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Special issue  
Visual motifs

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## From the handshake to the kiss: Visual motifs of affect in representations of politics in the Spanish press

### Abstract

In the last few years, affect has entered the field of politics through both the media and political actors themselves. This article is based on the hypothesis that the images of affect that illustrate contemporary political narratives in the media reflect different visual motifs which are linked to an iconographic tradition that began in the art world. Through the iconographic analysis of images published in the three newspapers in Spain with the largest general readership (*El País*, *El Mundo*, and *La Vanguardia*) from 2011 to 2017, this article identifies three visual motifs of affect: the handshake, the hug, and the kiss. The study of these motifs highlights the survival of certain forms of emotion that are easily recognisable and engage with a longstanding iconographic tradition. At the same time, the article inquires into the meanings derived from these iconographies and their implications on the representation of politics and of political leaders. The proliferation of motifs of affect in politics then connects with both the mediatisation of politics and an affective turn, which invites us to re-examine the role of emotion in the contemporary public sphere.

### Keywords

Iconography, political communication, gesture, affective turn, emotion, public sphere, visual motif.

### 1. Introduction

In the book *Mise en Scène and Film Style* (2014), Adrian Martin stresses the importance of the gaze in Barack Obama's town hall meetings during the 2008 elections. Martin finds Obama's performative capacity compelling: he directs his gaze left and right towards the audience attending the

event and then looks straight into the television cameras; it is an organic way to include the live audience and home viewers into a single mass (2014, p. 157). Just as the gaze may be a core feature in a politician's *mise en scène*, affective gesturality is also quite important. Obama uses a highly characteristic gesturality through which he presents himself as a charismatic yet approachable and compassionate leader, such as smiling greetings from a distance while waving with his arm raised, hugging his fellow party mates or family, or engaging in close contact with his hands. Since the late 1990s, we can see how affect, which traditionally took place in intimate settings like the family, neighbours, or friends (Sennett, 1978, p. 328), has shifted into the public sphere and become one of the core factors in understanding and

exercising politics. This is a gradual evolution which has clearly come to the fore in the past ten years, associated with the mediatisation of politics in a context in which the consolidation of entertainment and the social media have transformed the ways of presenting oneself and communicating in the public sphere.

As a space traditionally defined by the distinction between the public and private, the rational and the emotional, politics is currently undergoing a transformation. Different authors have pointed out how “political presentation increasingly conforms to media norms of presentation which emphasize the performance of emotion” (Wahl-Jørgensen, 2019, p. 29). This proliferation of images of affect leads us to ask what affective gestures have taken root in the iconographic imagery of contemporary politics. The purpose of this article is to analyse the representation of affect in media images of domestic (Spanish) and international politicians and to identify the main ‘visual motifs’ associated with emotion, as well as the iconographic bloodlines upon which they are constructed. This analysis will provide a better understanding of how politics is represented in the media and the role played by affect today.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

Within the context of the ‘third age’ of political communication, which Blumler and Kavanagh claim started in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the “media-saturated style of politics” (1999, p. 213) is driving a change in the way images of politicians are constructed and how they address the electorate. Values like approachability, conflict, drama, and personalisation permeate the media representation of politics (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). At a time when images proliferate and abound, the entertainment industry offers a web of conventions that prioritise the concrete, individual and psychological over the abstract and depersonalised in political processes in general (van Zoonen, 2005).

In this redefinition of codes, the very nature of politicians is being transformed, turning them into ‘celebrities,’ that is, assimilating the patterns on which entertainment stars’ images are built, in a dialogue between their exceptionalism and their quality as “common folk” (Oliva, Pérez-Latorre, & Besalú, 2015). Wood, Corbett and Flinders (2016) also underscore this paradoxical tension between the ordinary and the extraordinary, in which celebrity politicians seek to gainsay their presumed insulation from citizens’ everyday challenges. According to Street (2004), this signals the shift from a model that refers to the political figure’s professional capacities to one which stresses the similarities between the leader and the people. ‘Celebrification’ is also associated with a kind of emotional openness which blurs the boundaries between the public and private spheres (Oliva, Pérez-Latorre, & Besalú, 2015). Inasmuch as the public’s bond with popular culture pivots around expression and emotionalism, “we now seek certain kinds of emotionalized experience from politics that we have not done in the past” (Richards, 2008, p. 361). However, Richards (2007) clarifies that the politician’s expression of emotions also requires them to manage and maintain them properly, striking a balance between the human/private aspect of their persona and their pragmatic/public side in this “emotional labour.”

In the traditional dichotomy between reason/emotion, the exercise of political power has marginalised the latter by considering political passion to be associated with blind idealisation or utopian thinking (Demertzis, 2013). Likewise, within this dichotomy, emotionality is typically associated with the feminine, confirming the cultural alterity assigned to women as part of the gender binary: “because emotion is constructed as relatively chaotic, irrational, and antisocial, its existence vindicates authority and legitimates the need for control” (Lutz, 2008). Erika Falk (2010) finds that this association with emotionality has also been highlighted by the media when questioning the competence of female presidential candidates, an aspect which has helped to construct women as ‘external’ to the political arena (see, too, García Beaudoux, D’Adamo & Gavensky, 2017).

However, in around the late 1990s, the hierarchisation imposed by the reason/emotion dichotomy fell victim to a transdisciplinary pivot towards affect and emotion, often called the “affective turn”, which entails understanding “that what we imagine to be individual and specific –impulses, attitudes, emotions, and feelings– in fact have a social, historical and therefore shared dimension” (Greenwald Smith, 2011, p. 423). Nonetheless, this affective turn has not yet led to a true redefinition of the political that would erode the gender exclusions which have characterised this arena.

The possibility of an emotional and affective display does not lie solely in the actual display of affection but engages in dialogue with Richards’ contention and the performance of sincere emotion that Ellis (2009) discusses. Thus, the visual side of this emotion meshes with the existence of a ‘political scene’ as the site for “the pantomimes of party political knockabout, and for ritualised communication” (Richards, 2007, p. 102). Part of this scene reinforces the need to further explore the visual representations of emotion and affect, which are necessarily anchored in the corporality of political figures, both individually and interactionally, in order to identify the stories on international and intranational bonds. As part of this corporality, this study is interested in the gestures, facial and corporal expressions (kinesics) and interpersonal space management (proxemics) in the physical interactions among different political figures. As Jürgen Streeck (2008) states, the attention that the public and media pay to the body language of political figures is not matched by a broad scholarly corpus studying it.

However, given that neither images nor gestures are created in a vacuum devoid of meaning and history, understanding politicians’ public presentation and the role that affect plays in it also entails analysing the iconographic tradition into which these gestures are inserted and how these motifs provide a better understanding of the images and the values that they embody. When captured by photographers and disseminated in the press, expressions like hugs, handshakes and kisses are inserted into broad, rhizomatic networks of visual traditions and perpetuate aesthetic patterns that are repeated in the mass media while also mobilising a given narrative (Balló & Bergala, 2016).

### 3. Methodology

With the goal of studying the media representations of affect in politics, an iconographic analysis was performed of the images published on the front pages of the general press in Spain. This analysis is based on the concept of ‘visual motif,’ an “iconographic model of cultural representation which is transmitted and reinterpreted through the history of images, fostering narrative and emotional recognition” (Balló, Salvadó & Cairol, 2020, p. 60). The motif, which itself draws from an iconographic tradition of visual analysis, is affiliated with the considerations of historians like Aby Warburg (2010) and Erwin Panofsky (1972), who are interested in “image transfers, visual migration, or, more poignantly, the mobility of visuals across time and space” (Müller, 2011, p. 284). In this sense, the Warburgian concept of the *Pathosformel* assumes the existence of emotional formulas anchored in given graphic representations which are capable of re-emerging over time and space as residues or survivals of an imagery or visual memory (Didi-Huberman, 2017). The analytical method around these images, systematised by Panofsky, instituted stages from the identification of formal and structural contents of the images and recognition of their thematic content to their iconological interpretation, which reveals the image’s conscious and unconscious meanings (Marías, 1996, p. 106). This article is grounded upon the hypothesis that the images of affect illustrated in contemporary political stories in the media correspond to different

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<sup>1</sup> The terms ‘affect’ and ‘emotion’ tend to be considered synonymous (Lünenborg & Maier, 2017), even though the former has been understood as ‘the more embodied, unformed and less conscious dimension of human feeling, whereas emotion concerns the feelings which are more conscious since they are more anchored in language and meaning’ (Hoggett & Thompson, 2012, pp. 2–3).

visual motifs that interlink with an iconographic tradition that originated in the art world and posit certain relational dynamics among the figures featured in them.

While several authors have taken an interest in applying this method of analysis of political representation in recent years thanks to a “Warburg revival” (Müller, 2011), they have primarily focused on its ‘vertical’ dimension: representations of terror (Ginzburg, 2015) and dominance and despotic hierarchy (Bredekamp, 2007; see, too, Fleckner, Warnke & Ziegler, 2011). However, this article is interested in how the ‘horizontal’ between the political figure and the people is expressed through everyday actions (Salvadó-Romero, Fernández-Moreno & Tedesco-Barlocco, 2020) and in terms of affect in a context in which, as we have seen, politicians tend to want to show themselves as “regular folks” (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999).

To conduct our iconographic study of the visual motifs of affect in politics, we started with a sample comprised of all the images published on the front pages of the print editions of the three general newspapers with the largest readership in Spain (EGM, 2017) from 2011 to 2017: *El País*, *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia* (henceforth, EP, EM and LV)<sup>2</sup>. Of the total of 2,889 politics-related images published on the front pages of these three newspapers, a total of 598 images associated with affect, showing political figures making gestures of affect, were chosen. Three main motifs were chosen: handshakes, hugs, and kisses (a total of 357 images). The choice of these three gestures reflects their widespread presence in the sample; their interactive nature, which enables the corporality of political bonds to be analysed; and their iconographic baggage. In this sense, each motif will be analysed and related to referents in painting and sculpture to shed better light not only on their origins but also on the connotations and meanings they evoke. These three motifs do not exhaust all the ways affect can be represented in politics, but they do provide an understanding of the iconographic mechanisms by which the media represent politics in the contemporary context of the affective turn and mediatisation.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Handshakes

Handshaking has become one of the prime ways of visually narrating an encounter between two political personalities. This everyday gesture, which, as we shall see below, illustrates multiple meanings (greetings, reconciliation, congratulations, appreciation, farewell, or good wishes for the future [Morris, 2020, pp. 16-18]), takes on other meanings and nuances in the realm of politics: equity and a willingness to embark on political negotiations, the scope of a given agreement or the road towards peace between two clashing sides (countries or political parties). Even though the gesture has strong roots as political liturgy as designed by protocol offices and has little to do with affect a priori, it is a gesture of initial (minimum) contact which, depending on how it is used, can foreshadow or summarise the mood of a political encounter. As Herman Roodenburg states, “shaking hands and other ‘nonsensical minutiae’ were indeed as important as matters of state. In diplomatic circles they even *were* matters of state” (1991, p. 179). The more diplomatic side of the gesture is perfectly illustrated in the sample analysed, with 200 images containing the motif of politicians shaking hands, 126 of which show the gesture between a political duo from two different countries and/or disparate ideologies. In these images, we recognise the motif found on a relief dating from the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC, where the Assyrian King Shalmaneser III shakes the hand of the Babylonian King Marduk-zâkir-šumi I to commemorate the close bonds between the two kingdoms (Morris, 2020, p. 17). They

<sup>2</sup> This article summarises part of the results of the research project “Los motivos visuales en la esfera pública. Producción y circulación de imágenes del poder en España, 2011-2017” (Visual Motifs in the Public Sphere. Production and Circulation of Images of Power in Spain, 2011-2017) (CSO2017-88876-P), whose main goal is to analyse the recurrence, production and circulation of the visual motifs used to portray power in the media by tracing their iconographic roots in film, television, and the visual tradition.

are both depicted in profile, looking into each other's eyes, holding staffs and with swords at their waists, one seemingly a replica of the other. The equity, firmness (staffs) and latent conflict (the swords) summarise some of the aspects that the motif put into circulation. The meaning of this initial gesture survives on many of the front pages analysed, where senior political officials from different countries shake hands before the media. The formal pattern is also repeated today, and the profile shot of the political duo, their bodies erect and making eye contact, is a constant<sup>3</sup>.

The presence of the swords (which both kings are wearing) in the genesis of the motif also evokes the iconography of the handshake as a sign of peace, a signal of their desire not to use their weapons (Morris, 2020; Roodenburg, 1991). The original 'being disarmed' has a direct correspondence in the political iconography with handshaking at peace treaties or other disarmament processes. In the sample analysed, the rapprochement between the USA and Cuba stands out with a handshake between Obama and Raúl Castro at two points in time: the first in December 2013 and the second (and definitive) within the Seventh Summit of the Americas in April 2015 (both of which appeared in all three newspapers). In the first handshake, captured from a distance as if it were a casual encounter, there is no awareness of the scene and its historical importance, compared to the neatness of the second, which clearly refers to the idea of the self-representation of power.

A compositional variation on the handshake was introduced in the realm of journalistic photography, and specifically in international politics: the triangle. This occurred in the 1993 Oslo Accords with the iconic photograph of the leaders of Palestine (Arafat) and Israel (Rabin) shaking hands with Bill Clinton in the centre. Following John Bulwer's thinking (1974), the person in the background who serves as a witness to this gestural moment is also a prime player, the guide of both parties' 'internal desire' to reach this outward expression of peace. In the sample analysed, we find the same triangular composition, albeit less set up, with the handshake between Shimon Peres (Israel) and Mohammed Abbas (Palestine) with John Kerry (US Vice-President) in the centre (EP 27/05/13), and in the peace agreement between the government of Colombia and the FARC, with the central figure of Raúl Castro as the leaders Manuel Santos and *Timochenko* hold the documents in their hands (EP and EM 24/06/16).

One of the most recognisable pictorial manifestations of the motif as a way to narrate reconciliation is in the painting by Bartholomeus van der Helst, *Banquet of the Amsterdam Civic Guard in Celebration of the Peace of Münster* (1648). In it, the mayor of Amsterdam is shaking the hand of his lieutenants in a relaxed atmosphere fostered by the fact that they are both seated, one holding the 'horn of peace' and the other with his other hand on his chest. The van der Helst work introduces the dimension of friendship into the gesture, which attains a more emotional than purely diplomatic dimension.

Beyond this pacifying dimension in the van der Helst painting, handshakes shifted towards emotivity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the gesture became systematised among citizens. As Morris highlights, until that time "the handshake was considered too 'egalitarian' and out of place in such a stratified society centuries before" (2020, p. 16). Far from the connotations of elite imagery, the political duo shaking hands may refer to both the official nature of an encounter between peers (harking back to the root of the motif) and the closeness and affect between them (in a more modern dimension<sup>4</sup>). Therefore, on the front covers analysed, we

<sup>3</sup> However, in some cases the self-awareness of the symbolic value of the handshake has led the motif to mutate so the parties shaking hands are looking directly at the camera. The eye contact between the two in its iconographic genesis has shifted towards a direct gaze at the camera, as we see in the encounters between Zapatero-Blair (EM 29/11/13) and Obama-Xi Jinping (LV 04/09/16).

<sup>4</sup> Films, which have the ability to zoom in on the gesture and show it close-up, often exploits this iconography by placing it at the climax of films which show a reconciliation between the characters and the acceptance and acknowledgement of mutual friendship. In the entire sample analysed, just one image contains a close-up of a handshake (EM 29/08/2016), decontextualising its figures and the environment. This is the investiture agreement between Rajoy and Rivera, and it reveals that enlarging the gesture is not a common practice in the press.

see that many of the political duos shaking hands are also making other gestures, reinforcing the expression of emotions that are far from any hierarchical liturgy. In fact, this more empathetic and emotional variation, where the left hand (or vice-versa) is placed atop the right hands being shaken is traditionally associated with the sphere of politics to give an impression of extreme friendliness (Morris, 2020, p. 16). The hands, which become a symptom of human behaviour (Balló & Bergala, 2016, p. 365), reveal that the greater the expression of touch during the gesture, the greater the (ideological) proximity assumed between the two parties (Welton, 2000, p. 101). Thus, for example, European politics in the late stages of the economic crisis was visually represented on the one hand by duos (Merkel-Rajoy [EP 07/09/12], Sarkozy-Merkel [EM 17/08/11], Rajoy-Hollande [EP 29/05/13]) who are literally showing their affinity and alignment via handshakes with intense contact, and on the other by duos who show cold distance, such as between Greece and the European Union. Suffice it to analyse the front pages of the three newspapers on 31 January 2015, where we see the Greek Minister of the Economy (Yanis Varoufakis) and the President of the Eurogroup (Jeroen Dijsselbloem) in a brief, distant handshake where they never quite make eye contact. Unlike van der Helst's painting, where the two figures are shaking hands while looking into each others' eyes, in these two pictures the complete lack of visual contact reinforces the absence of physical contact. In this case, quite tellingly, none of the three newspapers chose to show the moment of contact during the greeting but instead only the empty space between the two hands before or after it.

Eye contact between both political leaders is a fundamental aspect of the meaning of handshakes. This can clearly be seen in many of the front pages analysed, in which the clasped hands are in the interpretative background and the faces and/or visual contact between the two leaders is what primarily constructs the meaning: this is clear in the Obama-Putin encounter (EP 06/09/13, EP 12/11/14) and the report on the ties between Rajoy (as the President of the Spanish government) and Sánchez (as the opposition leader) (EM, EP and LV 13/02/16). In both pictures, the handshakes are the symptoms of disagreement more than a desire to reach an understanding; the absence of eye contact and the tenseness of the faces turn the gesture into a sign of cooling relations between both countries in the former and parties in the latter. The rupture of the iconographic tradition is noticeable by the conflictive connotations implicit in them.

The meaning of this gesture shifts when it is exchanged between politicians and citizens. Within the context of electoral campaigns, we find the handshaking variation associated with the *celebrification* of political leaders on 21 front pages. Given that contemporary celebrity culture has been upheld on the balance between the extraordinary and the ordinary, the gesture of handshaking has become extremely important. On the one hand, it connects with the idea of being 'touched' by someone unique (based on the mediated image built around them), a gesture imbued with a kind of sacralisation which connects with what was known as the 'king's touch' in the Middle Ages, which was capable of healing (Brogan, 2015). This still survives today via the culture of celebrity. On the other hand, shaking hands also links up with the idea of the politician's normality and the expression of equity between the powerful and the people. The connotation of this gesture often depends on the context in which it takes place. For example, images of politicians at rallies in close contact with participants and shaking their hands are quite common in an iconography similar to that used with music or sports stars. In contrast, when the politicians are walking around streets, markets or squares, handshaking humanises them, dovetailing with this gesture's more egalitarian tradition. During the electoral campaign, both Rajoy (EP 07/05/11) and Pérez-Rubalcaba (EM 03/10/11), and later Sánchez (EP 05/12/15), were featured shaking hands, which on the one hand presented them as rock stars of the public sphere to citizens, while also literally situating them on the street as just another citizen.

#### 4.2. The hug

The hug is a gesture that connotes more affection and intimacy than the handshake, which is more formal. It is a very common motif in the representations of public actors and officials on the front pages of Spanish newspapers: 119 front pages show it. In them, we find different gradations of hugs depicted, which reflect different scales of intimacy and intensity of the emotions expressed.

The half-hug or side hug (shown in 36 pictures) is the prime way of representing politicians at rallies or celebrating election results alongside fellow party members. It is a form of gesturality that evokes (and performs) the hug that expressed solidarity and 'fraternity' associated with the symbolism of leftist movements (*The Strike at Creusot* by Jules Adler, 1899). Yet it is also used to represent friendship (*Friendship* by Jef Leempoels, 1896, or *L'amitié* by Pablo Picasso, 1908): a shoulder-to-shoulder hug with the arms resting on the shoulders, representing camaraderie yet without the intimacy inherent in other kinds of hugs.

A second type of hug is associated with the visual representation of celebration or victory. These are closer hugs, often photographed to capture people drawing closer to each other; although there is still some distance between them in the pictures, affectionate physical contact is evoked. Hugs between politicians and citizens are often shown during elections to simultaneously represent the voters'/citizens' support and the leader's proximity (one example is Sánchez hugging a citizen at a rally [LV, 20/05/15]). Allowing oneself to be hugged and hugging citizens is a more approachable and horizontal kind of greeting than waving or shaking hands (even though the hierarchy can be reinstated by nonreciprocal hugs or keeping a vertical distance).

Finally, the hugs that represent the maximum degree of intimacy and emotion are frontal-proximal hugs (20 pictures), in which the two bodies merge into a single volume while each person's head is on the other's back, or partially frontal hugs, in which both heads are looking forward. This type of hug is the prime way of representing 'succession' at the helm of a political party or government; examples include the images of hugs between Artur Mas and Jordi Pujol (LV 14/12/13), Mas and Carles Puigdemont (EM 11/01/16), José María Aznar and Rajoy (EP, 22/01/11) and Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff (EP 02/01/11), which evoke intense, shared emotion (Morris, 2020, p. 22). They represent harmony and continuity, as well as the idea of generational succession. At the same time, because they are reciprocal gestures, the two politicians are often represented on equal footing.

If we focus on the gender dimension, the motif of the hug associated with a reciprocal, horizontal gesture may foster representations of political men and women on an egalitarian level (indeed, Angela Merkel is depicted this way with other European leaders numerous times). In contrast, we find many fewer images of women hugging each other, only four of them in the entire sample, a consequence not only of their lower presence in politics but also their invisibilisation in the media. When politicians hug their partners or children, these hugs are situated within a frame of normative heterosexual relationships in which the woman is 'outside' the political arena, as in Pérez-Rubalcaba, the new PSOE leader, hugging his wife (EM and EP 10/07/11), Feijóo after winning the elections in Galicia (EM 26/09/16) and Sánchez hugging his daughters after being elected the new PSOE leader (LV 28/07/14)<sup>5</sup>.

Focusing on the gender dimension also reveals how by evoking different iconographic traditions, the media can reinscribe political women in traditional gender roles and stereotypes by limiting the 'horizontal,' equalising meaning of the hug. These images include most notably the picture of the succession between da Silva and Rousseff at the helm of the Brazilian government (EP, 02/01/2011). In it, da Silva is concealing his face in Rousseff's chest while she grasps him by the neck, her face rising above. In this way, Rousseff is situated at

<sup>5</sup> In this case, we found no examples in the sample of images that include female politicians celebrating election results by hugging their partners.

slightly higher than da Silva, who is depicted like a boy hugging his mother. This is an ambiguous image, which on the one hand shows Rousseff on a higher vertical plane than da Silva, underscoring a kind of hierarchical inequality, yet on the other hand also evoking iconographic motifs of motherhood, which are particularly common in Christian religious paintings: the embrace between the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child, depicted in a frontal hug in which their cheeks are touching, as young Jesus is stroking his mother's face (such as Titian's *Virgin and Child*, 1540). In this way, Rousseff is represented here via a traditional iconography which associates femininity with motherhood, tenderness and care, and which reframes her image via the 'role trap' of the mother (García Beaudoux, 2014).

The idea of motherhood as a 'role trap' for political women contrasts with the idea of the 'politician as father,' which Lakoff presents as an entrenched metaphor in representations of leadership (Lakoff, 2008, pp. 15-55). And this metaphor is expressed precisely via the hug<sup>6</sup>, especially in the images of hugs between male politicians and citizens associated with grief and consolation: Obama embracing and drawing a female US citizen to his chest after Hurricane Sandy (EP 01/11/12) or hugging a Japanese citizen at the event commemorating and pardoning the dropping of the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima (LV and EP 28/05/16). In the Obama photographs, the hierarchy is also reinstated via the vertical difference established, evoking the mother-son iconographies mentioned above, or father-son ones such as *Shylock and Jessica* by Maurycy Gottlieb (1876) and the *Portrait of Charles Hayard and His Daughter Marguerite* by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1815).

From a gender perspective, these images of Obama (and Rousseff) contrast with the photograph of Carme Chacón, the Minister of Defence, embracing a Spanish soldier, whom she is consoling over the death of two of his colleagues in a terrorist attack in Afghanistan (EP 28/06/11). This is a horizontal, reciprocal hug which underscores Chacón's empathy, yet instead of evoking the visual motifs of motherhood it draws from other ways of representing female leadership.

Likewise, similar to the handshake, the hug is a gesture that reveals *relations* between politicians (73 front covers). They evoke political acts like pacts, alliances and negotiations, following the trend towards the personalisation, narrativisation and dramatisation of politics. One interesting example is the images of leaders from different countries, especially within the European Commission or diplomatic trips, in which proxemics is used to represent cordial, harmonious relations, conflict or power inequality. In these photographs, we find more distant hugs and expressions of contained cordiality, closer to the sphere of traditional politics.

Even though the hug often represents relations between peers, it can also show hierarchical relations via non-reciprocal gestures in which one actor physically dominates the other. This type of image was particularly used during the years of economic crisis to represent the negotiations of the harsh austerity measures that the European Commission imposed on countries like Greece and Spain. One of these photographs shows Sarkozy grasping José Luís Rodríguez Zapatero's arms (EM 27/10/11) to represent the banking measures imposed on Spain. In another picture, Matteo Renzi, the Italian Prime Minister, is grasping the elbow of Alexis Tsipras, Greek Prime Minister, as they laugh, showing how the positions of the European Commission and Greece were drawing closer yet also how Greece lacked power in the negotiations (LV 26/06/15). In contrast, on another front page we see Merkel and François Hollande conjoined in a reciprocal hug, at the same level, representing the alliance between Germany and France and their leadership in Europe (LV 09/07/12). These images dovetail with an iconographic tradition in which the hug represents a religious and/or political-military alliance, as in the sculpture *Portrait of the Four Tetrarchs* (3<sup>rd</sup> century AD),

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<sup>6</sup> Morris claims that the hug "originates in infancy, when a father or mother holds the baby affectionately or protectively" (2020, p. 22).

with four leaders from Diocletian's Late Roman Empire embracing laterally, as if they were joined as one, and in *The Embrace of the Apostles Peter and Paul* by Angelos Akotantos (15<sup>th</sup> century), symbolising the Eastern and Western Churches (Morris, 2020).

Finally, just as with the handshake, the hug is also shown as a way of representing peace agreements or pacts among allies. We find this motif in the iconography associated with independence processes in Latin America (the Embrace of Acatempan) and Spain (the Embrace of Vergara). The hug as a symbol of peace and the end of conflict is also associated with forgiveness. A more recent example is *El abrazo* (Juan Genovés, 1976), the symbol of Spain's Transition which represents the end of the Franco dictatorship, amnesty, reconciliation, and hope at the beginning of a new democratic regime. This iconography is evoked in the photographs in the sample showing embraces between electoral opponents or rivals. Rivals hugging after the results are announced, one the winner and the other the loser, project the image of being a good loser, unity, and civility: they are pleased for their opponent and smile. When a different political party takes over the government, we find distant, contained hugs, such as Rajoy and Zapatero (EM and LV 21/11/12) and Rajoy and the socialist spokesman Antonio Hernando (LV 30/10/16). These images stand in opposition to the polarisation of politics and the tendency to spotlight negative emotions, especially anger (Ahmed, 2004; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019).

### 4.3. The kiss

Even though kisses appear less often than the other expressions of affect in the sample, with just 38 front pages, its diverse range of representations reveals the ways the same practice reflects different aspects of political power, from kisses that represent glimpses of true intimacy to those that show not necessarily affection but ideological or strategic alignment. This very diversity becomes a microcosm of the roles and forms the kiss has taken on throughout history and cultures, given that, as Bremmer and Roodenburg (1991) state, the kiss is not unequivocally generated as an expression of desire or love but can also be a rite of courtesy, friendship or veneration, or a tool for the sake of peace, reconciliation or alliance, like handshakes and hugs.

However, some of the most memorable representations of kisses show their romantic-sexual facet, such as Rodin's *The Kiss* (1882) and Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss* (1907-1908), as well as the mythology associated with love or desire, as in the sculpture *Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss* by Antonio Canova (1787-1793). Photographs such as *V-ŷ Day in Times Square* (Alfred Eisenstaedt, 1945) and *Le baiser de l'hôtel de ville* (Robert Doisneau, 1950) also highlight the romantic-sexual side of the gesture, but as Imma Merino notes (in Balló & Bergala, 2016), film is the art form that has best represented the kiss, even as a metonym of consummation in contexts of censorship, with the kiss preceding the fade-out which suggests the sexual act offscreen (Bou, 2019). Despite its traditional romantic overtones, the artistic archaeology of the kiss also denotes the polysemy of the gesture (Frijhoff, 1991), which was used in mediaeval representations of the 'kiss of peace,' a ritualised blessing or betrayal, as in Judas's kiss of Christ (Fra Angelico, *The Kiss of Judas*, 1450; Michelangelo Caravaggio, *The Taking of Christ*, 1602).

In political imagery, the practice of kissing babies, which is widespread in US presidential culture (Porter, 2019), connects with some of the desirable attributes of a political leader, such as reliability and their role as a family figure. Another typically political application, the socialist fraternal kiss, was consolidated inside and outside the USSR as a rite of equity and sign of proximity. Its infiltration into the realm of street art via the graffiti of Dmitri Vrubel *My God, Help Me to Survive This Deadly Love* (1990), which portrays the kiss between Leonid Brezhnev and Erich Honecker in 1979, cemented the fraternal kiss as a motif in itself, usually applied with a parodic intention appealing to a fictitious homoeroticism.

These two types of kisses, though not representative of the sample, help us understand its role within politics as a symbol of both the capacity and suitability of the political figure and the bonds of loyalty and collusion with their colleagues. Thus, the practice of political leaders kissing their spouses is aimed at bolstering the politician's ideal qualities and highlighting their patriarchal identity, in a context dominated by men. The kiss between political leaders and their spouses is repeated on five front covers, all of them involving heterosexual men and their female partners in an act "at once banal and iconic," as Morris and Sloop say, which "represents metonymically the shared cultural embrace of heteronormative values and behavior" (2006, p. 2).

As "appropriate gender behaviour" (Morris & Sloop, 2006), the heterosexual kiss takes on a triumphalist connotation on some of the front pages analysed, occasionally framed within the context of political conquests, such as the case of Rajoy's victory in 2011, represented by the kiss with his wife (EP and LV 21/11/11), Elvira Fernández Balboa, and the presidential investiture of Macri (EM 11/12/15), also captured in his kiss with his wife, Juliana Awada, before a gaggle of citizens. Those kisses, then, not only become an affective practice born of a moment of happiness but also validate the political figure's heteronormativity and family stability. As Aidan Smith says regarding political candidates, "adherence to the heteronormative paradigm of gender performance and sexuality [is] required" (2017, p. 1), so they highlight their representations as a father, mother or spouse at the heart of a functional nuclear family. That family identity, Smith adds, enables them to overcome obstacles posed by other undesirable personal attributes, suggesting their role as an exemplary member of society and an emotionally stable subject capable of maintaining order –mostly patriarchal– inside and outside the home.

The form of a kiss is also important: in four of the five front covers analysed<sup>7</sup>, the politicians and their partner are kissing on the lips, appealing to the universal gesture of romantic love, but their bodies are facing towards the camera, showing the public aspect of this display of intimacy. Unlike these kisses, others like the unusually intense kiss between Al and Tipper Gore at a 2000 Democratic convention given its context, clarify the boundary between fleeting evocations of the politician's private life and the suggestive outburst noted by Richards (2008).

The kiss on the cheek, featured on seven front pages, reveals its ritualistic nature, albeit with a greater degree of proximity than other greetings. A signal of both corporal and ideological or strategic closeness, the kiss on the cheek poses a compositional difficulty similar to a hug by the need to visually hierarchise the figures. However, the dissection of the gesture between Merkel and Sarkozy (LV 18/06/11), aiming to portray their reconciliation, suggests an equitable representation of the leaders, while the front-on kisses between Jean-Claude Juncker and Elena Salgado (LV 12/07/11) and Rajoy and Esperanza Aguirre (LV and EM 11/04/12) suggest a corporal management which refers to the performance of affect.

Just as the politician-spouse and the cheek kiss are aligned with the tradition of the political representation of the kiss, a third version deriving from the gesture, defined here as the 'fake kiss,' enables us to identify the malleability of the visual motif and the evocative power of incomplete gestures. The 'fake kiss,' identified in 23 of the front pages analysed, refers to the photographic shot of the moment prior to a hug or a kiss on the cheek between two figures, in which freezing them as they are drawing close creates the appearance of two faces fusing in a kiss on the lips. Thus, a hug or a kiss on the cheek are resignified by the image to evoke a gesture in which, just like Canova's sculpture, two bodies heading towards a kiss are frozen in its preamble. In the 'fake kiss,' however, the participants are political figures without any amorous or sexual bonds, or even anonymous political and civil leaders, and the

<sup>7</sup> The only kiss not on the lips came with the victory of a female politician, Theresa May, who shared a hug and a kiss on the forehead with her husband (LV 12/07/16).

motif reveals a pragmatic facet by exposing both faces mostly equitably and contributing to overcoming the compositional impediments of the hug or the kiss on the cheek, although that very arrangement of the figures suggests the sexual nature of the encounter. Even though both the public and the media are aware that a kiss on the lips never happened, the meaning of the ‘fake kiss’ is articulated around creating an image that suggests something that did not actually happen; because it depends on this frozen moment, the motif does not exist beyond the photographic image, as the audiovisual would suggest the realisation of a different act (a kiss on the cheek or a hug).

Just like the kiss on the lips, the ‘fake kiss’ is dominated by a clear heteronormative inclination: on the front pages analysed, only one portrays a ‘fake kiss’ between two individuals of the same sex, Lucas Papademos and Mario Monti (LV 12/11/11). However, even though there is a possible association with the homoerotic nature of *My God, Help Me to Survive This Deadly Love*, it is diluted by the handshake between the two. While the kiss between political figures and their partners reveals a perpetuation of the leaders’ heteronormativity and family functionality, this evocation appeals to heterosexuality from another perspective by sexualising encounters that were originally not sexualised, such as between Merkel and Obama (EM 25/04/16) and the German chancellor and Rajoy (LV 07/09/12) or Macron (EM 30/06/17). Even though that sexualization of the bond continues to operate in the metaphorical sphere of agreement, the insistence on showing female figures in ‘fake kisses’ also connects with the sexualisation of politics, as suggested by the Merkel examples. This aligns with Lachover, who says “women politicians are depicted in the same gendered, sexualized, sex-stereotyped manner as are women in general” (2014, p. 16). In view of these differences, even though the sexualisation of a non-sexual act in male-female dynamics distorts the encounter similarly for both figures, the cultural implications of that representation are not the same for both genders: in the ‘fake kiss’, men are seen as exceptionally placed in an instance of apocryphal sexual desire with their female colleagues, while women confirm a pre-existing representational tendency for their gender.

## 5. Conclusions

As we have seen, both shaking hands and hugging are motifs shown on the front pages of Spanish newspapers to represent relations among politicians, or between them and citizens. In the case of the hug, this evokes a tradition associated with certain iconographic motifs, both religious and secular: the maternal hug, the hug of consolation, the hug of friendship and the hug as a form of political-military alliance. Handshakes, in turn, fluctuate from a greeting between two senior political officials to an expression of friendship between them, as well as reconciliation. The variations on both motifs found in the photographs express political processes in an individual note and contribute to the emotionalisation of politics and politicians. In this respect, there has been a clear evolution from more diplomatic and militarised gestures, such as the Roman salute (Winkler, 2009), to handshakes and hugs, based on the utmost closeness. Likewise, the proliferation of these motifs shows how today the signs of affect, either among politicians or between them and citizens, evoke the precarious balance struck between verticality and horizontality, extraordinariness and ordinariness, which characterises the image of politicians today in a context in which the balance seems to tilt towards the idea of the leader’s ‘normality’ (Wood, Corbett & Flinders, 2016).

Our analysis also underscores the importance of the gender dimension in the visual motifs of affect. On the one hand, the images of affect between men (more than half of the sample) showcase an image of compassionate leadership and emotional openness, which stands apart from gestures of aggression and competitiveness associated with certain definitions of hegemonic masculinity (DiMuccio & Knowles, 2020), thus opening a possible route for future studies on the topic. These connotations of ‘new masculinities’ are precisely

invoked, for example, in the image of the ‘hug pact’ between Sanchez and Iglesias (2019), which represented the agreement between PSOE and Podemos to create a coalition government. This image conveys the idea of personal harmony and concurrence that goes beyond the political agreement. These representations of affect in politics reserved for men contrast with more sexualising images, such as the ‘fake kiss,’ in which women appear more prominently. Likewise, we see how female politicians are represented via iconographies that refer to and further female stereotypes, which are still quite common in the sphere of political communication and can be understood as ‘role traps:’ *mother* and *seductress* (see García Beaudoux, 2014; van Zoonen, 2006).

From a formal perspective, it is interesting to highlight the *chrono-photographic* dimension of these three motifs within the context of photojournalism. We find numerous suspended gestures in the images analysed, with the omission of the significant instant or a focus on the moment prior to the consummation of the gesture. The gap between both bodies (heading towards a hug a handshake or a kiss) is consciously used to open the gestures up to new meanings. The presence of a distance in this suspended gesture has become the way towards a possible fissure in political relations. In this sense, gestural studies of Shakespeare plays (Fay, 2016), for example, which reveal that the positivity and virtue poured into a gesture (such as a handshake) can become expressions of betrayal and or conspiracy (as in *Julius Caesar*), are quite powerful.

The management of these distances (handshaking, kissing or hugging) is precisely what rarefies and brings tension to the motifs of affect in the media. Hence, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a new iconographic horizon of affect in the sphere of politics has emerged. Outside the sample analysed, we find the first images of political duos interacting under measures that alter the iconographic tradition in the months after the onset of the pandemic. The three newspapers in the sample from 6 June 2020 showed the encounter between two of the opposition leaders, Pablo Casado and Inés Arrimadas, greeting each other with an elbow bump. Thus, many of the formal aspects of the genesis of the handshaking motif remain, but any capacity for interpretation is lost. In an overall context of the ‘emotionalisation of politics,’ this emotionless touch turns scenes of political actors robotic and makes their appearances in the public sphere texts that require connotation.

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