



THE VISUAL DISCOURSE OF THE ROMA COMMUNITY IN THE SPANISH PRESS A Multimodal Critical Analysis of Reference Journalistic Images

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the visual representation of the Roma community in the Spanish press during the first decade of the twenty-first century, a period marked by increased migration, including that of Roma populations, and by the influential role of mainstream media. Drawing on multimodal critical discourse analysis, the study analyses images published in two major British newspapers. The findings reveal meanings embedded within visual content that are not immediately apparent, enabling a more nuanced understanding of how the situation of the Roma community is constructed and developed through the visual treatment they receive.

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1. Introduction

The media discourse surrounding the Roma ethnic group has been examined from multiple perspectives. Since the late 1990s, a range of studies have shown that representations of Roma people in the media, both in discursive strategies and journalistic approaches, are permeated by stereotypes that reinforce clichés within majority society and contribute to social distancing. These representations frequently portray the Roma as a group anchored in the past and associated with marginality, as well as with picturesque and folkloric imagery (Flores Martos, 1996; Del Río, 2011; Oleaque Moreno and Moreno Castro, 2017).

The Roma community arrived in Spain approximately 600 years ago, a presence commemorated in 2025, and the images portrayed in the country's print media play a significant role in shaping the collective imagination surrounding this group. Roma people constitute approximately 1.5% of the total population and form a predominantly young community, with 66% under the age of 30, compared to 30% of the overall Spanish population (Fernández and Fernández, 2024). Levels of poverty among the Spanish Roma affect approximately 80% of families, while the rate of child poverty reaches 89% (Fernández and Fernández, 2024).

With the expansion of social media and digital technologies, discrimination against the Roma community has increased significantly. This trend is reflected in a 2024 report by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG), which identified 199 incidents of discrimination (FSG, 2024). Social media platforms have become key spaces for the circulation and reinforcement of hate speech, where racist and violent messages targeting the Roma community proliferate (HUMA, 2024).

Such forms of discourse are not new and have, at times, been reinforced by legal frameworks. A notable historical example is the approval by King Ferdinand VII of the Marqués de la Ensenada's guidelines in 1749, which ordered the indiscriminate arrest of Roma people. This measure, known as the Great Roundup, remained in force for fourteen years, during which it is estimated that approximately 9,000 individuals were imprisoned until their pardon was decreed by Charles III (Gómez, 2013).

Although no explicitly anti-Roma legislation was enacted during the nineteenth century, this absence did not prevent systematic discrimination. During this period, Roma people increasingly came to be represented as symbols of freedom and exoticism, a framing that, rather than facilitating social inclusion, contributed to the consolidation of reductionist stereotypes that confined them to familiar roles such as bullfighters, dancers, or bandits (Sierra, 2017, p. 23).

In the twentieth century, and particularly in the decades preceding the Spanish Civil War, these attitudes persisted. The Vagrancy Act of 1933, which criminalised practices such as begging, lack of documentation, or minor offences, intensified the persecution of Roma populations. Members of the Roma community who were active in the National Confederation of Labour, anarcho-syndicalist movements, militias, or right-wing groups experienced repression alongside the broader population. Many fought on the front lines and, during the Franco dictatorship, were subjected to persecution, with a significant number forced into exile (Martínez, 2017).

The adoption of the 1978 Constitution marked a turning point for Roma people in Spain, as it formally recognised them as citizens with the same rights as the rest of the population. Since then, despite ongoing challenges, including the loss of their ancestral language, Romani, derived from Sanskrit, the situation of the Roma community in Spain has been comparatively more favourable than in other European contexts (Oleaque Moreno and Moreno Castro, 2017). This relative improvement likely contributed to sustained migration to Spain by Roma populations from Eastern Europe during the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries. According to San Román (2012), discrimination against Roma people persisted during this period, with a particular impact on individuals from Romania and Bulgaria, thereby perpetuating longstanding stereotypes that frame Roma communities as problematic, including within media representations.

1.1. *The Media and the Roma People*

One of the earliest studies to examine media representations of the Roma community is the essay by the anthropologist Juan Antonio Flores Martos (1996), which analyses coverage in the newspaper *El País*.

Flores Martos observes that, while the articles under study ostensibly promote certain social values, they simultaneously reproduce difference through clichés embedded in collective memory.

The author identifies three recurring stereotypes of Roma in the selected news articles and, on occasion, in accompanying images: the trickster, the scrap dealer, and the 'aleluyas', a term used to refer to Roma who practise the Evangelical faith. To analyse these representations, Flores Martos (1996) draws on the anthropological distinction between 'emic' and 'etic' perspectives. Terms presented in quotation marks or italics are understood as originating within Romani language and culture and are therefore classified as emic, whereas unmarked terms are attributed to the non-Roma journalist and categorised as etic.

From this perspective, Flores Martos notes that the term 'patriarch' is a construction of the press, used to describe older men who are portrayed as exercising authority in news stories related to crime. Within the Roma community, by contrast, older men are associated with experience, responsibility, and respect, and are commonly referred to using the terms 'uncle' or 'aunt' (Kamira, 2016, p. 22). The analysis also identifies other derogatory expressions that frame the Roma community through negative and reductive patterns. This is evident in the use of the term 'clan', which is frequently linked to criminal activity rather than to the more accurate notions of 'extended family' or 'family group' (Kamira, 2016, p. 22).

Flores Martos's conclusions have been corroborated by subsequent studies, which similarly demonstrate the persistence of representations that reinforce marginality and negative racial stereotypes, often eclipsing folkloric and music related dimensions of Roma culture.

The presence of Roma in the press, together with the problematic representational models that emerge from such coverage, has also been examined by Roma organisations through a series of reports. Notably, since 1996 these have included annual publications by *Unión Romaní* and, subsequently, by the *Instituto Romanò para Asuntos Sociales y Culturales*. These reports compile and analyse news items from media outlets across Spain, with a particular focus on the press, with the aim of identifying recurring stereotypes while also offering recommendations and proposing good practices for media professionals.

As is customary in these reports, journalistic items published in media outlets within each autonomous community are evaluated. In 2023, for example, 450 items were analysed. Over time, the findings indicate a trend towards greater neutrality in media coverage, accompanied by a decline in both positive and negative bias. In 2021, the level of neutrality identified was 78.53%, rising to 88.66% two years later. At the same time, a decline in the consultation of Romani sources is evident. While this figure stood at 27.86% in 2021, it increased to 38.16% in 2022 before falling again to 29.11% in 2023 (Instituto Romanò, 2023, p. 151). The role of associations is consistently defended in these reports as a means of positioning them as reliable sources of information.

In addition, a range of studies initiated by Roma institutions, professional associations such as the *Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya*, and public bodies including the *Consell de l'Audiovisual de Catalunya* and the *Consejo Audiovisual de Andalucía*, which will be discussed in the following section, have examined media portrayals of the Roma community and sought to provide practitioners with recommendations and best practices. Nevertheless, many media outlets continue to disregard codes of ethics and their own style guides concerning the treatment of ethnic minorities. In the case of Roma representation, this has contributed to the persistence of stereotypes and to a lack of rigour in reporting on this community. As a result, many reports and related initiatives have limited impact, as their recommendations are often not implemented.

1.2. The Roma People in the Audiovisual Field

In the audiovisual field, several analyses (Breazu and Machin, 2020; Marques Gonçalves, 2020) highlight a clear disparity between the self-image held by Roma communities and the image constructed by the media, a gap largely produced through the repeated circulation of stereotypes. In television, Roma individuals frequently appear in music or entertainment programmes and, in more recent years, in reality television formats such as *Mi gran boda Gipsy*, *Palabra de gitano*, and *Los Gipsy Kings*. Rather than fostering more nuanced representations, these programmes have tended to reinforce narratives that are harmful to the Roma community (Cantón Galiana, 2017; Gallego Esteban, 2019).

A similar pattern can be observed in cinema, which has historically followed a trajectory of marginalising Roma people or reducing them to folkloric figures in films produced since the 1930s.

Some films from the past two decades reflect social change through the depiction of romantic relationships, yet these narratives remain framed within traditional representations of Roma identity. Characters from this community appear in works by both national directors, including Antonio Saura, Nicolás Astiárraga, Carlos Serrano, and Francisco Rovira Beleta, and international filmmakers such as Tony Gatlif, a French Algerian director of Romani origin, Emir Kusturica, and Guy Ritchie. In most cases, these productions continue to reproduce and reinforce stereotypes that have long shaped audiovisual portrayals of Roma communities.

In parallel with the efforts undertaken by Roma organisations to challenge unequal treatment in the press, the audiovisual sector has also been the subject of evaluative reports aimed at assessing the state of representation. These initiatives have resulted in a series of recommendations and proposed good practices for media companies and communication professionals, identifying issues similar to those observed in print media. Among the most persistent problems is the limited consultation of Roma sources in audiovisual content concerning this community, a pattern already noted in the previous section.

In the past decade, several docudramas featuring Roma individuals have been broadcast with the stated aim of informing the public about the customs of the community. However, these initiatives have frequently produced the opposite effect. Cantón Galiana (2017) analyses *Palabra de gitano*, produced by Mediaset and broadcast on the Cuatro channel between February and November 2013. The programme presents a range of recurring figures, including characters identified by nicknames, folkloric archetypes, traditional couples, dancers, and 'ajuntadoras', which are women tasked with verifying the bride's virginity, all of which contribute to a popular imaginary saturated with stereotypes about the Roma ethnic group.

Drawing on content analysis and surveys conducted with both Roma and non-Roma participants, Cantón Galiana demonstrates that the programme reinforces harmful stereotypes and generalises across the community as a whole, thereby contributing to a negative perception of Roma people (Cantón Galiana, 2017, p. 51). Among other effects, the programme reinforces the portrayal of Roma women as dominated by men, submissive, and lacking agency over decisions concerning their bodies, sexuality, and prospects for education or employment. Perceptions of the Roma community among non-Roma audiences were examined through pre viewing and post viewing surveys of *Palabra de gitano*, which revealed that negative attitudes held prior to viewing were further reinforced after exposure to the programme.

Similar patterns are identified by Gallego Esteban (2019) in his analysis of another reality television programme, *Gipsy Kings*. In this case, representations that purport to be inclusive are transformed into caricature and, at times, ridicule the participants. Depictions of everyday life, entrepreneurial initiatives, or business training ultimately construct Roma individuals as 'different from the rest of the population, whether through their lack of education, their incorrect way of speaking, or their use of tricks to always get their way' (Gallego Esteban, 2019, p. 72). Roma women, in particular, are portrayed in stigmatising terms as subjugated, dependent, and awaiting the approval of male figures (p. 73).

In response to the issues outlined in the preceding examples, a range of Roma institutions, including the Fundación Secretariado Gitano and the Federación Nacional de Mujeres Gitanas Kamira, continue to conduct regular analyses aimed at promoting the responsible use of Roma representation in the media. Despite variations in reported figures over time, these studies consistently identify the same underlying problems and emphasise the need for good practices to avoid perpetuating racist stereotypes reproduced by media outlets. One illustrative set of recommendations is presented in a joint publication by the Kamira Federation and the Consell de l'Audiovisual de Catalunya (2018). This document urges journalists to recognise the importance of providing 'fair, dignified, realistic, intercultural, and equal' coverage of Roma communities (p. 3), incorporating a gender perspective that explicitly addresses the negative and often essentialised portrayals of Roma women as excessively tribal or ancestral.

Pejorative narratives within the audiovisual sphere are not confined to entertainment formats. News coverage of Roma communities has also been examined, revealing less overt but similarly charged representational strategies from an international perspective. Breazu and Machin (2021), for example, analysed eighty-one television news reports broadcast in Romania that referred to members of this minority. Their findings demonstrate how television news can transmit racist stereotypes and incite hostility in subtle and indirect ways. In the sample examined, the appearance of Roma individuals did

not serve to provide meaningful information or to convey their perspectives, emotions, or opinions. Instead, these representations functioned to reinforce a discourse that constructs Roma people as negative, uneducated, backward, and unreliable (p. 13). The authors conclude that the news programmes studied employ understated discursive strategies that nevertheless contribute to the dissemination of racist ideologies. Although such expressions may be difficult to detect, they are highly effective and readily amplified on social media, a key environment for the circulation of hate speech (p. 15).

Other research in this area adopts a quantitative approach, such as the study conducted by the Audiovisual Council of Andalusia (2020). Focusing on the autonomous community with the largest Roma population in Spain, this analysis examines the frequency, duration, thematic placement, and representational characteristics of news items relating to Roma communities in Andalusian television news programmes. Variables considered include the number of items, time allocated, participant roles, geographical distribution, and gender. The data indicate that, during the period analysed, from 2010 to 2020, news items concerning Roma people accounted for only 0.10% of the total sample. Moreover, these items were, on average, 10% shorter than other news reports and appeared less frequently in programme headlines (CAA, 2021, p. 34).

1.3. Visual Representations of Roma in the Press

Although representations of Roma as a social group in audiovisual media in Spain and in countries with a significant Roma presence and history of emigration, such as Romania, have received scholarly attention, the role played by photography in the written press, both in print and online formats, has largely gone unnoticed. Given that the Spanish press has long been, and continues to be, one of the most established and influential media references, it is necessary to examine existing research on its visual practices in order to situate and articulate the contribution of the present study.

Photographs accompanying articles about the Roma community tend to convey a negative image marked by what Del Río Pedraza (2011, p. 200) describes as an 'ideological bias'. This bias is manifested through elements such as lighting and shadow, the spatial positioning of those depicted, and even the size of the images used. In his earlier study, Flores Martos (1996) analyses the photographs accompanying news items published in *El País*, drawing attention in particular to the depiction of Roma housing, especially interior spaces. Bathrooms are shown in states of disorder, with fixtures presented in ways that suggest neglect or lack of use. Such visual strategies foreground supposed hygiene practices, for instance through an image of a Roma woman washing clothes outdoors on a slab, an everyday activity framed so as to emphasise conditions of poverty and deprivation (p. 176), thereby reinforcing processes of othering (p. 178).

Flores Martos further notes that, at times, the photographic content does not correspond to the accompanying text. He illustrates this observation with a news item addressing drug related issues that is paired with an image of a domestic interior evocative of the 1950s and reminiscent of his grandparents' home. In other cases, photographs depict interiors overcrowded with objects and dilapidated furniture or show elderly women seated on the floor. These images construct Roma subjects as 'incarnations prior to modernity, to the triumph of the middle classes' worldview', positioning them as exotic, pre modern insiders within Spanish society (Flores Martos, 1996, p. 179).

Along similar lines, Flores Martos observes the recurrent reuse of images of Roma individuals to illustrate unrelated news stories. In one instance, the same photograph is employed both in an article on a literacy campaign and in a report on individuals travelling to Equatorial Guinea to obtain a driving licence in order to avoid the theoretical examination, revealing the extent to which Roma imagery functions as a generic visual resource detached from specific contexts.

Photographic representations of minors have not been exempt from these dynamics. Flores Martos (1996, p. 180) draws attention to the frequent presence of children in press images and classifies them according to four recurrent contexts: children with elders; children and deprivation; children and violence; and children and discrimination. He links these visual patterns to a broader perception within mainstream society that constructs Roma people as 'children', understood as incomplete subjects in need of guardianship, protection, and punishment, and as figures upon whom paternalism and welfare practices can be exercised (p. 180). Such representations carry harmful connotations that extend across generations.

More broadly, the studies reviewed emphasise that these images are often unnecessary, taken out of context, and contribute little to the informational value of the articles they accompany. Instead, they reinforce negative stereotypes and further stigmatise Roma communities (Flores Martos, 1996; Instituto Romanò, 2021). Nevertheless, Del Río Pedraza observes that photographs associated with the activities of pro Roma organisations tend to 'convey a positive meaning' (2011, pp. 199–200).

Journalistic photography displays representational patterns similar to those identified in textual and audiovisual portrayals of Roma people. Heredia (2021, p. 14) summarises these patterns into three recurrent situations that perpetuate stereotypes. The first involves assigning disproportionate importance to news that links Roma individuals to crime, presenting them as 'active participants' in such acts. The second consists of the graphic depiction of situations of extreme social exclusion, which caricature Roma lives and encourage racist interpretations. Finally, at the opposite extreme, media representations often construct a romanticised image of 'gypsy artist', an equally reductive stereotype that frames artistic expression as the sole legitimate form of social participation.

Similarly, Herrador's research (2020) examines the media discourse surrounding Roma women, who experience intersecting forms of discrimination based on ethnicity and gender. Through a framing analysis of both text and images in 116 articles published in sixty-eight newspapers and online magazines between September and November 2019, Herrador identifies representational tendencies that align with the findings of other studies discussed here. Although the articles depict women engaging in workshops or managing businesses, these images nonetheless render Roma women as 'simplified and homogeneous' subjects (p. 110). Herrador argues that such portrayals reveal a dual problem: Roma women are framed as passive recipients of a culture represented as inherently restrictive, from which they are expected to escape because it is constructed as 'guilty of inequality' (p. 111).

Previous studies have examined the textual dimension of representations of Roma people in the written press. However, as outlined above, the visual dimension has received comparatively limited analytical attention. In this context, the present study offers an original contribution by foregrounding the meanings embedded in visual elements, examined through a critical multimodal analytical framework.

1.4. Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis and Ethnic Visual Meanings

Journalistic photographs and illustrations can contribute to the construction of social and cultural representations that reinforce and homogenise the viewpoints originally promoted in written texts (Ruiz del Olmo and Bustos Díaz, 2016, p. 113). However, as Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) demonstrate, there are concepts and analytical tools that enable researchers to examine not only the formal features of journalistic images (and other visual genres), but, more importantly, the ways in which their constituent elements produce meaning. The development of this line of inquiry gave rise to Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA), an extension of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) into the visual domain, which had previously been centred primarily on textual data.

CDA is an interdisciplinary research approach aimed at uncovering the meanings and power relations embedded in the discourse produced by organisations, institutions and dominant social actors (Van Dijk, 2001; Reisigl and Wodak, 2015). Its focus lies on the semiotic dimensions of power, injustice and political, economic, social or cultural change, providing a framework from which researchers can address issues that require a critical social stance, such as racism or discrimination against minority groups.

MCDA, in turn, emerged in the late 1990s, largely based on the work of Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), who demonstrated that discursive meaning is not confined to language alone, but is also conveyed through other semiotic modes, particularly images. Their work established multimodality as a social practice in which meaning is constructed through the interaction of multiple semiotic resources within discursive practices (Oteíza and Franzini, 2022).

Within this framework, non-linguistic modes are not treated as mere accompaniments to text, but as complete semiotic systems governed by their own grammars (Kress, 2010). Visual mode analysis is therefore shaped by semiotic principles that condition how emotions, identities and social actions are represented. MCDA seeks to connect multimodal meaning-making to broader sociocultural processes, such as media globalisation, ideological formations, and the economic dynamics of cultural industries at specific historical moments.

In relation to photography, MCDA offers analytical tools applicable to still images that allow for the examination of discursive dimensions such as the naturalisation of social roles assigned to ethnic minorities, or the construction of emotional proximity or distance through visual elements including setting, lighting, social distance and gaze. As Machin and Mayr emphasise, the defining feature of MCDA lies in its critical orientation (2012, p. 9), which enables the identification of underlying ideas, absences and assumptions embedded in images (2012, p. 10). These dimensions make it possible to trace the articulation of specific interpretative frameworks that contribute to processes of othering, such as criminalisation or paternalism, within the media imaginaries in which ethnic minorities are positioned (Awino and Cheruiyot, 2025).

2. Method

Following the theoretical approach outlined above, derived from the principles of ACDM, this research focuses on how a series of prominent, non-obvious visual discursive meanings, specific to the photographic representation of Roma as a group, have been established or predetermined. This approach takes into account the growing importance of still images, particularly photography, as an illustrative resource that enhances journalistic meaning within the Spanish press.

To this end, the study examines images taken from journalistic pieces that are especially representative of the group under analysis, selecting those associated with the most prominent articles in terms of length. As a temporal reference, the research focuses on images published during the first decade of the 2000s, prior to the expansion of online journalism. Special attention is given to newspaper headlines which, particularly in print format, have historically functioned as a reference point for other media outlets and have influenced subsequent representations of society and its ethnic minorities.

The media outlets selected for this research are *El País* and *ABC*, two newspapers with clearly differentiated editorial orientations. *El País* has been, and continues to be, the leading centre-left journalistic reference, while *ABC* represents the traditional right. In 2023, *El País* recorded an average daily circulation of 52,024 copies, compared with 34,199 for *ABC* (Málaga Press Association, 2024).

Given the limitations imposed by the format of this article, the selection of the most representative journalistic photographs from the period under study was carried out by identifying annual peaks in publication. The analysis revealed that the years with the highest number of articles were 2003, 2004, 2008 and 2010. During these four years, a total of 455 articles related to this minority group were published across both newspapers, with 213 appearing in *ABC* and 242 in *El País*. This figure was obtained through a review of the digital archives of both media outlets, identifying news items of all journalistic genres in which the terms *gitano*, *gitana*, *gitanos* or *gitanas* were used.

We then selected images from the most extensive articles on Roma published during those years. These texts occupy at least three-quarters of a page or, in some cases, take the form of multi-page dossiers. They include long news items, reports and opinion pieces. Rather than highly topical content, these are articles in which the choice of image is carefully considered. This characteristic is of particular interest for this study, as it reinforces the representativeness sought in the visual material.

Six images are analysed discursively, one from each newspaper for each of the selected years, as examples of the graphic treatment given to Roma in these leading media outlets during periods of greatest publication intensity.

The analysis is guided by a critical examination of meanings embedded in key visual aspects of the images, moving beyond surface description. This perspective, grounded in ACDM, enables an in-depth interpretation of visual discourse. As Machin and Mayr argue, such an approach helps to reveal the types of ideas, absences and assumptions embedded in images (2012, p. 10), as well as the ideological and potentially discriminatory interests and connotations they may convey (2012, p. 10).

Machin has made a significant contribution to understanding the processes by which standardised global visual resources, such as recurring iconographic styles or compositional conventions, are disseminated and naturalised in the media. According to this perspective, such processes shape how social prominence, discrimination, emotion and cultural difference are represented, promoting simplified modes of expression that prioritise communicative efficiency while reinforcing ideological dimensions of visual discourse. In their joint work, Machin and Mayr propose a set of semiotic categories for image analysis, including the gaze of those represented, the setting and attributes such as clothing or objects, the angle and distance from which subjects are portrayed, the stylisation or pose of social

actors, and the ways in which individuals are stereotyped or collectivised through visual selection. From a critical standpoint, these semiotic resources are linked to broader social meanings, power relations and discriminatory ideologies that frame media representation.

For the purposes of this analysis, particular attention is given to specific visual discursive strategies that Machin and Mayr identify as especially relevant in representations of minorities. First, the study considers the iconography of attributes, focusing on clothing and objects associated with the individuals portrayed. Second, it examines the settings in which these individuals appear and the meanings they convey, following Machin and Mayr's interpretations. For example, an office setting suggests formality, empty spaces may enhance individual prominence, while street scenes featuring police officers evoke danger or criminalisation. Third, the analysis addresses the representation of attitudes through gaze, pose and stylisation. When examining gaze, it is relevant to observe whether the main subject looks directly at the viewer or elsewhere. According to the authors, a direct gaze seeks to establish proximity and engagement, while an averted gaze creates distance and may suggest superiority when directed upwards, or evasiveness when directed downwards.

Finally, the analysis considers the degree of individualisation or collectivisation of social actors within the images. Elements of identity may be foregrounded or relegated to the background, shaping how subjects are personalised or depersonalised. The study examines how visual strategies contribute to stereotyping or collectivising participants and how these processes influence their representation as social actors (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 12).

2.1. Objectives

The main objective of this study is to identify the graphic representation of Roma as a group in the Spanish press during the first decade of the 2000s, a period in which leading newspapers still exerted considerable influence, the effects of which remain visible today through influential publications that continue to shape public discourse.

The secondary objectives are twofold. First, the study seeks to identify the dominant meanings present in the visual representation of Roma as a group within representative and prominent journalistic pieces, through the analysis of specific semiotic categories and visual elements. Second, it aims to examine how migration is portrayed in relation to Roma during this period, which coincides with intensified persecution of Roma across Europe, when Spain became both a destination for Roma migrants from Eastern Europe and a place of refuge for refugees from different countries (Arango et al., 2016).

3. Results

3.1 Visual Representation of Roma in El País

First, we apply Machin and Mayr's (2012) semiotic analysis tools to three representative images published in *El País*. A detailed review of each image is conducted in order to reconstruct the meanings they convey.

The first image is a two-column photograph published on 29 March 2004 in the Entertainment section, although it refers to a court case. It accompanies a three-quarter-page news report entitled *Farruquito released on bail after pleading guilty to fatal hit-and-run*. The article addresses the complex situation of the well-known Roma dancer Farruquito following the incident indicated in the headline. The photograph shows Farruquito alongside his brother El Farru, also a dancer, who was a minor at the time and who confessed to the crime.

Both figures are shown from the waist up during a rehearsal, captured from a low angle. Although the shot is medium-range, this perspective magnifies the subjects, giving them prominence and making them appear larger and more imposing to the viewer. Combined with other visual elements, this angle contributes to a disturbing and tense atmosphere. This effect is reinforced by the aesthetic attributes of both characters, who are dressed in dark clothing, a common feature among flamenco artists. However, in the context established by the headline, these attributes acquire a harsher and more austere connotation, especially when considered alongside the dancers' rigid gestures and poses.

The setting is functional and stripped of decorative elements, conveying discipline and tension. Farruquito appears almost dressed in mourning, even wearing a black scarf. As Machin and Mayr note, dark colours in dramatic contexts are often associated with pessimism and negativity, in contrast to lighter tones, which tend to evoke hope or openness.

This sense of darkness is also conveyed through the gaze and posture of both Farruquito and his brother, positioned to his right. Neither looks directly at the viewer; instead, their gaze is directed upwards and forwards, avoiding visual contact. This lack of direct gaze creates distance and prevents the establishment of empathy that might otherwise be conveyed through expressions of remorse or vulnerability. Their poses appear constrained and defensive, partially obscuring their faces and casting shadows over their eyes, which hardens their expressions.

Finally, with regard to individualisation, the image clearly foregrounds the main character. Although other dancers are present in the background, they remain indistinct. Farruquito's face is more clearly visible than his brother's, and the visual focus rests almost exclusively on the two men. In this case, individualisation operates in relation to a familiar stereotype: that of the tormented flamenco Roma artist, a recurring figure in cultural narratives, whose personal suffering is portrayed as inseparable from his artistic expression and, by extension, from the collective experience of his community.

Continuing with flamenco-related imagery, on 11 June 2008 *El País* published an illustration in the form of a drawing that adapts the image of Camarón de la Isla, arguably the most iconic flamenco singer of the contemporary era. The illustration occupies almost two columns within a full-page opinion piece, announced on the front page, in the La Cuarta Página section. The article, written by the renowned author Eduardo Mendoza, is a one-page column entitled *Los gitanos y la materia de los sueños* (Gypsies and the stuff of dreams). The text evokes ancestral Romani history and traditional legends associated with Roma people and was written in response to the explicit persecution of Roma in Italy by Silvio Berlusconi's populist government, as stated in the lead paragraph.

With regard to attributes, the very choice of the illustrated figure is striking. Camarón had no direct connection to Italy or to the specific political situation of Roma in that country, which points to a collectivised and undifferentiated conception of Roma identity, treated as a homogeneous whole without internal distinctions. The illustration depicts the musician with his characteristic long hair, wearing flamenco boots and a crown symbolising his status as the "king of flamenco". These attributes contribute to the construction of a mythical figure, reinforcing a romanticised stereotype.

In terms of gaze and pose, the illustrated Camarón does not look at the observer and does not seek to establish visual contact or demand a response. His eyes are closed and his facial expression is one of ecstasy, a pose traditionally associated with flamenco singing. Rather than creating proximity or engagement, the image presents an unattainable and idealised figure. This visual strategy contrasts with the author's own call to action in the opening of the article, where he asserts that "we must defend them: here is a cause within everyone's reach". The illustration does not invite identification or solidarity, but instead places the subject at a symbolic distance.

The drawing shows Camarón full-length, although the disproportionately large size of the head introduces an element of unreality. This exaggeration further reinforces the image's mythical dimension and distances it from everyday reality. The result is the visual construction of an admired artist, elevated and exceptional, rather than a figure with whom the viewer might associate the lived experiences of discrimination faced by Roma people.

Finally, while the illustration clearly individualises Camarón, it simultaneously attempts to stand in for Roma people across Europe, including communities with no cultural connection to flamenco. In doing so, it produces a reductive stereotype of what it means to be Roma, ignoring the ethnic, cultural and historical specificities of different Roma groups. This visual generalisation ultimately undermines the complexity of the situation addressed in the accompanying text, which is precisely concerned with the persecution of Roma populations in diverse European contexts.

The final photograph analysed from *El País* corresponds to a dossier published in the Sunday supplement on 5 September 2010. It is an image distributed by the AFP agency (see Image 1) and used as the cover photograph for the dossier entitled *Expulsados del paraíso* (Expelled from Paradise), referring to the expulsions of Roma migrants from France carried out by the government of Prime Minister Nicolas Sarkozy.

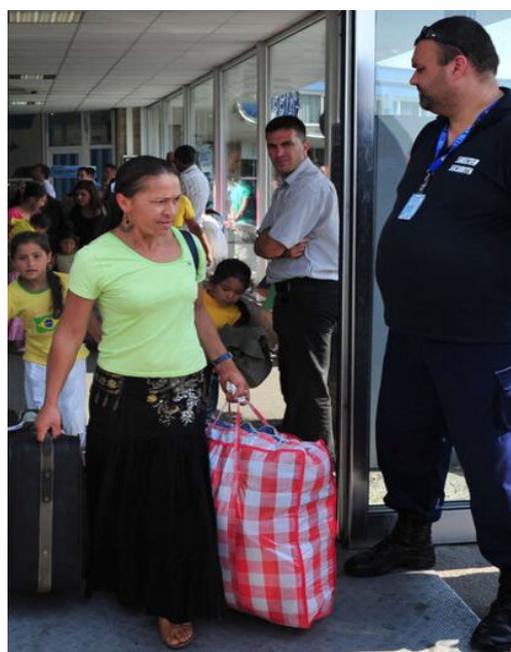
The photograph depicts a Roma woman from Eastern Europe walking through an airport corridor, followed by several girls who, unusually, appear without any facial protection to conceal their identity. The group is observed by a security guard, whose presence dominates the background of the image. The aesthetic attributes construct a stark contrast between the social actors. The woman's clothing is modest and functional, contributing to the stereotypical visual framing of a Roma woman with limited resources who is being forced to leave, as suggested by the headline. The cold, metallic airport corridor, together with the black uniform and military-style boots worn by the security guard, reinforces an atmosphere of surveillance and institutional control.

The use of gaze and pose is particularly explicit. The woman looks downward, avoiding eye contact, a gesture that Machin and Mayr associate with insecurity and evasiveness. By contrast, the security guard looks at her from an elevated position, both physically and symbolically. His greater height, upright posture and firm stance convey authority, confidence and vigilance. This asymmetrical configuration of gazes and poses visually establishes a hierarchy in which the Roma woman is positioned as subordinate and vulnerable, while the guard embodies institutional power.

The woman's pose suggests displacement and precarity: she carries her belongings with her, visually evoking the idea of transporting one's home on one's back. The guard, by contrast, remains static, anchored in the space he controls. This opposition reinforces the image of mobility as forced and unstable for Roma subjects, and stability as a privilege of the dominant group.

With regard to individualisation and collectivisation, the photograph simultaneously individualises and typifies its subjects. Despite the wide shot, both the woman and the security guard are clearly singled out as representative figures. Together, they form a visual cliché of confrontation between the dominant society and a marginalised minority, in which the majority exercises the power to decide the fate of the other. The image thus condenses complex political processes into a simplified and emotionally charged visual narrative that reinforces existing imaginaries about Roma migration and exclusion.

Image 1. Published in the Sunday supplement of *El País*. Source: AFP.



Source: Digital edition of *El País*.

3.2 Visual Representation of Roma in ABC

The first photograph analysed as representative of this medium was published on 27 November 2003 in the *Madrid* section. It occupies the upper portion of two columns in a three-quarter-page article reporting on a building in Madrid occupied by what the text describes as 'Roma families', whose renovation, due to extensive damage, would be highly costly. The headline states: *The repair of the*

squatted building in Usera will cost €880,000. The article specifies that the property did not belong to private individuals, but to the construction company Fomento de Construcciones y Contratas.

The photograph presents a half-page image of a police eviction. The aesthetic attributes depict two Roma women carrying their belongings, including a shopping trolley and a mattress. One is wearing a tracksuit and the other slippers, elements that visually signal poverty and precarious living conditions. Their domestic possessions are shown being dragged through the street, with the building in the background, within a setting that conveys suburban marginalisation and social exclusion.

With regard to gaze and pose, one of the women looks down at the ground, while the other turns her face away from the observer. According to Machin and Mayr (2012), a downward gaze conveys defeat and insecurity, while looking away generates distance and prevents empathic engagement. The bodily posture reinforces this reading: the women pull the trolley and mattress with a resigned gesture, visually suggesting acceptance rather than resistance. The eviction is thus represented not as a moment of protest or conflict, but as one of submission and failure.

Finally, in terms of individualisation and collectivisation, the image constructs the subjects as a collective rather than as distinct individuals. The distance created between the observer and the social actors, combined with the absence of visual interaction, positions them as a marginalised group, defined less by personal identity than by their social condition.

The next photograph, dated 8 September 2008, is of a newspaper front page in which the photograph occupies almost three-quarters of the page. Printed within the image is a headline: *War of the marginalised in Roquetas*, referring, according to the lead, to 'riots between gypsies and sub-Saharan' in that town in Almería. In that year of Italian government persecution of gypsies, *ABC* suggests a clash between migrants and local Roma. However, the gypsies are not in the photograph; they are omitted (they do not appear): the image shows a sub-Saharan woman, dressed humbly, coming out of a doorway with a bag in her hand, under the supervision of two civil guards: they are holding up a crime scene perimeter tape with the words 'guardia civil/no pasar' (civil guard/no entry) printed on it, and under that tape, the woman is leaving the doorway. The attributes and setting are therefore those of a police scene following riots and crime: the Roma, omitted, are subsumed in the image of a migrant woman, who represents all 'marginalised' people who are 'at war'. After being checked by the security forces, they let her go. The bag she is holding is plastic, she is wearing flip-flops, and her robe is simple. In contrast, the civil guards wear black uniforms with berets from the Reserve and Security Group, an elite formation. The image shows the majority in order as opposed to the chaos of the "marginalised". In terms of gaze, the sub-Saharan woman looks down, a sign of vulnerability and unease; the civil guards' eyes are covered by sunglasses. This gives them an air of mystery (we cannot see their eyes) and also strength.

In terms of posture, the officers stand upright, lifting the police cordon; the sub-Saharan woman has her head bowed, walking quickly away from the scene. Order, centred on the civil guards, remains, while marginality disappears. The characters are individualised, but without any aesthetic means of connecting with them. It is a wide shot in which the social actors are far away; we do not see them up close, and the distance prevents any feeling of closeness. The fact that two civil guards appear in front of a migrant suggests danger surrounding the scene. Overall, the absence of any Roma social actors collectivises them and the migrants as 'marginalised', stereotypically containing the image of one group within that of the other.

The third and final photograph reviewed discursively in *ABC* corresponds to a report entitled *Romanian Gypsies Coming and Going*, published on 19 September 2010 in the *International* section. The lead paragraph contains an alarmist warning from Sarkozy about Eastern European Gypsies, stating that they are causing 'poverty tourism'. The photograph (see image 2, below) occupies the top of two columns in a full-page report.

Image 2. Published in the International section of ABC. Source: AFP.



Source: Digital edition of ABC

The photograph depicts Roma people in the Bulgarian capital protesting against the policies of President Sarkozy regarding the expulsion of Roma, which generated widespread outrage across Europe at the time. The visual attributes include banners bearing the slogan of the French Revolution, *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*, used here in an ironic and oppositional manner. The group portrayed is composed of Bulgarian Roma, although the accompanying headline refers to Romanian Roma, a discrepancy that already signals a lack of precision and a tendency towards homogenisation.

The social actors appear with their eyes closed, their arms raised and their expressions marked by anger. When contrasted with Sarkozy's statements cited in the article, this visual portrayal constructs a clear opposition between the protesters and the political discourse that frames them as a source of 'misery' while simultaneously presenting their actions as protests 'against France', as indicated in the caption. The setting is the street, represented as a space that the group has symbolically occupied, reinforcing a sense of disruption and confrontation.

With regard to gaze and pose, there is no possibility of visual engagement between the observer and the subjects depicted. Their closed eyes and upward-directed faces convey fury rather than dialogue, while the raised arms and clenched gestures suggest aggression and unrest. The framing of the photograph intensifies this reading, emphasising movement and tension. Although the image is composed as a medium shot, which would normally reduce distance between observer and subject, the hostile gestures and expressions prevent empathic connection.

In terms of individualisation and collectivisation, the image clearly adopts a collectivising strategy. The repetition of similar gestures and facial expressions produces an impression of uniformity, presenting the group as an undifferentiated mass. This effect is further reinforced by the exclusively male composition of the group, whose raised arms and shared banners contribute to the construction of an aggressive and homogeneous collective identity.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The combined application of the analytical categories employed in this study allows for an interpretation of how images, through specific visual elements, participate in ideological discourses related to power, citizenship, identity and social legitimacy, in accordance with the principles of ACDM. This methodological framework facilitates the identification of how particular semiotic choices reinforce, reproduce or intensify hegemonic narratives prevalent within the majority population concerning Romani people.

The semiotic categories proposed by Machin and Mayr (2012) enable viewers to engage with images not only through what they depict, but also through what they represent socially. These categories reveal the cultural resources that visual discourse repeatedly draws upon to lend familiarity and credibility to ideological narratives. The analysis conducted here confirms that images representing the

Roma community in the mainstream press convey cultural meanings that distance viewers from empathic engagement, even when drawing on visual references associated with flamenco.

During the period analysed, when Spain functioned as a destination country for ethnic migrants, the mainstream press devoted significant visual attention to situations that linked ethnicity and migration to conflict. The objectives of the study have been achieved in highlighting this tendency. A recurring strategy of collectivisation is observed, whereby stereotypical visual characteristics are repeatedly mobilised. In one case in *ABC*, Roma is visually subsumed within a broader category of 'marginalised people', alongside sub-Saharan migrants. In contrast, *El País* favours more individualised visual representations, although these are similarly embedded within ideological frameworks of conflict from which ethnicity appears unable to detach itself.

The application of ACDM makes it possible to recognise that visual communication in high-quality traditional press should adopt a more open and pluralistic approach when representing Roma people. At key moments in recent history, particularly during formative periods in Spain's understanding of refugees and migrants, a visual universe has been constructed in which Roma are positioned at a distance from viewer empathy and identification. These repetitive visual patterns, disseminated by highly reputable media outlets, can be understood as having been subsequently reproduced and amplified by other platforms, and later adapted, often with less critical scrutiny, within digital and online media environments. It is precisely this process that the present study seeks to encourage reflection upon.

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