# Photojournalism and Covid-19: representation and invisibility during the first confinement in Spain

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## Abstract

The State of Alarm period declared by the Spanish Government due to the coronavirus crisis has had an exhaustive media coverage. However, it is observed how the visual story / narrative that has been published in the newspapers goes beyond the health field, focusing mainly on aspects of a social, political or economic nature. The types of images with the greatest presence in the representation of the harshest weeks of the pandemic determine the type of coverage, causing some relevant aspects to be minimized or invisibilized, and conditions the impact and the understanding of the severity of the disease in the society, in a particularly difficult and decisive moment such as the confinement of citizens. In the same way, the published images will have a later impact as a document by becoming part of the historical memory in the future. This article focuses on the analysis of the images published during the State of Alarm in three of the most relevant and broader scope national newspapers (*El país*, *La vanguardia* and *El mundo*), which is complemented by semi-directed interviews with several photojournalists who have covered Covid-19 during its first stage. The cataloging of the photographs in various categories is intended to observe the type of story that has been made visible of the Covid-19 (assessing the way in which this pandemic is being shown as an epidemic or syndemic), as well as to detect some of the most present and/or recurring visual representations and identify which are the most prominent absences.

## Keywords

Photojournalism; Covid-19; Illness; Death; Grief; Pandemics; Syndemics; Visual narratives; Illness narratives; Photography; Confinement; Spain.

## 1. Introduction

This study focuses on the visual portrayal of the Covid-19 crisis in Spain, one of the countries where a stricter lockdown was implemented and where the disease figures were especially high during the first wave of the pandemic. This analysis focuses on the first lockdown, from the declaration of the state of alarm to the start of its deescalation.

During that period, images published in the newspapers with the largest circulation and following in Spain are of special interest due to their important role during this period of social lockdown and isolation. To achieve an appropriate contextualization, research on visual communication during the pandemic was considered, including works focused on social media (**Castillo-Esparcia**; **Fernández-Souto**; **Puentes-Rivera**, 2020; **Freixa** *et al.*, 2020; **Loiti-Rodríguez**; **Genaut-Arratibel**; **Cantalapiedra-González**, 2021) whose visual and consumption parameters are different from "traditional" media, or those specialized in crisis communication that go deeper into areas related to police and security forces or the government (**Costa-Sánchez**; **López-García**, 2020; **López-García**, 2020). The increase in demand for reliable information by citizens, a greater perception of "traditional" media as reliable sources, and the consequent increase in their consumption during times of crisis and uncertainty have frequently been highlighted (**Argiñano**; **Goikoetxea-Bilbao**, 2020; **Ball-Rokeach**; **DeFleur**, 1976; **Cantero-de-Julián** *et al.*, 2020).

Some authors have analyzed the Spanish press in this period by focusing on

- front page headlines (**Núñez** *et al.*, 2020; **Monjas-Eleta** *et al.*, 2020);
- headlines and photos on the front page simultaneously (**Argiñano**; **Goikoetxea-Bilbao**, 2020; **Cantero-de-Julián** *et al.*, 2020; **Núñez** *et al.*, 2020);
- a limited number of images (**Freixa**; **Redondo-Arolas**, 2020).

Or more recently,

- complex nonphotographic visual communication using graphics (**Pérez-Montoro**, 2021); and
- the graphical portrayal of the SARS-CoV-2 virion (**García-Ramos** *et al.*, 2021).

Others have gone deeper into issues related to the health crisis and general visual coverage, such as the violation of the right to information during the state of alarm (**Caballero-Trenado**, 2021; **Rodríguez-Blanco**, 2021);

- visual disinformation (**Muñiz**; **Navazo**, 2021);
- the visual portrayal of the pandemic and its repercussions (**Gutiérrez**, 2020; **Pérez-Daza**, 2020; **Terrón-Blanco**, 2020), or
- the difficulties for grieving during the pandemic due to restrictions (**Sánchez-Sánchez**, 2020).

The novelty of this research lies in the selected time period; the detail of the analysis, which includes all photojournalistic images published during the lockdown in the three selected newspapers, allowing the visual portrayal in the press to be addressed by area (health, social, economic, and political); and the number of images reviewed, providing quantitative data that reinforce the qualitative analysis. The investigation is complemented by opinions collected from photojournalists responsible for the most representative images from this period or who have publicly criticized the circumstances at that time that prevented them from working as they wanted to or should have.

For all these reasons, when trying to analyze the visual representation of the pandemic, it is worth asking which areas of the crisis were presented and the importance given to them based on the number of published images, which ones help to understand the scope of the pandemic, and which effects limited such portrayals, among other relevant aspects regarding the image.

This study is thus motivated by the identification of a marked absence in the press of photographs showing the real severity of Covid-19, while cold figures of infections, ICU admissions, and deaths were presented in graphs, often accompanied by distant, metaphorical, or indirect images. However, this initial scope of the investigation (**Morcate**; **Pardo**, 2022) was soon broadened because, beyond the data on the explicit visual portrayal of the sick, dead, or bereaved, lie very interesting questions regarding the types of images published, their mismatch with the associated headlines, and the information that they accompanied and supposedly illustrated, as well as the proportion of images related to health or economic issues, two of the main crises at that time, compared with those related to society or politics.

This study thus tries to address a current research gap on the visual representation of the pandemic (or syndemic, as shown below), providing quantitative and qualitative data that enable an in-depth assessment of which type of crisis was portrayed as well as how and what could be the effects of this visual narrative.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. The pandemic from the social perspective

The beginning of the twenty-first century was marked by epidemics and by their presentation via photography, as pointed out by **Lynteris** (2020): from SARS (2002–2003) to Covid-19 (since 2019), through swine flu (2009), Ebola (2014-2016), and Zika (2015-2016), in addition to numerous epidemic outbreaks of other diseases endemic to different areas of the world such as malaria, Chagas disease, or dengue.

Because of the global nature of the Covid-19 pandemic as well as the large amount of information that began to circulate through traditional and social media, this crisis quickly reached huge dimensions in terms of impact and visibility, thus warranting its study.

'Photojournalists were subject to especially harsh and limiting conditions during the lockdown, and the images reflect this'

Precisely because of its size, **Horton** (2020), chief editor of the scientific journal *The lancet*, proposed the use of the term "syndemic," coined at the end of the twentieth century by Merrill Singer. This concept, unlike that of a pandemic, describes a broader and more integrated approach to understanding and treating diseases in which social and environmental factors interact synergistically, increasing the negative effects of a disease (**Singer** *et al.*, 2017). This approach reconfigures understanding of diseases in their context, emphasizing the conditions of social inequality and injustice that contribute to the clustering and interaction of diseases, and the vulnerability to them.

In this sense, Richard Horton explains that the most important consequence of considering Covid-19 as a syndemic is to highlight its social origins (**Horton**, 2020) in terms of the vulnerability of people such as older citizens, minority communities, or poorly paid workers and those with little social protection. This approach is especially useful when analyzing images published by newspapers during the early weeks of the pandemic.

However, this does not imply that the visual portrayal of Covid-19 is disconnected from that of previous pandemics.

According to **Lynteris** (2020), the first time a pandemic was photographed for newspapers was during the outbreak of bubonic plague in Hong Kong in 1894, and it was at this time that the way we see and therefore experience epidemics was established. Already at that time, there was systematic international coverage with images taken by different actors, from doctors to photographers to missionaries or mere spectators. According to **Lynteris** (2020), this resulted in a new photographic genre, viz. epidemic photography. In this genre, common themes are repeated internationally, as well as how they are portrayed. In this regard, it is common for newspapers to choose images illustrating the control of an epidemic or a plague in the form of disinfection and fumigation, or that present vaccination or living conditions that favor contagion via animal bites or due to overcrowding. Therefore, the types of images seen with regard to Covid-19 coincide in general with previous pandemics and epidemics (**Pardo**, 2020a), despite differences in some cases due to cultural issues or the colonial or postcolonial historical context, as well as other effects.

However, it is also useful to highlight some current changes such as the preservation of anonymity and privacy, which are addressed much more carefully, especially for Western citizens, or the variety enabled by the internet regarding the visibility of the pandemic, which can counteract to a certain extent the uniformity of media coverage, as discussed below.

However, the presence of so many images online and offline, whether complementary or not, is not necessarily good either. At the start of the twenty-first century, **Baeza** (2003) already criticized the presence of too many images in the press and how unimportant ones can negate the value of the necessary ones. In the case of Covid-19, abundant images in traditional media were accompanied by an unprecedented number of others of various types and origins shared via the internet, including many misleading, manipulated, or false images, as well as many showing irrelevant content. However, few studied have been published on this specific aspect of disinformation and images from the pandemic. Beyond the usual articles about hoaxes or fake news, some references have been made to "visual disinformation" (**Muñiz-Velázquez**; **Navazo-Ostúa**, 2021) and the proposal by **Pardo** (2020b) to call this torrent of images a "photodemic," in accordance with the term "infodemic" applied to information.

Photography is one of the most effective means to shape ideas and behaviors (**Freund**, 2002) and has value linked to emotions that can make us reflect on the human condition or the very essence of photography as a portrayal of reality (**Marzal-Felici**, 2007), given that even the most realistic images are representations of a world that we perceive according to socially conditioned categories and forms (**Bourdieu**, 2003; **Scolari**, 2020a). All this leads us to an interesting debate about the complexity of the photographic representation of Covid-19 during the first lockdown. This is important not only because of all the issues related to the difficulties in representation the world objectively, but also because of the omission of reality from the record of the pandemic and how this affects the narrative or collective memory left to us in such images.

## 2.2. Photojournalism, health, and the limitations of representation

The visual representation of Covid has passed through various phases (**Morcate**; **Pardo**, 2019) in which issues such as the subjects that could or could not be photographed, and the rights of patients over their own image and privacy have varied. Both the political background and the existence of violence in the gaze have been criticized based on the scientific claim that everything about the patient can be made visible (**Didi-Huberman**, 2015) or, in the field of mental health, for example, the violation of patient privacy in some cases (**Martínez-Azumendi**, 2005).

In the field of photojournalism, images related to illness have often been used as a tool for such criticisms, especially during the twentieth century, when they were essential for reforms and changes such as those at psychiatric centers (**Martínez-Azumendi**, 2005; 2008). This aim of such criticism has traditionally had a stigmatizing effect on a large part of both photojournalistic and medical images. For this reason, at present, the visual representation of health-related issues from such an external gaze is questioned, leading to a reevaluation of self-referential images that in recent decades have

portrayed medical or health issues in a more integral, human, and destigmatizing way in photojournalism and art, and even on social media (**Morcate**; **Pardo**, 2019; **Pardo**, 2017a; 2017b).

'The most optimistic views of health professionals are exaggerated in the published images'

From the end of the twentieth century, the representation of illness has undergone a process of change. People affected by different illnesses, pathologies, or health issues have begun to be aware of the respect they deserve regarding their treatment and portrayal. In recent years, mainly thanks to social media and digital photography, both people with an illness and their caregivers or loved ones have started to exert control over their own public portrayal, thus transforming how they are presented (**Morcate**; **Pardo**, 2019). In the case of Covid-19, especially from the early months, there seems to be a lack of self-referential images on social media of people affected by Covid-19, especially mild cases. However, self-referential images of health professionals have been shared on networks, depicting their difficult working conditions, but not in newspapers or on television.

In addition to all these issues, one must consider the growing concern regarding the right to information (**Caballero-Trenado**, 2021; **Rodríguez-Blanco**, 2021) and the documentation of an important time in history, given that images taken during the pandemic will form the basis of the narrative and collective memory (**Halbwachs**, 2004) in the future. However, it is also important to state that each image captures the situation at a specific time and place, and that what it portrays has a different interpretation and impact in each observer (**Nakahira**, 2018) depending on their context, knowledge, and experience.

Numerous experts have investigated the limits of photographic representation (**Butler**, 2007; **Grønstad**; **Gustafsson**, 2012; **Sontag**, 2003; **Tagg**, 1988) as well as the need for such visual representation to make such critical issues apparent to society. However, the symbolic value of images and their ability to go viral via social media have potential for the communication of conflicts or catastrophes that has not always been used well. Therefore, the debate on visual politics remains open, including essential issues such as the limits of representation, the effects of overexposure, the symbolic value of images, and visual politics.

The former is based on the limits on showing violence and/or human degradation and which type of visual approach should be applied to construct a narrative that portrays a photographed event faithfully while also depicting the subjects in a manner that respects their integrity and dignity. Regarding the effects of overexposure to violence and suffering, it is difficult to define limits on the representation of pain and violence while also determining the effects of repeated media exposure or even overexposure of certain stories, such as compassion fatigue or disinterest caused by overexposure to a topic or event (**Moeller**, 1999). Finally, the image has especially important political implications in the current, visual era (**Linfield**, 2010; **Azoulay**, 2008). **Costa-Sánchez** and **López-García** (2020) state that journalistic coverage includes examples of alarmism and sensationalism, although recommendations regarding health communication advise precision and careful planning to facilitate the management of uncertainty and fear (**Vállez**; **Pérez-Montoro**, 2020).

Some authors (**Aguiló-Vidal**, 2020; **Terrón-Blanco**, 2020) have argued that photojournalists in Spain agree that there was no desire in Spain to depict the chaos in the health system, with very similar arguments being applied to institutions such as hospitals or nursing homes: the prevention of contagion, preserving the privacy or intimacy of those affected, and a fear that photojournalists would hinder the work of professionals.

Meanwhile, images of exhausted doctors and nurses or deep marks caused by masks or PPEs, typically shared by the professionals themselves on social networks, raised awareness. **Terrón-Blanco** (2020) states that studying photojournalism is not the same as studying the images taken of the pandemic. Some images have been shared in specialist publications (**Aguiló-Vidal**, 2020; *Colectivo 5W*, 2021; **Rodríguez-Fischer**, 2021; *Fundación Enaire*; *PHotoEspaña*, 2020) or on social networks but not seen in the media. Surely, over time, further images taken by those affected during those days and that they still do not dare to share or do not consider appropriate to show at the moment will emerge.

On the other hand, regarding the limits on the right to information and privacy, a code of ethics should apply in the context of photojournalism. That of the *Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya* (2016, p. 5), for example, includes in point 6 that one must "reconcile individual rights with the public's right to know." This makes it possible to assess whether there has been a failure to protect the right to information during the coverage of Covid-19 because it specifies that

> "the journalist must defend the right to information in the face of any restriction on transparency as required by the public interest, especially when the sources are administrations and official bodies" ["*el periodista debe defender el derecho a la información ante cualquier restricción a la transparencia exigida por el interés público, especialmente cuando las fuentes son administraciones y organismos oficiales*"] (*Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya*, 2016, p. 5).

However, beyond statements by journalists, photojournalists, and other professionals from the world of communication defending this right during the pandemic, the problem remains that it will be more difficult to remember or show what could not be photographed. **Pintor-Iranzo** (2020) emphasizes that there will be no images in the form of *pietà* (shared lament) from this crisis as there would be if it were a war or another type of catastrophe, and this has clear consequences regarding the perception and processing of suffering, pain, and loss. Other work (**Freixa** *et al.*, 2020) also reflects on the

problems of portraying solidarity, a common visual trope in catastrophe communication, due to the limitations imposed by the lockdown and isolation in which windows, balconies, and terraces became new social enclaves.

In the interviews conducted for this investigation, some photojournalists speak directly of censorship by institutions that did not allow them access. These complaints coincide with those made by Alipio Gutiérrez, a journalist and author of *Covid-19, our war*. In an editorial (**Gutiérrez**, 2020, p. 350), he explains that, regarding the task of communicating via images, the media were not up to the task

> "because of an inappropriate exercise, in my opinion, of self-censorship and because of the censorship that politicians decided to impose by not authorizing journalists to places where events occurred" ["*por un ejercicio inapropiado, en mi opinión, de autocensura y por la censura que los políticos decidieron imponer al no autorizar a los periodistas a estar allí donde ocurrían los hechos*"].

This journalist adds that this inability to document, in particular, deaths

> "caused a false idea of unimportance among citizens about a pandemic that was and is lethal. Ignorance of the facts favors irresponsible behavior" ["*ha provocado una falsa idea de ligereza entre los ciudadanos acerca de una pandemia que era y es letal. La ignorancia de los hechos favorece la irresponsabilidad de los comportamientos*"] (**Gutiérrez**, 2020, p. 350).

On the other hand, one should also consider the physical limitations placed on the work of photojournalists because of the use of PPE, masks, or obligatory social distancing, in addition to the access difficulties mentioned by all of them when interviewed (**Ferry**, 2020; **Rowan**, 2020). The issue of the risk run by journalists is supported by figures from the NGO *Press Emblem Campaign* (*PEC*, 2021), whose website paying homage to journalists killed by the pandemic indicates that (by December 2021) some 1,890 journalists had died from Covid-19 in 85 countries. Among the most affected are Brazil (293), India (278), Peru (198), and Mexico (122). In Spain, this NGO reports 16 journalists killed by the virus. It is also important to highlight that some professionals have been "trapped" in- or outside of their country and have not been able to move or choose what to cover, achieving what they could in the context and within the limitations on their movement. It is also not trivial that the images were sometimes on social media before, from where journalists took them to illustrate reports and news (**Gutiérrez**, 2020). The working conditions of photojournalists were thus especially difficult and limiting during the lockdown, and the images reflect this as it marked in some regards the framing, angles, and lenses used and even the articles themselves, thereby conditioning through all these limitations the visual narrative of the pandemic and its focus. .

> 'The press photographs from the analyzed period focus on the social aspect with frequent use of visual metaphors'

## 2.3. Depicted and invisible aspects of the Covid-19 health crisis

Since its beginnings, photography has been linked to medicine (**Morcate**; **Pardo**, 2019), and photojournalism has gone through periods in which it has had important links with health issues. However, the literature contains few analyses focusing on photojournalism and illness in the media, and books on photojournalism hardly include theoretical works related to health (**Pardo**, 2017a; 2017b; **Terrón-Blanco**, 2020). The conclusions of the few specific references that exist indicate that patients are portrayed as innocent victims or as people who deserve what happens to them (**Peel**, 2014). Generally, these critical views of photojournalism and the media's treatment of health issues also coincide with the power of the media to increase or reduce the stigma associated with diseases such as HIV/AIDS (**Sontag**, 2011) or dementia (**Kirkman**, 2006; **Gilman**, 1988). In the case of the Covid-19 pandemic, one can identify various fundamental aspects to understand the health and social dimensions that have been made invisible or are clearly underrepresented in the visual narrative in the media. For example, **López-García** (2020) focuses on the constant presence on representatives of the armed forces and state security forces and bodies to participate in press conferences (with three uniformed spokespersons out of the five usual participants) and news stories related to disinfection, field hospitals, controls, and security tasks and "punishments." López-García concludes that this is part of the government's crisis communication strategy, along with the language of war, and proposes that this iconic role of the military reinforces the sense of the seriousness of the crisis and constitutes a metaphor for the state of war while at the same time reinforcing the control of the situation by the government. **Costa-Sánchez** and **López-García** (2020) indicate that this approach to the choice of spokespersons is contrary to the recommendations of crisis communication.

On the opposite side of the visual representation, after a specific analysis of images depicting illness, death, and grief (**Morcate**; **Pardo**, 2022), the data indicate that, although most news during the first lockdown referred to the pandemic and its effects, hardly any explicit images of death and disease were obtained or published. In this way, and during the first wave, in the newspapers analyzed in this work, only a single image of a clearly visible dead body (albeit with the face pixelated), taken by Di Lolli, was published, in *El mundo* on 15 April 2020, while headlines announced daily figures of hundreds of deaths in Spain alone.

The pandemic exposed numerous weaknesses in international health systems, as well as in governments, regarding their rapid and effective management of crises of this magnitude. In many cases, this meant, especially in the early months of the pandemic, a breach of many of the ethical protocols regarding patient care, the dying, and the dead, resulting in addi-

tional pain for millions of people. This also put extraordinary pressure on health personnel, who had to work in precarious conditions to offer the best possible assistance to their patients while enduring constant deaths among their number and in many cases being the only point of reference for patients in very harsh conditions for both (**Chochinov** *et al.*, 2020).

As mentioned in the previous section, photojournalists state that all this chaos in the health system was not made visible in Spain (**Aguiló-Vidal**, 2020; **Terrón-Blanco**, 2020). This coincides with the recognition by **Gilman** (1988) of a fear of collapse that contaminates the Western image of all illnesses and that is projected onto the world to locate it and control it when it is the "other" who shows vulnerability. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the more positive view of health professionals was exaggerated in published images, while the few serious images that have been seen were often taken in other countries. **Pintor-Iranzo** (2020) points out that the most intense iconographic clash is between images of health teams versus entertainment images of spacious and well-equipped homes, leading to an interesting reflection on how the intention to motivate lockdown runs the risk of hurting those who, for reasons such as work, could not be at home or were also visually underrepresented, such as the poor.

On the other hand, and despite the importance of achieving a reliable portrayal that shows and explains the health aspects of the pandemic, some researchers have collected information on the psychological distress supposedly resulting from repeated exposure to the media due to the extensive coverage of the pandemic (**Garfin**; **Silver**; **Holman**, 2020), suffering, or trauma, indicating that prudence is required regarding such coverage and more analysis is needed to determine its true, immediate and long-term implications.

## 3. Methodology

The methodology applied in this work was both qualitative and quantitative (**Hernández-Sampieri**; **Fernández-Collado**; **Baptista-Lucio**, 2014), viz. so-called mixed methods (**Campos-Arenas**, 2009).

Due to the special interest in the news and working conditions of photojournalists during the first lockdown in Spain, this study is limited to the period from the declaration of the state of alarm (14/03/2020) to the approval of the deescalation plan (28/04/2020).

Three national newspapers were selected (*El país*, *El mundo*, and *La vanguardia*) from among the four general non-free newspapers most widely read per week in Spain, in both print and online format (**Newman** *et al.*, 2019, p. 109). During the study period, *La vanguardia* was the most widely consumed digital newspaper (*La vanguardia*, 2019b) as well as the media outlet most read in Spain via mobile phones (*La vanguardia*, 2019a). In addition, these three newspapers offer geographic diversity, as they have offices in Madrid (*El país* and *El mundo*) and Barcelona (*La vanguardia*).

For this study, we analyzed and counted all images related to the pandemic visually, by their caption, or by the news they accompanied (with terms such as pandemic, covid, covid-19, health and/or economic crisis, victims, health emergency, infections, lockdown, state of alarm, virus, coronavirus, security measures, emergency protocol, or vaccines). All the newspapers published for 46 days were reviewed and analyzed, corresponding to a total of 137 copies in their national edition and in pdf format (which coincides with the printed edition), yielding a large set of 8,755 images (Table 1).

A taxonomy was agreed upon to facilitate the analysis and organization of the photographs, based on the key areas (health, society, politics, and economy) that were the target of this study, thus allowing an analysis of the images by theme (Table 2). The categories mentioned coincide with those of other investigations, considering the parti-

Table 1. Number of photographs counted in each newspaper and in total

| Newspaper | Number of photographs |
|---|---|
| *El país* | 2,371 |
| *El mundo* | 2,476 |
| *La vanguardia* | 3,908 |
| Total | 8,755 |

Table 2. Classification categories and featured content

| Categories | Featured content |
|---|---|
| Health service | Healthcare workers<br>Patients<br>Deaths<br>Scientific topics (vaccines, researchers, etc.)<br>Health facilities<br>Essential services (such as disinfection tasks) |
| Society | Funerals<br>Tributes<br>Life during the pandemic<br>Culture and entertainment<br>Other essential services (such as controls on movement)<br>Empty places |
| Politics | Political profiles<br>Press conferences<br>Locations related to politics |
| Economy | Teleworking<br>Closed premises<br>Businesses<br>Other economic topics |

cularities of the needs of each study. In general, it is observed that the elements of analysis in other investigations are broader, considering headlines and even texts (**Argiñano**; **Goikoetxea-Bilbao**, 2020; **Tejedor** *et al.*, 2020; **Cantero-de-Julián** *et al.*, 2020), but the basic categories of such classifications are usually also applied as reference categories for image analysis, especially those applying the typology of Semetko and Valkenburg (**Cantero-de-Julián** *et al.*, 2020) in which only "social" is changed for "human." However, for an analysis of images of the pandemic, it is considered that the term "social" is more appropriate and less ambiguous.

The classification presented in Table 2 enabled a numerical assessment of the visual presence of the aspects considered in this study and to plot graphs for the subsequent analysis. For some images, especially those corresponding to health, disambiguation was required since, because of their content, they could fall into more than one subcategory. In this sense, and given the aims of this work, the protagonist of the scene and counts of deaths or patients were prioritized over health workers, given that both appeared in most cases. In the different images in which disambiguation was applied, consensus was established based on the main element of the image and, in especially ambiguous cases, the content of the photo caption or the news that they accompanied.

These quantitative data, as well as the bibliographic and documentary review, were complemented with semistructured interviews (**Gubrium**; **Holstein**, 2002) with highly prestigious photojournalists who covered the pandemic in Spain (Table 3). A total of six interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached, selecting both photographers who worked for or collaborated as freelancers with the studied newspapers, as well as for other media or agencies, to obtain a broader view of their working experience during the specific conditions of the pandemic.

Table 3. Interviewees, media/agencies in which they work, date and duration of the interviews

| Interviewee | Media outlet/agency | Date | Duration |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ricardo García Vilanova | Freelance | 03/06/2021 | 38:16 |
| Ana Jiménez | *La vanguardia* | 08/06/2021 | 1:06:35 |
| Gervasio Sánchez | Freelance | 04/06/2021 | 1:16:43 |
| Susana Vera | *Reuters* | 21/06/2021 | 33:09 |
| Alberto di Lolli | *El mundo* | 11/06/2021 | 1:32:02 |
| Pedro Armestre | Freelance | 12/07/2021 | 1:37:39 |

The names of the interviewees are included in Table 3 since they are recognized professionals who have openly given their opinion in various media. Although interviews and publications in the media on the subject were also consulted, it was considered fundamental for the present study to confirm such data against specific statements by the above-mentioned professionals to obtain greater understanding of the results.

## 4. Results

The data obtained describe the number of images related to the pandemic compared with the total number of images published in each issue of each newspaper during the analyzed period, and how many of them are related to the different aspects studied.

Meanwhile, to avoid bias, we excluded from the analysis all images published in weekly supplements, the motor section, and the billboard, as well as portraits of journalists accompanying their signatures, since these have numerous specific images. The images evaluated as not related to Covid-19 thus correspond to all daily news items that address various current affairs issues (politics, society, economy, health, or culture) and thus describe the (im)balance of the focus of daily information during the pandemic.

The images related to Covid-19 were classified into four main areas: health (including images of health personnel, hospitals, the diseased, and the dead), social (including daily activities during the pandemic, funerals and tributes, essential services, entertainment, and culture during the pandemic), political
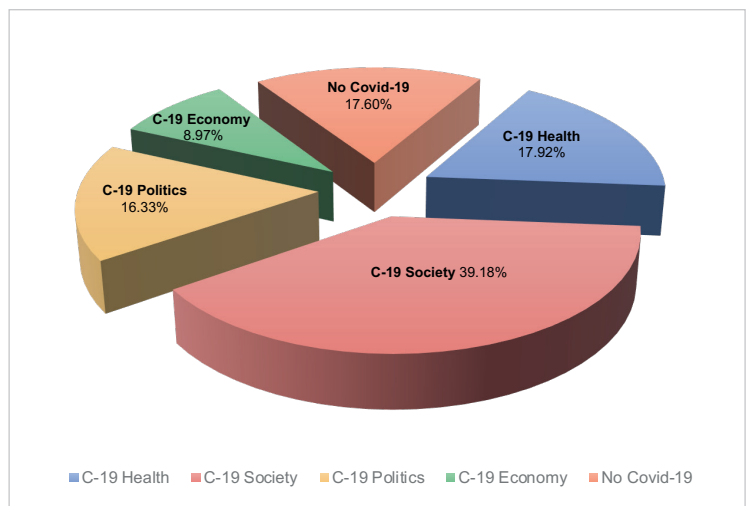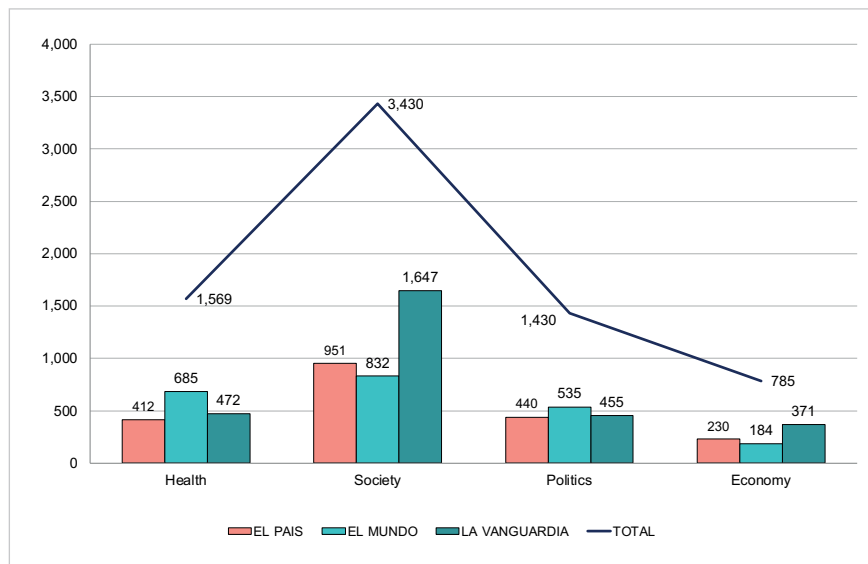


Graph 1. Percentages of photographs according to the topics of the news with which they are published during the first confinement in Spain (03/14/2020-04/28/2020)
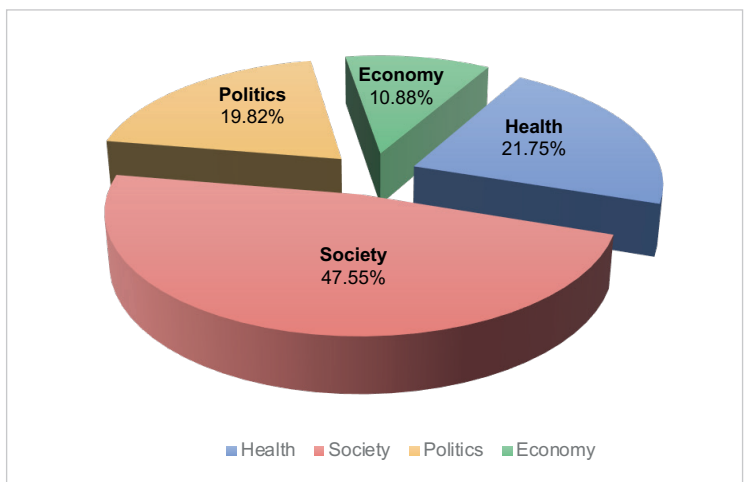


Graph 2. Percentages in the news related to Covid-19 of the visual presence of the four categories analyzed (03/14/2020-04/28/2020)

(portraits and places linked to politics), and economic (includes closed businesses, companies, and teleworking). This taxonomy facilitates the analysis of the quantifiable visual presence of certain aspects of the pandemic that indicate which type of crisis was made visible and prevailed in press images of the pandemic/syndemic.

In total, 8,755 images were reviewed (Table 1) from *El país* (2,371), *El mundo* (2,476), and *La vanguardia* (3,908). Among these, 1,541 accompanied news unrelated to Covid-19, representing 17.60% of the total images published (Graph 1). The rest of the images (7,214) accompanied



Graph 3. Number of photographs according to classification category, in news related to Covid-19 (03/14/2020-04/28/2020)

news related to the pandemic. This means that 82.40% of the images were published in the context of news about Covid-19 whereas only 17.60% of the photographs were framed in a subject other than the pandemic.

To assess this portrayal of the pandemic, whether a syndemic is exhibited, and the type of topic on which images focused, Graph 2 shows the percentages of images by topic, but only for news related to Covid-19. Social issues are present in nearly half of the images, while health and politics reach similar percentages (21.75% and 19.82%, respectively) and the area with the least visual presence is economics (10.88%).

Finally, to evaluate the presence of the topics analyzed in each of the three newspapers, Graph. 3 shows that *La vanguardia* stands out in terms of the number of images published in the society category (1,647), offering almost twice the number of images in this field as the newspaper that published least on this aspect (*El mundo* with 832 photographs), even though *La vanguardia* dedicates its central pages each day to people and society with numerous photos. The newspaper that published most images on health was *El mundo* with 685 photographs, some being the most explicit in terms of illness or death, given that was the only newspaper to publish a photograph of a deceased person, by Di Lolli, on its front page.

Given the large number of images in the society category, Graph 4 shows the different subcategories used and the number of images appearing in each. It is noteworthy that the category of culture, sports, and shows/entertainment
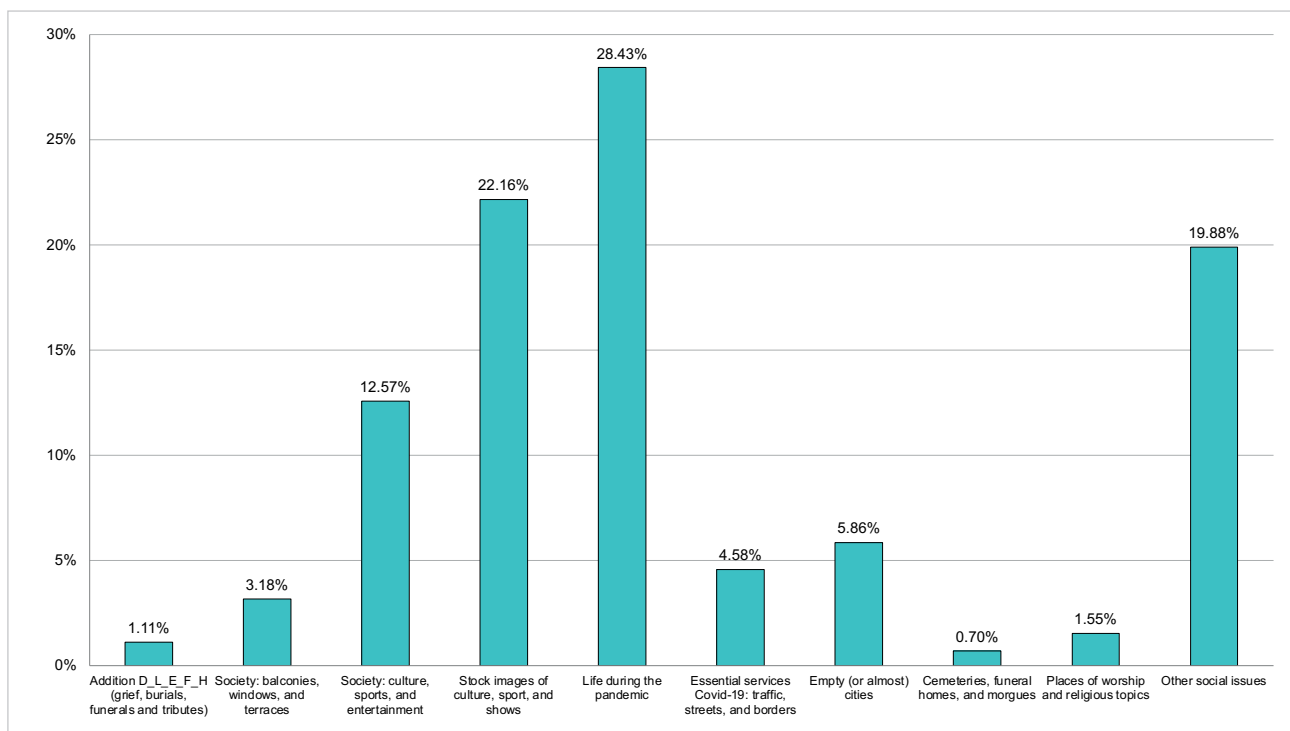


Graph 4. Subthemes that appear in the total of the images analyzed within the category "society" in news in the context of Covid-19

includes two subsections because it was considered relevant to differentiate stock images (22.16%) from those taken during the lockdown (12.57%), given that the news frequently dealt with events that were canceled or held behind closed doors. The category of life during the pandemic (28.43%), which is the one with the greatest visual presence, includes images of the day-to-day life of

> The interviewed photojournalists give priority to the right to information, i.e., showing the population what was really happening, although they were not allowed to do so for weeks

Spaniards, from children studying through different domestic scenes to teleworking. These generally interior images (given that the entire population was locked down) are complemented by photographs of balconies, windows, and terraces (3.18%) that captured moments of applause, concerts, or "socializing" with neighbors, those of essential services controlling the streets, traffic, and borders (4.58%), and those of empty cities or with one or two people walking (5.86%). It is interesting to note that another study on Spain and Italy (**Tejedor** *et al.*, 2020) found an even lower presence of empty streets on Spanish front pages (2%), while this theme had greater presence in Italy (25%).

Finally, only a few images (1.55%) included places of worship or themes linked to religious aspects, 1.11% of the images are related to themes of grief, mourning, burials, funerals, and tributes (generally secular), while hardly any (0.70%) presented cemeteries, funeral homes, and morgues. These data coincide with those published in the above-cited study (**Tejedor** *et al.*, 2020), in which the portrayal of morgues and burials on the front pages of newspapers in Spain was 1%, and even lower in Italy. Considering the large number of Spaniards who died during this time and the problems that arose in being able to bury them or celebrate funerals, these data have special relevance when assessing the proportionality of the photographic representation.

Regarding images from the health field, the majority showed healthcare personnel, with a small number clearly showing interiors or activity in healthcare centers (84), as well as very reduced explicit visibility of the dead (with only three images during the entire period, in which they are shown partially visible and/or with their faces pixelated, the rest of the images portraying them indirectly as by coffins), as analyzed in depth in specific research (**Morcate**; **Pardo**, 2022).

## 5. Discussion

The numbers of images in each of the analyzed categories reveal a clear focus on the social in all three newspapers, as well as a low visibility of the economic crisis (with only 8.97% of the photographs, although this is understandable since the true economic impact appeared only later, in the medium term). Some revealing percentages also indicate a similar visibility for political and health issues. Considering that all these photographs were published in the context of a pandemic, the percentage of 21.75% dedicated to health seems excessively low.

The photographs published in the press from the beginning of the analyzed period focus on the social and political aspects of the pandemic. However, it is also interesting to relate these results to findings from other investigations that indicate, for example, the importance in headlines of the social theme followed by the economic and political ones, as well as the differences between the images and their headlines, and the importance of photographs that reinforce the feeling of solidarity or a sense of community (**Argiñano**; **Goikoetxea-Bilbao**, 2020). However, the period, location, and object of analysis must also be considering when comparing results, since they could result in different percentages in terms of the importance of the categories analyzed; For example, terms related to death were found more frequently than images, and some analyses already indicate that the great impact of Covid-19 has also marked the treatment of the health crisis by the press (**Vállez**; **Pérez-Montoro**, 2020) and that the themes differ by month, with the problem being defined in January, the causes diagnosed in February, and solutions proposed in March (**Cantero-de-Julián** *et al.*, 2020).

In many of the cases analyzed, an excessive use of visual metaphors is detected, both through images of emptiness and the stoppage of activity in the streets to portray the lockdown as well as other, more severe aspects of the disease itself, such as discussing the dead using images of the exterior of hospitals or nursing homes. As Ricardo Garcia explains:

> "Basically, since I didn't have access, what I tried to do was convey that horror. To transmit that message of what was happening with a type of visual language that would at least make the viewer react and lead them to imagine that image that you couldn't take at that time." [*básicamente, como no tenía ese acceso, yo lo que intenté fue transmitir ese horror. Transmitir ese mensaje de lo que estaba sucediendo con un tipo de lenguaje visual que hiciera al menos reaccionar al espectador y que le llevara a imaginar esa imagen que en aquel momento no podías hacer.*]

Therefore, this approach, with hardly any images related to health or that make the disease visible, corresponds to the restrictions on movement and the aforementioned limitations on access. For this reason, the view is from outside, from street level and limited, including images that often had little or no connection with the text of the news item, such as headlines about deaths but with photographs of people on the street (Illustration 1) and even images that mismatch the headlines, as in Illustration 3, in which a group of healthcare workers can be seen making signs of victory and joy while the headline speaks of a thousand deaths. Regarding these types of images, some differences are observed between the newspapers, which could be the object of future analysis.

Illustration 1. Page 18 of *El país*, 03/04/2020 and central detail of the photograph with highlighted text.
Headlines translation: China assures that throughout the country have been registered 3,200 deaths and 82,000 infected, figures in question.
Wuhan says goodbye to its dead without knowing how many there are.

Little by little, images showing nursing homes (almost always from the outside), hospitals (mostly doors and windows), and the daily life of Spaniards (children doing homework, adults teleworking, families living together in small spaces, etc.), as well as images corresponding to the economic effects of the crisis (such as closed premises and companies), started to appear. Given the debate on the need for images, as explained above, some achieve a symbolic and viral potential that manages to change situations, as explained by Gervasio Sánchez in the specific case of a nursing home:

> "They let me take photos of the elderly and show their faces, and the next day... it was published, and it had such an impact... Also, I entitled it "Wanted: People to Cry," because the situation was truly brutal (...) In fact, my article caused a nursing home to be taken over by the authorities (...)." [*Me dejaron hacer fotos de los ancianos y mostrarles las caras, y al día siguiente... se publicó, y tuvo tanto impacto... Además, lo titulé "Se Buscan Personas para Llorar", pues porque verdaderamente la situación estaba siendo brutal (...) De hecho, mi artículo provocó que una residencia fuera intervenida (...).*]

On the other hand, for the health field, the (generally external) images of field hospitals under construction, ambulances, hospitals, in addition to the few interiors in which PPE and equipment dominate clearly show a desire to protect the privacy of patients and professionals, as well as the limitations due to the restrictions at that time. On the other hand, surely due to their exceptional nature that makes them newsworthy, there is a disproportionate visual presence of certain health facilities such as *Ifema*, hospital ships, or the military, or other curiosities such as public transport converted into patient transport during the pandemic. These images support a narrative in which medical practice and care are represented by technological advances (**Terrón-Blanco**, 2020) and in which the more human aspect of health professionals is diluted or blurred. One sees what they did, especially outside health centers, such as transporting patients, testing in parking lots (in cars to avoid infection), applause, or some demonstrations.

Data from another work (**Tejedor** *et al.*, 2020) focusing on the front pages of newspapers and Covid in Spain and Italy also point to a low visibility of patients, healthcare personnel, and scientists compared with images centering on public figures, anonymous citizens, and politicians, who the researchers highlight as the true protagonists of the "pandemic" (although it would be more appropriate to speak of a syndemic).

Given that we have seen harder images during pandemics such as Ebola that did not generate as much controversy as with Covid-19, another of the important issues regarding the photographic treatment of this pandemic is whether such photographs shock us because of their content or because those who are suffering are our neighbors. Ricardo García explains:

> "...I have much more access in conflict zones than I had in Spain (...) What I don't understand is the double standard that exists in developed countries, right? How can we put a photograph of a Syrian child on the front pages of newspapers around the world and when it's our turn to protect all those rights based on that argument that makes no sense, because in the end you can treat an image with respect and empathy, that's the sense of our

Illustration 2. Cover of *El mundo*, 29/03/2020 and detail of the cover with some prominent text.
Headlines translation: The great fiasco of the crisis: This is how Spain left without protecting its health personnel.
The sob of the presidents of Autonomous Communities: "We have no right to cry".
The war in the hospitals had already been lost on February 27.
Total closure of non-essential activities.

work. I believe that what has happened is that (...) since there were no images and nobody knew anything about what was happening (...) Those numbers did not correspond to people (...) and did not translate into human capital." [...*yo en zonas de conflicto tengo mucho más acceso que el que tenía en España (...) Lo que yo no entiendo es esa doble moral que existe en los países desarrollados ¿no? Cómo podemos poner la fotografía de un niño sirio en las portadas de todo el mundo y cuando nos toca a nosotros guardar todos esos derechos en base a esa argumentación que no tiene sentido, porque al final tú puedes hacer ese tratamiento de imagen con ese respeto y con esa empatía, que para eso es el trabajo que tú haces. Lo que ha pasado para mi o a mi entender es que (...) como no había imágenes y nadie sabía nada de lo que pasaba (...) Esos números no se correspondían con personas (...) no se traducía en ese capital humano.*]

Along the same lines, Gervasio Sánchez explains that he has covered epidemics and health issues in different countries, but was shocked at not being able to take photographs in Spain:

"I have covered cholera (...) Ebola in the Congo that killed more than 90% of the people who caught it. And that was in the year 1995, and I was there, and I entered the hospitals; and I have done many stories about hospitals, health, many stories. In fact, *Mined Lives* is a project about those maimed by mines, and in almost every conflict I've been in, hospitals were a daily part of the trip. (...) Just imagine! I have photographed Afghanistan, in Kabul; I have taken photographs when it was totally prohibited." [*Yo he cubierto el cólera (...) el Ébola del Congo que mataba al 90 y tanto por ciento de las personas que lo pillaban. Y eso fue en el año 95, y estuve allí, y entré en los hospitales; y he hecho muchas historias de hospitales, de salud, muchas historias. De hecho, Vidas Minadas es un proyecto sobre mutilados por las minas, y en casi todos los conflictos que he estado los hospitales eran parte diaria del viaje. (...) ¡imagínate tú! Yo he fotografiado Afganistán, en Kabul; he hecho fotografías cuando estaban prohibidas totalmente las fotos.*]

Faced with this surprise expressed by professionals at the problems in covering the pandemic in Spain, it is interesting to highlight the existence of serious images of the disease in other countries, such as Brazil or the USA, in line with the theories of **Susan Sontag** (2007) and **Sander L. Gilman** (1988).

On the other hand, when classifying and analyzing the images, it is clear that there are socially coded categories, as indicated by both **Gilman** (1988) and **Nakahira** (2018), and that to understand this first lockdown during the pandemic, it would be necessary to reconstruct the patterns that define them. In this regard, it is interesting to recall that, according to **Nakahira** (2018), the visual level and, therefore, the ability to decode an image is closely linked to the linguistic level, but in the case of a crisis like this, perhaps what we are capable of seeing is more linked to the scientific level, to current knowledge, and to our experience of the pandemic itself. Therefore, these images do not have the same meanings or implications for all viewers.

A clear example is the 109 images of life on balconies, terraces, and windows, which do not symbolize the same thing for those who were locked down but not directly affected by the pandemic as for those who lost a loved one and went through silent grief. Surely only those who were admitted to an ICU in the first few weeks or who lost a family member in those days can really decode the suffering behind the many images of the fronts of hospitals or nursing homes, of ambulances and hearses (Illustration 2), or the small total number (38) of images depicting grief, burials, funerals, and tributes. The rest of us are only capable of connecting the visual with the information available. It is very difficult, for example, to see a single ambulance on a street or the transfer of a corpse in a hearse as representing thousands of critically ill patients. The subject may even be literally invisible when the image shows a camouflaged army lorry transporting numerous corpses.

> " Surely only those admitted to the ICU during the first weeks or who lost a family member in those days can truly decode the suffering behind the numerous images of the fronts of hospitals or nursing homes "

In any case, representing only 1.81% of the total visual presence in the society category (Graph. 4), summing the two subcategories linked to death and grief for the loss of so many thousands of people, it seems reasonable to talk about the invisibility of pain or collective grief for the deaths caused by Covid-19.

All the interviewees expressed concern about their working conditions, and the topic of the right to information appeared frequently in the conversations. None of the photographers reported problems with the newspapers or agencies for which they work or collaborate with when publishing certain images, and some were also self-critical of the profession. All of them describe difficulties in accessing hospitals, funeral homes, or nursing homes, especially in the early weeks, and identified the press or communication offices of institutions and companies as one of the greatest obstacles when it comes to obtaining permits and accessing locations to do their job, although one of them justified this. The control of information by institutions, censorship, and/or self-censorship and the possible violation of the right to information and its consequences are thus criticized.

The code of ethics specifies that journalists must be especially sensitive to diversity and act with a sense of justice and respect toward those affected. Indeed, the latter appears in nearly all the interviews with the photojournalists, i.e., the need to do justice and explain with respect what was happening. As Pedro Armestre declares:

"Now is the time when you have to go out into the street to tell everything" ["*Ahora es el momento en el que tienes que salir a la calle a contarlo todo*"].

In this sense, Ana Jiménez confirmed that everything has to be seen:

"if not, what is the point of our work?" ["*si no qué sentido tiene nuestro trabajo*"]



Illustration 3. Page 20 of *El país*, 27/04/2020 and detail of the photograph with highlighted text.
Headlines translation: Despite its thousand deaths, infections per inhabitant in the region account for a quarter of the national average. In search of explanations for the Andalusian anomaly.

Illustration 4. Page 18 of *El país*, 02/04/2020 and detail of the photograph with highlighted text.
Headline translation: "It's great to feel useful at such a crucial time".

On the other hand, regarding the responsibility for the images that could be captured and taking precautions, another of the great limitations in the coverage of this crisis, Susana Vera described the day she covered a Champions League match behind closed doors and got an older man to let her take pictures from his balcony, shortly before the lockdown when masks were not being worn:

> "It was the first time in my life that, as a professional, I was aware that reporting could endanger the person I was photographing. (...) and for me that created an ethical problem." [*Fue la primera vez en mi vida que, como profesional, fui consciente de que realizar una información podía suponer poner en peligro a la persona a la que estaba fotografiando. (…) y a mi eso me creó un problema ético.*]

However, despite all these issues, all the photojournalists interviewed put the right to information first, i.e., showing the population what was really happening, even though they were not allowed to do so for weeks.

One could add that, because of the restrictions on entering health centers, a large fraction of the published images of health professionals were of smiling doctors and nurses (Illustration 3), accompanying patients who were being discharged, clapping, or simply leaving or entering the hospital. The decoding and meaning of these images are not the same for those who did not set foot in a hospital as for those who suffered long working hours in precarious conditions within the healthcare system.

If photojournalism professionals cannot access facilities, they can only photograph what happens outside, and this will come to represent the sector. Peculiar situations thus arise, such as when the image that accompanies a text in which health professionals highlight how great it is to feel useful shows them collecting donated pizzas (Illustration 4). In this context, the aforementioned criticism by Pepe Baeza about the dangerous course that photojournalism was taking 20 years ago takes on new proportions.

Exactly because the visual narrative does not seem to proportionately portray the daily experiences of healthcare professionals during lockdown, these pictures also do not contribute to the generation of a debate about the conditions in which they worked or public health needs, raising serious questions about the blurring of barriers between information and advertising, promotion, or even an approach that highlights mainly the positive aspects. For Alberto Di Lolli, if you do not see what is really happening, you cannot be aware or co-responsible, and he further specifies:

> "But the thing is, I wonder: Is there going to be a debate now so that there is an extraordinary and much more abundant injection of money into public health? (...) Why is this debate not being generated? Because we have not been truly aware of the impact that this has had, of the suffering of how people have died." [*Pero es que, yo me pregunto: ¿Va a haber un debate ahora para que haya una inyección extraordinaria y mucho más abundante de dinero en la sanidad pública? (...) ¿Por qué no se genera ese debate? Porque no hemos sido conscientes de verdad del impacto que ha sido esto, del sufrimiento de cómo se ha muerto la gente.*]

On the other hand, the visual scarcity of traditional medical photographs could be highlighted (**Lynteris**, 2020) given that, during those weeks, there is hardly any representation of symptoms, healing methods, or the patients themselves.

However, there is a coincidence with the typologies of epidemic photography, especially in the representation of control and containment measures. Indeed, images of fumigation, disinfection, and research on vaccines abound. On the other hand, images of care are rare, precisely because of the isolation of the sick. However, despite this lack of images, there are testimonies of humane treatment by health professionals, of soldiers watching over coffins, and doctors and nurses who lent their phones or tablets to patients so they could communicate with loved ones.

> Such representations that are distant, anonymous, sterilized (shown clean and without fluids), and without visible pain or suffering could be called "aseptic illness narratives"

This analysis thus indicates that the visual account of this phase of the pandemic is incomplete. Indeed, in contrast to the attention paid to the testimony of patients themselves in contemporary illness narratives and those affected, this could even be called an "aseptic illness narrative" in which it is portrayed as distant, anonymous, sterilized (being shown clean and without fluids), and without visible pain or suffering. In fact, Ricardo García speaks of invisible death:

> "One of the things that strikes me is indeed that I came from Syria and always associate death with destruction, but here death is invisible." ["*Una de las cosas que me llaman la atención justamente es que yo vengo de estar en Siria hasta esas fechas y yo siempre asocio la muerte a la destrucción, pero aquí llego y es esa muerte invisible*"].

Reviewing what happened throughout the pandemic, the criticisms of the scant visual richness by authors such as **Baeza** (2003) take on great importance. Above all, when the constant and repetitive images are those of applause, smiles, and signs of victory, at a time when the current situation was one of global health, social, and economic crises unprecedented in recent history, it seems that the visual narrative that has been constructed seems to describe another, much more friendly and metaphorical experience.

Various narratives and visual metaphors have been used during the lockdown period and the first wave, and **Scolari** (2020b) points out that they were reassuring by giving meaning to reality, simplifying chaos, and reducing uncertainty. Those of a warlike nature stand out (**Argiñano**; **Goikoetxea-Bilbao**, 2020; **Scolari**, 2020b), being commonly used to illustrate disease, beyond the pandemic (**Sontag** 2011), or the recurring photographic use of the "deserted post-apocalyptic city" (with connections to other cultural vehicles such as dystopian cinema), where **Scolari** (2020a) highlights the variant of the solitary walker crossing a street or city, thus enhancing the feeling of emptiness. These images from the beginning of the crisis are being replaced by others that respond to the "normalization" and adaptability of society to the pandemic and that could lead to long-term research on changes in the visual narrative.

The current research lays the foundation for future lines of research, among which it is worth developing a comparison of photojournalistic images versus the impact of the images created and shared by citizens (including all those non-professional photographers who documented the pandemic as eyewitnesses), or even those produced within an artistic context. In the same way, it would be interesting to analyze the changes in interest, content, and visual treatment in the portrayal of the pandemic in later stages, once there is a certain relaxation of measures and access to professionals is allowed. It would also be interesting to analyze the progression in the visual representation of the different protagonists: patients, healthcare workers, politicians, soldiers, etc.

## 6. Conclusions

The Covid-19 pandemic, and especially Spain as a case study, is an excellent example to analyze the type of coverage and photojournalistic treatment of a global health crisis in a context of visual saturation. Specifically, one should consider the complexity and large size of the narrative or visual story published in the press.

The statements made by the photojournalists highlight the decisive role of communication offices in limiting their access to important locations during the early weeks of the state of alarm and criticize how such restrictions clearly conditioned the type of images that could be seen and published, as well as the effect that this had on the communication of the severity and scope of the pandemic, in addition to the impact that their absence will have on the legacy of this event in the collective memory in the future.

The quantitative analysis of the images published in three selected newspapers reveals a visual representation of the crisis that clearly fits the definition of a syndemic, presenting a narrative that goes far beyond a mere health crisis to encompass the complexity of other fundamental (e.g., social, political, and economic) aspects that enable an understanding of the scope and repercussions of the pandemic. Moreover, according to the distribution of images, the visual narrative focused especially on the social aspect.

> The visual narrative does not seem to proportionately portray the daily experiences of healthcare professionals during the lockdown, nor do these pictures contribute to the generation of a debate about the conditions in which they were working or the public health needs at that time

It is interesting to note that the exceptional nature of emergency facilities located outdoors such as car parks, field hospitals, or hospital ships, due to their newsworthiness, played a visual role that could contribute to diverting attention away from more frecuent events such as overwhelmed normal healthcare centers, to which access was not allowed (as mentioned above).

> The images published in the three selected newspapers show a visual portrayal of the crisis that clearly fits the definition of a syndemic

In the same way, the narrative generated during the state of alarm in Spain is marked by some aspects that are particularly underrepresented, such as the harshest aspects in the health field (overwhelmed hospitals, exhausted professionals, or seriously ill or dead patients), something that goes beyond the usual invisibility of pain and suffering in relation to death. In contrast, the data obtained reveal a clear tendency to overrepresent aspects of daily life during the pandemic (both the most popular aspects such as applause or essential purchases, as well as images showing the unusual empty appearance of public spaces). On the other hand, the presence of positive images or those directly unrelated to the content that they supposedly represent in negative news with harsh headlines on topics such as health services stands out in a clear counterpoint that may be confusing.

All this has contributed to a visual narrative of the coronavirus, at least during this first wave, that matches an aseptic illness narrative, and this will influence the impact of the disease on citizens, contributing to a less harsh and dehumanized vision of suffering.

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