



Homeless people: Images and imaginaries

Juan M. Agulles^{a,*}, Juan A. Roche Cárcel^b

^a University of Alicante, Department of Sociology I, Spain

^b University of Alicante, Department of Sociology I, Spain, P.O. Box 99, E-03080 ALICANTE Spain

ABSTRACT

This article argues that the construction of social imaginaries around homelessness, which usually focus on the individual variables involved in situations of exclusion, have given way to a broader understanding of homelessness as part of a process of residential exclusion of structural scope. However, both imaginaries, that of the individual causes and that of the structural causes of homelessness, struggle in social practice. Thus, we start from the idea that the different social imaginaries around homelessness are related, in a dialectic way, with the images, produced by different media, of situations in which life in public space is susceptible to be scrutinized in its daily life.

In this sense, our analysis of the photographs taken by the journalist Rafa Arjones in the city of Alicante (Spain), between 2002 and 2020, has as its main objectives (Meert and et al., 2004) [1] to reveal these relationships (Rubio-Martín, 2017) [2], to describe which imaginaries may be influencing the production of images on homelessness and (Caeiro and y Gonçalves, 2015) [3] to reveal how the photographer reproduces or questions them throughout the period studied. To achieve these objectives, our analysis is based on a comprehensive Weberian sociology and a hermeneutic/interpretative methodology that attempts to reveal the inner meaning of the photographic images from the external ideological discourse.

The findings of our study point to a shift in the photographs analysed, from an approach to homelessness that highlights individual situations to one that seeks contradiction and a focus on the structural problem of access to housing. This is in line with wider social changes that may be occurring in imaginaries of homelessness.

1. Introduction

The sociological analysis of the relationship between images and social imaginaries, in the study of the phenomenon of homelessness, has tended to privilege news as a primary source. The positions of the various media and the dissemination of certain stereotypes through the photographs disseminated, which would tend to legitimize a specific type of social policy, have been the priority objectives of study [1,2]. In other words, most of the attention has focused on the formation of social imaginaries through the dissemination of news and images as a support for an ideologically oriented journalistic discourse [3,4]. From this point of view, the media treatment through which the images reach the public would be the fundamental variable when establishing the degree of influence they exert on social imaginaries (see Fig. 31)

However, the path taken by this article is, in a way, the opposite. In fact, the analysis of audiovisual content, in our case, the work of a photojournalist, through the interpretative or heuristic method, allows us to classify different forms of image production with respect to discursive categories *already present* in the various social imaginaries [5]. That is, to focus our attention on how social imaginaries can explain the production of certain images and not others. From this perspective, the interest would focus not so much on the media treatment of the images, but on their production, the elements chosen for the representation, the predominant framing of reality and the intention of the maker, and all that this reveals with respect to pre-existing and often conflicting social imaginaries.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: jm.agulles@ua.es (J.M. Agulles), Ja.Roche@ua.es (J.A. Roche Cárcel).

The concept of “social imaginaries” that we include in this article is based on the meaning used by Taylor ([6] p.18), who considers that “Our social imaginary is the way in which our contemporaries imagine the societies of which they are a part”. However, the main vehicle for the expression of social imaginaries is constructed in the media through the discourse previously elaborated by journalists [7]. In fact, “What we know about our society, even about the world we live in and know, we know through the mass media” ([8] p. 9).

On the other hand, we use the term “social imaginaries”, instead of “social representations”, to emphasize the dynamism and overlapping of different imaginaries that can occur in a particular social context. In this sense, we can talk about the resistance and the rooting of certain imaginaries about homeless people that, in spite of the findings of social research regarding the weight of structural variables in homelessness [9–11], continue to privilege an explanation of an individual nature, associated with “marginal lifestyles”, to the problems derived from addictive behaviors or mental illness, or to the ideas of “misfortune” and its neighboring “piety,” anchored in Jewish-Christian religious feelings [11].

On the other hand, the discussion around the definition of homelessness has been articulated, fundamentally, in terms of social intervention and the adequacy of welfare resources for these people [12]. Furthermore, from the definition used during the eighties of “homeless” or “transients”, to the current description of homelessness as a dynamic process that emphasizes the conditions of access to adequate housing [13], the ways of understanding the phenomenon have undergone important variations. Thus, the explanation made from a Sociology of Deviance, which emphasized marginal lifestyles, deviant behavior, or psychosocial variables, has been giving way to explanations that give more weight to structural variables.

Indeed, the change of perspective came to reintroduce the question of structural causes at a time when the effects of the recessionary crisis around the world were becoming more evident. The relative collapse of the real estate market and mortgages, and the social imbalances caused by cracks in the consensus on the social state, together with the application of neoliberal policies, made it clear that the increase in situations of insecurity in housing should be seen as an essential factor in understanding the phenomenon of homelessness.

As a consequence of this new orientation, studies have focused on residential exclusion as a key factor in understanding homelessness. The initiation of programs and policies oriented from the *Housing First* perspective, and the research carried out on their results, have pointed out the importance of structural variables, especially those referring to access to housing and security of tenure [14–16], as well as to understand homelessness as a dynamic process. In this regard, it has even been pointed out the possibility of being in front of a “paradigm shift” in the studies on homelessness [17].

However, social imaginaries around “social dangerousness”, “urban hygiene” and control of public space [18,19], have continued to gain strength as the social fragmentation caused by the economic crisis increased the number of homeless. Often, the criminalization of extreme poverty is based on the guilt of the individual as the subject of marginal dynamics and lifestyles that deviate from the norm [20,21]. In this way, society explains its social contradictions through an attribution of individual responsibility that is confirmed when the consequences of material deprivation leave the individual naked in the public space, in front of the eyes of others.

In the case of the city of Alicante, recent research on homelessness and residential exclusion [22], has shown the coexistence of two social imaginaries on the phenomenon of homelessness that, since the economic crisis of 2008, have remained in conflict.

On the one hand, the period opened by the recession gave way to a great social vulnerability, derived from the excessive dependence of the local economy on sectors such as construction and tourism [23]. In fact, the growth experienced in recent decades was due to economic development based primarily on tourism and the construction sector. Specifically, housing construction in the municipality of Alicante increased by 21 % in the period 2001–2011, while the average year-on-year growth of the total population was 1.24 % (1999–2014). This also had an impact on the structure of employment. In addition, the motor of the real estate sector drove a growth dynamic that also led to higher house prices and increased household indebtedness [23]. Meanwhile, the percentage of empty homes in relation to the total number of homes in the municipality continued to be, according to INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística) estimates, 13 % of the total (25,170, specifically for the 2011 census) [22]. Thus, the unequal access to the real estate market became a major social problem in the city that would be deepening the dynamics that expelled more and more people from access to housing. The explanation of homelessness as a phenomenon largely derived from these structural constraints developed a social imaginary that appealed, on the one hand, to the minimum benefits - the case of the *Guaranteed Income of Citizenship*, later converted into the *Valencian Income of Inclusion* - and, secondly, the “right to housing” as ways to ensure social cohesion.¹ The implementation of housing projects oriented from the *Housing First* perspective in the municipality, from mid-2017, would be evidence of this change in orientation of public policies.

However, as the social crisis deepened, the number of people without stable accommodation in the city, camped in irregular settlements, occupying unfinished building structures and all kinds of alternative accommodation, grew. According to the report of the *Homeless Meet Up Alicante 2018*, prepared by RAIS Foundation, REAPSHA and the City of Alicante, about 195 people were living in the streets of the city. Of those surveyed during the nightly count, carried out in November 2017, 42 % had suffered aggressions and 55 % had serious health problems. Seventy-seven percent had no income at all and 83 % were in high or extremely high vulnerability.² The increase in the situations of deprivation exposed in the public space, together with some news appeared in the local press and the social context of a strong crisis of integration, were reinforcing the criminalizing speeches about homeless people [21], who have never stopped being present in society. According to Geremek, there has always been that “Cain’s lineage” on which society projects its image

¹ Decreto Ley 7/2020 del 6 de junio de 2020: https://dogv.gva.es/portal/ficha_disposicion_pc.jsp?sig=004917/2020&L=1#:~:text=La%20renta%20valenciana%20de%20inclusi3n%20es%20un%20derecho%20subjetivo%20que,exclusi3n%20y%20la%20vulnerabilidad%20social. [Visited on 29/9/23].

² Homeless Meet Up Alicante, 2018 https://reapsha.org/wp-content/uploads/Informe_meet_Alicante_C-V.pdf.

in negative.³ This protagonism of social imaginaries about social dangerousness and deviant or pathological behavior of the homeless has had as its culmination the approval, in 2020, of the municipal ordinance that penalizes begging and regulates many uses of urban space. This ordinance was adopted for the first time in 2012, and was repealed in 2015, only to be revived just after the confinement resulting from the state of alarm caused by the Covid-19 health crisis.⁴

Thus, we have what appear to be two great social imaginaries about homeless people struggling in social practice. Following the method of the Weberian “ideal types”, we could give them the names of “housing first” and “Cain’s lineage”. The interaction of these two social imaginaries, and their different modulations in the social practice, constitutes the axis that vertebrates our analysis of Rafa Arjones’ photographic work about homeless people in Alicante, between 2002 and 2020.

1.1. Objectives and methodology

The main objective of this work is to explore the social imaginaries about homeless people included in the photographs of a well-known photojournalist from the city of Alicante. Alicante is a municipality of 338,577 inhabitants, belonging to the Valencian Community, Spain. In the successive surveys on homeless people carried out by the National Institute of Statistics (2005, 2012), the Valencian Community appeared as one of the communities with the highest number of homeless people per 100,000 inhabitants. Although statistical methodologies have a high margin of error for this sector of the population (due to their high mobility and lack of registration in the municipal census), the first nocturnal count of homeless people carried out in Alicante resulted in 195 people sleeping on the streets of the city. In the last year 2021, Alicante City Council has attended to more than 1089 homeless people at risk of social exclusion in the only Center for the Reception and Integration of Homeless People (CAI) in the Valencian Community (see footnote 2). This is quite a high number considering that the count carried out in the same year in Madrid, a city with more than 3 million inhabitants and the second city (after Barcelona) with the most homeless people in the country, resulted in a total of 650 people living on the streets.⁵ With all due caution about the reliability of these statistics, it can be stated that Alicante has a higher rate of homelessness than Madrid, Barcelona or Zaragoza,⁶ some of the most populated cities in the country. In any case is one of the Spanish cities with a significantly high proportion of homeless people, hence the relevance of its choice for this study. This is partly due to the city’s favourable climatic conditions⁷ and the fact that Alicante is an important tourist destination. This is partly due to the city’s favourable climatic conditions and also to the fact that Alicante is a major tourist destination. That makes homeless people in search of employment think of more job opportunities in the service and catering sectors.

Historically, Sociology has privileged texts and has marginalized the use of images, “disqualified as ‘data’ and also as ‘instruments’ of research” (31, p.65). Nevertheless, it provides us with useful theoretical and methodological tools to analyze and interpret [24–26] the photographs of homeless people in the Spanish city of Alicante, taken by the photojournalist Rafael Arjones. Indeed, on the one hand, it is useful to apply two concepts from Max Weber’s Comprehensive or Interpretative Sociology [27–29], the “correspondence in meaning” or “elective affinities”. And it is through them that it is possible to bring together in a common worldview the different spheres - economic, religious, political, social, ethical and aesthetic - that modernity has broken and, in this way, to reconstruct the physical, intellectual and sentimental universe of the homeless [27–29].

Particularly fruitful for Comprehensive Sociology is the “heuristic or interpretative method”, which has its origin in hermeneutics, a science whose central problem is interpretation ([30] p. 39). In fact, it constitutes a philosophical reflection, sociological in scope, which attempts to understand the human in its connection with the world, that is to say, which interprets things themselves in their context [31]. It is especially dedicated to unveiling the inner, profound meaning of the images offered by the external ideological discourse [32].

On the other hand, Visual Sociology, which has interesting antecedents [33–35], has developed a large amount of research in the field of photography, as Eduardo Bericat points out [36]. Among these numerous works are those dedicated to life in prisons by Bruce Jackson (1977, 1978); those concerning the homeless by Douglas Harper (1978); those on working children in the United States since 1908 by the photographer-sociologist Lewis Wickes Hine; and those dealing with racial segregation by John Grady (2007) [37–39]. Moreover, Visual Sociology is currently consolidated and experiencing “a new renaissance (...), with young researchers more versed in new technologies” (40, p.2). This is so because it approaches the world of images by analyzing their content and using them as a document of information on social reality. In relation to this, the fusion of both possibilities reveals to us, precisely through images, the production of social knowledge, the ultimate goal of the subdiscipline [40].

However, this does not mean that visual sociology has a unitary paradigm, since, rather, what dominates it is the plurality of perspectives. First of all, because it works with or on photographs already taken, so that these constitute, in sociological research, either a primary source, when they make it possible to observe, in an original way, the object of study, or a secondary source, when

³ He coined this expression in his book *La estirpe de Caín (Cain’s lineage)* (1990), Mondadori.

⁴ Ordenanza de convivencia cívica en el Término Municipal de Alicante: <https://www.alicante.es/sites/default/files/documentos/202204/ordenanza-convivencia-civica.pdf>.

⁵ Report IX Homeless Count Madrid https://www.madrid.es/UnidadesDescentralizadas/IntegracionyEmergenciaSocial/SAMUR%20Social/ficheros/INFORME%20RECUENTO%202018_FINAL.pdf.

⁶ See https://www.cope.es/emisoras/comunidad-valenciana/alicante-provincia/alicante/noticias/alicante-presenta-indice-personas-sin-hogar-superior-ciudades-como-madrid-barcelona-zaragoza-20211124_1637883.

⁷ On the relationship between climate and how climate change may affect homelessness, see Kidd, S.A., Greco, S. & McKenzie, K. Global Climate Implications for Homelessness: A Scoping Review. *J Urban Health* 98, 385–393 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-020-00483-1>.

these images have been taken in pursuit of ends extraneous to the research and give rise to a collection, a compendium or an archive [41,42]. But also because the plurality of approaches to photography from Sociology is produced, according to H. Becker, from three different possibilities, the journalistic, the documentary or that of Visual Sociology.

This paper uses photojournalistic images from a professional documentary archive of the Alicante newspaper *Periódico Información*. We believe that the content related to the homeless in this archive shows both the self-representation they make of themselves and the conception that the Alicante society has of them, that is, how they are imagined [42].

Finally, our research will take into account the following characters with which the specialized literature has defined photography.

1°) The link with the present and History. Photography and Sociology have in common that they are dedicated to the events that are taking place now ([43] p.55), which is particularly true of photojournalism, since it apprehends daily life ([44] p.1), is fully conditioned by the present and pursues snapshots of contemporary reality ([45] p. 198). This is not an obstacle for photography, paradoxically, “only acquires its full value with the irreversible disappearance of the referent, with the death of the photographed subject” ([46] p. 19–20) and for Sociology not to worry about the past, since it considers that it explains the present [47]. In this sense, although photography deals with the present, its nature is historical, since the photographer has a prior knowledge of the situation portrayed and since he made his works, sometimes dozens of similar ones, several years before we sociologists analyze them ([48] p. 35).

2°) Photography as a reflection and construction of society. Any photograph constitutes an “index”, “a trace of the existence of a real phenomenon of which it is a reference” ([49] p. 36). In this respect, as photojournalists “have to produce clear, immediately understandable, interpretable and descriptive images to be included in the pages of newspapers” ([50] p. 203–204), their works are an outstanding social document. Likewise, they constitute a source of information, fundamental for, in our case, offering an image of the tragic situation experienced by human beings who are homeless. Therefore, photography is a tool for social analysis, in fact -as H. Becker points out-, it draws its meaning, in the same way as any cultural object, from its context [51].

Now, if photography reflects society, at the same time it can help to construct social reality ([52] p. 84–86) and even to create “the socio-identitarian worldview” [53]. Indeed, the experienced photojournalist selected in this article -as will be seen below-offers us an alternative discourse of the homeless people of Alicante ([54] p. 100).

3°) The emotional weight of the photographs. The photographs exhibit an emotional presence superior to that of any written text, which makes it possible to humanize and raise awareness of social problems ([55] p.88) and, especially of people living on the street, turning them in the eyes of the viewers not into abstract beings, but flesh and blood, individual, struggling and suffering like any other person.

The “heuristic or interpretive method” comes from hermeneutics, a particularly useful science for comprehensive sociology, insofar as its central problem is interpretation ([50] p. 39). Certainly, it is based on a philosophical reflection, of sociological scope, about the understanding and axial role of the interpretation of the human in its relationship with the world; in fact, what is interpreted with social hermeneutics are the things themselves but seen in their context [51]. More precisely, it is a matter of finding the profound keys to the photographic images, that is, of revealing their inner meaning from the external ideological discourse [52].

There are common elements between Iconological Analysis, the Documentary Method, and Visual Framing. The latter, which comes from the field of Communication, has inherited influences from Sociology, particularly from Gregory Bateson [56] and Erving Goffman [34], so that the visual elements connect Journalism with Sociology ([57] p. 347). The definition of what visual framing represents is still not very clear, despite the existence of numerous publications on this method [58–60], to which it must be added that it often does not sufficiently value the richness provided by images ([55] p. 1). However, it is commonly accepted that it visually frames reality, that is, the “angle, focus, perspective or treatment of information that is manifested in the choice, emphasis or importance attributed to the different elements” ([61] p. 52). Moreover, it is very useful to analyze the content of images, to make various combinations [62] and to connect it to the concept of ideology [63–65].

In summary, the interaction that we carry out here between Iconological Analysis, the Documentary Method and Visual Framing has enabled us to reveal three levels of reality: the world (the homeless, the objects and the street or the space through which they pass), the photograph -its visual and aesthetic aspects- and the intention of the photojournalist -his discourse and ideology-. These three levels, combined, have allowed us to analyze Rafa Arjones’ photographs of homeless people who are or are temporarily settled in the city of Alicante. However, we have not forgotten that these images, although they start from reality, are not reality, but a representation of it that expresses the imaginary plane of society, with its ontological, political, ethical, aesthetic and, in short, sociological dimensions.

In this way, we have been able to identify some thematic axes of the photojournalist Rafa Arjones, which could be included in the two blocks of imaginaries that we have described as “Housing First” and “Linaje de Caín” (Lineage of Cain). These thematic axes, on the other hand, have been compared and contrasted with other investigations about social imaginaries and homelessness, such as those of the artists M. Rosler [65] and Lee Jeffries, *Lost Angels*, about vulnerable subjects who live on the street and approach the phenomenon of homelessness in a critical way [66].

Also interesting is the research on the life of a homeless man in Castellón de la Plana (Spain), during 8 years, captured photographically [67]; that of homeless people in Hamburg who used exhibitions to improve their public image [68]; and the work of Serrano and Zurdo [5], who found 7 categories or imaginaries present in a wide sample of audiovisual productions on homeless people. The analytical scheme used by Serrano and Zurdo, more complex than the one used here, placed the images in a continuum of social imaginaries ranging from “the discourse of exclusionary rejection” to “contextualizing critical discourse”, passing through the “liberal discourse of individual failure” and the “discourse of misfortune”. In our analysis, we have assimilated all those images tending towards the “contextualizing critical discourse” as rooted in the “discourse of exclusion”.

The photographs taken under this approach privilege collective aspects of urban structure and housing and seek to superimpose images of advertising and the consumer society with situations of extreme poverty as a way of promoting critical reflection. On the



Fig. 1. The confusion between begging and homelessness. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. January 28, 2019.

other hand, those images that can be rooted in the imaginary that we have called “Cain’s lineage” are those that mix begging with homelessness, privilege an individual framing or aestheticise misery without offering a broader context, regardless of whether the orientation of the image and the accompanying news item has a more or less criminalizing character of homelessness or is framed in a pious tone or in the discourse of misfortune.

1.2. Criteria for selection of photographs

The selected photojournalist, Rafa Arjones, -as he has informed us- has been in the profession for 36 years (since 1987). He belongs to a family of professionals from Galicia and settled in Alicante, where he works for the newspaper *Información*, the most read newspaper in the province and one of the most outstanding⁸ of the *Prensa Ibérica Group*, the most important journalistic holding in the country.⁹ In addition, Arjones is an expert in Photography and Visual Arts from the University Miguel Hernández (Alicante), has studied Journalism, in its audiovisual branch and has obtained, in 1987, the Fotopress Award from the Fundació La Caixa.

For the selection of the photographs, we have entered the newspaper library of the newspaper *Información de Alicante*¹⁰ and consulted and read the newspapers published, in the period between January 01, 2002 and December 15, 2020, in which there were photographs of Rafa Arjones linked to the homeless. According to the latest data from the INE’s (Instituto Nacional de Estadística) time series of surveys on homelessness, in the period 2005–2022 there has been a cumulative increase of 25 % in the number of homeless people in Spain.¹¹ The period chosen for the selection of photographs (2002–2020) covers the entire series, and especially the years 2008–2019, when the economic and real estate crisis had the greatest impact on the increase in homelessness in many Spanish cities, including Alicante. Specifically, we have incorporated, after the name of the photographer, the keywords “beggars” (107 entries), “homelessness” (1 entry), “destitute” (0 entries), “homeless people” “personas sin hogar” (554 entries), “roofless” (878 entries) and

⁸ The newspaper has a 68 % market share in the province of Alicante. Source: <https://www.informacion.es/alicante/2020/04/12/lideres-momentos-duros-4693061.html>.

⁹ Source: <https://www.prensaiberica.es/noticias/prensa-iberica-numero-1-de-la-informacion-digital-en-espana-32516/>.

¹⁰ See: “Hemeroteca Corporativa”. <https://hemeroteca.epi.es/login.do>.

¹¹ See: https://www.ine.es/prensa/epsh_2022.pdf.



Fig. 2. The feminization of poverty. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. May 28, 2019.

“passers-by” (165 entries). Of all of them, those referring to “beggars” and “passers-by” have been especially useful to us, since in them we have found most of the images published by the photojournalist. In total, in a first review, we analysed 1704 photographs.

Secondly, we have contrasted these images from the newspaper’s library with those from the photojournalist’s own personal archive, who provided us with a total of 170 photographs, considered by him to be of the highest quality and representative of his professional work in the subject matter addressed.

Our final selection was 31 images (about 18.23 % of the total), all of them previously published in *Diario Información*, which we considered sufficiently illustrative and significant of these issues, of the way of thinking of the photojournalist and of what the social imaginary thinks and feels about homeless people. But, in order to do this, we have not only taken into account the general context of the phenomenon of homelessness, its essential characteristics and effects, but also the textual notes present at the foot of the photographs and the written information provided by the journalist in which the image was inserted.

In any case, the selected photographic corpus is still small and arbitrary ([24] p.2), as it is in any research, although we have tried to achieve the greatest possible rigor and, above all, that the images could be as representative and significant as possible. In other words, we have tried to ensure that they contain the essential values present in the photojournalist’s discourse, as well as that they adequately express his sensitivity towards the subject of the homeless, and his desire to achieve the greatest possible objectivity in reflecting the daily life experienced by the homeless.

In short, this article is part of Weber’s Comprehensive or Interpretive Sociology for which the social world and the relationships it generates are full of meaning. Also, in a Visual Sociology on photojournalistic images made in the period 2002–2020.

This is not incompatible with the fact that we are aware that all the photographs are halfway between the subjectivism of the photojournalist and the objective dimension of the historical reality he or she wishes to portray, in this case the homeless.

Moreover, they constitute social documents and provide “social types or schemes”, in the Weberian sense, which, although they are not exactly the reality related to homeless people, allow us to understand it better.¹²

1.3. Homelessness, begging and new homelessness

1.3.1. Begging, work and new homelessness

The social imaginary about homelessness often confuses begging with homelessness - Fig. 1 - phenomena of different nature and that may not occur at the same time. In fact, there are people who can practice begging in public spaces and have more or less stable accommodation and there are people who do not have stable accommodation, but do not resort to begging in public spaces to solve their daily needs, as they have other sources of income derived from the informal economy, minimum benefits, etc [20].¹³

The great heterogeneity of the processes of downward social mobility reveals the conditions of fragmentation produced by neoliberal policies and the forms of management of the recurrent economic and financial crises that have occurred in recent years [68].

¹² The confusion between begging and homelessness is sometimes present in the newspaper itself, which in turn reflects the social imaginary. For example, a photograph from 01/26/2013, on page 13, is placed next to the headline “begging shelter” in Sant Cristófol Square. In contrast, another image from 02/01/2013, page 20, states that “More than 200 people live on the street due to lack of resources”. Finally, another, published on 25/05/2017, on page 25, has the headline “Some of the “homeless” who live in the small park in the Barrio del Pla”.

¹³ Another photograph of Algerian migrants living in a shantytown was published by the newspaper *Información* on 02/02/2011, on page 18.



Fig. 3. Migrants and the emergence of homelessness. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. August 04, 2020.



Fig. 4. Asking for work and food, but no accommodation. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. October 15, 2014.

Among the new realities researched around the processes of residential exclusion are the feminization of poverty¹⁴ [69] -Fig. 2; the problem of access to housing and the incorporation of migrant workers into citizenship rights [70] -Fig. 3; as well as the emergence of homelessness among large groups of workers subject to the new flexible working conditions [18].¹⁵

At the door of a supermarket there is a man, bald and wearing glasses, with a sign covering the top of his body, with which he moves and which indicates, in a striking way, that he is Spanish -Fig. 4. Also, that he is unemployed, that he has two daughters and that he is asking for a job, as the person in Fig. 5 does, as a waiter; the words “I accept food” also stand out. His young face is serious and his dignified corporal attitude, although it presents a “staging” of poverty tending to *move* the recipients, nevertheless it moves away from the usual and theatrical “dramatism” of a good part of the people who ask for money in the street. Behind this individual, there is an advertisement from a supermarket fixed to the glass door with an offer that indicates “on Sundays we give you the bread” for “purchases over 10 euros”. Next to this advertising poster, you enter the store, inside which there are a number of people doing their job or buying and the products for sale.

Significantly, the photographer has portrayed the applicant outside the store, in front of the entrance, in the opposite direction and bathed in a light that contrasts with the greater darkness of the establishment. As if he wanted to express, in this way, that he does not have a dignified job similar to that of the salesclerks; as if he could not access the store; as if his world and that of the business contrasted ontologically, or better, as if they belonged to two different universes, but at the same time irremediably connected. In fact, the same economic system that allows opening on Sundays, which, as we know, is the workers’ day of rest in Spain, does not offer this person a job with which to earn a decent salary. What’s more, he has turned his body into a mobile advertisement that gives away, that makes public, his personal situation.

In spite of this, the store will remain open, also on holidays, and will give away the bread only if you can afford to consume it.

¹⁴ An interesting work on Brazilian homeless women in Recife, with precarious work, is da Silva, P. M. F. (2020). Between streets and works: work of homeless people in Recife-Brazil. *Revista Colombiana de Sociología*, 43 [2], 67–89.

¹⁵ In many supermarkets in the city of Alicante we can find images like this one. The confusion between begging and homelessness is common. Nothing tells us that the person in the photograph does not have a place of residence. Do not ask for accommodation, ask for work. Another photograph published by the newspaper *Información* on 01/06/2013, on page 10, includes the text “from professional to beggar”, which happens to a former truck driver.



Fig. 5. From professional to beggar. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. October 16, 2014.



Fig. 6. "Family" social relationships in homelessness. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. May 29, 2019.

1.3.2. Isolation and community ties

The social imaginary that we have called "Cain's lineage" tends to associate homelessness with uprooting and disaffiliation. And it is true that, in many aspects, the consequence of the loss of a home, of a stable address, brings with it the rupture of many social ties. Some authors, however, have argued that with respect ([71] p. 64). With regard to homelessness, it is not possible to speak of an absence of links in absolute terms. New social relations are often generated - Figs. 6 and 7 - within a particular situation, which allows us to see "exclusion not so much in terms of isolation, but as a function of daily socialisation in a context of extreme precariousness". ([71] p. 64)

The images of the homeless often privilege the individual frame (Fig. 8) emphasizing isolation and loneliness, rarely capturing the collective expressions of the phenomenon (Fig. 9) and the forms of mutual aid that arise among the homeless that also take place. The processes of mutual support and protection that some of these people develop in the situation of spending the night outdoors, and the constant flow of information and communication about different resources and places of refuge, which constitute a tool of survival in the street of the first order, are difficult to represent through the fixed image.

In Fig. 10, we see a person walking towards the spectators and the photographer in a central shopping street in Alicante. He is wearing dirty pants and his torso is naked, with his shirt folded over his arm. Otherwise, he is a man with a thin and apparently strong



Fig. 7. New social relationships. Making coffee in the middle of the street. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. October 16, 2014.



Fig. 8. Isolation and loneliness of the homeless. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. December 19, 2007.

build, but his short-stepping walk and slightly hunched back show that his gait looks tired. In addition, his bushy beard and unkempt curly hair, both dark in color, indicate that, although he is young, he looks somewhat aged. Her head is head down, she is facing the ground and not forward, and, moreover, she is oblivious to the people who move around, indifferent, in the opposite direction, with their backs to the passer-by himself. Some of them are carrying several shopping bags, from a famous Spanish shopping center and only one man, unfocused and located behind a *vespa*, looks vaguely at the target, while another cornered woman, whose face we can also



Fig. 9. The collective expression of the phenomenon of homelessness. Rafa Arjones. January 2000.



Fig. 10. A "passerby" introspective and lonely. Rafa Arjones. December 20, 1995.



Fig. 11. A walker without adventure and without travel. Rafa Arjones. October 15, 2014.



Fig. 12. Transparent exhibition objects for the gaze of the street passers-by. Rafa Arjones. March 06, 2001.

see, is talking on her cell phone (see Fig. 11).

Introspective and lonely, despite the crowd, barely naked and with no clothes to wear, it is likely that our protagonist will find the shopping street and the people who also circulate there strange; they have just bought, without paying any attention to him, without offering him any clothes. And, on the other hand, his head down, alienated and concentrated on the steps he takes, evidence that he has no future, but only a short and exhausted present. Not to mention that his urban walk, as captured by the photojournalist, contrary to the flow of buyers and without any precise or conscious direction, turns him into a “passerby,” like the one in Image 11, placed with his backpack before the urban art painting of a facade representing an empty street-into someone who, contrary to what the collective imagination thinks, does not possess a “fixed place”. Hence, in this case, the uprooting is total, since not even the sense of adventure and travel can be attributed to him. In this respect, Z. Bauman [72] distinguishes, in the global world, between the “tourist” and the “wanderer”, the former who lives in time and in the global, and the latter who lives in space and in the local.

2. Homelessness, real estate market and precarious housing

2.1. Banks and houses

The urban dynamics that restrict access to housing are not usually exposed in the images of the homeless, but the two are clearly related. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, Miloon Kothari, issued a report in 2008 concluding that the right to housing had been systematically violated in Spain with the active participation of the authorities.¹⁶ The UN-Habitat report (2013), reported that in the period 2001–2010, Spain had built nearly 7 million homes, while the population had only grown by 5.2 million, yet housing prices had doubled and evictions from foreclosures increased as the financial crisis deepened. Therefore, the relationship between the right to housing, residential exclusion and homelessness has been confirmed from various areas of social research [73,74].^{17,18,19}

In the glassed-in hall of a bank office, where in Spain surely the ATMs are available 24 h a day, although they are not shown, there are four people lying on the floor and covered with blankets, next to their few belongings: some bags and a suitcase standing (Fig. 12). Those lying down take advantage of the small useable space and all face the same direction, sticking to one of the office walls contrary to where the cashiers should be and indifferent or turning their backs to the interior access door of the office. This does not exclude that their way of lying down is individual, since one of them places his head upwards, another his body in a lateral way, the next one turning his back to it and, the last one, looking at it. On the other hand, the hall is lit up, but outside it is night, while the inside of the bank is completely dark.

Thus, the sleeping people are in a small, illuminated space arranged between two darkness, the natural one of the night outside and the even more unfathomable one of the interior of the office. This means that they are neither inside nor outside, but in an artificially constructed *limex*, with one access door open to the street, and another closed, to the bank. In that liminal place it seems as if the light (artificial) and the darkness (natural) were separated and that these people, finally, had a peaceful place to sleep. However, this has turned them into transparent exhibition objects for the gaze of the street passers-by, as if the lighting had transformed them into

¹⁶ ONU: Consejo de Derechos Humanos, *Informe del Relator Especial sobre una vivienda adecuada como elemento integrante del derecho a un nivel de vida adecuado*, Sr. Miloon Kothari: Adición: Misión a España, 7 Febrero 2008, A/HRC/7/16/Add.2, disponible en esta dirección: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/47c7d4b82.html> [Accesado el 29 Septiembre 2023].

¹⁷ In recent years, after the economic crisis, the use of these banking spaces for overnight stays in the city of Alicante has proliferated. Talking to some of these people who use them (during the performance of the duties as an educator in the municipal center for homeless people of one of the authors), we know that the employees of some of these entities often allow homeless people to sleep there. They have even agreed with them that, when the office opens, they must leave the space.

¹⁸ The social work of a savings bank - a banking institution - does not seem to take care of this homeless man who sleeps in his office.

¹⁹ On the glass façade of this bank, the “Welcome” sign appears. The homeless person, in any case, sleeps inside.



Fig. 13. Life on the street of immigrants, between indifference and loss of privacy. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. October 15, 2014.



Fig. 14. Since the crisis of 2008, bank offices have served as a place to stay for the homeless. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. October 16, 2014.

merchandise and the space where they are in a small advertising window.

In this respect, it is ironic, the irony is also apparent in [Figs. 13 and 14](#), that the same bank that, surely, has processed eviction proceedings against people, old and young, and entire families for mortgage default, expelling them coldly from their homes, has become a refuge for homeless people who have nowhere to spend the night. Moreover, lacking rights, even to the night itself, they merely have a small place of transit from which, with their suitcases ready, they can escape, leave, or be expelled at any time.

These people, on the other hand, have in common that they do not possess money - they are located at a distance from the ATMs - nor do they have access to loans or credit; the door to the bank is closed to them. But they do differ in the way they sleep and in the way they place their bodies. In this sense, they express their emotional needs: to turn their backs on others or to seek physical contact with them. But, above all, they are different by memories of their daytime life experiences, past or present, by dreams about how to get out of their situation or, in the worst case, by nightmares suffered in view of the impossibility of achieving such utopia.

2.2. Precarious housing

Social research on homelessness has been using different tools for the conceptualization of this phenomenon. The application of the ETHOS typology [European Typology of Homelessness], emphasizes a continuum of categories related to access to housing, ranging from total lack of accommodation and street life to precarious conditions of habitability, security, and tenure [75,76]. The emergence



Fig. 15. Precarious places, invisible during the day and populated at nightfall. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. June 12, 2020.



Fig. 16. A precarious home: property or prison? Rafa Arjones. Alicante. July 31, 2019.

of precarious settlements and self-constructed housing, in an irregular regime, is part of the broad spectrum of homelessness that is handled from the social imaginary that we have called “housing first”.²⁰

Some homeless camps, which have been established in recent years in Alicante, are located in places with little traffic, away from the public eye (Fig. 15). Parks, urban mountain areas (in the surroundings of the city’s two castles), sports facilities, unfinished building structures, open spaces near the Homeless Reception Center, are places that are invisible during the day and are populated at nightfall. Here a dialectic between light and darkness, the visible and the hidden, is developed, which the photographic image tries to capture.²¹

In the center of Fig. 16, we see a man in front of whom there is a wire fence that serves as the wall of his precarious “home,” as in

²⁰ A photograph of a camp in the Tossal was published by the *Diario Información* on 24/12/2018, on page 5.

²¹ Because of the situation and the perspective of the image, this settlement could be located on the slopes of the San Fernando Castle, where in recent years have grown more or less stable settlements, in a place sheltered from public view.



Fig. 17. A “home” dump. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. May 28, 2019.



Fig. 18. A home between reality and representation. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. May 23, 1998.

Fig. 17. Inside it, there are diverse objects, while in the background, we can see the castle of the city of Alicante, as in **Fig. 18**, and some buildings of the same. The face of the portrait is serious and is framed by the sunlight, while some of the objects are in semi-darkness. On a white canvas located behind him, his shadow is projected and, next to it, that of the photojournalist who, at that moment, is looking through the lens.

This person may have placed such a fence in the small space where it is located as a sign of his property and protection from the outside. However, this fragile wall will not prevent the wind, cold and humidity from passing through it and, when it rains, its “owner” will get soaked to the bone. And what is even worse, perhaps unknowingly, with it, he has isolated himself, locked himself up and imprisoned himself.

The city of Alicante and its history make a backdrop, of fictitious decoration, of the present of this person whose geography is subject to the inclement weather and life. The scenery in which it takes place, at the end, constitutes a mixture of reality and desire, of the world as it is and of the imagination that recreates it.



Fig. 19. The self-construction of settlements in the city: a metaphor of “the dispersed city” that Alicante is today. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. November 13, 2012.



Fig. 20. A house and a “normal” life? Rafa Arjones. Alicante. November 13, 2012.

The photographer’s shadow reminds us, in this respect, that his photographs, like all of them, manifest his ideological discourse and, therefore, are halfway between reality and representation.^{22,23}

In an open space located on the outskirts of the city, relatively close to buildings, appears Fig. 19, a small house built with carefully assembled wooden planks. It is indeed skillfully built, as it has a framed window, a fireplace, an outdoor lantern at the top, a perfectly aligned roof, a floor that protrudes from the house and protects it from humidity, and a television antenna; furthermore, attached to it, there is a work trolley that seems useful and available. On one side of the house there is a woman and, a little further away and heading towards the house, a man, who is carrying a small dog in his arms affectionately; behind him, tied up, is another dog.

The sky is densely populated with clouds that seem to threaten to fall on top of the small house and give a heavy rain. The black and white photo taken by the photojournalist is very expressive, dramatic even, since it is dominated by a light that is muffled by the great variety of intense greys, which, paradoxically, do not allow for shadows; everything seems to be in darkness, and nothing shines brightly. In addition, there is a certain parallelism between the earthy soil with the few grasses that sprout from it and the overcast sky.

In the following photo, Fig. 20, there is an isolated vertical construction, for one person, with a toilet, next to the previous house. Above it, there is an “ingenious” installation with a cable that “borrows” electricity from the public grid. In front of the door of the building there is a mat to wipe your feet and keep the toilet clean from dirt or mud outside. The same dense sky covered with clouds

²² The self-construction of settlements is growing in Alicante. Of course, not all of them are as well built as this one. The presence of animals with the homeless is also evident in the photograph that was published by the *Diario Información* on 24/02/2018, on page 5.

²³ This image could be a metaphor of “the dispersed city” that Alicante is today.



Fig. 21. A “frontier” accommodation, located between exclusion and homelessness. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. October 16, 2014.



Fig. 22. A home car. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. October 16, 2014.

crowns this human work.

The “loving” care with which the house and its toilet are raised, and the detail of the mat express the desire that they are clean and, in short, that they represent a true home; the pets help in this. However, the wasteland, almost desert, and the dim light sadden the environment of these people and do not seem to accompany them in their desire to lead a “normal” life.²⁴

This photograph, Fig. 21, shows a middle-aged man inside a car with the front door open. He is sitting in the driver’s seat with his body turned out, while he puts on his pants.

In the following Fig. 22, the same man sitting in this car ties his shoelaces. It is striking that he is well dressed, with clean clothes and shoes. Furthermore, as the open back door of the vehicle shows bags with a few belongings, this makes us suppose that he has slept in the vehicle, that he does his daily life in it and, in short, that this is a home car. Surely, he has a job, he is well dressed, it is possible that he has been divorced, since he is alone, but he does not own a house. His life, on the other hand, has lost intimacy and, although he can travel and move from one place to another, from one city to another, what level of roots can he have, what can he identify with in his “current” life?²⁵

²⁴ The parking lot where this car is parked is located a few meters from the *Center for Reception and Insertion for Homeless People* in Alicante. Often, people who have a car, use this parking lot, combining some resources of the Center. Therefore it has become a “frontier” accommodation, located between exclusion and *homelessness*.

²⁵ The photograph was published by the newspaper *Información* on 07/02/2013, page 6. It is an unfinished apartment on José Espadero Street and used by “beggars” (according to the newspaper). The bursting of the so-called “real estate bubble” after the economic crisis of 2008 left many structures like the photograph scattered around the city of Alicante.



Fig. 23. An unfinished apartment on José Espadero street, due to the 2008 real estate bubble, and used by “beggars” (according to the newspaper). Rafa Arjones. Alicante. December 19, 2017.



Fig. 24. The occupant of the place lives surrounded by garbage, as if he were just another disposable object, a waste of the consumer society. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. December 19, 2017.

On the second floor of a building under construction stands (Fig. 23) the “home” of a homeless person. As a wall, some curtain walls seem to limit the place that has neither doors nor windows, although it does have a roof. In the center of the photograph, framed by the rectangle of the plant section, a man standing seems to be the “owner” of the place and surrounds himself with a multitude of objects, as if they were the utensils of his “home”, although many of them are useless. Behind this individual is the façade of another building that does have windows and balconies with curtains that give its tenants the intimacy and privacy that the portrait lacks (see Fig. 24).

The following photograph [24] brings us even closer to this unfinished “home”. In it, the same person is shown sitting on a sofa, like the one in Fig. 25. In the space of the house, next to him, a large number of bottles, empty and unused glass containers and broken objects are piled up. In this way, the occupant of the place lives surrounded by garbage, as if he were just another disposable object, a waste of the consumer society.



Fig. 25. An unfinished and empty house. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. December 19, 2017.



Fig. 26. The life of consumption and the lives consumed. Rafa Arjones. January 20, 2011.

3. Consumption life and “lives consumed”

3.1. Homelessness and consumerism

Much of the social imaginary about the homeless is built on the daily encounter on the streets of big cities, especially in commercial spaces, where there is a coexistence of consumer life with “consumed lives”, due to a conspicuous consumption that ends up annulling the singular personality of the individuals, their substantial subjectivity. The staging of this clash of “two worlds”, that of absolute lack and that of overabundance, points to the interrelationship between the social imaginaries about homelessness and the images that capture this “staging of everyday poverty” in spaces saturated with consumer-oriented symbols [77]. The aesthetic - and ethical - dimension of this superposition of commercial images with the image of homeless people in the commercial streets of Alicante has an important place in the work of Rafa Arjones, who reveals his critical intention through the selection of the elements and the perspective with which he captures his images.²⁶

To the left of the composition, Fig. 26, we observe a woman sitting on a street platform with a small box in her hand and asking for money. Her head is slightly tilted and in her hand, she holds, attached to her body, a photograph of a man. Since she is wearing a ring, it is possible that she is married, and that man is her husband or her son and the reason she is asking passers-by to help her financially. This is also indicated by the sign with the incomplete letters “... vor” -a fragment of “Please” [por favor]- attached to the photograph of her loved one. Above this woman, behind a glass window, you can see an armchair for sale, a “sale inside” sign and, next to it, a larger advertisement that reads, “Don’t feel guilty. From January 7 to March 13, 2011”, “Plaza Mar 2”, a shopping center in the city of Alicante.

It might seem to be an appropriate marketing strategy for businesses to try to temporarily limit guilt in the context of a culturally Jewish Christian society determined by feelings of guilt. In fact, this advertising campaign seems to be having an effect, since in Fig. 27, a consumer walks around indifferent and without any apparent feeling of guilt in front of the body that sleeps in the street of a man.

²⁶ The image was published by Diario Información on 30/01/2011, on page 10. The woman is asking in Maisonnave Avenue, the commercial artery of the city. The picture refers to the life of consumption and the lives consumed, from which the homeless do not escape either.



Fig. 27. A consumer walks around indifferent in front of the body of a man that sleeps in the street. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. March 20, 2014.



Fig. 28. Bodies-things. Rafa arjones. Alicante. January 18, 2019.

However, this seems ethically reprehensible to the photojournalist -and hence his great success, from our perspective-since he has portrayed this homeless person right next to the advertised word “guilty”. Thus, on the one hand, her reclining head could express that she feels guilty, ashamed, or humiliated for having to beg. And, on the other hand, the association of this word with the person who is begging could, in the collective imagination, induce to blame him of his situation, when in fact he is a victim. Without forgetting that, on this specific personal and social situation, it can also be inferred that the reductions within the trade correspond to the “lowered” social level of this person. It is not in vain that she is practically at ground level and even underneath the very sofa that should serve as her seat.

In any case, the image criticizes the frivolity with which the economic system, and a large part of society, fuses poverty and consumption, as if they were two opposing realities, when in reality they make up the two sides of the same coin, the two faces of our society.

3.2. Homelessness and “waste” bodies

The homeless, in their way of being exposed to the public eye, end up being represented as body-things. By having to accumulate



Fig. 29. Waste bodies. The homeless as an imaginary public health problem. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. March 13, 2019.



Fig. 30. Societies of over-abundance and waste of food. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. May 10, 2012.

their few belongings in the minimum space occupied by their bodies (Figs. 28 and 29), this accumulation comes to represent the most brutal counterpoint to the process of accumulation of goods and artifacts that takes place in urban agglomerations. The association with the “dirt” and the “uselessness” of this precarious accumulation, forced by the lack of stable housing, makes the bodies exposed to the elements to be equated with “waste” [78] and thus reinforces the social imaginary of the “homeless” as a problem of “public hygiene” [2].²⁷

In photo 30, we see five people collecting the waste from the stalls of the popular market of Campoamor in Alicante; in image 31,²⁸ some people are searching among the trash of the containers for their use, just when the hours of sale to the public have ended. On the left of the image a child, a man, and a blond woman are huddled, crouched. In the center of the composition, but behind the pile of

²⁷ At the end of the open-air markets, there is often the urban “gleaning”, the result of societies of over-abundance and waste of food. In Alicante, at present, this market has moved to a new location, in front of the *Center for Reception and Insertion of Homeless People*. The people who live there rarely participate in this “gleaning”, since the Center’s regulations prohibit the introduction of food from outside.

²⁸ Other photographs related to “garbage” were published by the newspaper *Información* on May 22, 2003, page 10, and January 11, 2004, page 6.

garbage, a woman and a girl are arranged, eating one of the fruits thrown on the ground.

People and boxes of bananas, fruits and kiwis from New Zealand make up a motley, hybrid pile of things and human bodies. But the low height and shrinkage of the latter, which does not exceed that of the waste, fuses them together in such a way that they seem to end up being the same thing: things abandoned in the street.

4. Discussion

The similarity of Rafa Arjones' photographic work with that of other photojournalists around the world was already noted in a previous article published in this journal [79]. Broadly speaking, the findings of the analysis of Rafa Arjones' photographs are consistent with other studies that have analysed the production of images in the press [1,5,80] or Best's work [81] on 475 news items about homeless people that appeared in different media. The imaginaries about homeless people that circulate in society end up being reflected in the images disseminated by different media and these, in turn, reproduce these imaginaries. This is what Schmidt [82] has called the visual regimes of homelessness, which in this paper we have tried to analyze in the work of a renowned photojournalist who has paid special attention to homelessness in the city of Alicante. In this sense, based on the analysis of Rafa Arjones' photographs, we have categorised three major thematic blocks, full of meaning, in his production of images on homelessness: the one that refers to homelessness and forms of begging; the one that relates homelessness to the housing market and residential exclusion; and the one that criticises consumerism and the lives that are consumed by consumption.

In the period analysed 2002–2020, Arjones's photographs have been adding images that have brought his photographic discourse closer to an increasingly explicit critical sphere, (i.e. our analysis of photographs 12, 13 and 14, where the coexistence of homeless people with the advertising of the banks in whose premises they sleep is portrayed) as the economic crisis that began in 2008 made homelessness more and more evident on the streets of the city of Alicante. As we have tried to show, changes in the production of images of homelessness are dialectically linked to changes in broader social imaginaries. Thus, there is an evolution from imaginaries that highlight individual aspects of homelessness (as analysed in the case of photographs 1, 8 and 9) which privilege an individual approach, to those that emphasize structural variables (analysis of photographs 26 and 27).

Indeed, throughout the period under study, Arjones's photographs have in some ways reflected these changes, incorporating new, more explicitly critical images into the conventional approach to homelessness.

However, new approaches to the use of visual research techniques for the study of homelessness point out that the unidirectionality of image production by the media has been able to orient research towards the interests of scholars and the general public. However, some of the production of images and imaginaries made by homeless people themselves, often situated as the objects of image production rather than its subjects, has been left out: "while the use of visual methodologies is often only considered in terms of benefits to the researcher or the population, engagement with anticipatory research methodologies can also benefit the individuals involved in the research as they actively participate" ([83] p. 209).

5. Conclusions

Through the iconological analysis of the photographs of photojournalist Rafa Arjones, we have been able to confirm that, the photographer's images would be expressing, for the most part, a tendency to contemplate structural variables as opposed to individual ones and "marginal lifestyles". Both the elements chosen, and the look developed by the photojournalist show a special interest in elaborating a narrative that is articulated in three main axes: begging and work; housing and homelessness; and consumer life and homelessness. It is in these last two themes where the images most clearly construct a critical discourse on homelessness, by superimposing in the images the financial institutions and the people who sleep in their facilities. This also occurs when the staging of commercial and consumer life is interspersed with the homeless.

Therefore, one could say that, in the period studied, between 2001 and 2020, the photojournalist has tried to capture the social contradictions that arise from the coexistence of a society of abundance and the most severe material deprivation. But, in doing so, he



Fig. 31. The homeless, things abandoned on the street, bodies-garbage. Rafa Arjones. Alicante. February 11, 2016.

expresses part of a social imaginary that, instead of the frequent blame that can be found in the media treatment of homelessness, points to the social dynamics of dispossession that is at the base of downward social mobility. In conclusion, this, during these years, has increased the phenomenon of homelessness in the city of Alicante.

Finally, it should be noted that photographic images, as pointed out in the section “Objectives and methodology” refer pages 6 and 7, have a higher emotional charge than words. In addition, “the directness of the information” and its “proximity to actual experience” ([84] p. 16), the “sensory image” it provides ([85] p. 21), its greater plasticity, and connection to material reality - it constitutes a “trace of reality”, an “image of the real” ([85] p.23) - with the photographed referent, has helped to humanize the social problem of the homeless, turning these human beings, before the spectators, not into abstract beings conceptualized by words, but into individuals and collectives that suffer and struggle. In this sense, the use of participatory visual techniques [86], through the mobile phone diary, or elicitation interviews,²⁹ could broaden the framework of our research on images and imaginaries of homelessness in the future. Without forgetting that Rafa Arjones’ photographs insist that they are victims of an economic system based on consumption that consumes them, thus fleeing from the negative stereotypes of the social imaginary that represent them as marginalized, as guilty of their own situation, if not as mere criminals.

Limitations of the study

The study deals with the work of a single photojournalist who works in the city of Alicante. A broader analysis of the imagery could include images of other professionals, enriching the analysis with a comparative approach of their works.

On the other hand, the production of images of homeless people should also include the self-production of images of these people. As we have commented at the end of the discussion, the treatment of images made by homeless people has not been included in this

²⁹ In this regard, on the use of photography in workshops by homeless people in Puerto Rico. See, Nina, R., Ostolaza, C., & Rodríguez, F. (2013). *Personas sin techo: ¿cuáles son mis derechos? Una experiencia comunitaria a través de la fotografía*. *Revista de Psicología*, 22 [2], pg. 64. Equally useful is the participatory methodology of photography, Polin, V., & Bertani, M. (2019). Homelessness, Identity and the City. Un approccio multi-methods per valutare l’impatto del disagio abitativo sull’identità (No. 13/2019). About the elicitation, please see Oter-Quintana, C., González-Gil, T., Martín-García, Á., & Alcolea-Cosín, M. T. (2017). Photoelicitation: A useful tool to investigate management of the vulnerability of homeless women. *Enfermería Clínica (English Edition)*, 27 [5], 308–313. For more information on elicitation in women, see also, Posada-Abadía, C. I., Marín-Martín, C., Oter-Quintana, C., & González-Gil, M. T. (2021). Women in a situation of homelessness and violence: a single-case study using the photo-elicitation technique. *BMC women’s health*, 21 [1], 1–15. Another interesting work on participatory photography is, Piña-Cabrera, L., & Pinochet-Cobos, C. (2019). Puertas adentro de la calle. Fotografía participativa y derecho de mirada en Santiago. *Aisthesis* [64], 111–134. On participatory methodologies, such as photographs and cartographies -personal drawings-, referring to the city of Buenos Aires, one can read Ghea, M., Gueglio Saccone, C. L., & Mira, F. E. (2016). Metodologías participativas en investigaciones sobre vulneraciones sociales: entre lo técnico y lo ético. In VIII Congreso Internacional de Investigación y Práctica Profesional en Psicología XXIII Jornadas de Investigación XII Encuentro de Investigadores en Psicología del MERCOSUR. Facultad de Psicología-Universidad de Buenos Aires. Another interesting research on young people in Medellín, Colombia, using “personal cartographies” (drawings of themselves), is Silva L. M., Aristizábal, A. I., Gómez, M. C., González, Y., Acevedo, C. M., Ortiz, Y., ... & Campo, N. M. (2018). Reconstrucción de experiencias y percepciones propias de jóvenes habitantes de calle. *Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Niñez y Juventud*, 16 [2], 809–823.

work. But we hope to conduct further research in this regard.

Data availability statement

All the photographs used in the analysis have been published in the *Diario Información de Alicante*, and are available in its digital newspaper archive: <http://hemeroteca.epi.es/login.do>.

Declaration

All authors have contributed substantially to all of the following [1]: the conception and design of the study, the collection of data, or the analysis and interpretation of the data [2]; the drafting of the article or the critical revision of its important intellectual content [3]; the final approval of the submitted version.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Juan M. Agulles: Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Juan A. Roche Cárcel:** Resources, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

References

- [1] H. Meert, et al., "The Changing Profiles of Homelessness People: Homelessness in the Written Press: a Discourse Analysis", FEANTSA, 2004. https://www.feantsaresearch.org/download/2006_conflict_rooflessness_and_use_of_public_space8353053374602533184.pdf.
- [2] M.J. Rubio-Martín, Representaciones sociales sobre las personas sin hogar: una herencia aún no superada, *OBETS Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 12 (nº1) (2017) 87–118.
- [3] T. Caeiro, A. y Gonçalves, Homelessness-press, policies and public Opinion in Portugal, *European Journal of Homelessness* 9 (1) (2015) 99–122.
- [4] C. Larsen, The por in Mass Media. Negative Images in the US and UK versus Positive Images in Sweden and Denmark, *Homelessness in Europe*, spring (2014) 6–8.
- [5] A. Serrano, A. y Zurdo, "Representaciones audiovisuales de las personas sin hogar: entre la espectacularización de la exclusión social extrema y la culpabilización de las víctimas", *RES* 20 (2013) 105–137.
- [6] Ch Taylor, *Imaginarios Sociales*, Paidós, Barcelona, 2004.
- [7] Pintos Juan-Luis, "Algunas precisiones sobre el concepto de imaginarios sociales", vol. 4, *Revista Latina de Sociología*, 2014, pp. 1–11.
- [8] N. Luhmann, *La realidad de los Mass Media*, Anthropol, Barcelona, 2000.
- [9] J. Doherty, et al., Homelessness and exclusion: regulating public space in European cities, *Surveill. Soc.* 5 (3) (2008) 290–314.
- [10] P.A. Toro, Toward an international understanding of homelessness, *J. Soc. Issues* 63 (3) (2007) 461–481.
- [11] Cabrera (2008a), "Personas sin hogar", en Hernández Pedreño, M (Coord.), *Exclusión social y desigualdad*, Editum, Murcia, 2008, pp. 185–228.
- [12] P. Cabrera, *Huéspedes del aire. Sociología de las personas sin hogar en Madrid*, Universidad Pontificia de Comillas, Madrid, 2002.
- [13] Feantsa, "El papel de la vivienda en el sinhogarismo. Alojamiento y exclusión residencial", *Informe Europeo*, 2008. www.feantsa.org/spip.php?action=acceder_document.
- [14] P. Ridgway, A.M. y Zippel, *The paradigm shift in residential services: from the linear continuum to supported housing approaches*, *Psychosoc Rehabil. J.* 13 (4) (1990) 11–31.
- [15] V. Busch-Geertsema, I. Shalin, *The Role of Hostels and Temporary Accommodation*, nº1, *European Journal of Homelessness*, 2007, pp. 67–93.
- [16] V. Busch-Geertsema, *Housing first europe. Results of a European social experimentation project*, *European Journal of Homelessness* 8 (1) (2014) 13–28.
- [17] J.M. Agulles Martos, *Las personas sin hogar y exclusión residencial ¿hacia un cambio de paradigma?* *Cuad. Trab. Soc.* 32 (2) (2019) 265–275.
- [18] A. Tosi, Homelessness and the control of public space. Criminalising the poor? *European Journal of Homelessness* 1 (December) (2007) 225–236.
- [19] M. Bergamaschi, et al., *The homeless and public space: urban policy and exclusion in bologna*, *Revue interventions économiques* 51 (2014) (Publicación on line).
- [20] et. al. Cabrera, *¿Quién duerme en la calle? Una investigación social y ciudadana sobre las Personas sin Techo*, Fundació Caixa Catalunya, Barcelona, 2008.
- [21] C. Harring, D. Yarbrough, L.M. Alatorre, *Pervasive penalty: how criminalization of poverty perpetuates homelessness*, *Soc. Probl.* 67 (Issue 1) (2019) 131–149. February 2020.
- [22] J.M. Agulles, *La caridad y la terapia. Personas sin hogar y exclusión residencial en Alicante*. Tesis Doctoral. RUA. https://rua.ua.es/dspace/bitstream/10045/56565/1/tesis_juan_manuel_agulles_martos.pdf, 2016.
- [23] F. Díaz, M.L. y Lourés, *La globalización de los mercados inmobiliarios: su impacto sobre la Costa Blanca*, *Ciudad Territ. - Estud. Territ.* XL (155) (2008) 77–92.
- [24] Carlos Abreu, *El análisis cualitativo de la foto de prensa*, *Revista Latinoamericana de Comunicación Social* 57 (2004) 1–5.
- [25] C. Muñoz, et al., *Imágenes de la inmigración a través de la fotografía de prensa. Un análisis de contenido*, *Comunicación y sociedad* XIX (1) (2006) 103–128.
- [26] M.E. Casanova Cuba, B. y Massó Guijarro, *Aproximación a la crisis de los refugiados a través del titular y de la fotografía de prensa en España*, *Intersticios: Revista sociológica de pensamiento crítico* 12 (2) (2018) 109–119.
- [27] M. Weber, *Conceptos Sociológicos Fundamentales*, Alianza, Madrid, 2006.
- [28] González García, M. José, *Las huellas de Fausto. La herencia de Goethe en la Sociología de Max Weber*, Tecnos, Madrid, 1992.
- [29] J.M. González García, *Sociología e iconología*. REIS, vol. 84, *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, 1998, pp. 23–43.
- [30] J.M. Echavarren, *Sociología visual: la construcción de la realidad social a través de la imagen*, *Documentos de trabajo (Centro de Estudios Andaluces)* 2 (2) (2010) 1–13.
- [31] Davila Legerén, Andrés, *Retrato de mirada sociológica con cámara fotográfica (Considerando los textos verbosuales de Lewis W. Hine)*, *Quaderns-e* 16 (2011) 60–88. Barcelona, ICA (Institut Català d'Antropologia). Disponible en la URL: [http://www.antropologia.cat/files/Quaderns-e16\(1-2\)_Davila.pdf](http://www.antropologia.cat/files/Quaderns-e16(1-2)_Davila.pdf).
- [32] Pierre Bourdieu, *Alain Touraine, Un art moyen: Essai sur les usages sociaux de la photographie*, Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 1965.
- [33] E. Goffman, *Frame Analysis: an Essay on the Organization of Experience*. (Northeastern University Press, Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1974.
- [34] De Miguel, M. Jesús, De León, G. Omar, Ponce, "Para una sociología de la fotografía", *Reis*, 1988, pp. 83–124.
- [35] E. Bericat Alastuey (Ed.), *Sociologías en tiempos de transformación social*, vol. 34, *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, Madrid, 2012.

- [36] A. Davila Legerén, "A la luz de la propia sombra. Incorporaciones de la fotografía a la sociología". *Fotocinema*, Revista científica de cine y fotografía, vol. 10, Universidad de Málaga, 2015, pp. 285–326. <http://www.revistafotocinema.com/index.php?journal=fotocinema&page=index>.
- [37] E. Bericat Alastuey, Ciencias Sociales y cultura audiovisual: el conocimiento de la fotografía, in: en J.A. Roche Cárce (Ed.), *La sociología como una de las bellas artes*, Anthropos, Barcelona, 2012, pp. 201–224.
- [38] P. Faccioli, G. Losacco, *Manuale di sociologia visuale*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2003.
- [39] A. Appadurai, *Mondialisation, recherche, imagination*, RISS/ISSJ 160 (1999) 257–268.
- [40] D. Harper, Visual sociology: expanding sociological vision, *Am. Sociol.* 19 (1) (1988) 54–70.
- [41] M. Beltrán, Cinco vías de acceso a la Realidad Social, *REIS* 29 (1985) 7–41.
- [42] Roland Barthes, *La cámara lúcida. Nota sobre la fotografía*, Paidós, Barcelona, 2018.
- [43] Chiara Scardozi, Antropologia pubblica e ricerca visuale, *Antropologia Pubblica* 7 (1) (2021) 1–12.
- [44] Luc Boltanski, *Capitolo secondo. La retorica della figura*, in: Pierre Bourdieu, *Un arte media. Saggio sugli usi sociali della fotografia*, Milano: Meltemi, 2023.
- [45] B.R. Amezaga, Las imágenes como fenómeno cultural: una necesaria mirada en etapas para abordar los retos actuales, *Hist. Mem. Educ.* 10 (2019) 17–49.
- [46] R.C. Cazarín Brito, A. Davila Legerén, Religiosidad y (re) producción audiovisual. Representaciones sociales en sonidos e imágenes de un culto pentecostal africano, *Gazeta de Antropología* 30 (1) (2014).
- [47] J. López Del Ramo, M.L. y Humanes, Análisis de contenido de la representación fotográfica de la crisis de los refugiados sirios y su incidencia en el framing visual, *Scire* 22 (2) (2016) 87–97.
- [48] S. De Andrés, E. Nos-Aldás, A. y García-matilla, "La imagen transformadora. El poder de cambio social de una fotografía: la muerte de Aylan". *Comunicar, Revista Científica de Educación XXIV* (47) (2016) 29–37.
- [49] M.J. Aguilar Idáñez, Usos y aplicaciones de la Sociología Visual en el ámbito de las migraciones y la construcción de una ciudadanía intercultural, *Tejuelo* 12 (2011) 100–135.
- [50] P. Ricoeur, *Hermenéutica y acción. De la hermenéutica del texto a la hermenéutica de la acción*, Prometeo, Buenos Aires, 2008.
- [51] M. Beltrán Villalba, *Dramaturgia y hermenéutica: para entender la realidad social*, CIS-Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, Madrid, 2016.
- [52] J. Grondin, *A la escucha del sentido: conversaciones con Marc-Antoine Vallée*, Herder, Barcelona, 2014.
- [53] E. Panofsky, *Estudios sobre iconología*, Alianza, Madrid, 1972.
- [54] E. Panofsky, *El significado en las artes visuales*, Alianza, Madrid, 2004.
- [55] T.A. Van Dijk, *Ideología. Una Aproximación Multidisciplinaria*, Gedisa, Barcelona, 1998.
- [56] H. Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time, 25th Anniversary Edition*, Pantheon Books (Random House, New York, 1979).
- [57] T. Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1980.
- [58] G. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1972/1955.
- [59] H. Fehrenbach, D. Rodogno, "A horrific photo of a drowned Syrian child": humanitarian photography and NGO media strategies in historical perspective, *Int. Rev. Red Cross* 97 (900) (2016) 1121–1155.
- [60] A. Ghajarjazi, *The migrant through the looking glass: a material semiotics of the contemporary visual art and media*. Master's Thesis, Utrecht University, Netherlands, 2016.
- [61] M. Mortensen, H.-J. Trenz, *Media morality and visual icons in the age of social media: alan kurdi and the emergence of an impromptu public of moral spectatorship*, *Javnost - The Public* 23 (4) (2016) 343–362, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2016.1247331>.
- [62] M.A. Bock, *Theorising visual framing: contingency, materiality and ideology*, *Vis. Stud.* 35 (1) (2020) 1–12.
- [63] R.M. Entman, *Framing: toward clarification of a fractured paradigm*, *J. Commun.* 43 (4) (1993) 51–58.
- [64] M. Rosler, *Si vivieras aquí. Modos de hacer. Arte crítico, esfera pública y acción directa*, Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, Salamanca, 2001, pp. 173–203.
- [65] A. Biondi, R.T. Teixeira, *Inscrição de alteridade, artefatação do olhar: a fotografia de sujeitos vulneráveis em Lee Jeffries*, vols. 124–138, Galáxia (São Paulo), 2020 pgs.125 ff.
- [66] A. Esteban Sebastia, *8 años viviendo en la calle: Proyecto fotográfico*, Castellón de la Plana: Universitat Jaume I, 2021.
- [67] K. Schmidt, *Seeing the 'homeless city'? Some critical remarks on the visual production of homelessness through photography*, *European Journal of Homelessness* 9 (2) (2015).
- [68] J. Doherty, *El origen del sinhogarismo: perspectivas europeas*, *Documentación social* 138 (2005) 41–61.
- [69] J. Bretherton, *Reconsidering gender in homelessness*, *European Journal of Homelessness* 11 (No. 1) (2017). May 2017.
- [70] K. Hermans, et al., *Migration and homelessness: measuring the intersections*, *European Journal of Homelessness* 14 (No. 3) (2020) 2020.
- [71] S. Bachiller, *Exclusión, aislamiento social y personas sin hogar, Aportes desde el método etnográfico*. Zeerbitzuan. *Revista de Servicios Sociales* 47 (2010) 63–73.
- [72] Z. Bauman, *La Globalización Consecuencias Humanas*, México F.C.E., 2001.
- [73] J. Ponce, G. Fernández, *Derecho urbanístico, derecho a la vivienda y personas sin hogar. Nuevos desarrollos y perspectivas en España a la vista de las novedades europeas en la materia*, *Revista de Derecho Urbanístico y Medio Ambiente* 255 (2010) 39–78.
- [74] L. Cortés, "Indagaciones sobre la exclusión residencial", *Arxius de Ciències Socials* 10 (2004) 39–53.
- [75] D. Clapham, *Housing pathways: a post modern analytical framework*, *Hous. Theor. Soc.* 19 (2) (2002) 57–68.
- [76] O. García, G. y Brändle, *Relevance of the use of ETHOS in the assessment of housing exclusion: proposals for discussion from the Spanish case*, *European Journal of Homelessness* 8 (2) (2014) 191–208.
- [77] J. Gerrard, D. y Farrugia, *The 'lamentable sight' of homelessness and the society of the spectacle*, *Urban Stud.* 52 (12) (2015) 2219–2233.
- [78] Z. Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*, Blakwell Publishing, Cambridge, 2004.
- [79] J.A.R. Cárce, *Images of the emptied society*. Alicante (Spain), local and global example of the consequences of the coronavirus, *Heliyon* 7 (5) (2021) e06951.
- [80] I. Vasilachis de Gialdino, *Pobres, Pobreza, Identidad Y Representaciones Sociales*, Barcelona, Gedisa, 2003.
- [81] R. Best, *Situation or social problem: the influence of events on media coverage of homelessness*, *Soc. Probl.* 57 (1) (2010) 74–91.
- [82] K. Schmidt, *Seeing the 'homeless city'? Some critical remarks on the visual production of homelessness through photography*, *European Journal of Homelessness* 9 (2) (2015) 283–303.
- [83] Q. Tyminski, V. Hung, R. Drummond, *Visual research methodologies for homelessness. A synthesis of the literature*, *European Journal of Homelessness* 16 (1) (2022) 199–215.
- [84] Donis A. Dondis, *La sintaxis de la imagen*, Gustavo Gili, Barcelona, 2018.
- [85] C. Jewitt, R. Oyama, *Visual meaning: a social semiotic approach*, *Handbook of visual analysis* 134 (2001) 156.
- [86] D. Karadzhev, *Expanding the methodological repertoire of participatory research into homelessness: the utility of the mobile phone diary*, *Qual. Soc. Work* 20 (3) (2020) 813–831.