

The constructed and constructive experience: journalistic framing of the “day of fire” in the Amazon

A experiência construída e construtora: enquadramento jornalístico do “dia do fogo” na Amazônia

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Resumo: *Objetiva-se identificar quais foram os quadros de sentido (frames) construídos pelo discurso jornalístico sobre o “dia do fogo” na Amazônia, bem como compreender de que maneira a experiência dos jornalistas contribuiu para o processo de enquadramento (framing). Com base em Goffman (1974), entende-se que os quadros de sentido são os elementos básicos que os indivíduos conseguem identificar. A análise incidiu em 121 textos publicados pelos jornais Folha de S.Paulo (Brasil) e Público (Portugal). Os resultados mostraram que, em ambos os periódicos, foram construídos quadros de conflito, de responsabilidade, de interesse humano e de consequências econômicas. Ainda que, do ponto de vista editorial, o caso tenha sido tratado de forma “nacional” pela Folha de S. Paulo e de forma “internacional” pelo Público, os dois (estrangeiros à sua forma) evidenciaram as faltas do presidente Jair Bolsonaro na resolução do problema ambiental.*

Palavras-chave: *Construção jornalística; Análise de enquadramento; Amazônia; Folha de S.Paulo; Público.*

Abstract: *The article aims to identify which frames were constructed by the journalistic discourse about the “day of fire” in the Amazon, as well as to understand how the journalists’ experience added to the framing. Based on Goffman*

(1974), it is understood that frames are the basic elements that individuals can identify. The analysis focused on 121 texts published by the newspapers *Folha de S. Paulo* (Brazil) and *Público* (Portugal). The results showed that both constructed frames of conflict, accountability, human interest, and economic consequences. Even though, from an editorial point of view, the case was handled in a “national” way by *Folha de S. Paulo* and in an “international” way by *Público*, both (foreign in their own way) highlighted the faults of President Jair Bolsonaro in solving the environmental problem.

Keywords: Journalistic construction; Framing analysis; Amazon; *Folha de S. Paulo*; *Público*.

Introduction

In August, 2019, images of the Amazon on fire circulated among the Portuguese-Brazilian society. Unlike the forest fires in Pedrógão Grande, Portugal (2017), or the fire season in Australia (2019-2020), the intentional nature of the fires and president Jair Bolsonaro's (2019-2022) apparent encouragement of deforestation in the Amazon have made the case unique – known as the “day of fire” (MAISONNAVE, 2019). Based on journalistic discourse, we intend to identify and discuss the construction process of the frames about the “day of fire”, as well as to understand in which way the journalists' experience contributed to the framing.

In dialogue with Goffman (1974), it is possible to notice that this is a type of framing that overlays different objects and practices, fitting them into an ordered structure. In this way, the frames determine the reasonableness of the statements and communicative processes. Because of its communicative power, journalistic discourse allows us to examine not only the practices and routines of news production, but also the relationship between journalism and society, in addition to the powers that act in this relationship (CARLSON *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, in a broader sense, we are interested in understanding the vision of the Portuguese-Brazilian society about the Amazon, considering the interests that permeate this understanding.

We start from the notion that a given public event (which will be the object of public attention) results from a discursive construction by the media. The process takes place by means of an “operational network” (HILGARTNER; BOSK, 1988, cit. por NEVEU *et al.*, 1997, p. 14), understood as “the means through which ‘problems’ are able to access the media and the consecration of the social status of the event [which is at the origin of the problem]”. This implies the existence of “more or less institutionalized interrelationships between specialists in a given type of problem (health, environment etc.) within different social arenas (journalism, government, associations, companies etc.)” (NEVEU *et al.*,

1997, p.14). Thus, rather than discussing the production of the frames based on an “event”, we will discuss it based on a “public problem”.

This perspective is articulated, in our view, with the idea of the news “as an inherently dynamic entity, shaped in a social environment” (PAUL; BERKOWITZ, 2019, p. 1). Therefore, “the formation and personal experience of a journalist, the organization of the workplace and the interactions with society in general during a period of time affect the construction of the news” (PAUL; BERKOWITZ, 2019, p. 1).

We have chosen to analyze the “day of fire” through the newspapers *Folha de S.Paulo* (Brazil) and *Público* (Portugal). Despite their different socio-historic and political-institutional contexts, both claim to be committed to democracy, the rule of law and human rights (CARVALHO; DÁVILA, 2020). Furthermore, both newspapers are references in the daily publications segment in their respective countries; therefore, their discursive productions provide clues about Portuguese-Brazilian society.

The article begins with a theoretical-experimental positioning regarding the framing process. Next, we explain the methodological procedures and, finally, we present and discuss the work’s results. For media and journalism studies, the effective contribution of the analysis developed here consists of explaining the stages for discursive analysis. The criticism that the methods for finding the frames are illusory is valid, since they refer to a set of approaches of a deductive nature (VLIEGENTHART; VAN ZONEN, 2011). However, the innovation lies in examining the construction of news considering the interests that permeate journalistic practices and routines, as well as the experience of professionals involved in the case.

Furthermore, the framing provides clues about the transformations experienced by newspapers that traditionally produce print editions, as well as their strategies of news production – especially in the face of digital media. Even though the “day of fire” has been discussed in previous works, through the framing analysis, it is possible to add another layer of comprehension to the case, since the Amazon has strategic importance in curbing climate change and is the target of a symbolic international dispute.

The frames and the framing: a theoretical-experimental path

In sociological literature, the framing concept makes strong assumptions about the individual cognitive processes, that is, the structuring of cognitive representations and the theoretical orientation of information processing (PAN; KOSICKI, 1993). This understanding is useful to Communication Sciences, as it helps to understand in which way people interpret their life experiences and give meaning to the world around them (SCHEUFELE; TEWKSBURY, 2007).

França's (2002) definition of experience is recurrent – a word that, etymologically, comes from Latin (from the noun *experientia* and the verb *experire*). According to the author, the sense of experience highlights the nature of practice, action and experience, that is, a practice developed by someone, by a person who is in the world, that experiences the world, that lives it through senses. The process occurs not only from cognitive structures, but also by means of prior knowledge, of references – that which Goffman (1974) called frames, that is, the elaboration of situations according to the organization principles that govern social events and subjective engagement in them; the basic elements that one is able to identify; the organization of experience.

In the sociologist's definition, in order to efficiently process new information, individuals apply primary schemes to classify and interpret it in a meaningful way. The primary schemes of a given social group are the central elements of the culture. In other words, they are its beliefs, its “cosmology”. Any situation that is not managed based on this traditional stock will cause public unrest. Therefore, language becomes the place where experience is realized.

Starting with Entman (1993), the frames began to be seen as a central idea that underlies and orients the construction of texts and, in short, the discursive construction of reality. For the author, the framing involves the selection of some aspects of a perceived reality in order to make these aspects more evident in a communication text. This means making information more perceptible, meaningful or memorable to the

public in order to promote the definition of a specific problem, the diagnosis of its cause, its moral evaluation and/or the recommendation of solutions.

Journalists use their repertoire of frames to build a news story; therefore, organizational factors, external conditions and journalistic sources can influence the selection of a frame (VAN GORP, 2010). Each reconstructed frame is presented by a frame package, that is, by an integrated structure of framing devices. Thus, a logic chain of reasoning devices demonstrates how the frame represents a given problem.

Some examples of framing devices are metaphors, historic situations from which lessons are learned, catchphrases, visual representations and images, themes and subthemes, types of actors, actions and settings, lines of reasoning and causal connections, contrasts, lexical choices, information sources, quantifications and statistics, tables and graphs, and appeals (emotional, logical and ethical). Coleman (2010) adds that visual messages (photographs, moving images, maps, graphs, drawings and colors) and verbal messages (texts) take place at the same time in the media and the public processes them simultaneously. Therefore, framing also refers to the selection of a view, scene or angle when producing the image, cropping it, editing it or selecting it.

De Vreese (2005) states that the potential of framing resides in understanding how the frames emerge (or are constructed) and in defining these frames (the interaction between media frames and audience predispositions). In general, in Communication Sciences, framing analysis adopt two perspectives: that of the means of social communication (media frames) and/or that of the public/audience (audience frames). It is possible, according to Scheufele (1999), to encompass two dimensions: between-level, which define media framing at a macroscopic level and audience framing at a microscopic level, conjecturing potential relationships between them; and within-level, conceptualizing media framing and audience framing separately as independent and dependent variables. Often, one of these three processes is examined:

- frame-building, which highlights the factors that interfere in the structural quality of the news, such as social norms and values, organizational constraints and pressures, pressures from the groups of interest, journalistic routines and political-ideological orientations of journalists;
- frame-setting, which refers to the interaction between media framing (independent variable) and prior knowledge and the predispositions of individuals (dependent variable), admitting that news framing may affect learning, interpretation and evaluation of problems and events;
- individual-level consequences of framing, which can be observed in the change of attitude of an individual towards a problem, when exposed to a given media framing.

In line with the question that guides this article, which fits into the perspective of media framing, this study will be limited to observing and analyzing the construction of frames about the “day of fire” in the Amazon in order to perceive the understanding of Portuguese-Brazilian society about the case, as well as the interests underlying this vision.

Methodological procedures

Case studies are in-depth, comparative researches, that must be able to capture other elements of the larger context, without necessarily being representative of it (OROZCO; GONZÁLEZ, 2012). In this work, it is admitted that the “day of fire” represents a case that is illustrative of the journalistic production on an environmental problem, which is the deforestation of the world’s greatest tropical forest, of transnational dimension. Although it is not possible to make generalizations, we expect to find clues regarding the power relations that permeate the social construction of the biome.

The choice of newspapers *Folha de S.Paulo* and *Público* is justified because it is understood that the Amazon represents the other, which is physically and temporally distant not only from Europe and Latin

America, but also from the political-economic Brazilian centers. In Paes Loureiro (1995), it is clear that the difficulty of accessing the Amazon, imposed by the rivers and the forest, has consolidated its two main social characteristics, which are isolation and identity (given the predominance of indigenous and caboclo peoples). Therefore, it is admitted that both periodicals characterize a foreign view.

Through a non-probabilistic sampling process for typical cases¹, we selected journalistic texts about the “day of fire” published on the websites of newspapers *Folha de S.Paulo* and *Público* between August 2019 and October 2020, which allowed the creation of a corpus with 60 texts from the Brazilian newspaper and 61 texts from the Portuguese newspaper. An analysis grid was applied, which allowed for the identification of the journalists who produced texts about the case under study. From then on, we created a sample of interviewees²: journalist Phillippe Watanabe and editorial secretary Vinícius Mota, from *Folha de S.Paulo*; journalist Ricardo Cabral Fernandes and the university professor and journalist Joaquim Fidalgo, who provided information about *Público*. With the four interviewees, we conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews via Skype (due to the limitations imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic). As a data collection technique, this type of interview allows us to understand social reality through discourse, considering a specific time and socio-historical context (FRASER; GONDIM, 2004).

In order to operationalize the framing analysis, we followed the guidelines of Linström and Marais (2012), which begin with the deductive selection of the typology of frames followed by precise descriptions that specify the phenomena of interest. The results were gathered after two readings of the journalistic texts (the first reading, to describe their

- 1 It is important not to confuse the fact that the “day of fire” is characterized as a case study, as it represents a reality, and that newspapers *Folha de S.Paulo* and *Público* are typical cases of journalistic productions, as they allow us to analyze this case.
- 2 The content of these interviews was not subject to content analysis. The information provided by the journalists was useful because it helped to elucidate the process of constructing journalistic discourse and, consequently, of the framings. This is the reason why we first analyzed the news and then conducted the interviews.

discursive characteristics, according to the analysis grid; the second reading, to identify the frames).

The framings about the “day of fire” in the Amazon: results

In this study case, based on Valkenburg *et al.* (1999), four types of frames were recognized in the journalistic texts about the “day of fire” in the Amazon:

- conflict frames, which emphasized the disputes over power and meaning between people or institutions involved in the “day of fire”;
- human interest frames, which presented an emotional or humanized angle of the Amazon forest fires, in order to personalize or dramatize the news;
- accountability frames, which highlighted the guilt or negligence of people or institutions regarding the “day of fire”;
- economic consequences frame, which discussed the financial losses that Brazil and the world could suffer if the Amazon forest continued to be destroyed.

In *Folha de S.Paulo*, the conflict frames presented different points of view about the “day of fire”. According to those responsible for the forest fires (“loggers, farmers and businessmen”), the initiative to burn part of the Amazon forest in one single day was a way of showing president Jair Bolsonaro that “they wanted to work”. The discursive confrontation was established when this perspective was questioned by scientists. The conflict frames became more complex when they incorporated the accusations made by president Jair Bolsonaro and his supporters: that non-governmental organizations (NGOs), indigenous peoples and small producers were truly responsible for the fires in the forest; that the fires were natural, due to the “dry climate” in the Amazon; that the National Institute for Space Research (INPE) had released false data on

deforestation in the Amazon aiming to damage the government's image; and that foreigners had "dubious interests" in the Amazon – this last accusation resulted from the criticism made mainly by French president Emmanuel Macron (2017-present) and by American actor Leonardo DiCaprio.

The accountability frames highlighted the increase in the number of fire outbreaks in the Amazon, and also showed that the environmental monitoring agencies – the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA) and the Chico Mendes Institute of Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio) – had been weakened since the beginning of the Bolsonaro government. This made it impossible to prevent alleged environmental crimes and to hold those involved accountable. Furthermore, the invocation of the Guarantee of Law and Order (GLO), provided for in the Brazilian Constitution, and the fire moratorium, as the presidential decree number 9.992/2019 became known, which prohibited the use of fire in the Legal Amazon for 60 days, were president Jair Bolsonaro's responses to the "day of fire". However, actions were taken late, only by the end of August. In line with the presidential stance, Brazil's then Minister of Justice and Public Security, Sérgio Moro, ordered an investigation into the case by Brazilian institutions.

The human interest frames highlighted that Brazilian and international artists drew attention to the forest fires in the Amazon through the social media platforms Twitter (currently, X) and Instagram (even though, in some cases, the images published by them did not truly refer to the "day of fire"). Google and Twitter metrics corroborated the interest of users in Brazil and around the world in the case. Also in this frame, it was highlighted how the fires in the Amazon affected the rituals in the *Japuira* village of the *myky* people, in the *Menku* Indigenous Land, in Brasnorte, in the state of Mato Grosso; as well as the life of journalist Adécio Piran, who had to leave the town of Novo Progresso, in the state of Pará. Piran had anticipated the intentions of the farmers involved in

the “day of fire” through the newspaper *Folha do Progresso*. As a result, he received threats.

Finally, the economic consequences frame showed that the forest fires had damaged the hotel sector in the Amazon jungle. Also, that the suspension of financial transfers to the Amazon Fund, by Germany and Norway, made it difficult to continue environmental conservation policies. It was possible to notice that foreign investors were demanding that the Brazilian government combat environmental crimes and, especially, deforestation in the Amazon. We also identified Bolsonaro’s government point of view, defended by the then Chief of Staff, Onyx Lorenzoni, that it was necessary to “develop” indigenous lands and, thus, guarantee “better living conditions” for that population. To this end, it was necessary to regulate mining activity on indigenous lands in the state of Amazonas.

Figure 1 – Framings about the “day of fire” produced by *Folha de S.Paulo*.



Source: Own elaboration.

In the newspaper *Público*, the conflict frames emphasized the idea that the fires were spreading through the Amazon forest with no control

at all by the Brazilian government. The discursive confrontation was established due to the divergence between the French and Brazilian presidents, Macron and Bolsonaro. The former was acting through G7 to combat the Amazon fires, while the latter not only refused the help, but also insulted his counterpart. To a large extent, the exchange of accusations between the two leaders occurred on Twitter. On the national scene, the clash between the Brazilian President and the governors of Legal Amazon was highlighted, as the latter were receptive to international financial aid.

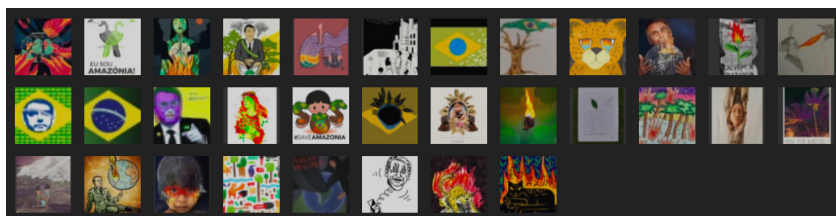
The accusations by Bolsonaro, endorsed by then-Vice President Hamilton Mourão, that the NGOs and the rural producers in the Amazon were accountable for the fires; the Brazilian president's aggressive speech at the 74th and 75th General Assemblies of the United Nations (UN); the scientific reports that attested to the gravity of the increase in carbon gas emissions for the planet; Brazilian scientific projects halted due to lack of funding; and the video campaign by the Articulation Association of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil, which directly questioned the Bolsonaro government and the stance of European leaders and consumers in the face of the fires in the Amazon, consolidated the conflict frames in *Público*.

The accountability frames demonstrated what could be done, within the scope of citizenship, in order to reduce forest fires in the Amazon: signing on-line petitions, contributing financially with NGOs, participating in protests, reducing paper and wood consumption, as well as non-certified soybean oil and beef. The action of the Brazilian military to combat the fire in the Amazon was highlighted, as well as the Greenpeace protest, which intervened in front of the European Parliament headquarters, in Brussels. The initiative demanded that European leaders be more incisive with president Jair Bolsonaro so that he would not only control the fires in the Amazon, but also develop his policies regarding the environment. President Macron's articulation during the G7 meeting, in Biarritz, reinforced the accountability frame, as the fires

spread to different countries in the Pan-Amazon region, also threatening the French Guiana (a French overseas territory).

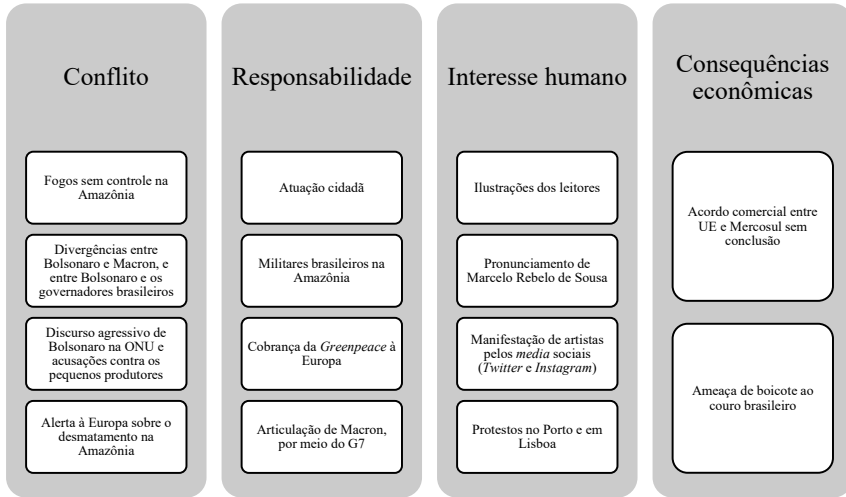
The human interest frames were perceived in the illustrations produced by the readers of *Público* (figure 2), which revealed particular views on the “day of fire” in the Amazon, as well as in the official statement by Portuguese presidente Marcelo Rebelo de Souza (2016-present); in the manifestation of Portuguese and international artists via Twitter and Instagram (in some cases, with images that were not related to the “day of fire” in the Amazon); and in the protests that took place in Porto and Lisbon.

Figure 2 – Illustrations sent by the readers to *Público* about the “day of fire”



Source: *Público*.

Finally, the economic consequences frames warned of the possible non-conclusion of the trade agreement between the European Union (EU) and the Southern Common Market (Mercosul). Representatives from Finland, Ireland and France took advantage of the situation to demand clear guarantees that the Brazilian government was capable of controlling the fire in the Amazon, as well as showing respect for the independence of scientific-environmental agencies and indigenous peoples. However, part of this motivation aimed to protect domestic producers. Also highlighted was the possibility of transnational companies boycotting the purchase of Brazilian leather, because of its association with deforestation in the Amazon.

Figure 3 – Framings of the “day of fire” produced by *Público*.

Source: self-made.

Although the four types of frames were identified in both newspapers, it was noted that the conflict frames were predominant in *Folha de S. Paulo*, and the accountability frames predominated in *Público*. In the following section, we will discuss what these discursive constructions reveal about the “day of fire” and the power struggles in the Amazon.

Discussion of results

In the two selected periodicals the following frames of meaning were identified, according to the typology proposed by Valkenburg *et al.* (1999): conflict frames, accountability frames, human interest frames and economic consequences frames. However, when comparing figure 1 and figure 3, it was noted that, in the Brazilian newspaper, the conflict frames were more elaborate, while in the Portuguese newspaper, accountability frames were privileged. In line with our theoretical positioning, we believe that this difference can be understood based on the socio-historical and cultural environment in which each newspaper is inserted (DE VREESE, 2005; ENTMAN, 1993; SCHEUFELE,

1999; VAN GORP, 2010), as well as the experience of the journalists (FRANÇA, 2002; GOFFMAN, 1974) involved in the coverage of the “day of fire”. Likewise, we assume that both newspapers reflect a “foreign” perspective (PAES LOUREIRO, 1995) on the theme under analysis – that is, they are geographically and emotionally distant, contrary to what could be expected from *Folha de S. Paulo* which, from the outset, would fulfill the news value of proximity.

As will be seen later, the difference between the frames of meaning can be elucidated based on a criterion according to which, for the Brazilian newspaper, the “day of fire” effectively highlighted (from an editorial point of view) a “national” issue, while for the Portuguese newspaper the issue was “international”. It was understood that the conflict frame was predominant for *Folha de S. Paulo*, in the sense that this event/problem triggered, reinforced and prolonged the broader sociopolitical tension that permeated the country. This does not mean that the political dimension was absent from the accountability frame outlined by *Público*; however, it emerged associated with an international geopolitical context in which the Amazon is treated as a universal topic, which concerns everyone and which is everyone’s responsibility. In other words, it is seen as a territory symbolically appropriated in a universal way.

Taking as a reference a merely quantitative indicator – the number of texts published by each newspaper – the discussion becomes more complex, since we have almost the same number (one more in *Público* – 61). This could mean, as discussed below, that the relevance given to Amazonian issues by the Brazilian newspaper is not superior or qualitatively different from the one given by the Portuguese newspaper – the same “foreign” perspective. On the other hand, one could argue that the numbers are close because issues related to the Amazon arouse international interest and, in Brazil’s specific case, there is a particular interest on behalf of Portugal (this argument can be challenged, naturally, by bringing to comparison other newspapers from both countries and other geographic zones).

In this matter, we resort to Wu (2000) and Sakurai (2017), who identify economic and political power as systemic (external) determinants of the international flow of journalistic coverage: the greater the perceived political and economic power of a given country, the greater the probability of it being represented in the news production of another. Attesting to this possibility in the case under study would involve analyzing the economic interaction between Brazil and Portugal and determining how relevant this relationship is for the Portuguese. Nonetheless, the economy as a determinant does not limit itself to the trade balance: one must consider the cost of producing international news (WU, 2000) or geographically distant news (even when dealing with the same country). Therefore, it can be seen that news agencies (the size of their presence in each country) have emerged, for over 20 years, as the second biggest predictor, by making available certain themes and certain sources of information (WU, 2000).

The premise – to which we have already alluded – that Portuguese-Brazilian Society sees the Amazon as foreign, seemed to be confirmed, given the newspapers' practices and routines. At *Folha de S. Paulo*, Phillippe Watanabe was the journalist who produced the most articles about the case, however, he never visited the places affected by the forest fires. The Brazilian newspaper has a correspondent in the city of Manaus, journalist Fabiano Maisonnave – who was the author of the first text to be published about the case. In general, the information collected by Maisonnave was shared with the editorial headquarters, in São Paulo, and cross-referenced with data obtained from other sources, such as scientific institutions and INPE. The conflict frames were constructed based on a broader understanding of the national and international scenario. Due to the limitations of his activities (the journalist works with the investigation of raw information in the field, that is, he travels through the Amazon searching for data that the editorial office, in São Paulo, can not obtain), it is understood that Maisonnave was not the main journalist working on the case, although his contribution was decisive in *Folha de S. Paulo's* framing.

The Brazilian newspaper's routine of journalistic production consolidated above all the conflict frames regarding the "day of fire", since, due to the emphasis on certain expressions ("the August fires", "international crisis" and "night in the city of São Paulo") and the recurring use of satellite images (which indicated the hot spots in the Amazon) and graphics (that annually recorded the total number of forest fires), it was possible to note that deforestation in the Amazon was being driven by anthropogenic factors – unlike what president Bolsonaro stated. However, the same dynamic corroborated the foreign perspective, since Watanabe, who has been working with scientific and environmental journalism since the beginning of his professional life, has never been to the Amazon. In fact, the journalist's experience is with scientific data on environmental issues, which is an essential background: interpreting data is very relevant, especially when dealing with scientific journalism. Nevertheless, contact with the physical world (a hallmark of journalistic reporting) is what brings numbers and scientific reports to life. According to Watanabe himself, he does not believe that it is necessary to leave São Paulo in order to understand the importance and the complexity of environmental problems, in addition to the fact that there is more security and infrastructure at the editorial headquarters.

Apparently, the Amazon rainforest is still seen as a territory to be explored – isolated and with its own identity (PAES LOUREIRO, 1995). According to editorial secretary Vinícius Mota (who admits that *Folha de S. Paulo's* audience is not in the Amazon), the costs of practicing journalism in this part of Brazil are high. In order to reduce expenses, the newspaper tries to maintain correspondents throughout the country. In the case of the "day of fire", the correspondents' work was particularly reflected in the human interest frames, as it emphasized the consequences of the alleged environmental crime for indigenous peoples and for journalist Adécio Piran. In accordance with the "cost-benefit" logic, the Brazilian periodical tries to establish partnerships, especially for the acquisition of images. In the case under study, most of the photographs were provided by the *Reuters* news agency. Figure 4, for example, was

repeatedly used in texts. Among the possible meanings, the contrast between light and dark reinforces the conflict frame, that is, the opposition between the alleged criminals (supported by President Bolsonaro) and the defenders of the Amazon forest – as the fire invades a site that is not natural to it and does not stop until it burns everything, deep into the night.

Figure 4 – The *Reuters* agency provided most of the photographs on the “day of fire”.



Source: *Folha de S.Paulo*.

At *Público*, although the newspaper had journalists specializing in environmental issues, the case was covered by the international editorial team, at the time called “Mundo”, without calling them into action. Most of the texts about the “day of fire” were signed in a generic way (“PÚBLICO”) and/or by the *Lusa* news agency, since *Público* did not send a journalist to the location of the event. According to journalist Ricardo Cabral Fernandes, who worked temporarily at the periodical between June 2019 and August 2020, this occurred because many journalists were

on vacation during the time of the forest fires. In Cabral Fernandes' opinion, due to the lack of particular events in Portugal and the summer holidays, it was possible to cover the case from a distance, without the need to reorganize the team or to reallocate journalists specializing in the environment – which strengthened the construction of the accountability and human interest frames. It should be noted that, during the same period, there were forest fires in Portugal, however, the scale and the alleged criminal bias of the “day of fire” may have been the reason why the Brazilian case was more extensively covered by *Público*. In other words, this was a process of news construction marked by the dependence on information from the agencies (WU, 2000) and, from the organizational point of view, by decisions to allocate resources, in a context where they are scarce (KIM, 2003).

Although international news is important to *Público*, researcher and journalist Joaquim Fidalgo (who actively participated in the founding of the periodical) corroborates that, traditionally, there is no editorial orientation to pay special attention to what goes on in the former Portuguese colony, nor in the outskirts of Brazil, where the Amazon forest is located. The newspaper is more interested in what is happening in the other European centers and in the USA. The increasing Brazilian immigration³ to Portugal certainly leads the periodical to report more in Brazilian contemporary times, but still without a socio-historical understanding.

This analysis seems to meet the perspective of Sakurai (2017), who recognizes the relevance of cultural aspects in the flow of international news – namely the sharing of a “language” and “colonial ties”; however, he argues that these dimensions end up being diluted by the most important determinants: economic interest, the political factor and the interests of the news agencies. This may explain the perception that *Público* is more interested in the European context. Furthermore, “the

3 Dados de 2022 do Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras apontam que, dos 781.915 imigrantes regulares em Portugal, os brasileiros representam a maior comunidade: 239.774 pessoas (30,7% do total de estrangeiros). Ver: <https://www.sef.pt/pt/Documents/RIFA2022%20vF2a.pdf>.

dominance of the ‘Big Four’ news agencies [AP, UPI, AFP and Reuters] allows the United States, France and Great Britain to establish their hegemonic spheres of international influence (SAKURAI, 2017, p. 4).

The lack of in-depth reporting was noted in the case of *Público* due to generic repetitions, such as “The Amazon is the largest tropical rainforest in the world and has the greatest biodiversity recorded in a single area of the planet” (LUSA; PÚBLICO, 2019), as well as misunderstandings, such as the metaphor of the Amazon as the “lungs of the world”. According to Oliveira (1991), the origin of this erroneous view goes back to an interview given by German biologist Harald Sioli, in 1971, in which the reporter changed the symbol for carbon dioxide (CO₂) for the symbol of oxygen (O₂). What should have been absorption of the latter was understood as absorption of the ladder. Thus, the Amazon became the “lungs of the world”, but the forest’s potential is to fix carbon dioxide, so the correct association should have been “filter of the world”. The perspective of a specialized journalist would certainly have helped to avoid the spread of less precise understandings, from a scientific point of view.

Each in their own way, *Folha de S. Paulo* and *Público* recognized the importance of the Amazon in curbing climate change, but the efforts to understand the biome beyond its natural characteristics were hampered by financial costs. It is important to highlight the unequal forces that act in the social construction of environmental problems. The voice of the “other”, which is physically and temporally distant from the major political-economic centers of Brazil and Europe has less visibility in the social dialogue, that is, it is not the center of the issue. In this case study, it was noted that the social side of the Amazon (that is, the people who live there and who are probably the most vulnerable to environmental crimes) were presented through “human interest”, that is, by the most peripheral places, from the framing point of view.

Conclusions

This article aimed to identify the frames regarding the “day of fire” constructed by two newspapers from different geographies – *Público* and

Folha de S. Paulo – and to understand in which way the journalists’ experience contributed to the framing process. This was done to reach a broader understanding of the Portuguese-Brazilian perspective (with due limitations and without generalizations) on the Amazon. In both newspapers we noted conflict frames, accountability frames, human interest frames and economic consequence frames. The practices and work routines, as well as the journalists’ involvement in the case, contributed to the consolidation of two foreign perspectives on the Amazon – even though, from an editorial point of view, the case was treated in a “national” way by *Folha de S. Paulo* and in an “international” way by *Público*.

For the Brazilian newspaper, correspondents and partners (such as news agencies) were strategic in order to reduce expenses of journalistic production in this part of Brazil, in the same way that the experience of the main journalist involved in the “day of fire” (Watanabe) contributed to the revelation of the political and economic – not just environmental – and international tension triggered by the Bolsonaro government. For the Portuguese newspaper, the news agencies were equally essential (*Lusa* above all), given the lack of resources to send reporters to the Amazon. However, some editorial organization would be required in order to understand the political-economic and social nuances surrounding the Amazon forest – which could avoid the repetition of traditional mistakes, such as the metaphor of the “lungs of the world”.

In concrete terms, this work contributes to media and journalism studies in three aspects. The first one refers to the professional field, since it was noted that the production of news, especially those that involve hard-to-reach places, such as the Amazon, is directly related to organizational determinants (internal to the periodicals). However, there is a differential regarding the experience of journalists – so much so that *Público* was able to draw attention to the “day of fire” although it seemed to be more limited (in terms of human resources) than *Folha de S. Paulo*. This shows that public problems tend to be better investigated and communicated when the professionals are better trained – which

ARTIGO

implies not only better qualification (initial, but also in service), but also better gross pay and adequate financial resources (which translates into time to investigate, funds for travelling etc.). The issue is beyond the scope of this work, but it is a subject for future researches.

The second aspect resides in the theoretical-methodological sphere, since the applicability of framing as a discursive technique in the comprehension of complex empirical phenomena was demonstrated. It is possible to use it separately, as in this study, or together with other qualitative techniques, such as the narrative analysis. From this second aspect comes the third contribution of this work, which is a social one. When identifying the frames of meaning surrounding the “day of fire”, as well as understanding the framing processes by newspapers *Folha de S. Paulo* and *Público*, the serious problems in the management of the Amazon were highlighted – both from the internal point of view, and as a universally appropriated territory.

For the Portuguese-Brazilian Society, the issues of the biome are not restricted to Brazil, especially because carbon dioxide emissions (due to deforestation) affect the entire planet. Therefore, there is an expectation – particularly from the international community – that the top leader of the country that is home to much of the largest tropical rainforest in the world will adopt positions and policies that are consistent with such responsibility, not only in controlling an environmental crisis, but above all in a real commitment to sustainable development. By highlighting how the performance by President Jair Bolsonaro (in the case of the “day of fire”) not only failed to meet that expectation but also positioned him in a conflict frame, this work reinforces the role of journalism as a pillar of democracy (only informed citizens will be able to make informed and free choices), as a watchdog, and guarantor of accountability on the part of political power.

Authors' contributions

The authors participated equally in the conception and design stages of the work; data acquisition, analysis or interpretation; writing of the manuscript and critical revision of the intellectual content.

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