as similar according to larger dimensions of inequality will conduct or publish about, it is relatively safe to assume that individuals who do not have access to an academic education will not receive research grants and will not publish an article in an academic journal. The distinction between spheres of inclusion and exclusion helps to differentiate between political efforts that aim at changing the conditions of inclusion within the field of academic knowledge production and reflexive efforts that aim at exploring the impact of positionality and relationality on modalities of knowledge production. By definition, the latter applies only to cases in which some degree of inclusion has taken place.

We arrive at a brief summary of the four modalities:

1. **Intersectional Reflexivity:** Intersectional reflexivity depends on a bird's eye perspective on society from which encompassing dimensions and categories of power/inequality, such as race, class and gender are deduced. The relevance of the categories articulated to large-scale regimes of domination is considered omnipresent. While the intersectionality perspective does not necessarily pre-suppose a specific socio-spatial scale, it does have an affinity to macro-theoretical understandings of inequality. Intersectional reflexivity allows for asking how relatively pervasive dimensions of inequality—like those between men, women and queer persons, rich and poor, white and black persons or citizens of wealthy and poor nation-states—relate to historically rooted regimes of domination such as patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism and nationalism. Of particular interest in this framework are the intersections of dimensions of inequality and their effects on personal positionalities, social relations and scientific knowledge production. Furthermore, intersectional reflexivity makes it possible to address who is structurally excluded from access to the field of academic knowledge production and to reflect about potential consequences of these representation voids.

2. **Situational Reflexivity:** As we have shown above, some qualitative researchers follow the "flat ontology" (Schatzki, 2016) of practice theory in which sociality is not seen as a structurally layered entity extending from the micro-level of interactions to the macro-level of global power structures, but rather as a complex interweaving of situated and emplaced practices, knowledges and objects. Against this background, it is the primary task of researchers to re-construct the salience of specific positions/relations within the framework of situated interactions. It does not exclude addressing the relevance of race, class or gender but emphasises situational forces which structure being and knowing (Hirschauer, 2001). From this perspective, the most salient asymmetry, for instance, in the case of interviewing is between interviewers and interviewees, playing football between players and referees, health care practices between doctors and patients and so forth. Situational reflexivity allows to ask to what extent proximity or

distance to situational positions influences the knowledge that is produced within and about a social field. Situational positionality should thus not be seen as a source of distortion that can or should be avoided but as a source of knowledge that has to be reflected upon methodologically (Breidenstein et al., 2020, p. 99).

3. **Academic Reflexivity:** As Bourdieu has emphasised, academic knowledge production requires researchers not only to become part of a field of research but also of an academic field. It requires socialisation in academic institutions, the reading of specific literature, the selection of scientific methods and the publishing of results in specific journals or book series. The academic field in which one is situated is crucial for evaluating the quality, relevance and innovativeness of academic knowledge. Making a contribution to it demands from researchers that they position themselves competently in relation to an accepted range of methods, theories and research topics. Innovation and critique are integral parts of academic discourses, but are only recognised if they can be related to an established body of knowledge. Reflexivity in this context means making efforts to give account of the possibilities and limits of knowing that result from social positioning in specific academic networks, institutions and knowledge traditions. In this context, it has also to be considered that the actors, networks and institutions that constitute the academic field are located in larger historical, disciplinary, linguistic and geopolitical landscapes that differ in regard to their internal structure and the amount of academic capital they incorporate and produce. Inequalities between academic institutions, countries and world regions have effects on the field and the modalities of academic knowledge production. Nevertheless, at least in the spheres of inclusion, the link between the position in the global political economy and in the academic field appears to be relatively loose. As an indicator for the produced content of academic knowledge, academic discipline, methodology or field of research appears to be much better suited than the positionality of researchers in a global political economy.

4. **Political Reflexivity:** Due to the reappraisal of the epistemic role of activism, the question of how to position oneself in regard to activists' political agendas or other forms of political practice has become more significant as a modality of reflexivity within the field of migrations studies. This includes the question of how to relate to state institutions and state-sponsored research. Reflexivity in this modality means exploring the epistemological and methodological consequences that proximity to or distance from activists, policy-makers or political organisations have or should have for academic knowledge production. In this framework, the self-ascription of not being political can also be made an epistemic object of reflexivity. It allows us to ask into which political space of resonance academic knowledge falls that is understood as apolitical by its producers. Political reflexivity also involves epistemic boundary work with regard to where the limits of academically legitimated knowledge are and where the expression of political opinions or even political propaganda begins (e.g. in the case of the denial of the Holocaust or climate change, to name two clear-cut cases). In this framework, political reflexivity requires recourse to quality standards of

Table 5.1 Modalities of reflexivity.

Type of relations	Type of positionality	Object of reflexivity	Examples
Intersectional	Intersections of structural dimensions of inequality	Structural effects of domination on knowledge production	Race-, class-, gender-relations
Situational	Positions within interactions	Effects of situational proximity/distance on knowledge production	Interviewers, interviewees
Academic	Positions within the academic field	Effects of proximity/distance to academic positions on knowledge production	Ethnographers, quantitative researchers; life course of researchers
Political	Positions in relation to social movements, political organisations and policy-makers	Effects of proximity/distance to political positions on knowledge production	Activist scholars, members of political think tanks

academic knowledge production such as the validity of truth claims, methodological reliability, theoretical plausibility and originality (Table 5.1).

We have emphasised that while the four modalities are not mutually exclusive and interact with one another, they should still be considered as analytically distinct. They unfold their epistemic potential only if they are not subsumed under a single theoretical umbrella but explored in their own terms. One example of realising the epistemic potential is Khazaei's contribution (Chap. 9) in this volume, in which the author makes use of at least two modalities of reflexivity—the intersectional and the academic—in order to critically analyse the academic (non-)engagement with race and racism in the field of migration studies.

5.7 Reflexivity in Migration Studies

We have argued here that post-positivist currents in European migration studies have led to a crisis of representation that has stimulated demands for more reflexivity (Nieswand & Drotbohm, 2014). These have addressed in particular (a) the relevance of politically constituted entities (especially the nation-state) in the construction of epistemic objects of migration studies (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2003; Pott et al., 2018), (b) the question of how far migration research contributes to the ethnic, cultural or racial othering of migrants and the perpetuation of colonial legacies (Glick Schiller et al., 2006; Vertovec, 2007; Römhild, 2014; Dahinden, 2016; Will, 2019) and (c) the role that moral, ethical and political entanglements play in the construction of the epistemic objects of migration studies (Fassin, 2005; Nieswand, 2021). It has been argued that the demand for more reflexivity did not solve the epistemic insecurities triggered by the crisis of representation but led de

facto to a pluralisation of modalities of reflexivity that we have tried to capture by distinguishing four main types. Critical and postcolonial migration researchers reflect on how colonialism, racism, patriarchy, capitalism and their intersections influence migration policies and research agendas (de Genova, 2010; Lutz & Amelina, 2021). Ethnographic migration researchers are concerned about the effects of multiple situatedness and contextual positionalities on both their informant's life trajectories (Van Geel & Mazzucato, 2021) and their own knowledge production (Jaeger & Nieswand, 2022). Historians and sociologists reflect on how the situatedness of migration research within a historically and politically shaped academic field has shaped the development of its epistemic objects (Bommes & Thränhardt, 2010; Espahangizi, 2021). Researchers of undocumented and refugee migration discuss the possibilities and limits of engaged and applied scholarship (Hess & Lebuhn, 2014; Kraler & Perchinig, 2017).

In addition to these four modalities, one can also ask about the temporal dimension of how reflexivity evolved. In this respect, three waves can be distinguished. In the first wave the main question was how far the social construction of migrants and migrations in public discourses is articulated in processes of racialisation (Miles, 1982), cultural fundamentalism (Stolcke, 1995), or ethnic primordialism (Allahar, 1996). These works were part and parcel of a paradigm shift from realism to social constructivism within the social sciences. In this context, it was emphasised that ethnic and other socially constructed boundaries between groups should not be taken for granted but should better be seen as powerful constructs of exclusion and marginalisation whose appearance and maintenance requires sociological explanation (Brubaker, 2001). The focus came to be on the social means of organisation through which social and classificatory boundaries between migratory and non-migratory parts of the population were maintained. These boundaries and not 'the migrants' or their life courses as such constituted the objects of political discourse and epistemic practice. The second wave of reflexivity was especially influenced by the critiques of the ethnic lens and methodological nationalism. They modified the object of reflexivity by directing the recursive process more specifically towards knowledge production within migration studies. In doing so, they tied the imperative of reflexivity back to the field in which the researchers themselves were situated and thus ultimately to their own practices of knowledge production. While in the first wave it was still relatively easy for migration researchers to imagine themselves in a privileged epistemic position vis-à-vis other members of society, the turn towards immanence of the second wave created more insecurities and ambivalences in regard to the positionality of researchers. It includes doubts whether research should be organised along asymmetrical categories such as 'migrants' or 'ethnic minorities' or whether the use of these categories already contributes to the reproduction of inequality (Foroutan, 2018). The second wave, however, promised that migration researchers who become reflexive are in a superior epistemic position to those migration researchers who are not and therefore contribute to the reproduction of hegemonic knowledge. However, as we have argued, the hopes of the first wave and the second wave underestimated the internal dynamic of the reflexive turn. Since reflexivity could not restore academic authority but rather contributed to its

further erosion, we argue for a third wave of reflexivity in response to the pluralisation of reflexive modalities in the second wave. The goal of this wave of reflexivity could be gaining a better knowledge of one's own position by engaging with other modalities of reflexivity in their own terms. In this framework, reflexivity does not function as an attempt to restore a unified source for scientific authority but rather as a means for dealing with their pluralisation. Pluralisation means that the boundaries between academic knowledge production, politics, activism and ethics appear more blurry but not that they are obsolete. The examples of Holocaust and climate change deniers show that reflexivity does not exempt one from taking a position on the limits of academic pluralism. Acknowledging the need to draw boundaries by referring to immanent standards of academic knowledge production (e.g. methodology, theory, review of existing knowledge) constitutes the difference between arbitrariness and contingency as a modus vivendi of scientific knowledge production.

5.8   Reflecting About the Reflexivity Paradigm

In this contribution we described the rise of reflexivity as a reaction to epistemic and normative complications and insecurities, which we called a crisis of representation. Returning to the Writing Culture debate helped us to see that there are no general solutions to the sketched intellectual problems and suspicions. It might be worth reconsidering Johannes Fabian, who more than 30 years ago wrote that "to stop writing about the Other will not bring liberation" (1990, p. 760). The most important lesson to be drawn from attempts to engage with reflexivity is that neither unquestioned truth nor moral innocence can ever be achieved. The promise of reflexivity, as we understand it, is that exercises in self-relativisation increase the capacity to deal with a plurality of truth claims and imaginaries of the good. Moreover, the reflexivity paradigm can relieve especially younger researchers from finding solutions to an overwhelming set of intractable epistemic problems and moral suspicions. Since the reflexivity paradigm allows one to work with boundaries and limitations rather than condemning them, it facilitates pragmatic ways of academic knowledge production about migration in a contradictory, complex and unequal world. However, the paradigm of reflexivity also has limitations and risks. If it becomes an end in itself (Dean, 2021, p. 179), it can easily lead either to an abyss of infinite regression or to a narcissistic mode of self-representation that loses sight of the mandate of migration studies, which remains to provide a larger public with appropriate and reliable knowledge about migrants, migrations and the socio-economic and political conditions of their becoming.

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