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Genealogies of Roma Othering: Media Representation, Securitization, and Conditional Inclusion in Slovenia

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Abstract

This article examines how two Slovenian outlets represent Roma in online news coverage during a period of heightened public attention. It takes a genealogical perspective to analyze how contemporary reporting rearticulates historically rooted forms of othering and positions Roma as political subjects, targets of securitization, recipients of humanitarian paternalism, or cultural Others. The study uses a qualitative case-study design, combining critical discourse analysis and thematic analysis of 59 news articles from MMC RTV SLO and 24ur.com published between 1 June and 15 October 2025. The analysis identifies three recurring representational frameworks: Roma as a threat, as victims, and as a cultural Other. These frameworks overlap and may help reproduce criminalization, paternalism, symbolic inequality, and conditional inclusion. Although some reports challenge collective blame, address structural inequality, or include Roma representatives, Roma voices generally enter public discourse defensively and are less often treated as authoritative sources. The findings suggest that coverage by the two portals does not merely reflect majority attitudes toward Roma but may also help reproduce them. Addressing the portals' role in reproducing Roma marginalization through discourse requires more than balanced coverage; the findings point to the value of contextualized, participatory reporting that recognizes Roma as equal political subjects and producers of public knowledge.

Keywords: Roma; media representation; genealogical perspective; othering; securitization; symbolic inequality; conditional inclusion; Slovenia

1. Introduction

Romani communities' position in Slovenia reflects the intersection of symbolic, institutional, and material inequalities (Kostadinova 2011; Sancin et al. 2021; Zevnik and Russell 2020). For decades, Roma communities in Slovenia have faced multiple forms of marginalization, including restricted political participation, exclusion from education, social disadvantage, spatial marginalization, and unequal access to rights and public services (Janko Spreizer 2005; Bešter et al. 2017; Pirc and Bešter 2025; Sancin et al. 2021). In this context, media representation is more than a matter of public communication: media help shape the meanings, categories, and interpretive frameworks through which minority groups become publicly recognizable (Erjavec 2001; Fairclough 1992). Reporting on Roma is therefore part of broader processes through which social hierarchies and power relations are established, naturalized, and legitimized (Erjavec et al. 2000; Bourdieu 1998; Hall 1997).

The article approaches media representation as a genealogical issue. Drawing on Foucault (1977b), we use genealogy to trace how the categories, distinctions, and representational practices that position the Roma in relation to the dominant social and political

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group have emerged and changed contingently over time (Bevir 2010). Rather than assuming that current stereotypes simply reproduce earlier forms of discrimination, a genealogical approach examines how historically established forms of paternalism, racialization, and cultural othering are reinterpreted across political and media contexts (Powell and Lever 2017; Erjavec 2001; Zaviršek 2010). This perspective allows us to examine continuity through transformation rather than as simple repetition.

The genealogical approach adopted in this article connects several historical developments (Foucault 1977b; Bevir 2010). During the socialist era, Roma were generally represented in paternalistic terms associated with modernization, education, labor, and civilizational progress, while folkloric portrayals also emphasized their cultural distinctiveness (Bašić Hrvatin et al. 2004; Janko Spreizer 2005; Silverman 2012). In the post-socialist period, narratives of national unity, social order, and territorial control increasingly cast them as an internal Other (Zaviršek 2010; Sardelić 2011). Public debate focused on contrasts between order and disorder, work and idleness, and the majority population and its supposedly problematic minority (Zaviršek 2010; Sardelić 2011). Contemporary media discourse can renew older forms of othering through distinct mechanisms. Discourses associate Roma with public order, social risk, and heightened state intervention, thereby securitizing them (van Baar et al. 2019). Moral panic theory explains how media amplification can frame a group or event as a threat to dominant social values and help legitimize political responses (Cohen 1972; Garland 2008). Digital-platform attention economies can privilege conflict, simplification, and emotional intensity (van Dijck et al. 2018). Research on voice and visibility highlights unequal conditions of audibility and recognition (Couldry 2010; Verbuč 2025). In Slovenia, research has examined the legal position of the Roma, as well as their institutional discrimination, educational exclusion, social marginalization and political participation (Janko Spreizer 2004, 2005; Zaviršek 2010; Sancin et al. 2021; Bešter et al. 2017; Bešter and Pirc 2020; Zevnik and Russell 2020, 2023, 2025; Pirc and Bešter 2025). More recent studies have explored the conditions under which the Roma become visible in public discourse and the persistence of conditional recognition (Pirc and Bešter 2025; Zevnik and Russell 2023, 2025). Developments since 2021 have further underscored the importance of the article's question about securitization. In November 2025, the National Assembly passed the Act on Urgent Measures to Ensure Public Safety (Republic of Slovenia 2025), extending police powers in designated 'security risk areas' and allowing social assistance benefits to be deducted in cases of unpaid minor fines. In its April 2026 assessment of Slovenia, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (2026) stated that the Act could disproportionately affect Roma communities and lead to their criminalization and stigmatization. Yet the links between these historically established forms of marginalization and their ongoing reproduction in digital media remain insufficiently examined. An earlier study by Erjavec et al. (2000) found that Slovenian media generally reported on the Roma only when conflicts became matters of broader public interest. This study examines how that pattern has been reproduced, adapted or transformed amid contemporary online journalism, political securitization and heightened public debate.

The article empirically analyses 59 online news articles published by MMC RTV SLO and 24ur.com between 1 June and 15 October 2025. This period spans the weeks before and after a violent incident at a firefighters' festival in Ribnica, which prompted widespread media and political reactions and brought Roma communities in southeastern Slovenia to the center of public debate. To examine how topic and source selection, linguistic categories, quotations, and interpretative frameworks shape the construction of Roma, the article combines critical discourse analysis with thematic analysis. Based on this analysis, the article identifies three dominant representational frameworks, developed in detail in the empirical

section: Roma as a threat, Roma as victims, and Roma as a cultural Other. These frameworks are historically connected forms of othering rather than mutually exclusive categories. The article argues that contemporary Slovenian online media do more than repeat isolated stereotypes; they reshape the historically accumulated genealogies of Roma othering within today's media environment. As society has shifted from socialist paternalism to post-socialist nation-building and digital securitization, the Roma have repeatedly been portrayed as a group to be managed, protected, disciplined, or included on certain terms. In this way, media discourse helps draw a boundary between a legitimate social "us" and a problematic "Other" while limiting the conditions under which the Roma can be recognized as autonomous political subjects.

The article therefore addresses the following research questions:

- How did Slovenian online media portray Roma as a social, political, and cultural group in their coverage around the 2025 Ribnica incident?
- How do these representations reproduce historically entrenched forms of paternalism, racialization, securitization, and cultural othering?
- How do MMC RTV SLO and 24ur.com differ in articulating these representational frameworks?
- When are Roma portrayed as political subjects, and when are they cast instead as threats, victims, or objects of social management?

2. Literature Review and Analytical Framework

The situation of the Roma in Slovenia cannot be explained solely by poverty, social exclusion, or inadequate integration. It must also be understood as the result of historically established processes that have defined, categorized, controlled, and represented the Roma as different from the majority population. This literature review therefore brings together five closely related areas of research: the institutional and material marginalization of the Roma in Slovenia; the historical origins of treating the Roma as 'other'; media representation and the construction of the 'Other'; the links between crisis, security, and digital visibility; and questions of Roma voice and political subjectivity.

In this context, genealogy traces how categories have emerged and changed over time, rather than suggesting that the same stereotypes are simply repeated. A genealogical approach examines how particular distinctions and forms of knowledge become established, how they connect to institutions and practices of governance, and how they are reinterpreted amid changing political and media circumstances (Foucault 1977b; Bevir 2010). From this perspective, current portrayals of Roma are neither entirely new constructions nor mere continuations of past patterns. Instead, they transform earlier forms of paternalism, racialization, cultural essentialism, and political exclusion.

2.1. Roma Marginalization in Slovenia: Legal, Institutional, and Material Dimensions

Studies of the Roma in Slovenia have examined several closely related dimensions of marginalization, including legal status, access to citizenship, exclusion from education, spatial segregation, socioeconomic disadvantage, and limited political participation. These should not be treated as separate social issues: they reinforce one another, as material deprivation is connected to limited recognition, weak political representation, and restricted access to a legitimate public voice.

A prominent feature of Slovenia's legal framework is the distinct legal status it assigns to minority groups. The Constitution designates the Italian and Hungarian communities as "autochthonous national communities," while classifying the Roma as an ethnic community with a narrower range of constitutionally guaranteed rights. Although the legal definition of autochthony is vague, the concept has also been used to determine Roma political

participation. This has created an institutional distinction between Roma groups considered autochthonous and those that are not, hindering the consistent enforcement of Roma political rights (Janko Spreizer 2004). Sancin et al. (2021) argue that making autochthony a condition for granting special rights is not adequately grounded in Slovenian or international law and could lead to a deterioration of Roma rights.

The issue of legal and political exclusion is also evident in what is known as the 'Erasure' of 1992. About 25,000 people, many of them Roma, were removed from the register of permanent residents, losing their legal status and access to employment, health insurance, and other social rights. The consequences went far beyond the loss of documentation, leading to de facto statelessness and long-term institutional invisibility (Mandelc and Učakar 2011). This example shows that exclusion does not always stem from explicit racial laws; it can also result from formal administrative procedures that have unequal effects on different social groups.

A legal and policy framework has developed alongside these forms of marginalization. The Roma Community Act of 2007 (Republic of Slovenia 2007) established the legal basis for Roma participation in local politics, including the appointment of Roma councilors in municipalities designated as traditional Roma areas. Slovenia's National Program of Measures for Roma for 2021–2030 (Republic of Slovenia 2021) serves as the country's national strategic framework for Roma affairs and addresses education, employment, healthcare, and housing. However, independent civil society monitoring has raised concerns about its implementation. The Roma Civil Monitor's report on Slovenia highlighted persistent gaps between formal commitments and actual outcomes, including the unresolved distinction between "autochthonous" and "non-autochthonous" Roma communities, inadequate institutional coordination, and the continued absence of ethnically disaggregated data needed for evidence-based policymaking (Roma Civil Monitor 2023).

Education is another major area where institutional disadvantage is perpetuated. Studies show that low completion rates, the placement of Roma students in special education programs, limited access to Roma teaching assistants, and persistent prejudice among educational professionals are closely linked factors that contribute to educational exclusion (Bešter and Pirc 2020). Educational inequality cannot, therefore, be adequately explained by supposed cultural deficiencies or a lack of individual motivation. Rather, it must be understood within a broader institutional context, where linguistic differences, residential segregation, limited resources, and majority-group expectations shape the educational opportunities available to Roma children.

Political participation is another dimension of this inequality. Although Slovenian Roma have access to some forms of local representation, these arrangements do not offer equivalent opportunities at the national level. As Zevnik and Russell note, the limited scope of current representation prevents Roma from being fully recognized as equal political actors. They argue that reserved representation at the national level could foster political empowerment and help address socioeconomic marginalization (Zevnik and Russell 2020). This issue matters for media analysis because political and media representation are closely connected: groups with limited institutional power are more likely to be portrayed as objects of policy, concern, or surveillance than as authoritative participants in public discussion.

Taken together, this body of literature challenges the assumption that integration is primarily a task for the Roma, showing instead that administrative procedures, policy implementation gaps, educational practices, and limited political representation reproduce exclusion. The question is not simply whether the Roma are included in existing institutions, but also what conditions make inclusion possible, who sets those conditions, and whether the Roma are recognized as legitimate political actors able to advance their own demands.

2.2. Historical Genealogies of Roma Othering: From Socialist Paternalism to Post-Socialist Internal Othering

The way Roma are portrayed in Slovenia today reflects long-standing processes of racialization, cultural essentialism, and institutional paternalism (Zaviršek 2010; Janko Spreizer 2002; Sardelić 2011). Historical research shows that perceptions of Roma have shifted over time, oscillating between demonization—which casts them as dangerous, deviant, or uncivilized—and romantic folklorization, which portrays them as exotic, artistic, culturally authentic, or associated with music and tradition (Mlakar 2019; Silverman 2012). These perspectives are not mutually exclusive. They can coexist, framing Roma as culturally different from the majority population while making that difference a basis for condemnation, romanticization, or conditional acceptance (Hall 1997; Todorova 1997).

Socialist Yugoslavia introduced a particular form of inclusion grounded in modernization and social integration. Its policies addressed Roma settlement, employment, education, and broader social development, but generally took an assimilationist and paternalistic approach. The Roma were viewed as a group in need of state guidance and improvement, rather than as a community with independent political interests and distinct institutional representation (Janko Spreizer 2005; Sardelić 2011; Zaviršek 2010). Thus, the language of progress and civilization implied a hierarchy: the Roma were considered not yet fully modern, while the state and majority population were seen as capable of guiding their development.

This paternalistic framework coexisted with folkloric depictions. The Roma were often associated with music, performance, mobility, and cultural difference. Silverman shows that Romani music and cultural performance can create opportunities for recognition and economic participation, while tending to reduce Roma identity to an aesthetic, depoliticized form of difference (Silverman 2012). Although these representations may seem positive, they can still constrain Roma subjectivity by casting Roma primarily as performers, cultural symbols, or keepers of tradition, rather than as citizens, workers, political actors, and knowledge producers.

The shift that took place in the post-socialist period altered this framework but did not eliminate its fundamental hierarchy (Sardelić 2011; Zaviršek 2010). After Yugoslavia broke up and a new national political system emerged, narratives about national unity, territorial order and social discipline began to portray the Roma as 'internal others' (Zaviršek 2010, p. 87). In the post-socialist media environment, public discussion was shaped by contrasts such as order and disorder, work and idleness, and 'us' and 'them'. In this context, the Roma came to symbolize social disorder and were depicted as a group requiring discipline, surveillance and institutional control (Sardelić 2011; Zaviršek 2010). The situation in Slovenia aligns with wider European research showing how discourses securitize the Roma by linking their minority status to public order, social risk and increased state intervention (van Baar et al. 2019).

The transition from socialism to post-socialism should not be understood as a complete break. Rather, earlier forms of paternalism and cultural othering were reframed through new terms associated with citizenship, integration, security, and national identity. Sardelić argues that stereotypical images of Roma have persisted through this ideological shift and have been embedded in new political and institutional structures (Sardelić 2011). This aligns with Powell and Lever's processual approach, which explains the stigmatization of Roma through long-standing relations of unequal power, collective fantasies, and the spatial and social marginalization of Roma communities (Powell and Lever 2017).

Research on Slovenia similarly indicates that the Roma are not simply absent from public discussion. They become highly visible when their difference is associated with conflict, violence, social disorder, or failed integration. Zevnik and Russell describe this as

public unbelonging: Roma visibility stems from negative narratives, while even seemingly positive representations can reinforce the idea that the Roma are exceptional rather than ordinary members of society (Zevnik and Russell 2025). The issue is therefore not merely the repeated use of a single stereotype, but the persistence of a hierarchy in which the Roma are recognized only under certain conditions and through the lens of majority norms.

2.3. Media Representation and the Construction of the "Other"

Critical media research challenges the idea that news reporting provides a transparent view of social reality. Rather, news emerges from processes of selection, categorization, attribution, framing, and interpretation. These processes shape which events receive attention, which individuals are considered credible sources, and which explanations appear reasonable or obvious (Fairclough 1992; Hall 1997). This perspective is especially relevant to the Roma, as the media do not merely report on an existing social group; they also help construct 'the Roma' as a social and political entity. Erjavec shows how Slovenian media reporting can normalize discrimination through the arrangement of headlines, opening paragraphs, evaluations, and narrative structures. They do so by reducing complex situations to a single dominant interpretation, selectively presenting information, and treating the majority's views as common sense, thereby legitimizing unequal relations between the majority population and the Roma (Erjavec 2001).

The pioneering Slovenian study by Erjavec et al. (2000) similarly found that media discourse represented Roma mainly in connection with conflict or social disorder. Roma voices were rarely included as independent sources, and Roma were more often portrayed as a collective group than as individuals with diverse experiences and perspectives. This pattern matters because the absence of Roma sources is more than a lack of journalistic diversity: it shapes the conditions under which Roma can be recognized as legitimate knowers and political actors.

Comparative research across Europe shows that media portrayals of the Roma are closely linked to major events, journalists' sources, and the type of news outlet. Kroon and others found that the Roma were depicted both as victims and as people who commit offences. Problem-oriented frames became especially prominent during political conflicts, evictions, public protests, or periods when security concerns were alleged (Kroon et al. 2016). For the present study, this finding matters because it shows that victim and perpetrator frames should not be treated as separate categories. Rather, they tend to occur within the same crisis-focused media environment. This pattern extends well beyond Slovenia. In Italy, populist political discourse has constructed the Roma as an "enemy who lives among us", using Romaphobia in election campaigns to reinforce the "us versus them" division characteristic of populist communication (Cervi and Tejedor 2020). In Spain, an analysis of national journalism found that reporting based on the "Gypsy threat" constitutes symbolic and epistemic violence, thereby legitimizing structural discrimination (Cortés Gómez 2020). These findings suggest that the Slovenian case examined here reflects a broader European pattern: crises can create opportunities to revive and intensify the long-standing portrayal of the Roma as a security issue.

Presenting the Roma as victims may seem to challenge narratives that lead to criminalization, but it can also reinforce paternalistic relationships. In humanitarian media discourse, the Roma are often portrayed as passive, vulnerable and in need of help, rather than as people with political status (Chouliaraki 2006; Sardelić 2011; Zaviršek 2010). In Slovenia, Roma representatives tend to attract attention only during a crisis, when they are stigmatized or accused of sharing responsibility. In these situations, they are asked to reject generalizations, denounce violence, or explain the structural causes of their marginalization (Erjavec et al. 2000; Zevnik and Russell 2023). Their statements therefore emerge within

a dominant framework that has already defined the problem and established acceptable responses, often limiting what they can say (Couldry 2010). Othering also occurs through positive or apparently inclusive portrayals. Images of "well-organized" Roma settlements, "successful integration" or "good Roma" create a conditional standard of acceptability: Roma are recognized positively only when they come close to meeting majority norms (Hall 1997; Zevnik and Russell 2025). For example, portrayals of the Pušča settlement emphasize order and normality as special achievements for a Roma community, rather than as ordinary aspects of citizenship (Mlakar 2019; Zevnik and Russell 2025). In this way, othering does not disappear; it becomes positive exceptionalism, recognizing those Roma who seem to have overcome or diminished their differences (Hall 1997; Zevnik and Russell 2025).

2.4. Crisis, Security, and Digital Visibility

Crisis situations are especially important in the genealogy of media othering because they activate and intensify existing categories. They do not necessarily create portrayals of Roma as dangerous or disorderly; instead, they provide events through which older narratives can be renewed, amplified, and linked to demands for institutional intervention. The concept of moral panic helps explain this process. Cohen describes moral panic as a situation in which a group, event, or practice is portrayed as a threat to dominant social values, while media amplification fuels public anxiety and legitimizes political responses (Cohen 1972). In reporting on Roma, individual incidents may therefore be presented as evidence of collective danger. At the European level, the securitization of Roma has been identified as a recurring feature of crisis periods, when Roma-related issues become part of broader debates about migration, public order, and the boundaries of European citizenship (Pulay 2018; van Baar et al. 2019).

The concept of securitization extends this analysis by showing how social problems come to be treated as matters of public, national, or community security. Research on the securitization of Roma in Europe shows that they have repeatedly been portrayed as threats to public order, social stability, borders, and national belonging (van Baar et al. 2019). Security discourse, therefore, does more than describe crime: it can make an entire minority population a legitimate target of surveillance, exceptional intervention, and intensified control, consistent with Foucault's (1977a) account of disciplinary power.

Crisis reporting may also revive historical stigma through new political language. Chiruta's analysis of Romanian media during the COVID-19 crisis shows how sensationalist narratives associated Roma with lawlessness, indiscipline, and collective responsibility for disease transmission. The study shows that crises can reactivate older stigmas while adapting them to contemporary forms of public health and government control (Chiruta 2021). In the Slovenian case, this suggests that the Ribnica incident should be understood not as an isolated media event but as a moment when pre-existing representations were reorganized around security, violence, and collective responsibility.

Digitalization has changed the speed, circulation, and visibility of representations of Roma. Online news portals and social media create new opportunities for minority expression and self-representation, but they also operate within attention economies that privilege conflict, emotional intensity, simplification, and personalization (van Dijck et al. 2018). Greater opportunities for expression, therefore, do not automatically produce more equal public communication. Roma voices still face unequal conditions of audibility and recognition, particularly when mainstream media determine which topics, speakers, and forms of knowledge are considered newsworthy (Couldry 2010). Digital media may also reinforce the distinction between formal objectivity and substantive neutrality. Journalists may present ethnic identification as information from an official source and include opposing statements in the name of balance, while leaving the underlying interpretative framework

unchanged. In the Slovenian material, this form of objectivity coexists with the repeated association of Roma identity with crime, local insecurity, and social disorder (Erjavec 2001). The result is a reporting framework that may appear procedurally balanced while continuing to reproduce the criminalization and ethnicization of Roma communities.

Visual representation matters just as much. Sedláková's analysis of Czech television news found that Roma were often depicted in groups, as children or young people, in settlements, and amid poor living conditions, while rarely appearing as authorities or expert sources. These visual patterns reinforced Roma otherness, even when reports used formally neutral language (Sedláková 2022). This suggests that the genealogy of othering operates not only through explicit statements but also through recurring visual links between Roma identity and space, poverty, disorder, and dependence.

2.5. Roma Voice, Self-Representation, and Political Subjectivity

The final strand of the literature examines the relationship between media visibility and political subjectivity. Visibility alone does not ensure recognition: a group may be frequently represented yet still lack the authority to define events, articulate political demands, or challenge dominant categories (Couldry 2010; Zevnik and Russell 2020). This distinction is central to analyzing Roma representation. Roma may appear in the media as perpetrators, victims, aid recipients, or targets of integration policy, while remaining largely absent as authoritative interpreters of their own social and political position (Kroon et al. 2016; Erjavec et al. 2000). In Slovenia, Roma have therefore been represented primarily as a problem to manage or an object of concern, rather than as full political subjects with their own voices, interests, and interpretative authority (Sardelić 2011; Zaviršek 2010; Zevnik and Russell 2020).

Political representation is therefore inseparable from media representation. Zevnik and Russell argue that Roma in Slovenia have limited representation in political institutions, affecting their recognition as equal political actors (Zevnik and Russell 2020). Without stable access to national political institutions and mainstream media, Roma are more likely to intervene defensively. They may be called upon to reject collective responsibility, distance themselves from violence, or show that they are "not all the same" (Erjavec et al. 2000; Zevnik and Russell 2020). This kind of visibility does not necessarily give Roma a political voice. It allows them to speak, but only within a pre-existing frame that defines the problem and sets the terms for an acceptable response (Couldry 2010). The distinction between being quoted and being recognized as an authoritative subject is therefore analytically important. Section 5 discusses how this distinction informed the empirical analysis and what it revealed about Roma voice in the analyzed material.

At the same time, Roma communities have forms of self-representation in Slovenia's media environment. Since 2007, the public broadcaster RTV Slovenia has aired the weekly radio program Naše poti/Amare droma, followed in 2008 by the television program So vakeres?/Kaj govoriš?; both are produced in cooperation with Roma journalists. Since 2008, Radio Romic in Murska Sobota has operated as the country's first Roma radio station, while local stations such as Murski val and Studio D have produced bilingual programming for Roma communities (Lesjak 2008). Beyond national broadcasting, local initiatives and community media provide additional spaces where Roma address education, employment, identity, discrimination, and community life on their own terms. These initiatives challenge mainstream media's dominance in producing public knowledge, though they continue to operate amid unequal funding, visibility, reach, and institutional recognition (Couldry 2010).

The literature therefore points to a participatory understanding of media equality. The question is not merely whether media include more Roma perspectives, but whether Roma

can help define the topics, categories, and interpretative frameworks used to represent their lives. This means shifting from representation of Roma to representation with Roma, and moving beyond the binary of the dangerous Roma and the needy Roma, both of whom remain objects of majority interpretation (Hall 1997; Sardelić 2011; Zaviršek 2010).

2.6. Analytical Synthesis and Research Gap

Research on Roma in Slovenia has documented unequal legal positioning linked to the distinction between "autochthonous" and "non-autochthonous" Roma (Sancin et al. 2021; Zevnik and Russell 2020), the consequences of the 1992 "Erasure" (Mandelc and Učakar 2011), educational exclusion (Bešter and Pirc 2020; Pirc and Bešter 2025), and limits on political participation (Janko Spreizer 2004, 2005; Zevnik and Russell 2020). These institutional and material inequalities also intersect with symbolic representation. Research on Slovenian media has shown that Roma are often represented in connection with conflict or social disorder, and that media discourse can normalize discrimination (Erjavec 2001; Erjavec et al. 2000).

A genealogical perspective links these documented historical patterns to contemporary media without assuming that they simply repeat. It considers both continuities and discontinuities, asking how categories persist, change, or become contested in new political and media contexts (Foucault 1977b; Bevir 2010). Media representations are examined alongside—but not as substitutes for—the institutional practices through which categories are produced and enacted, including legislation and administrative classification, policing, welfare administration, and statistical categorization (Janko Spreizer 2005; Sancin et al. 2021; Zevnik and Russell 2023). Although Bevir (2010) applies genealogical analysis primarily to governance and governmentality, this study extends its logic to examine how historically formed categories are carried into and reworked in journalistic discourse.

Five related concepts guide the analysis. Othering constructs a dominant "we" in opposition to a supposedly different or threatening "they" (Hall 1997; Tileagă 2005). Racialization attributes stable, collective, and hierarchically valued differences to a group, including through cultural claims rather than biological ones (Balibar 2004; Gilroy 2000). Securitization recasts social issues as security problems linked to danger and heightened control (Buzan et al. 1998; van Baar et al. 2019). Humanitarian paternalism acknowledges vulnerability while portraying Roma as dependent on care or intervention (Chouliaraki 2006; van Baar et al. 2019). Political subjectivity concerns Romani communities' ability to define events, articulate demands, and participate as legitimate political interlocutors (Couldry 2010; Zevnik and Russell 2020, 2023). These frames may overlap, and both security and humanitarian framings can constrain political agency.

Digitalization is treated not as a separate object of analysis, but as the context in which representational patterns circulate. Online attention economies can privilege conflict, simplification, and emotional intensity, while visibility alone does not ensure equal audibility or political recognition (van Dijck et al. 2018; Couldry 2010; Zevnik and Russell 2023). Earlier research found that Slovenian media often reported on Roma in connection with conflict or social disorder (Erjavec et al. 2000). Less systematic attention has been paid to how these patterns operate in contemporary online news, where crisis reporting, security discourse, and humanitarian language intersect. This study addresses that gap by examining how the two selected portals rearticulate historically established categories and position Roma as political subjects or as objects of security, assistance, and social management.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Analytical Approach

This study uses a qualitative case-study design to examine how contemporary Slovenian online media represent Roma. It focuses on reporting by two major Slovenian media organizations, RTV Slovenia and POP TV, on their respective online news platforms. Rather than seeking statistically generalizable findings about the Slovenian media landscape, the study offers a theoretically informed analysis of how Roma are positioned within a specific media and political context.

Methodologically, the study combines critical discourse analysis and thematic analysis. Critical discourse analysis examines how language, categorization, source selection, and interpretative framing contribute to reproducing power relations, inequality, and social exclusion (Fairclough 1992; Wodak 2015). Thematic analysis identifies recurring structures of meaning across the corpus and organizes them into broader representational patterns (Maguire and Delahunt 2017). The approaches serve complementary purposes: thematic analysis identifies the dominant patterns through which Roma are represented, while critical discourse analysis interprets their social and political significance. The genealogical perspective informs this interpretation by drawing attention to the relationship between historically established categories and their contemporary reformulation. It therefore serves as an interpretative orientation rather than a separate method.

The analysis assumes that media representations are not neutral accounts of events but socially situated practices that shape public meanings and power relations. However, the study does not assume that every article presents events in the same way or that journalists necessarily intend to reproduce discrimination. Instead, it considers how specific linguistic choices, sources, narrative structures, and interpretative frames may have unequal effects within the wider media discourse.

3.2. Corpus and Sampling

The corpus consists of 59 articles published between 1 June and 15 October 2025. Articles were identified through a systematic search of both portals' online archives. Searches used each portal's own search function and, in parallel, a general search engine restricted to the respective domain. The keyword "Roma" (Romi) was used alongside closely related variants: "Roma community" (romska skupnost) and "Romani" (romski). Searches were conducted in October 2025, after which the retrieved records were screened for topical relevance. An article was included if Roma individuals or communities, or Roma-related social, political, or security issues, formed a substantive part of the text—either as the main topic or as a clearly identifiable theme in reporting on the Ribnica incident and its aftermath. No other content types were excluded in advance, so the corpus reflects the full range of articles returned by the search, including news reports, longer features, and coverage of political reactions. This procedure yielded 31 articles from MMC RTV SLO and 28 from 24ur.com.

The corpus consists of news reports by journalists who regularly contribute to the selected media outlets. The articles include statements from politicians, public officials, experts, local residents, and Roma community representatives. Alongside coverage of the Ribnica incident, the material addresses broader issues affecting Roma communities and local populations. The sample is purposive, not statistically representative. It examines how Roma were represented during a particularly significant period of heightened public attention, rather than measuring how frequently particular representations appeared across all Slovenian media.

3.3. Data Collection and Unit of Analysis

The primary unit of analysis was the individual news article, treated as a structured discursive text rather than an isolated collection of statements. The analysis considered each article's central topic, semantic emphases, categorizations, attributions, evaluative language, and the distribution of quoted and paraphrased voices. Particular attention was given to how Roma communities and individuals were named, described, contextualized, and positioned in relation to the majority population. The analysis also examined whether Roma appeared as collective actors, individual subjects, victims, alleged perpetrators, cultural figures, political representatives, or participants in public debate. These dimensions helped connect textual features to broader analytical concepts.

3.4. Coding and Analytical Procedure

The analysis unfolded in two main phases. First, all articles were read several times and analyzed through open coding, with particular attention paid to semantic emphases, metaphors, attributions, categorizations, and evaluative statements about Roma communities. Next, the initial codes were compared, grouped, and organized hierarchically into broader thematic categories. These categories were developed through repeated comparisons across articles and media contexts. This process helped identify recurring structures of meaning while preserving differences in tone, sourcing, and narrative organization among individual articles.

Both authors coded the material collaboratively, each working on their own computer. They then met regularly to compare and discuss their individual coding decisions. When a passage could plausibly fit more than one category, they discussed the open question and reached a consensus during these sessions. They documented each decision and applied it consistently to comparable passages throughout the rest of the corpus. Thus, the study relied on negotiated agreement between the authors rather than a formal inter-coder reliability procedure, in keeping with the interpretative character of the analysis.

Although the initial coding was inductive, concepts such as othering, racialization, securitization, humanitarian paternalism, and political subjectivity served as sensitizing concepts. They did not predetermine the codes but guided the later interpretation of empirically identified patterns. Two examples show how textual features informed broader themes. First, headlines and lead paragraphs often referred to Roma collectively, without identifying individuals, and framed incidents using the language of policing and containment (e.g., demands for increased police presence and calls for restrictive measures). These passages received open codes such as "collective ethnic attribution" and "security vocabulary," which were later grouped under the broader theme of Roma as a threat or securitized population. Second, articles that quoted individual Roma residents commenting on an incident and challenging its association with their community (e.g., rejecting collective responsibility for individual acts) were coded as "individualization" and "voice as commentary." These codes informed the analysis of the conditions under which Roma appear as political subjects. The examples also clarify why each article was not assigned to a single fixed category: several frameworks could operate simultaneously within one text. Critical discourse analysis then examined how these patterns were embedded in power relations, historical meanings, and unequal conditions of public visibility. The three dominant representational frameworks identified in the analysis are presented in the following results section. For the descriptive comparison in Section 4.4, each article was also assigned a primary representational frame based on its overall emphasis. When two frames were comparably prominent, and neither could be identified as primary, the article was classified as mixed. This summary classification does not mean that the frames were mutually exclusive in the broader thematic analysis.

Unless otherwise noted, the authors translated all quotations from Slovenian-language media sources into English.

3.5. Methodological Limitations

Several methodological limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study covers only two media outlets and a limited time period. Its findings therefore cannot be statistically generalized to the Slovenian media landscape as a whole. Rather, they should be understood as a theoretically informed case analysis of a specific period of heightened media and political attention.

Second, both thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis are interpretative approaches. Identifying and organizing codes relies on the researchers' analytical judgment and theoretical positioning. Although the iterative coding procedure was designed to make the analytical process systematic and transparent, it cannot remove the interpretative nature of qualitative research. The two authors also coded the data by reaching consensus rather than using a formal inter-coder reliability procedure. While this negotiated agreement is common in interpretative qualitative research, the study therefore does not report formal reliability statistics. Accordingly, the findings should be understood as the product of a shared interpretative process, not as a fully standardized coding outcome.

Third, because the study analyzes published journalistic texts, it cannot fully capture the broader digital media environment. It does not examine reader comments, visual representations, social media interactions, or the editorial processes behind the articles. These limitations narrow the scope of the conclusions while also pointing to future research on Roma self-representation, visual media, local reporting, and audience responses in digital environments.

4. Empirical Findings

The analysis identified three main frameworks for portraying Roma in the media: as a threat, as victims, and as a cultural or folkloric Other. These categories often overlap, with articles blending elements and shifting between security and vulnerability angles. The threat framework associates Roma with crime and disorder and calls for control. The victim framework emphasizes discrimination, poverty, and neglect, often depicting Roma as passive recipients. The cultural Other framework presents Roma as exotic or exceptionally different. Together, these frameworks shape how Roma are represented in the media.

4.1. Roma as a Threat: Criminalization and Security Discourse

The representation of Roma as a threat was the most prominent framework in the analyzed material. A first-pass classification of the corpus found that the threat framework was coded as the dominant frame in 19 of the 31 MMC RTV SLO articles and 16 of the 28 24ur.com articles; another 13 of the 59 articles combined it inseparably with other frames. Because the first-pass classification involved interpretive judgment, the two authors discussed and resolved borderline cases by consensus during the joint coding sessions. "Most prominent" refers primarily to frequency, although the framework also carried discursive weight through its recurrence in headlines, leads, and political reactions across both outlets. It was most evident in coverage of violence, public insecurity, alleged institutional inaction, and calls for stronger state intervention. The threat framework operated not only through explicit accusations but also through repeated associations between Roma identity and criminality, disorder, and the perceived failure of the state to protect the majority population.

The initial coverage of the Ribnica incident illustrates this process. A 24ur.com article published on 11 June 2025 carried the headline "Local Residents Demand Measures, Roma Accuse the Mayor of Inciting Intolerance." Its opening described the attack on the mayor,

a police officer, and a secondary-school student, identifying the alleged perpetrators as members of the Roma community. The headline both foregrounded local residents' calls for action and framed the incident as a conflict between local residents and Roma (24ur.com 11 June 2025). MMC RTV SLO used similar framing in its report, "At a Firefighters' Festival, the Mayor of Ribnica, a Police Officer, and a Young Person Were Attacked," published on 8 June 2025. The article quoted the mayor identifying the attackers as Roma and warning: "Today I was the victim, next time it will be someone else." It also reported that police had deployed additional forces to the Ribnica area to protect people and property (MMC RTV SLO 8 June 2025). Together, the ethnic identification, the warning of future victims, and the report of an increased police presence shifted the event from an individual criminal case toward a broader narrative of collective insecurity.

The shift from individual responsibility to collective identity was reinforced by the accumulation of separate incidents. In its coverage, 24ur.com presented the phrase "Roma gangs beat children" as one of several media descriptions of the situation in southeastern Slovenia. The same report linked this wording to a recent assault on a seventeen-year-old, a shooting in Dobruška vas, and an attack on the Ribnica mayor (24ur.com 25 July 2025). By grouping these events into a single narrative, the article depicted danger as ongoing and spreading geographically. The focus thus shifted from the legal assessment of individual cases to the presumed security profile of Roma communities.

The same logic appeared in reporting on local political responses. In the MMC RTV SLO article "Mayors of Southeastern Slovenia Support Pogorelc: 'Government, There Is No More Time for Delays,'" published on 13 June 2025, mayors called for "serious, systemic measures" to address what they described as Roma-related problems (MMC RTV SLO 13 June 2025). This framing is significant: by presenting the issue as requiring systemic intervention, it extended the meaning of the Ribnica incident beyond the alleged perpetrators' actions. The event became evidence of a broader failure of governance, law enforcement, and social regulation.

The threat framework was also evident in the presentation of increased policing as an immediate response. In its report, MMC RTV SLO described the police as deploying additional patrols and other units to the region to improve public safety (MMC RTV SLO 8 June 2025). Later coverage continued to link areas inhabited by Roma with intensified police activity. This reporting did not necessarily claim explicitly that all Roma were dangerous. However, repeatedly associating Roma settlements with security risks and police surveillance contributed to a discursive field in which Roma communities appeared to require intensified monitoring and management.

The security framing was especially explicit in coverage of calls to arm civilians. Security framing was not coded as a separate frame; it functioned as a dimension of the threat framework discussed at the beginning of this section, whose overall distribution is presented in Table 1 (Section 4.4).[1] On 16 July 2025, MMC RTV SLO reported that SDS Member of Parliament Žan Mahnič had urged citizens to join shooting clubs so they could legally keep firearms at home. He linked his statement directly to protests over violence allegedly committed by individual members of Roma communities and proposed that excessive self-defense should no longer be recognized by law (MMC RTV SLO 16 July 2025). The article also reported condemnations of the proposal and the Interior Minister's assurance that Slovenia remained stable and secure (MMC RTV SLO 17 July 2025). A related report by 24ur.com, "Residents Call for Measures: How Do the MPs from the Freedom Movement and the SDS Respond?", published on 25 July 2025, situated discussion of Roma-related violence within broader questions of political responsibility, public fear, and defense policy. It referred to the shooting in Dobruška vas and quoted local residents saying the latest incidents had "gone too far" (24ur.com 25 July 2025). This example shows how a specific

incident could become part of a broader political narrative about worsening security and the alleged failure of existing institutions to provide protection.

Some articles included counterarguments to these security claims. They reported statements by government representatives, police officials, and political actors who opposed civilian armament, condemned the escalation of public fear, or cautioned against stigmatizing the entire Roma community. For example, MMC RTV SLO reported the Interior Minister's condemnation of calls for weapons and his insistence that the police and judicial system should address criminal acts within the existing legal framework (MMC RTV SLO 17 July 2025). However, including critical responses did not necessarily displace the security framework. By repeatedly circulating the original calls for armament and presenting them as part of the ongoing debate on Roma-related violence, the articles also helped keep that framework visible and persistent.

The threat was represented through both explicit and seemingly neutral forms of ethnicization. Roma were not always described in openly racist terms. More often, their identity was linked to criminality and insecurity through ethnic markers, conflict-focused headlines, generalized descriptions, the accumulation of separate incidents, and repeated references to local disorder. The coverage therefore portrayed Roma not only as individuals involved in specific criminal cases, but also as a collective population associated with danger, institutional failure, and the need for increased control (24ur.com 11 June 2025; MMC RTV SLO 13 June 2025; 24ur.com 25 July 2025).

4.2. Roma as Victims: Marginalization, Discrimination, and Defensive Discourse

Although the dominant pattern portrayed Roma as a threat, the corpus also revealed another framework: Roma as victims of discrimination, exclusion, neglect, and stigmatization. In the first-pass classification, this framework was coded as dominant in 4 of the 31 MMC RTV SLO articles and 4 of the 28 24ur.com articles; the full distribution is presented in Table 1 (Section 4.4). This framework appeared mainly as a defensive response to criminalization and stigmatization. Roma representatives largely criticized blame and hate speech, while describing their communities' experiences with violence and inadequate policies.

A particularly important example is the intervention by Jožek Horvat Muc, president of the Roma Community Council of the Republic of Slovenia, as public tensions escalated in June and July 2025. In an article published on 24ur.com, Horvat Muc stated explicitly: "The key point is that incidents should not be addressed on the basis of ethnic affiliation, but on the basis of the actions of individuals." He added that "responsibility for the incident must be personal, not collective," and that individuals should be treated according to the law, regardless of their ethnic affiliation (24ur.com 21 July 2025). His intervention challenged the dominant security discourse by clearly condemning violence while insisting on equality before the law and individual responsibility. Horvat Muc also offered a structural interpretation of the conflicts, linking many incidents to social exclusion, poverty, unemployment, and limited access to education. He identified education, employment, housing, and social integration as necessary long-term responses (24ur.com 21 July 2025). In this sense, the Roma were not portrayed merely as passive victims in need of assistance. Instead, the statement turned the language of victimization into a political demand directed at both the state and the majority society. It called for institutional action, as well as dialogue, mediation, and the inclusion of Roma representatives in processes related to security, integration, and social policy.

A similar counter-discourse emerged in reporting on Roma representatives from the Pomurje region. In an article titled "Romi iz Pomurja: Ne mečite nas v isti koš" ("Roma from Pomurje: Do not put us all in the same basket"), Roma representatives explicitly rejected attributing violence committed by individuals to the entire Roma population, stating: "Let

them not lump us all together, because we are not all like that" (24ur.com 22 July 2025). The article began by noting that Roma in Pomurje also condemned violence but opposed being collectively associated with events in southeastern Slovenia (24ur.com 22 July 2025). It also presented the settlement of Pušča, near Murska Sobota, as an example of a different model of coexistence. The article highlighted the settlement's relatively high employment, improved housing, shared football facilities, and a kindergarten attended by both Roma and non-Roma children (24ur.com 22 July 2025). These details helped shape an alternative narrative in which Roma were associated not primarily with danger or dependency, but with work, family life, civic participation, and long-term cooperation with local institutions. Nevertheless, the article retained an integration-oriented framework, as it largely explained successful coexistence through employment, education, infrastructure, and conformity with broader social norms.

The victim framework also featured in reporting on state policies and institutional responses. On 24 July 2025, 24ur.com reported on government measures to include Roma in education and the labor market, including changes to school legislation, earlier preschool inclusion, Roma coordinators, and multipurpose centers for Roma children (24ur.com 24 July 2025). These reports implicitly cast Roma as victims of long-standing educational and socioeconomic inequality and presented institutional intervention as the main way to address it. At the same time, the framing remained largely paternalistic: Roma were portrayed as a population to be integrated, assisted, educated, or activated, rather than as equal political actors involved in setting policy priorities.

The analysis therefore suggests that portraying Roma as victims cannot simply be seen as the positive counterpart to criminalization. This framing creates space to criticize discrimination, hate speech, poverty, and institutional failure, but it often remains limited by a majority perspective that determines the conditions under which Roma can speak. Even when Roma representatives are included, they most often appear in response to a crisis—to reassure the public, reject collective blame, or show that integration is possible. Their visibility thus increases, but their discursive position remains largely reactive.

4.3. Roma as the Cultural "Other": Stereotyping, Positive Exceptionalism, and Folklorization

The third identified framework presents Roma as a cultural "Other." In the first-pass classification, this framework was coded as dominant in 2 of the 31 MMC RTV SLO articles and 1 of the 28 24ur.com articles; the full distribution is presented in Table 1 (Section 4.4).

Unlike the explicit criminalization in security-oriented reporting, this form of othering is subtler. Roma are portrayed as a culturally distinctive, traditional, or exceptional community, while their political agency and internal diversity remain largely invisible. Rather than necessarily depicting Roma as dangerous, the cultural framework positions them outside the unmarked majority norm, presenting them as fundamentally different, culturally interesting, or acceptable only under particular conditions.

One example appears in 24ur.com's coverage of the Roma settlement of Pušča, near Murska Sobota. The article portrayed the settlement as orderly, highlighting its "tree-lined avenue of coexistence," football field, and kindergarten attended by both Roma and non-Roma children (24ur.com 22 July 2025). It also quoted Roma representatives describing Pušča as a community shaped by "acceptance and coexistence" (24ur.com 22 July 2025). At first glance, this is a clearly positive portrayal: it presents Roma as capable of cooperation, employment, educational participation, and successful coexistence with the majority population. However, this positive framing also carries an implicit logic of exceptionalism. Pušča is presented as a model precisely because it seems to differ from dominant expectations about Roma settlements. The emphasis on order, employment, education, and infrastructure suggests that, when associated with Roma communities,

these are exceptional achievements rather than ordinary aspects of citizenship. In this way, the portrayal reinforces a distinction between "successfully integrated" Roma and those implicitly viewed as insufficiently integrated.

A related form of culturalization appeared in MMC RTV SLO's coverage of a commemorative event honoring the victims of the genocide of Roma and Sinti. The article described a cultural project that brought together Roma cuisine, art, oral tradition, and music to preserve and promote Roma cultural heritage (MMC RTV SLO 31 July 2025). This representation offered an important alternative to criminalizing and deficit-oriented coverage. It portrayed Roma culture as a source of knowledge, creativity, and historical continuity, while acknowledging that Roma communities have long been marginalized. Nevertheless, cultural visibility can remain ambivalent when Roma are made visible primarily through tradition, music, food, commemorative practices, or other forms of cultural heritage. Such reporting may challenge negative stereotypes, but it can also reduce Roma identity to an aesthetic or ethnographic category. Roma are presented as bearers of a distinctive culture, while their contemporary political demands, class differences, professional identities, and everyday forms of citizenship receive less attention. Cultural recognition, therefore, does not automatically lead to political recognition.

The analyzed material thus reveals a form of positive stereotyping: Roma are accepted when they meet majority expectations of order, education, employment, and peaceful coexistence. This creates a distinction between "good" and "problematic" Roma. The former are portrayed as successful examples of integration, while the latter remain linked to disorder, dependency, or cultural incompatibility. Rather than dismantling the logic of othering, positive exceptionalism recasts it in a more socially acceptable form. The cultural "Other" is therefore neither a complete alternative to threat discourse nor simply a form of positive representation. It operates within the same broader distinction between the majority norm and Roma difference. Whether portrayed as dangerous, vulnerable, or culturally distinctive, Roma retain only conditional public legitimacy. They are recognized as a problem to be managed, a population to be assisted, or a cultural community to be admired, but less often as politically autonomous citizens entitled to define how they are represented.

4.4. Comparative Overview: MMC RTV SLO and 24ur.com

One research question examines how MMC RTV SLO and 24ur.com differ in articulating representational frameworks. The comparison suggests that, in the analyzed corpus, the outlets differed more in style and discursive intensity than in the broad frameworks used to represent Roma. Table 1 summarizes the distribution of frames and illustrates differences in headline framing, security discourse, sourcing, and cultural representation.

The distribution of descriptive frames is consistent with the preceding qualitative analysis. The threat frame was dominant in 19 of the 31 MMC RTV SLO articles and 16 of the 28 24ur.com articles, making it the most frequently identified dominant frame in both outlets. The victim frame appeared equally often in both outlets, in four articles each, while the cultural frame was less common, appearing in two MMC RTV SLO articles and one 24ur.com article. Another 13 articles—six from MMC RTV SLO and seven from 24ur.com—were classified as mixed because the threat frame co-occurred with another prominent frame. This distribution supports the finding that representational frameworks can overlap within individual articles rather than functioning as mutually exclusive categories.

Table 1. Comparative overview of media framing in MMC RTV SLO and 24ur.com.

Comparative Dimension	MMC RTV SLO	24ur.com
Corpus and first-pass frame classification	31 articles: threat, 19; victims, 4; cultural Other, 2; mixed [1], 6.	28 articles: threat, 16; victims, 4; cultural Other, 1; mixed, 7.
Headline and lead framing	The report on the Ribnica incident foregrounds the attack and the mayor's warning; its account also notes the deployment of additional police forces.	The headline "Local Residents Demand Measures, Roma Accuse the Mayor of Inciting Intolerance" places residents' demands and Roma representatives' response side by side.
Security framing and emotionalization	Coverage links the incident to calls for systemic measures and increased policing.	One report brings separate incidents together in a narrative of expanding danger, including the phrase "Roma gangs beat children."
Sources and countervoices	In reporting on calls for civilian armament, the article also includes the Interior Minister's rejection of the proposal and support for responses within the existing legal framework.	Articles include Roma representatives' responses: Jožek Horvat Muc rejects collective attribution of responsibility, while representatives from Pomurje contest being grouped together with individuals involved in violence.
Cultural representation and positive exceptionalism	The coverage of a Roma and Sinti genocide commemoration presents Roma cultural heritage through cuisine, art, oral tradition, and music.	The report on Pušča presents the settlement as an example of coexistence, employment, and shared educational and community life.

[1] "Mixed" refers to articles in which two representational frames were both prominent and could not readily be reduced to one dominant frame.

Taken together, these examples suggest that the outlets differed more in how they articulated the frameworks than in which broad frameworks they used. In the 24ur.com examples, conflict is foregrounded by a headline that juxtaposes residents' demands with the Roma representatives' response, as well as by the accumulation of incidents into a narrative of growing danger. The MMC RTV SLO examples include official attribution and responses from police and government representatives, including a ministerial counterstatement to calls for civilian armament. These examples illustrate tendencies in the analyzed material; they do not establish that every article from either outlet follows the same style. Nonetheless, both outlets represented Roma through overlapping frameworks that positioned them as a problem, an exception, or a crisis.

5. Discussion: A Genealogical Reading of Media Representation, Historical Continuity, and Roma Political Agency

The analysis of media representations of Roma in selected Slovenian online media confirms a central premise of critical media studies: news reporting does not neutrally reflect reality but socially and discursively produces it, helping shape power relations. Through

their selection of topics, sources, frames, and linguistic categories, media do more than describe individual events: they influence how those events are understood, and which social actors are considered legitimate. This finding aligns with Fairclough's (1992) view of discourse as productive rather than merely descriptive, and with Erjavec et al. (2000) work showing how media practices contribute to the naturalization of ethnic inequality.

We interpret the findings genealogically rather than as an isolated media response to the events of 2025. This interpretation is grounded in the historically documented categories and in the continuities and transformations identified in the literature. Contemporary reporting draws on historically established representations of Roma as a population requiring supervision, assistance, integration, or control. During the socialist period, Roma were often portrayed through the paternalistic language of modernization and "civilizational development." In the post-socialist period, they increasingly became symbolic internal Others, associated with disorder, insufficient integration, and the need for surveillance. The contemporary digital media environment has not eliminated these older frameworks; instead, it has combined them with commercial competition, emotional personalization, rapid circulation, and greater visibility for conflict-oriented narratives.

A methodological note is needed here on the specifically genealogical character of these interpretations. The analyzed corpus alone cannot establish historical continuity; it documents contemporary patterns of representation. Interpreting a contemporary frame as a rearticulation of a historically sedimented structure, rather than simply as a contemporary instance of stereotyping, is warranted by the convergence of three elements: first, the correspondence between contemporary representational forms and categories documented by historical research on Roma in Slovenia (for example, the paternalistic vocabulary of socialist modernization and the post-socialist construction of Roma as an internal Other); second, the recurrence of the same underlying distinctions, such as order versus disorder and deservingness, across different contemporary frames; and third, the activation of these distinctions during a period of explicit political and security mobilization, when older categories became publicly available resources for interpretation. The genealogical claim therefore rests on the alignment of the contemporary corpus with independently documented historical categories, not on an assumption of repetition.

The most prominent pattern in the analyzed material was the criminalization of Roma and their portrayal through a security lens. Individual incidents were often presented as evidence of a broader collective threat, linking Roma identity to violence, criminality, and social disorder. This reporting does more than inform the public about isolated crimes: it turns specific events into symbolic evidence of the alleged dangerousness of an entire community. This reflects Cohen's (1972) account of moral panic, in which a limited number of incidents prompt broader social mobilization, intensified political rhetoric, and calls for repressive measures.

Importantly, criminalization does not rely solely on explicitly racist language. It can also operate through seemingly neutral discursive practices, such as repeatedly identifying suspects by ethnicity, using expressions like "the Roma issue," and constantly emphasizing "local insecurity." These practices create a discursive field in which Roma identity itself shapes how criminal acts are interpreted. The findings therefore align with theories of cultural or differentialist racism (Balibar 2004; Gilroy 2000), which frame difference not in terms of biological inferiority but through assumptions about cultural incompatibility, lifestyle, or an allegedly problematic relationship to legality. Media discourse thus portrays Roma as a dangerous Other while reinforcing the majority's self-image as civilized and law-abiding, and as needing protection.

The representation of Roma as victims does not simply reverse the security framework. It opens space to recognize discrimination, hate speech, poverty, educational exclusion, and

institutional failure, yet it often remains defensive and paternalistic. Roma representatives enter the public sphere primarily to reject collective blame, condemn violence, or explain the structural causes of marginalization. Their voices are present, but often on terms set by dominant discourse. The public expects them to reassure audiences, demonstrate responsibility, or prove that not all Roma are alike. This supports the broader finding that media visibility of Roma is selective and crisis-driven, while everyday, professional, cultural, and political perspectives remain less visible. The distinction between Roma being quoted and Roma speaking as political subjects can now be stated more precisely. In this study, Roma actors were considered to speak with political subjectivity when they met three conditions: they defined the meaning of an event or problem rather than responding to a definition provided by others; articulated collective or policy demands directed at institutional actors; and participated legitimately in debates about law, security, equality, or social policy, rather than appearing exclusively as respondents to accusations. According to these criteria, Horvat Muc's intervention after the Ribnica incident is the clearest case of political subjectivity in the corpus. It defined the problem in terms of individual rather than collective responsibility, made explicit policy demands concerning education, employment, housing, and social integration, and insisted on equal treatment before the law. By contrast, quotations from Roma individuals in incident-driven reporting—where they are asked to condemn violence or distance themselves from others' actions—fully meet none of these conditions and remain voices within a framework defined by others. This operational distinction explains why the apparent expansion of Roma visibility during the analyzed period did not lead to a corresponding expansion of political agency.

This point is particularly important in relation to Kostadinova's (2011) distinction between redistribution and recognition. The position of Roma cannot be understood solely in terms of material deprivation, such as poverty, unemployment, inadequate education, or poor housing; it must also be analyzed in terms of recognition, voice, and political agency. The present analysis suggests that these dimensions are closely connected. Media discourses about welfare dependency, failed integration, and social exclusion often overlap with security discourses, allowing Roma to be portrayed simultaneously as a social problem and a security problem. Such portrayals may help legitimize responses focused on surveillance, discipline, and conditional assistance, rather than on addressing structural inequality and expanding political participation.

The third framework, Roma as the cultural "Other," shows that othering can also occur through seemingly positive representations. Roma may be portrayed as culturally distinctive, traditional, artistic, or as successful examples of integration, yet this recognition is often conditional. Pušča's portrayal as an exemplary settlement illustrates how positive exceptionalism can reinforce the idea that order, education, employment, and peaceful coexistence are unusual achievements in Roma communities. This reproduces the distinction between "good" and "problematic" Roma in a subtler, more socially acceptable form. As Hall (1997) argues, positive stereotyping remains a form of symbolic control when minority subjects are recognized only within frameworks established by the majority culture.

This study does not claim that media representations alone shape public attitudes or political decisions. Instead, it identifies the discursive mechanisms that make some interpretations of Roma more available, credible, and politically usable than others. The analysis thus supports earlier research showing that media reproduce symbolic inequality, especially when marginalized groups have limited opportunities to represent themselves within dominant public spheres. Media representation should therefore be understood not only as a matter of journalistic ethics but also as an issue of citizenship, recognition, and democratic equality.

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The analysis draws on the corpus described in Section 3.2; because it covers only two outlets and a restricted time frame, its findings cannot be generalized to the entire Slovenian media landscape. Nevertheless, the study provides insight into contemporary representational patterns and points to several avenues for future research, including the role of reader comments, visual representations of Roma, comparisons between national and local media, and the conditions that enable Roma to develop autonomous forms of media self-representation.

Taken together, the findings of this study answer all four research questions. Around the 2025 Ribnica incident, Slovenian online media represented Roma primarily as a threat, victims, or a cultural "Other," combining social, political, and cultural forms of representation. In a contemporary digital and political-security context, these frameworks rearticulated historically established patterns of paternalism, racialization, securitization, and cultural othering. MMC RTV SLO and 24ur.com differed mainly in the style and intensity of their coverage, not in their underlying representational frameworks. Roma were most clearly portrayed as political subjects when their representatives responded to the crisis, rejected collective blame, defended equal treatment, or proposed structural solutions. Outside these moments, Roma were more often positioned as objects of securitization, humanitarian paternalism, cultural evaluation, or social management.

In conclusion, the analyzed material points to a persistent symbolic structure in which Roma are portrayed mainly as a threat to be controlled, a vulnerable population to be helped, or a cultural community to be assessed. Though these portrayals differ in tone, they have a shared effect: Roma are more often treated as objects of public discourse than as politically autonomous subjects able to define their own experiences and interests. A genealogical reading shows that contemporary digital reporting does not simply repeat older stereotypes unchanged. Instead, it adapts them to new media conditions while maintaining the deeper distinction between the majority norm and Roma difference. Addressing this pattern requires more than adding positive stories or occasional Roma voices. The findings suggest that meaningful change would require transforming the conditions of media visibility, enabling Roma to participate as producers of public knowledge, political meaning, and social interpretation.

6. Conclusions

This article examined contemporary media representations of Roma in Slovenia through a genealogical reading of 59 articles from two analyzed portals. Focusing on the period surrounding the Ribnica incident, the study identified three recurring, overlapping frameworks: Roma as a threat, Roma as victims, and Roma as cultural Others. While these frameworks differ in their evaluative and emotional tones, they share a common effect: they tend to position Roma as objects of securitization, humanitarian paternalism, integration, or cultural evaluation, rather than as autonomous political subjects able to define their own interests, experiences, and interpretations of social reality.

The genealogical perspective developed in this article shows that these representations should not be understood merely as contemporary stereotypes or immediate responses to specific events. Rather, they are historically contingent rearticulations of longer-standing forms of Roma othering. Paternalistic assumptions linked to modernization and integration, post-socialist constructions of Roma as an internal Other, and contemporary discourses of security and social disorder converge in digital news reporting. Across these transformations, what persists is not an identical representation of Roma, but a deeper asymmetry: the majority retains the authority to define the terms on which Roma become publicly visible and intelligible.

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Voice is therefore central to the findings. Roma representatives appear in the media analyzed, and some articles explicitly challenge racism, collective blame, and reductive explanations of social problems. However, Roma voices most often become visible only after a crisis narrative has taken shape: they condemn violence, reject collective responsibility, defend their communities, or call for dialogue. Their participation is therefore often reactive rather than agenda-setting. The question is not simply whether Roma are quoted, but under what conditions they are recognized as legitimate producers of knowledge. Media inclusion does not amount to political agency when minority actors are invited primarily to respond to questions, categories, and problems defined by others.

The comparison between MMC RTV SLO and 24ur.com further suggests that unequal representation cannot be attributed to tabloidization alone. MMC RTV SLO generally used a more restrained, attribution-based style, while 24ur.com more often relied on emotionally charged, personalized, and conflict-oriented narratives. Nevertheless, both outlets largely operated within similar underlying structures of visibility. Their difference lay primarily in discursive intensity and journalistic style, rather than in fundamentally different representational regimes. This finding highlights a broader structural issue in media representation: Roma become especially newsworthy when they can be framed through conflict, insecurity, social dysfunction, or exceptional integration.

The study has several limitations. Its qualitative case-study design, focus on two national online news outlets, and limited time frame mean that its findings cannot be generalized to the Slovenian media landscape as a whole. In addition, the analysis focused mainly on textual news discourse and did not systematically examine visual representation, audience reception, reader comments, social media circulation, or the production practices that shape which stories and sources become newsworthy. Future research should address these dimensions, compare national and local media, and investigate Roma-led and alternative media spaces. This work could clarify not only how dominant media institutions represent Roma, but also how Roma actors negotiate, challenge, and potentially transform unequal regimes of public visibility.

The analysis suggests that improving media representation requires more than removing explicitly discriminatory language, increasing the number of positive stories, or achieving formal "balance" between competing viewpoints. Such interventions may leave intact the deeper discursive structure that positions Roma as a population to be explained, managed, protected, disciplined, or integrated. More substantive change would mean moving from ethnicization to contextualization, from collective attribution to individual and institutional accountability, and from episodic crisis reporting to sustained attention to the structural conditions that shape inequality.

Most importantly, this would mean moving away from speaking "about" Roma and creating conditions for Roma to participate as equal producers of public knowledge and political meaning. From this perspective, media representation is not simply a matter of journalistic ethics or representational accuracy; it is a matter of recognition, citizenship, and democratic participation. A genealogical reading shows how historically sedimented power relations continue to shape contemporary digital media, while reminding us that these relations are neither natural nor inevitable. Because representational regimes have been historically produced and repeatedly transformed, they can also be contested and changed.

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Note

[1] The calls for civilian armament were covered by articles in both outlets during the observation period: MMC RTV SLO reported on the call, the responses to it, and the reactions of the Roma Council and the President of the Republic between 16 and 23 July 2025, while 24ur.com covered the episode between 16 and 25 July 2025, including a report that situated it within broader questions of defense policy.

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