



Master Thesis

# Framing Crisis: Geopolitics of Contemporary Mass Media Representation

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## Abstract

Contemporary mass media is continuously presenting overwhelming amounts of information along with outstanding headlines and powerful images, targeting media users daily for their attention. Since visual content requires less time and effort to grasp the basis of an event, photographic images, given their general notion of being truthful, play a crucial part in representation of the events and thus are the key element in constructing news narratives. What is more, aftermath photographs, often used in news reports, are vital in creating common memory and helping to understand the issue while landscape photographs illustrate the scale of the disaster and present political or institutional powers of the place. However, a closer look at the mass media news reports shows that geopolitics may be another critical yet overlooked component in constructing mass media news stories with potentially unfavorable effects on news credibility. Visual analysis of two recent events presented by this research, namely Amazon rainforest fires and Siberian wild forest fires, illustrates how selection of photographs regarding the place of the event might be dependent on geopolitical aspects, in turn making some of the events more visible than others despite their equal significance on a global scale. Hence, this thesis discusses the role of geopolitics in visual representation of the events and questions in what ways do they contribute to the framing of the news on mass media platforms along with possible consequences of their perception and evaluation by the public.



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## Introduction

In 2012 Emmanuel Hoog the CEO of Agence France-Presse, presenting his keynote speech at the meeting of the European Alliance of Press Agencies, said one of the most iconic phrases which certainly characterizes the representation of global news on mass media today – “If you want to create an event, you first have to create the visuals” (2012, EANA). Eight years later this is still the case. Every day the headlines of the online news sources and mass media platforms such as well-known BBC, CNN, The Times, The Guardian, Reuters, etc. present another seemingly groundbreaking story aiming to gain public attention and in turn causing a trending topic or even global concern. The effect of the reported information on the events can be said to be highly dependent on photographic images used alongside, given their significance within contemporary social structure of visual culture (Rossler, Bomhoff, Hachke, Kersten and Muller, 2011, p. 415-416). According to media scholar Astrid Gynnild (2017) since mass media news language is largely built upon imagery, genuine photographs show a remarkable power to frame the representation of events towards desired public judgement, which in turn contributes to the formation of social and political conventions of power and dominance within international context. Thus, the presence of photographic fact becomes crucial for news reports both visually and politically. Nevertheless, the production and distribution of photographic content often falls into question of the agency responsible for it. While in some places the distribution of imagery is regulated merely by the general request for visual content, other areas present tight relations between the news agencies, mass media and the government, suggesting underlying political interest in structuring local and even global reception of the news (Gynnild, 2017, p. 25-39). For these reasons, photographs play a major role in mass media representation of the news, serving not only as mere illustrations of the event but also as an evidence of truth. Simultaneously, a closer look at the photographic representation may reveal underlying geopolitical aspects, which provide a better view on some of the contemporary mass media phenomenon, such as under-representation or popularization of the events. Therefore, the analysis conducted by this research discusses what is the role of geopolitics in constructing

visual representation of a place in mass media news and provides some insights on possible consequences.

Geopolitics, being a less addressed topic within the field of media representation, is one of the perspectives for a discussion on what constitutes the visibility and directs representation of the news. The scope to which geographical studies of media and communication are starting to build bridges among disciplines can be seen to be expanding and establishing geopolitics within the field of media studies, as it has shifted from being invisible to cutting a distinct profile just over the past decade (Adams, 2017, p. 366). As political scientist David Campbell (2007) notes, research done on world politics ‘has not yet fully grasped the weight of visual culture within the field of politics’ (p. 358). Visual culture, according to visual culture theorist Irit Rogoff (2000), translates representations and practices which by circulating within our field of vision create visibilities as well as policing invisibilities, establishing power relations, constructing stereotypes and nevertheless creating the ability to know and to verify (p. 20). Therefore, as Campbell highlights, there is little research done specifically on visual culture of politics, not to mention the importance of documentary photography and photojournalism within the processes of contemporary geopolitics (2007, p. 358). Nevertheless, geopolitics today are conceived not only as international relations and foreign policy making tool, but they are also the transformations of contemporary political and economic processes, within which communication, culture and media play a significant role, especially in balancing global power relations. The emergence of critical geopolitics and some recent developments of this academic field have facilitated the new ways of thinking about the connection between geopolitics and media. Two key factors become notable in addition to the shifts in power dynamics, both regional and international. On one hand, the rapidly changing technological environment and the weight of such change in regards to the scale and structure of medial streams and on the other hand the necessary reconsideration of the nation-state roles, which are still highly present today (Burkart & Christensen, 2013, p. 4). Respectively, the recent events analyzed in this research, namely Amazon rainforest fires and Siberian wild forest fires of the summer 2019 serve as an illustrative example of the weight of geopolitics on visual representation of the news. The comparison of the photographic content within the news reports presented by mass media online sources reveals imbalanced coverage of the two substantial events, equally

meaningful within the global context although represented from a rather biased point of view. As a result, visual framing of the photographs has contributed to particular public perception of the events while simultaneously reflecting on the political and social views on the two regions.

The comparison of the two cases of fires in different regions - Amazonia and Siberia, serves as an expository base for discussing the role of geopolitics in constructing visual representation of mass media news, since it concerns geographical places rather than national borders of the states and therefore provides exclusive approach for questioning geopolitics within media context. Since geopolitics are concerned with the region or a place, this dissertation conducts visual analysis of specifically landscape and aftermath photographs as these genres bear characteristic abilities for the representation of power relations, politics and contribute to the formation of collective memory of the crisis. As art history scholar W. J. T. Mitchell (2002) notes, landscape is the focus of a historical, political and indeed aesthetic vigilance to the horror and brutality written on the land. Hence, referring to philosophy scholar Jeff Malpas, landscape can be seen to operate in two-fold ways, concealing as well as fueling forms of the power of class and money. In this sense landscape is not necessarily perceived as an art genre, but rather directly tied up with human life, the spaces and places where that life is lived (Malpas, 2011, p. 1-2). Even though tradition of analysis of a landscape takes into account both space and place as separate categories, Malpas supports W.J. T. Mitchell's argument suggesting that thinking of these terms should be in connection to one another. According to Malpas (2011), it is beneficial to address place rather than space of the landscape since it presents the underlying power relations. The view on the landscape in connection to place opens up a discussion on more than visual or spatial aspects of a photograph, it encourages engagement with rather than merely separation from the place. As there is surely political character to the landscape, there is also political character of a place. However, neither place nor landscape can be perceived within the political aspect alone although landscape offers multiple perspectives for discussion on forms of practice, genres and modes of analysis (2011, p. 2-4).

Moreover, considering photographs published alongside news reports on media being often linked to the traumatic events, the question of collective memory as an outcome of

photographic representation related to disastrous events is addressed through the prism of aftermath photography. This type of photography offers a rather specific way of immersing into a place on a picture in turn changing the way we think of time, history and memory. As presented by scholar in the field of modern art Donna West Brett (2017) aftermath photography presents an exceptional character, it performs as a ‘startling fracture in the field of vision as special kind of vision related to clinical astigmatism, which distorts the view’ the same way as fragments of traumatic memories are being stored in ones’ subconscious (p.3). As a result, aftermath photographs relate to how traumatic events are identified and remembered, what is their meaning for the places where they took place and how are they communicated through. These images project belated cultural pursuit to incorporate experiences into contemporary recognition, also continuous endeavor to fix alternative histories into common memory (Brett, 2017, p. 9). Therefore, visual analysis of landscape and aftermath photographs of Amazon rainforest and Siberian wild-forest fires can provide a better understanding of geopolitical implications on mass media representation as well as public perception of the news.

Since this research focuses primarily on the photographic representation of the events, visual analysis conducted for this research is based on the method introduced by cultural geographer Gillian Rose (2001). According to Rose, visual analysis of photographic images must take into account the three main sites responsible for the creation of the meaning of the photograph, namely the site of production, the site of image itself and the site of audiences. These sites or in Rose's words - modalities, greatly contribute to the critical dissemination and understanding of images. However, in order to provide more concise results in regards to construction of visual representation and public perception, this research focuses on visual appearance of the photographs, the site of images and their reception – the site of audiences. Hence, it takes into account formal aspects of the image, defining the tools which have been used in order to enhance the scene, interpret its thought composition, which refers to formal strategies of the image - colors, lighting, style, quality and perspectives. Additionally, Rose (2001) stresses the importance of the genre of the image, as it helps to distinguish certain features shared within the same category of the images and provide an insight on potential difficulties in terms of categorizing and reflecting on them. Hence, it allows "to make sense of the significance of elements of an individual image if it is known that some of them recur

repeatedly in other images" (p. 19). Nevertheless, the social modality is claimed to be the most important one, since it deals with cultural aspects of image reception and recognition. Social modalities in this regard discuss the range of social, political, economic or institutional aspects and practices surrounding the image and may be reflected upon it as well. Moreover, the factor of audience meaning who reads the image or to whom the image is addressed is also taken into account. As a result, application of methodological tools for visual analysis presented by Gillian Rose provides strong theoretical grounds for the evaluation of the photographs presented alongside the mass media news reports as well as the role of the external cultural and political factors behind these images.

Chapter 1 presents a discussion on geopolitics within mass media communication by comparing Russian and Brazilian communication practices as well as international relations in order to outline to what extent do geopolitics of both countries determine the representation of their local news for international audiences as well as the reception of them, in turn revealing the reasons for visibility or invisibility of the regions in global context.

Chapter 2 questions the weight of photographic imagery in contemporary mass media news representation and how does it reflect on the geopolitical factors in terms of visual framing. By introducing the two dominant photographic genres within media news representation – landscape and aftermath, it analyses the meaning of photography for public perception of the event and the place where it happens, how do photographic images contribute to the collective memory and in turn – establish particular notions about the place.

Chapter 3 provides a visual analysis of the photographs of Amazonian rainforest and Siberian wild-forest fires happened in the summer of 2019 published on the popular online mass media platforms. Alongside the analysis of case study photographs, discussion draws on geopolitics of both cases Russia and Brazil, outlining how are they reflected in the ways international mass media frame visual representation of the regions, their meaning and consequently public perception of these events.

The thesis concludes by suggesting that the analysis of visual representation of global crises reveals underlying geopolitical factors causing particular media framing of the news in

turn accelerating contemporary media phenomenon of news prioritization. Consequently, it can be seen to result in altered public perception and invisibility of significant yet underreported events such as the fires of Siberian wild-forest.

## Chapter 1: Geopolitics within Mass Media Communication

Drawing on the findings conducted by a number of scholars (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013; Castells, 2012; Howard and Hussain, 2013; Papacharissi, 2014), it can be said that new media technologies and especially at the time of writing - digital media technologies - foster political changes mainly through the new forms of connectivity and communication, in advance or in some cases in disregard to democratic values and ideals, this way benefiting political aims over the public opinion on local or global issues (Aouragh & Chakravartty, 2016, p. 560), given that today regional powers are more than before responsible for setting the tone for their local governing as democratic superpowers are cutting down their global influence (Kagan, 2015, p. 29). Thus, a clearer overview of how media structures work could be grasped when looking at the history of places and the ways in which power relations have been build and nourished for the benefit of new regional alliances, the effects of which can be seen to be present as well in contemporary times. The context of digital infrastructure is closely related to the early colonial encounters and to some extent determined by history of disrupted, uneven capitalism, which determines varying stages of development of media and the governing of communication which in turn provide valuable insights on news representation, their outreach and public perception. Nevertheless, the analogue means of communication, namely telegraph and telephone cables as well as the modern digital communication technologies are both in fact part of these ruptured urban infrastructures which have to be taken into account when discussing the role of geopolitics within mass media. Yet, referring to the studies done by Graham & Marvin (2001) and Larkin (2008), Aouragh & Chakravartty (2016) sees these infrastructures to be material expressions of new concepts of light, speed, power and indeed information exchange (p. 564). Therefore, there is a clear conceptual benefit of thinking of media and information systems as of an infrastructure, which is based on historical changes and provide analytical basis for a discussion on contemporary media policies in the regions and their governing policies towards communication.

Referring to Castells' theories (2009, 2011), the very foundation of communication lies in a global web of linear communication networks. Building upon this idea, author states that

media are not the ones who hold the power but rather constitute the space for communication in which power is resolved, what suggests that power over the representation of the news events is constructed by more factors than media institutions alone. The structural power of a social actor or the agency, according to Castells, is situated in its ability to establish its aim over other actors within this progressively challenged space. In this regard, author proposes that in our time communication power is settled on the circulation of messages by a large number of senders and receivers on the Internet and states that power is no longer primarily in the communication networks or in corporate owners but it is held by every agency within the media, from the audience to political figures. However, since contemporary communication is largely build on imagery, Gynnild (2017) calls for rethinking and re-examining the significance of visual communication in particular, taking into account the power of photographic imagery in constructing news narratives. Being concerned with earlier established gate-keeping functions of news agencies, author argues that these media agencies bear potential power over social acknowledgment of visual storytelling, even though new digital communication platforms and spaces make it especially challenging to grasp in what ways and to what extent news agencies are actually capable to affect users and shift immense amounts of information towards any particular direction (Gynnild, 2017, p. 28). Thus, closer look at the establishment of mass media communication practices within different state governments may provide a better view on what determines the construction of visual news narratives as well, also how and by whom is the spread of news content including their visual material is directed.

As research on visibility and invisibility of news reports on media, conducted by Gursel (2012) shows, the dominance of the news largely depends not only on the institutions governing the news production, but also on the place where the events happen and the visual aspects of their representation. As Gursel (2012) points out, African news, for example, are often ignored if they do not have much to do with Europe. News outreach then depends on how popular they are predicted to be among the viewers and selected according to supposed dominance rather than the factuality of the event. Therefore, if a plane crash happened in faraway place and most of the victims were not from Western Europe or the United States, it makes it less appealing for the image brokers and media reporters, which results in such news being overshadowed by possibly less significant but more attention drawing events (p. 76).

Respectively, events which took place ‘closer’ in regards to political and social familiarity happen to gain more attention since they are better understood and tend to appear as affecting on more personal grounds despite the physical distance. In addition, since contemporary media consumption is closely related to the visual representation, photographic images become important elements in acquiring public attention. This being said, the example of Amazonian region suggests that the news from Amazon gained more attention due to the familiarity of the region and political closeness to the West, compared to less known Siberia along with the general recognition of Russia as of exclusive and rather aggressive state. In this context Amazon as a tourist attraction for its iconic rainforest presents a more significant meaning due to its visual familiarity created by distinctive imagery often used by the media which highly contrasts with the international acknowledgement of Siberia, which is rarely exposed by the media and therefore lacks cultural or political recognition as well as closeness. Therefore, as the example of African plane crash discussed by Gursel (2012) and similarly Amazon and Siberia shows, the ways in which news framing is implemented are to some extent as well predetermined by profound geopolitical conditions, presenting the patterns in which the news are being selected and represented, based on their assumed popularity among the public. Therefore, this calls for new perspectives of looking at visual communication and including more factors into the discussion on power over the construction of visual representation of the news reports on mass media, one of which is particularly informative yet less evident, defining political concerns regarding the place and communication practices within this place – geopolitics. Hence, this chapter presents a discussion on geopolitical differences between Brazil and Russia in regards to international relations and mass communication, highlighting the ways of creating visibility or invisibility of the region’s news for the international audiences and proposing potential reasons for it. By comparing the two cases, namely Amazon and Siberia, it is questioning geopolitical conditions for the outreach of the news and analyses to what extent international relations of both countries determine the representation as well as perception of their local news on foreign mass media.

## 1.1 Russia in The Eyes of the West

Geopolitics, according to political scientist Yulia Nikitina, is a particular theoretical school within Russian international relations which has developed organically. Dating back to the 19th century, this is the only analytical faculty in contrast to the most of the other international relations works which has not been secondary drawn from already existing Western middle-range theories. As an independent school of Russian politics, geopolitics demonstrate a unique outlook on Russia's power, closely relating it to the greatness of its size and favorable geographic position, the qualities which are also highly prized and so fixed in Russian self-representation within international context (Nikitina, 2012, 257). The 19th century debates concerning Russia's relationship vis-a-vis modern Europe have certainly influenced the emergence of Eurasianism - a multifaceted body of ideas, coherent and self-conscious approach focusing on Russia's combined European and Asian geographical identity. Since that time this approach has been expanded as well as altered, especially in the post-Soviet period. The core proposition of Russian Eurasianism has been that as the geographical center of Eurasia, Russia is a peculiar nation which is not utterly compatible with its neighboring civilizations, Europe or Asia. What is more, according to this approach, Russia operates as the integrator within Eurasian space that closely correlates with the former Soviet establishment and highlights Russian leadership within its area of interest as well as demonstration of power to the competitors - the West and the United States (Silvius, 2015 p. 242). Hence, power manifestation within every aspect of country's enterprise is visible even at contemporary times, as well as international relations and especially mass communication, including institutional framing of news representation on media within the country and for the outside audiences.

Looking at Russian online media in the 20th century, web news remains the most controversial phenomenon to this day. Given the growing numbers of users among the country, it is still just a fraction of population leaving the rest without an access to the information online, limiting digital news sources merely to the elite. However, since the introduction of the Internet went in parallel with remarkable freedom of press, it encouraged new journalistic paradigm to flourish, this way making the Internet perhaps the only truly free medium which is

as well cheap to sustain and difficult to control. Nevertheless, it must be addressed that even being exceptionally successful, it is still accessible only for a narrow audience of the West. Due to the lack of information infrastructures and language barrier, news on national matters coming from suburbs and rural areas of Russia hardly reaches larger international audiences this way concealing many of Russia's internal issues. What is more, in comparison to the West, where most of the print news content is also being published online, in Russia online news sites' content frequently does not have print analogues, which makes news reports scattered and appropriated to different audiences – print for the lower classes and citizens of the outskirts yet digital for the upper class and the elite, this way creating rather closed circuits for news flows. This shows that in comparison to majority of the other countries, such as Brazil, online media in Russia had developed on its own this also being the reason for uneven media coverage and fragmented news outreach. While radio, print and television were struggling with the issues of censorship and lagged behind, the Internet has developed its own logistics and infrastructure, even though it can be accessed by only a small percentage of the population. These media paradoxes present a number of larger issues when it comes to news distribution and factual photographic content which can also be illustrated by the example of Siberia. Being a large rural area it indeed lacks sufficient communication infrastructure which makes it difficult to spread the news on region's issues, such as fires, promptly and explicitly. Hence, the lack of visual representation of far-away regions on mass media shows the centrality of information networks, which are being gathered within the populated areas, simultaneously making it easier to filter the news and frame their meaning in order to sustain the power over public opinion. Since there is no information nor photographic content of the events coming from the further regions, it is creating a false impression of serenity and thus grants public trust on the government's ability to manage the outskirt areas even in critical situations if such news does appear. While print media remains accessible to majority of the population yet subjected to institutional censorship, which may conceal politically unfavorable information, online media, while being rather free from institutional regulations, appears to be unable to sufficiently provide news abroad or even to a majority of the citizens within the country (Arutunyan, 2009, p. 11-12). As a consequence, geographical magnitude, along with political aims for power and dominance, plays as an information suppressing factor resulting in lack of news representation

on media within and outside of the country. However, despite geographically determined infrastructural matters, political dominance over freedom of expression presents even more challenges for the representation of the news regarding Russia's internal affairs.

When it comes to freedom of speech and institutional regulations for the online or offline communication, one of the exceptional rules of journalistic practice in Russia is the ownership of the media platforms which juxtaposes journalistic independence with the control of media content. Reporters are granted freedom to write and publish their works although they are supervised by the platform owners, whether it is state regulated or privately owned. With an exception of a few cases when journalists collectively managed their own media source, they are mostly reliant on distributors who then regulate circulation and content of the reports. Moreover, there is indeed little difference whether the media platform is controlled by the state or privately owned, since press processes are restricted either way by filtering news reports, supervising their distribution or in some cases concealing internal social, political or environmental issues, which otherwise might affect the authority of the state within international politics and diminish its hypothetical power (Arutunyan, 2009, p. 2). As in the case of Siberian news on wild forest fires, drawing on Arutunyan's argument, it may be implied that reports have not been in favor of the state's power over its own crisis, which is why the flow of the content outside of Russian media, both informational and visual could be restricted in order to preserve the impression of strong political governing. This idea could also be supported by the fact that Russian officials for decades have been actively establishing state-sanctioned understanding of the world order by introducing organic intellectuals also called 'political technologists' who would be responsible for multiple discursive logics, such as cultural, religious or social, continually shaping the perception of Russian statecraft and nation as distinctive and contradicting aggressive cultural and political tendencies found outside of Russian geography (Silvius, 2015 p. 243). Since news flows are much dependent on political aspects, observations made by Nikitina (2012) offer another suggestion as to why visual material and general information on Russian events are less prominent on media. Nikitina (2012) argues, that Russia has always been to some extent excluded from the Western politics and global decision making. As noted earlier, due to the size of the country and non-democratic outlook, it simply cannot be brought into close relationships with Western countries. This

alienation then creates a gap within the general knowledge about Russia in the eyes of the West and thus diminishes outside public's engagement with the news on it, especially given Russia's complicated relationships with surrounding post-Soviet countries, making it too distant and reclusive (p. 260). In this regard, communication boundaries become even more prominent, making the news on Russia's regions seem obscure, consequently losing its significance and visibility as in the case of Siberian fires. As a consequence, Siberian wild-forest fires have not been acknowledged as an international concern at the time they started and gained more international attention only when placed in parallel with Amazon fires, in turn categorizing the news as of similar topic and only then perceived as an alarming environmental concern.

As noted earlier, two key factors have been the shaping Russian mass media, namely the authoritarian model which dominates every aspect of everyday life and corrupts information for propaganda purposes along with continuously accelerating growth of digital media. However, in contrast to the big part of the world, where censorship and state regulation were indeed notable features of media development yet did not present long lasting effects, in Russia, the legacy has still kept its position and remains visible up until today. Moreover, the government itself has been observed to be an active player in falsifying the national media, generating and reinforcing outlets which would then be used for the means of control of public opinion. In these circumstances, any somewhat successful release often appears to be launched by the government and ultimately forced into submission, paradoxically presenting increasingly dynamic development, where traditional and very much appreciated written word goes along with the legacy of media being a tool for manipulating mass consciousness (Arutunyan, 2009, p. 1). Thus, even though digitalization of media in Russia has been rapidly developing, written word is still of a high importance today, as many Russians still prioritize physical newspapers to digital information source. It also appears that mass circulation newspapers present a specific kind of financial model which takes into account the size of the country as well as its multi-ethnicity and focuses on large audiences with different interests and preferences, which makes entertainment a priority over information on state matters. This kind of universality is built on adaptation, simplification and narrowing of social, political or economic narratives and increased focus on celebrity scandals, pop culture or other themes based on entertainment, sensationalism, family, health, or travel advise, which accumulates in large amounts of

information and rejects journalistic quality standards. Consequently, the reader is put in a rather comfortable position with given information being easily digested, avoiding confusion or complicated socio-political aspects, keeping the nation at calm. Indeed, digital media function in similar patterns even when it comes to the leading publications online. Trusted media sources can be said to be mainly focusing on the elite who are interested in the exchange of information about social issues, therefore excluding middle and lower classes. Nevertheless, this suggests that even the events of crucial importance are often being represented only to a certain extent within the regulation of the state this way keeping the power over the nation in official's hands (Arutunyan, 2009, p. 1).

The overview of Russian geopolitics in regards to media outlines that, since the Soviet Union era, Russia has been in constant power competition with the West showing its greatness and wealth. Therefore, political ideologies have always played an important role in shaping Russia's identity and representation to the world, even if it meant hiding devastating events and concealing social issues. Similar patterns can be noticed even in contemporary digital geopolitics and thus mass media. As observations by Arutunyan (2009), Silvius, (2015), Nikitina (2012) as well as Bassin and Suslov (2016) show, media platforms in Russia are struggling to reach larger audiences due to geographical greatness of the country and insufficiently developed fragmented information infrastructures which can be seen as circuits of narrowed down information appropriated for particular audiences. Most importantly, they are still highly policed, even nowadays, which often results in lack of information reaching international media users and therefore constraining global public engagement with Russian news. Although journalism in Russia is not being silenced, distribution of the news is being supervised by institutional and governmental activities consequently causing centralization of the news networks and presenting lack of free local amateur journalism in rural areas, such as Siberia. Remarkably, large amount of information on internal matters is being lost or becomes overshadowed by low quality entertainment or popular news coming from the West (Bassin, Suslov, 2016).

## 1.2 Brazil as The New Emerging Global Power

According to scholars Mares & Trinkunas, (2016), Brazil, compared to Russia, recently has been showing ‘increasing power in terms of international relations and communication, aiming at contributing to international peace, stability and cooperation’ while Russia is still more often seen as one of the declining major powers within the global political scene, establishing its position merely by military and political force (p. 85). In the past years Brazil has been working on positioning itself as a global player in the international economics as well as politics, establishing close friendships with the neighboring countries and contributing to a number of international activities, such as sports and cultural events in turn becoming more visible on mass media channels than ever before and no longer being recognized for the Amazonian rainforest alone. Brazil's awakening can be clearly seen by growing foreign and domestic investment, booming consumer demand, expanding export, social focus on the minorities in need and also democratic political cohesion. All these factors together present Brazil as economically and socially attractive in the field of global affairs, though its progress is still ongoing, which gives the country potential to become one of the leading countries in the near future (Onis, 2008, p. 110). Being the fifth largest country in terms of land and demography, Brazil grew to become the seventh largest economy in the world along with continuously growing commodity exports, increased diplomatic representation, leading peace-keeping operations in Democratic Republic of Congo and Haiti, opening embassies across Africa and the Caribbean, not to mention being a host for the conferences and social, cultural events of a global importance, opening its borders for international companies, tourism and communication (Mares & Trinkunas, 2016, 1-2). All of the efforts have certainly promoted Brazil as a new emerging power, both politically and socially, revealing its favourable position towards international relations which is also one of the major differences compared to Russia. Another important aspect of Brazil's position in global perspective is historical as well as cultural closeness to the West alongside close co-operation with the United States. For many years Brazil has been a strong supporter of pan-Americanism, the doctrine created by the cooperating countries on the Western Hemisphere, supported by the United States. However, although Brazil has maintained close relationships with the West, in the era of globalization it

aimed at establishing more independent position, largely due to its nationalist character. Nevertheless, nationalism, in case of Brazil, presents less of an aggressive form as the country has always intended to become globally respected and thus restrained from applying harsh means of power in order to achieve universal acknowledgement (Onis, 2008, p. 120 - 121).

Looking at the development of media in Latin America and Brazil in particular, one element stands out especially – the development of new media. Media as a whole, has become a greatly refined mechanism of power and control, however less politicized and more focused on the needs of markets within liberal democracies in the region. Despite mass media being adapted to ideological frameworks, it can be noticed how some of the repressive elements originating from the dictatorship have gradually mutated into new, more subtle means of control and censorship. However, similarly to Russia's case, some of the political elites and media owners benefit from growing media's role in political arena, this way fulfilling their personal interests. As these situations rather often escalate into close partnerships between media and politicians, the function of journalism is then being reduced to decorative or concealing. Journalistic practices still involve political topics, yet these are often presented in forms of scandals and gossips, which are prioritized over general news (Lugo-Ocando, 2008, p.2). The partnerships between political figures and the press present challenges for sufficient news coverage, which shape public perception of some issues happening within the country. This is seen to be even more troubled by generally preferred communication channels, since the main and the most popular media in Brazil has always been television. Just as in Russia, where television is valued as much as written word, Brazil's key communication network has always been broadcasting, the media which is highly dependent on governing institutions and thus easily manipulated. However, the emergence of the Internet has marked a significant change in country's mass communication, since it has surely restructured Brazilian models of regulation in regards to communication. The increase of new technologies and rapid innovation has led to profound change in culture consumption habits and general destabilization of cultural industries (Bolano, 2014, p. 226). Given Brazil's aspiration to gain major power status and also its history of hard work catching up with the digital development, it is natural for the country to have so far achieved a vast communication network and developed media tools. What is more, innovation, productivity and international communication is crucial for establishing Brazil's

role as an equal player within international politics, which has been one of the main motivating factors for the Brazilian government. Drawing a lot of attention to digital media technologies and development of the Internet, Brazil had successfully established not only strong network, close political relationships with international community but also developed a social inclusion model. Such model is presented to well guarantee social involvement on media platforms and digital communication networks, meaning better access to the information and freedom of expression even given the fact the geographical size of the country does present difficulties in establishing extensive communication infrastructures (Mares & Trinkunas, 2016, 151-156). As a result, Brazil is continuously constructing communication networks encouraged by the government, this way aiming at accelerating information spread, user engagement and resulting in news outreach within the country's rural areas as well as international audiences. The development of technology as well as particular political attitude towards media communication can be said to be just a few, yet significant reasons for Amazonian news visibility within global mass communication, allowing information to reach the audiences and spread visual evidence therefore gaining public engagement and international concern.

However, even though Latin America has adopted media technologies and also launched unique user engaging initiatives, some contradictions in terms of media consumption still remain. Given that the media consumption is exponentially growing it is still a privilege to have access to it and participate in its content production, since the number of media consumers is still rather small taking into account country's large population. Accordingly, this presents a problematic dilemma, as digital media is being challenged by trying to achieve knowledge technology and creativity as obscure goods which are not easily accessible due to financial and literacy issues of the lower social classes. What is more, new dimensions to current media production are brought by growing number of new satellites and cables. In some cases, it has made it impossible to produce local media content due to market fragmentation and saturation while in other instances, they have encouraged the re-emergence of developing audiovisual industry, yet only in the most potent places (Lugo-Ocando, 2008, p. 4). Nevertheless, when compared to Russian media policies, Brazil shows positive approach towards developing digital communication technologies by actively working on introducing new media to the lower classes this way educating and encouraging its population to take part in governing and

sustaining the country. As a result, the representation and perception of a region, its' space and power can be said to be largely dependent on the history of a state, its international relations, cultural aspects and internal regulations.

Differently from Russia, tropical images of exotic Brazil have always been dominating the West's perception of this land and making it an attractive tourist destination, triggering interest in its traditions and nature. The cultural colorfulness, variety of the goods originating from Brazil and indeed Amazon rainforest – all has become familiar to the international audience. Yet Amazon particularly up until today remains in the focus of the studies within Brazil, as rainforest is widely referred as the lungs of the planet and habitat for the majority of species originating from Latin America, giving it an iconic meaning and contributing to the visibility of Brazil in global context. Being a well-known region, Amazonia is often encountered within ecological discourse, making it a popular region and diminishing geographical distance with reappearance of photographic images. Therefore, it can be said that Brazilian popularity and “closeness” to the West is also build up on the meaning of Amazonian rainforest for global ecology as well as tourism and culture, alongside it's continuously spreading communication infrastructures and political interest in becoming an open, well-known and visible country for the outside world (Marcus, 2011, p. 37).

Notably, most of the works done on geopolitics deal mainly with narratives, concepts and other linguistic practices, leaving visual representation aside. However, a better look at the photographic practices within mass media and geopolitical aspects of communication reveals a strong bond between the two disciplines. Since photography is also a medium for information exchange, photographic images published alongside news reports on mass media may be seen to be to some extent dependent on historically established geopolitical notions of the place they represent and translate particular messages about the matter which in turn shapes general public view on global events. Hence, policy makers have certainly become attuned to the power of visual content, realizing the close relationship between public interest and the level of photographic coverage of events. This shows a particular concern with the geopolitical aspect of communication in relation to both old and new media, flow of information as well as human and non-human agency's participation in the process (Adams, 2017, p. 366). Thereof, even

though the majority of visual analysis in regards to geopolitics has been focused on film, it can be argued that photography plays equally critical role in academic debate on the relation between visual representation and geopolitical establishments, highlighting the role of geopolitics in the construction of visual narratives and the visibility of the news rendered on mass media platforms. For this reason, next chapter presents a discussion on the meaning of photography in news representation and how is photographic news representation determined by geopolitical factors.

## Chapter 2: The Power of Photography in Representation of Crisis

Contemporary society of today is as never before connected through online networks allowing people to communicate, share opinions and discuss global events, which contributes to increasing consumption of information at great speeds. Thus, politics as much as media itself has been striving for innovation and new strategies for representation of the global events as well as incorporating new approaches for power exploitation over public opinion (Wodak, 2011, p. 73). Even though the change in media representation of news has been largely based on the convenience and access of the Internet, as the previously presented overview of geopolitics shows, it has also produced forms of social exclusion and inequality within the less computer-literate social classes creating spaces for political manipulation of the news reception. Since in some countries the gaps between rural areas and the larger cities are until this day evident, information outreach becomes constrained in turn frequently making it easier for the authorities to conceal unfavorable information or in contrary accelerate the flows of particular media content. However, communication networks are continuously developing and spreading out as the media platforms are aiming at reaching larger and more diverse audiences adapting its content in accordance to public needs or interests, which also shows two-fold outcomes – it improves connectivity among social classes, but blurs the boundaries between entertainment content and essential information on the local or global matters (Wodak, 2011, p. 74). Alongside the technological development and growing media consumption, the coverage of the events can also be seen changing its appearance by shifting from linguistic story telling into brief, attention capturing visual snippets, which are effortless to understand and provide an idea of the represented issue within seconds by the use of usually iconic, visually prominent photographic images (Wodak, 2011, p. 75). The photographs presented in news reports have a profound effect on public perception, understanding of the event, shapes a particular view on the place where it has happened and also participate in shaping common memory due to their inherent nature of documentation and truthfulness (Strange, Garry, Bernstein, Lindsay, 2010).

The processes of visual communication and persuasion through photography can be better understood within the notion of framing – a concept closely related to the theories of the popular news construction. According to social sciences and geopolitics scholars Martin Barthel & Hans – Joachim Burkner, framing is a process of selecting and highlighting certain information about the event, in turn augmenting the greatness of a particular presentation or interpretation, which is often being repeated in preferred manner, consequently losing any unfavorable opinions of the event. Biased reporting then, can be created willingly, or in some cases, especially regarding social media, be caught up in mass reproduction this way accumulating false facts around the event. Bias, however, is not by default generated by media alone. The political orientation is as well responsible for structuring context dependent and contingent production of truth, which may also be grounded on historical past (2019, p. 5). Nevertheless, in contemporary mass media frames operate as tools for selection and classification of large amounts of information, which assist individuals in managing and interpreting the data. Frames also help to make sense of the issues presented, they can either promote or diminish particular problem in turn affect the reception by the audience (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011, p. 49). This way rather complex stories are often reduced to static photographs presented by the media in accordance to predetermined public reception and framed for desired acknowledgement. Eventually, visually constructed news narratives are engraved into common memory, sweeping away underlying conditions and contexts of the matter, consecutively reflecting the public views on the world rather than actual meaning of the represented issues (Wodak, 2011, p. 76). Given the significant shift in contemporary mass media communication from language to image, as photography historian Walter Benjamin writes - photographic images have taken an essential part of a modern life, a part of the viewers' internal world, where they are less determined by general understanding or a tradition but operate on more personal grounds. What is more, author sees photography closely related to technology, making it an archive of modern memory and history. Since photo camera is a mechanical object, Benjamin relates it to memory due to independent, subconscious operation of it. As memories are often stored in our subconscious without our active effort, photographs are being created by the device autonomously from the photographer's physical intervention (Benjamin, 1999, p. 512). Respectively, camera captures more than it consciously perceive, just

as human memory captures moments in time which require personal knowledge of the scene to be fully processed, often evoking understanding of what was seen only after some time when more knowledge and experience is gained.

This being said, the overview of two regions, Brazil and Russia, shows a significant difference in terms of governing country's self-image together with internal and international communication based on historical technology development which in turn determines how both regions present themselves for the international public or are being represented by foreign and local media. Establishment of communication infrastructures alongside political traditions of governing information streams has based particular grounds for news framing and hence the visual representation of the news, playing a crucial role in contemporary culture, which is highly focused on the visuals. When it comes to geopolitics, photographic images are particularly important when discussing communication practices based on regions and the news representation on mass media coming from them, due to its ability to bring news from far-away places home. It is one of the principal ways enabling news reports to travel and thus construct the notion of "home", shaping public perception of distance between regions. Therefore, photography operates as a medium for connectivity, which is why it can provide valuable insights on what determines visual framing of news coming from regions. Since the beginning of travel photography practices, images have become an important source of information about people and places witnessed during those journeys, which in turn has added up to the emergence of the dichotomies of North/South, developed/underdeveloped, civilized/uncivilized - all of it being prominent aspects of imagined geography. Alongside the development of the technology and digitalization of media, a big part of "foreign" news would present stories of tragedies and disasters in contrast to relatively stable and less frightening "domestic" realm this way enlarging geographical as well as social distance. However, visual analysis of the recent events with the account of their geopolitical realities presents rather different patterns which are highly determined by internal governing of each state. The news reports on Amazonian forests have produced significantly more outstanding photographic content, making the issue appear especially important, compared to Siberian reports, which provided comparably less and lower quality photographic content, in turn making Siberian fires look less dreadful and lost in the vast amount of information. Therefore, according to the

argument presented by David Campbell it can be noted that visual content and geopolitics are indeed closely related and therefore create two-fold effect, in which photography functions as a tool for geopolitical action and geopolitics become the means for constructing visibility of the news since they enable or restrict the outreach of visual content (2007, p. 358). Looking at the mass media news representation the power of photography appears outstanding, which is why this chapter questions what makes it so significant and effective for the formation of public opinion in turn leading to the shift in social reception of the mass media news. As follows, chapter discusses in what ways does photography direct public reception of the news, how do photographs narrate the stories they depict and how are photographs being framed by the media. Additionally, examples of aftermath and landscape photography are analyzed, highlighting their genre specificity in regards to representation of trauma, nation state power and collective memory, discuss, how do they contribute to the news representation on the media, what meanings of the events as well as the places they depict do they translate and also how are aftermath and landscape photographs guiding public understanding of the events photographed.

## 2.1 Framing Photographic Narratives

There are varying opinions among scholars when it comes to the discussion on photographic properties in terms of their ability to tell the story independently from the other factors, such as text. One of the perspectives for analyzing photographic narration, presented by philosopher Judith Butler (2009), suggests that photographic images do not depend on linguistic constraints, which makes it an autonomous form of representation, highly informative and complex on its own. According to Butler, photographs operate independently from the photographer and the observer as well as their personal interpretation of the photographed, yet intentionally or not photographs themselves impose what can be read from them, or in Butler's words photographs "become a structuring scene of interpretation" (p. 67). This view is highly contradictory to the one presented by Susan Sontag (2003), who claims that photographs do not contain "imprint" of truth. According to Sontag (2003) photographs may affect the viewer by

evoking emotions, but they cannot narrate the scene since they are not sufficient to build an interpretation, therefore captions or linguistic explanations are needed in order to inform and translate meaning. Being merely captures of a moment they are dissociated from reality in turn providing nothing more than emotional shock, which is just a trace of something that happened at a time and no longer exists (p. 154). Therefore, according to Sontag's argument, photographic meaning is achieved only when the photograph is being placed within certain social context or political background which then provides the narrative needed for the complete apprehension.

However, in favor of photography Butler (2009) builds up her theory by suggesting that the underlying conditions of photographs and the motives for taking a photograph already embeds an interpretation in the frame of the photograph. Frames in this sense can be understood as a set of tools for interpretation of the image, which then help the viewer to identify the scene photographed, locate it and categorize information, thus, they work as schemata for classifying and handling information efficiently. In visual communication practices frames operate as organizational principles which are commonly and persistently shared among society symbolically structuring the surrounding world. When analyzed in media communication context, framing reveals how differently mass media highlights or neglects certain aspects of the issue when reporting on the same topics. There are many approaches for visual framing of media news, however, it is agreed that every media channel adds its particular reference as a guidance for user's interpretation, be it a personal opinion of a journalist, organizational views on the topic or certain judgments in regards to the targeted audience. At the same time, part of the user's judgment depends on pre-existing conditions, such as personal experiences, political views, the place he lives in and general interpretation of reality (Brantner, Lobinger, Wetzstein, 2011, p. 524). Thereof, as photographs work as visual story-tellers, they are framed by the photographers or media agencies according to desired responses and can function outside of linguistic explanations such as captions this way translating active interpretation compelled by the agency behind. Hence, referring to Butler (2009) photographs indeed function not as merely illustrations which need to be interpreted, but rather images which thoroughly interpret themselves (p. 66).

The weight of photographic framing in news reports is also discussed by scholars Bryan H. Reber and Bruce K. Berge, who support the idea that in terms of mass media frames are significant political actors, since they shape the news reports and determine the discourse around reported issues. Prior to visual content selection, a certain frame is being picked and enforced, in turn leading further public discussion. Frames, then, function as systems of power over audiences' knowledge, as they may define and shape the events without reader's recognition (2005, p. 186-187). What is more, as scholars of communication Brantner, Lobinger and Wetzstein have observed, readers of mass media news often scan images rather than read the captions this way deciding which article is worth attention. Hence, more photographic content grants more visibility and enhances user engagement. Although restricting the content of the news does not necessarily mean changing the narrative of the story, it is still to an extent a way of determining and shaping public perception (Butler, 2009, p. 66). Then it can be said that within the notion of "visual interpretation" photographs play a crucial role in framing reality by incorporating social, cultural and even political ideologies as well as different illustrative aspects, such as photographic angle, colors, light and focal point. Photographs in this sense work as the first stimulus which is perceived quickly and effortlessly, they can recall various emotions and attitudes which then form public evaluation of the presented news. The emotional effect then adds to recipients' judgment of the news and influences how the text is being understood, as positive image may result in more positive evaluation of the matter. This suggests that visual framing of the photographs often depends on underlying cultural or political factors adopted by the photographer, which in turn highly contributes to the construction of the visual news representation on the media (Brantner, Lobinger, Wetzstein 2011, p. 524).

Although when evaluating the illustrative properties of the medium photography may be criticized to function as a nothing more than a decoration rather than information source, providing only some abrupt insights, scholar of visual culture and philosophy Jiri Benovsky (2010) argues, that a closer look at the creative techniques of photography reveals that photographic images are able to narrate the stories even given the fact that they are static. Photographs serve as both depictions and representations since they provide direct perception of what is visible, namely photographic depiction and yet they represent rich visual content

which in turn serves as a representation of the scene photographed when combined with general views on the world, common cultural or political knowledge (Benovsky, 2010, p. 195-196). Based on general human understanding of the surrounding world, the depth of field and exposure time can illustrate motion, distance or suggest a process of change while colors and the lightness propose the mood or emotion, guide viewer's attention and perception. What is more, images not only depict scenes, but also refer to meanings based on viewer's personal knowledge, experience and cultural beliefs. Given the example below (ill. 1), photographic image depicts forest, smoke, remote landscape while also narrates the process of burning fire instantly signifying a loss. The depth of field and the smoke spreading around and upwards creates the sense of vast space suggest the ongoing fire is directed by the wind, as well as water being dropped from the helicopter giving an idea of the time passing together with the trajectory of the helicopter's movement forward. Although photographic narratives are very much different from cinematic, the creative tools still tell a story which operates on the viewer's personal conceptions. The depth of field instantly guides the attention towards the main element, focusing viewer's attention on one part of the photograph or juxtaposing it with the clearly seen background. Hence, the depth of field and scaling of the photograph followed by the rule of thirds (ill.1) does not focus on the helicopter alone but rather positions it within the relatively sharp magnitude of the field covered with smoke. As a result, it magnifies the field when compared to the helicopter and suggest the size of the scene. The sense of time passing is also emphasized by the shades of smoke indicating change, covering the most of the forest which can be seen through a small part of the photograph. Wide angle of the image also contributes to the representation of the greatness of the forest as well as suggesting geographical location of the site. The combination of creative tools then correlates with commonly understood signs and notions such as danger of the smoke, helicopter as an aid for help, cold and dark colors indicating oppressive moods which are supported by the unknown and unseen part of the image. This way it constructs a dynamic photographic image by not only depicting a forest but implementing creative tools in order to accentuate certain elements which then operate on culturally established understanding and personal experiences of the viewer eventually evoking alarming emotions and thus suggesting the event to be critical.



1. A ministry of emergency helicopter drops water on a forest fire in Krasnoyarsk region on Aug. 4.  
Photo: Donat Sorokin/TASS via Getty Images

Therefore, the photograph of fire does not depend on the additional contextual attributes such as text in order to inform, as it already narrates the scene of burning forest, but it is however framed in a way to guide certain evaluation of the viewer and therefore reflects on the photographer's views. Likewise, representation can be said to be closely related to photographic narration as it exploits imaginative abilities of the spectator and makes it possible for photographic images to represent events in a broader sense than what they depict, even if they are framed to achieve particular response. Nevertheless, photographic genre, as stated by Rose (2011) is another element within photographic representation providing some insights on the meanings reflected by the image as it highlights ideological as well as stylistic features shared within the same classification. Since large scale events are often represented through landscape and aftermath photographs, the next section provides an overview of these two particular genres.

## 2.2 Representing the Place of Crisis Through Photographic Prism

From early times photography has played a vital role in constructing national identity and promoting its authentic character with the images of symbolic landscapes, which have always been central in photographic practices, following other artistic representations such as paintings, prints or engravings. Widely scientific in their nature these forms have amply represented landscape power in constructing national character as well serving geographical and political purposes (Brett, 2017, p.7). Photographic landscape is also the leading photographic genre when researching news report photographs, building bridges between the landscape itself and a place within the landscape. This distinction between landscape and a place is clearly problematic in terms of art history, as it is rarely touched upon. Landscape as a sovereign photographic genre has a long and in a way vague tradition dating back to the beginnings of the practice while the notion of place is still struggling to establish its position. Although photography has always served as a medium for documenting places, when looking closer to the practice as a whole a fair difference can be pointed out. It is a distinct artistic attention given to the place which is often somehow specific and engaging, requiring more than just a moment of mediation (Fesser, 2012, p. 318). Thus, even in contemporary media the significance of a landscape remains, being central in representation of places and the events which took place there. However, landscape photography in relation to geographical studies presents a number of challenges and questions as being a frozen surface of a fluid space a photograph allows many ways of entering this enigmatic space of confrontation. It can challenge the juxtaposition between photographic images and words, as discussed by Heng (2011) or build upon something that cannot be gasp and remains invisible (Chari, 2009), it raises the question of audience's participation (Brickell, 2014), and encourages a debate on how do photographs travel through space and time, both physically and digitally, altering the place making process and cherishing encounters between audiences, subjects and photographers to their benefit (Loopmans, 2012).

The past ten years have recorded an important shift or even an array of shifts within the discourses related to landscape and the figures of landscape. One of these changes has been marked by art history scholar W. J. T. Mitchell (2002), highlighting the critical engagement with landscape away from innocence, who's idea was later refined by Kenneth Clarke, focusing on the landscape art as characteristically being a part of a cycle in which the human soul is aiming at creating a harmony with the surrounding environment. As W.J.T Mitchell points out, the three significant terms in regards to landscape analysis, namely the space, place and landscape itself are rarely considered as a one full body, a conceptual totality. Mitchell accentuates the importance to reconsider the need for re-evaluation of these elements as a one entity and indicates their inter-dependency. Place being a specific location and a space as so called practiced place, which is contextualized by the actions happening there, landscape then is a site recognized as an image or appearance, which largely operates on sensual perception of the place, causing soothing or agitating effects and confronting the viewer with the place as well as with himself (Mitchell, 2002, p. viii). Photographic representation of place sets up new ways of perceiving events and places where they happen, often relating to traumatic experiences or memories and thus presenting a distinct approach for communicating them though allegedly empty images – aftermath photographs. Such images, as discussed by Donna West Brett (2016) can be presumed to be as both building concepts of place and yet as being established by the place (Brett, 2017, p. 2-3).

Photographs have an ability to be of a help for memorizing but also constraining the meaning and prevent experience from transforming into memory. This numbness, discussed by Campany (2003) is connected to the effects of traumatic experience, in which trauma memory is set aside and lingers at the end of perception. However, repetitive observation of dreadful images results in anesthetizing feeling or even have aestheticizing effect, in turn making images look rather vague and surreal losing their emotional load and making viewer numb to the image that once used to be a wound to the previous traumatic experience. Therefore, this aspect of late photography might have twofold effects, either reinforcing the potential healing process or annihilate photographic records of trauma by distancing the fact from an image, creating the feeling of belatedness (Brett, 2017, p. 5). Following Brett's argument, aftermath photographs translate into seeing but not fully, knowing but doubting, which according to the author is

similar to astigmatism, in optometric terms meaning visual condition, a defect in the eye or in terms of photography - the lens, when 'the rays of the light are not focused on one object, but form multiple focal points making the field of vision distorted' (p. 3). When it comes to aftermath photographs, visual and metaphorical focal point of the image is not fixed, it is scattered across the surface and beyond the frame. This results in the subject being in between the image and its acknowledgment, laying in the margin. Then, in a photograph of a place where an event took place long before the picture was taken, the image imminently implies to what is not visible instead of the visible residues of its occurrence (Brett, 2017, p. 3). Thus, looking at the photograph of an Amazon rainforest fire aftermath (ill. 2), burned out spots of the rainforest may be interpreted as blind spots within the memory of the event, as missing parts of the view as it was known before the fires took place. Green areas contrasting with the brown red of the soil evoke alarming senses of the death of the forests, leaving wounds in the landscape as well as in the common memory of the people within Brazil and abroad. Gloomy and silenced image, diminished contrast juxtaposed to saturated colours seems to romanticise the view, provide a nostalgia for something that is lost without referring to it directly. The photograph itself translates a rather desperate feeling for something that is not there anymore. Hence, it presents visibility of the landscape together with the invisible to the eye event which took place within that space, something that happened leaving the view as it can be seen now, painfully rugged by the traces of fires. The aftermath photograph of the fire shows what was discussed by Brett (2017) – a variation of focal points which distort the view and refer to the blind spots of the memory of the event, empty paths within the photograph, which shock and urge to take action. Just as in regards to traumatic events, which instantly evoke the need for action, or urge to fix the situation, aftermath images provide the same instant reaction – to repair, discard or forget.



2. Victor Moriyama for The New York Times. Aftermath of Amazon rainforest fires

Being a rather recent photography genre, often associated with violent, disastrous events, aftermath photography captures their traces, or in Campary's (2003) words 'they function as traces of the traces of events'. These images confront with the otherness unfamiliar for us, bring us face-to-face with something that cannot be fully grasped. As in the example above (ill. 2) the photograph confronts with a tremendous landscape bearing a number of smaller details each of which can be a focal point of its own, which is why the image cannot be instantly perceived. It invites to take time and immerse into to its complexity presenting the power of the land through its magnitude and at the same time encounters the viewer with the unknown, as stated by Campary (2003) - just the traces of something that is not there anymore. It can be said that to some extent they operate as metaphors for our understanding of the past while reflecting on the present as they narrate the stories of the past events at the same time

manifesting our current perception of the surrounding world (Faulkner, 2014, p. 123). According to visual culture scholar Ulrich Baer (2002), aftermath images call into question processes of visual analysis which aim at renewing mechanically captured events from the past. They passively dispute the dependence on historical background as a framework for an explanation. These images tend to situate us particularly in the affinity to something that is above historical knowledge (p. 3).

As stated by Baer (2002), images of a landscape (ill. 2) are drawing on the notions of Romantic landscape art and provide a sense of being directly addressed by the depicted view, therefore, in need to respond to them, creating an impulse to locate ourselves within the space organized by the landscape which is as well the place where human life is being lived and therefore signify the place as highly meaningful. In contemporary context, landscape photographs manifest a rather modern phenomenon of self-awareness which positions the individual within broader historical context and refers to personal experiences as well and knowledge on the surrounding world. Landscape photographs, according to Baer (2002), pull the viewer into these uncomfortable visual settings and in turn reveal the link between the visual experience of the place with the vague structure of the lived memories. By exposing the dreadful aftermath of the landscape the image also presents the borderline between photographic site for historical documentation and personal confrontation with the site and the memory of it, making it a monumental photographic representation of the event (p. 68-69). Therefore, as discussed by Malpas (2011), landscape is indeed outstanding not only as an art genre, but it is directly tied up with human life, experiences and memories, it structures and represents the surroundings, which gives it a particular political character (Malpas, 2011, p. 1-2). Hence, according to scholar of political geography Bernard Debarbieux (2011) landscape in contemporary context can be seen as a medium for constructing state visibility and establishing national territory in which the sovereignty is exercised. It closely corresponds with the national society and even more often with particular symbols or icons which operate on two levels, namely as an expression of unity within the nation itself and its territory and as a defining feature of the nation acquired through common familiarity of the figures constituting the notion of "we" (p. 137). In this regard, the photograph above (ill. 2) becomes a symbol of national loss, since Amazonia is considered an iconic rainforest not only for the Brazilians, but the

entire world, signifying the health of the planet, variety of species and national wealth, which makes the photograph of its fires aftermath even more disturbing and deeply touching for large audiences.

Since contemporary culture is largely based on visual content, photography provides strong grounds for the analysis of the underlying conditions determining visual news framing, such as geopolitical factors, which contribute to the common understanding and memory of certain events or places. For a long time, photography has been considered as superior medium for representing people or places, which can be said to be the case in contemporary media representation of crisis as well, largely due to photographic immediacy, independence from the object photographed and most importantly documentary character - the common association of photography with truth which has positioned it as a key medium for news representation within media (Devereaux, 1995, p. 95). Even though photographs have been perceived as duplications of visual reality, meaning they function as an evidence, they still carry underlying technological conditions and participate in complex processes which diffuse reality and contribute to the construction of common sense (Devereaux, 1995, p. 95). In this regard, photographs can be as well seen as a tool to reveal political and ideological doctrines of visual representation within mass media. Thus, mass media representation of the global events can be seen to be dependent on the underlying conditions, such as geopolitics and therefore, analysis of the photographic images presented by mass media may in turn provide not only visual narratives of historical events but also analytical grounds for distinguishing the ways in which geopolitics intervene with the visual construction of mass media news. These processes then illustrate the power of photography within media news representation since it reflects on social beliefs, political ideologies and contribute to the formation of public perception as well as common memory and therefore national history. Hence, following section presents an analysis of news photographs which were used as visual representation of the news on Amazonian rainforest fires and Siberian forest fires. Since most of the photographic content regarding the two events on the mass media channels is landscape images or the aftermath of the place, the analysis is taking into account the meaning of the genre itself due to political aspects of it as well as visual framing and the message they translate. By comparing photographic representation of the events along with previously discussed geopolitical aspects, the thesis argues that the

differences seen between visual framing and representation are based not only on creative or journalistic decisions, but by underlying historical geopolitical factors as well.

## Chapter 3: Photographic Representation and Public Perception of Amazonian and Siberian Fires

The annual rainforest fires of the Amazonia in summer of 2019 were especially memorable due to an outstanding amount of visual content circulating on media platforms as well as remarkable public engagement with the news. Reported as the most devastating of all times, threatening well-being of the ecosystems and communities both locally and globally, the information on the event has been circulating on every news platform, starting from popular mass media to social networks and television. As the rainforest fires were gaining momentum, well-known online mass media channels, such as CNN, BBC, The Guardian, Bloomberg, Reuters and many more continued producing extensive volumes of visual material as well, depicting loss and trauma, causing public panic and global involvement by the governments, joining in not only Brazilian community, but also audiences from abroad. As numbers of photographs circulating among media channels tended to be overwhelming and visually profound, as a consequence the Amazonian rainforest fires appeared to be a global catastrophe rather than an annual forest burn, causing emotional responses towards the loss of iconic forest and urging to take action for its protection. However, at the time of Amazonian disaster there was no room left for the reports on Siberian fires, which were happening already before the news on Amazonian region appeared. Siberian forest fires, taking over larger than ever areas of the land, lasted for months unreported by the media, threatening not only the wildlife but people as well, causing destroyed habitats for the animals and leaving thousands of people drowning in smoke. The news about Siberian events reached public just around the peak of Amazonian news reports, only by the time unrepairable damages were already made, revealing even larger political and social issues. Therefore, by applying the visual analysis method introduced by Rose (2011) and drawing on the theories discussed in the earlier sections on political views, media communication and photographic meaning, this chapter provides a visual comparison of the photographs provided by online mass media news channels and highlights the differences in the photographic framing of the two events while also suggesting geopolitical

reasons behind these differences as well as discussing photographic weight on the public perception of these cases.

Landscape photographs being widely used for photographic representation of the large scale events also provide a variety of insights on how the place is seen and what message it translates. When looking at the landscapes of Amazonia and Siberia, the photographs of Amazonia instantly appear much more visually appealing than those of Siberia in turn directing viewer's perception of the event as of something that is critical, remarkable and substantial, this way raising its assumed importance and generating further public engagement with the news on the matter. Photographs of Amazon fires produced by or represented by the mass media can be seen to be more effective in terms of their colors, perspectives, scaling, focal point, quality and quantity which suggests that much more professional journalistic attention has been given for the representation of the event in turn reflecting on the popularity of the region as well as media interest in the event itself. What is more, in terms of the amount of content coming from the regions or being produced by international news agencies, communication structures alongside political ideologies within both countries seem to highly determine the outreach of information not only within the country but also outside of its borders, this way adding up to the visibility or, as in the case of Siberian wild-forest fires – invisibility of the event. Given two examples below (ill. 3 and 4) both photographs depict landscapes of Amazonia and Siberia and narrate ongoing fires, vast spaces filled with smoke, darkened trees within large areas, however, the visual framing of them illustrates how differently mass media has represented the two environmental crises regardless of their equal meaningfulness within global context. While Amazon photograph presents warm yet dark color tones of an immense cloud of smoke which signifies fear and despair, the photograph of Siberian landscape depicts considerably smaller white clouds of smoke, dull and gloomy landscape of rather cold color tones. Although both landscapes are photographed from the same angle and are similar in terms of scaling as well as the size, Amazonian landscape can be said to be framed to represent the event from a much more dramatic side, presenting horror of the forest being swallowed by the smoke and fire, covering most of the visible area which in turn translates the sense of unknown and therefore dangerous. Hence, coming back to the Siberian forest, it looks rather shallow, clearly visible field with just some traces of the fire. Therefore, when placed alongside, Amazonian

photograph clearly overshadows the Siberian photograph by its artistic framing, since it is much more outstanding and alarming. It invites to look into the invisible parts of the forest covered by the smoke yet restrains from fully acknowledging the vastness of the crisis, encouraging the viewer to take some time and immerse into the view. Thus, the visual framing and the attention given to the form of representation suggests higher media concern as well as bigger public interest in the Amazonian rainforest fires compared to Siberian case.



3. A forest fire near Palmeiras, an isolated Amazon settlement in Brazil's Rondônia state – The Guardian.



4. Donat Sorokin/Tass for The Guardian

When it comes to the perception of the photographic representation, two factors determine how the image will be understood. Literary theorist Judith Butler distinguishes two terms contributing to the frames of perception - "apprehension" and "recognition". The main difference between the two, according to the author, is that the sense of apprehension is not as strong as recognition, since it imposes 'acknowledgment without full cognition'. Butler suggests that apprehension is not always a conceptual form of knowledge, although it may be and it is closely related to perceiving or anticipating. In this sense recognition sets norms of apprehension determined by historically articulated conditions, thus "recognizability" prepares the event or an object to be recognized through general conditions, norms and traditions which operate rather independently and subject the event for a certain foreseen results (Butler, 2009, p.5). Consequently, it explains that public perception may often be determined not only by journalistic or institutional intentions but also general historical norms and conventions of

evaluation which are reflected within the visual analysis of the two cases discussed. Landscape photography, as the most outstanding photographic genre in terms of news representation can be then seen as the concern for national socialization, it is an element of social control, power of the governance which reaches the whole society and is being produced yet as well constantly reproduced in various cultural and social practices. Landscape as such aims at legitimizing connections between territorial establishments, where the boundary within the discursive landscape gains dual role, one being a reflection of collective consciousness and individual on the other. Collective consciousness accumulates with the flow of information coming from scattered media networks, being manipulated or misinterpreted, politically restrained or reinforced. The boundary by no means limits itself to the landscape or the nation border, but manifests itself generally on a larger scale by social and cultural means, practices and legislations including old and new media, both digital and in physical forms (Newman & Paasi, 1998, 196).

The construction of visual representation of both crises also reveals another element within media framing of the events - imaginaries. Imaginaries, which are very much different and should not be taken for imaginations or images are based on vague ideas, narrowed down to a rather simple formula even though they are more complex than the definition suggests. Imaginaries emerge from coherent sets of beliefs, ideas, values, experiences and images, which can be effortlessly merged with political projects. Many of those come from overlapping ideologies and simplified to the necessities of political intentions. Hence, they are later used for assembling social structures and creating legitimation. As credible ideas contribute to a particular frame, imaginaries then configure common beliefs and notions regarding places, events or processes (Barthel & Burkner, 2019, p. 5-6). As in the case of Amazonia and Siberia, the familiarity of Brazil alongside the iconicity of the Amazonian region in particular, widely recognized by communities abroad generate sets of notions of the place which is then reflected within visual representations of it, building upon common knowledge the place it and in turn granting public interest as well as recognition. Thus, imaginaries adopt guiding and familiarizing functions by bringing together seemingly logical arguments as well as representations of perceptions and approaches. Within media led discourses these imaginaries transmit varied feelings, attitudes or ideas which provide political aspirations with authority

and power. As a result, they become naturally acceptable without further explanation or specific context, they render subject or idea as obvious and without a need of any interpretation (Barthel & Burkner, 2019, p. 6). Hence, it can be suggested that the repetition of alarming photographs generated common acceptance of the event as being a global crisis in turn accelerating public interest and providing large amounts of visual content taken out of the factual context. Conversely, Siberia, being a place within the generally closed, politically aggressive and restrictive Russia, is less known and largely unfamiliar to the outside public, which allows it to be easily overshadowed by more visually and emotionally engaging representations. Therefore, visual framing, along with historically established geopolitical notions and the viewer's personal experiences, contributes to the perception of the media representation of the two countries, Brazil and Russia, in turn directing the acknowledgement towards desired result without any further explanation need (Brantner, Lobinger, Wetzstein, 2011, p. 524). For this reason, Brazil is not only visually framed as being in great danger, emphasizing on the visual effects which in turn provoke strong emotions, but is also perceived as a more important region due to its familiarity on a global and personal grounds, while Siberian landscape photograph translates the sense of calm emptiness without any particular alarming reference, as merely distant and rarely seen, unrecognizable, dreamlike place which makes it difficult to relate to on emotional level since there is no familiarity within it and, in this sense, the loss is not personal. As both landscape photographs (ill. 3 and 4) work as visual story-tellers of the fires which took place at the specific regions, they also reflect the outside view on both places and highlight the political aspect of landscape representation, framing Amazonian landscape within significant artistic visualization in turn rendering the powerful representation of the land itself. In contrast, Siberian landscape is depicting the view which is barely narrating a disastrous event, but rather reflects on itself and the frames chosen for the representation. It shows plain field in cold, dim light and dark silhouettes of trees creating an impression of the far away region, thus showing that frames function not only as tools for visual representation but also as the means for directing viewer's reception, simultaneously drawing on pre-existing collective ideas on a place or on the other hand – the absence of them.

While landscape images to an extent operate as a representation of the nation's power and reveal political aspects of its representation, aftermath images tend to work on more

personal thus emotional grounds and become as an aid for memory of trauma alongside soothing or in some cases urging effects. The view of emptiness, in this regard, serves as pointer of something that has happened but it is no longer there, confronts the viewer with the outcomes of the event and urges to cope with the trauma - the wound in the common memory which is then creating the need to fix it. Referring to Brett (2017, p. 5) aftermath images present something that is invisible to the eye, something that lingers outside of the photographic frame and builds common memory by unifying individuals who share the same longing for the lost forest. Looking at the aftermath photograph of the Siberian forest fire (ill. 5) it presents a cold, static view of supposedly dead forest with empty gaps within the scene which refers to the similar memory gaps of traumatic instances. Due to the stillness of the composition it causes disorientation within the distorted landscape of narrow gaps which prevents from seeing further through the photograph. As there are only some fragments of the remaining forest floor to be seen through a number of tree logs they appear to be concealing the view in turn blocking viewer's perception of the ability to fix it. Static view of the logs covering the view behind them suggests that the viewer is uninvited and does not belong to the site which, referring to Baer (2002) translates that it is already too late and there is nothing left to see (62), this way rejecting the viewer's gaze. The aftermath image presents a specific way of looking at the scene, it is acknowledging but not entirely, both visually and emotionally. Thus, the background smoke provides a hint of the past event, just the traces captured by the photograph yet not entirely visible to the human eye. Hence, photographs as such (ill. 5) operate as sites of memory of traumatizing visual experiences contributing to the common understanding of the event as well as the memory of them, adding up to the history of the place as well as the nation which correlates with that place.



5. Destroyed woodland in Krasnoyarsk. Photograph: Kosmicheskiye Resheniya/TASS



6. Burned rainforest in the Amazon. Credit Victor Moriyama for The New York Times

However, the example of Amazonian rainforest aftermath (ill. 6) presents a quite different view. Being a rather rich and very detailed in terms of composition it provides a close up view of the loss, the damage that has been done. The remains of the forest provide a close look at the disastrous consequences to the land that for many is reminiscent of the iconic rainforests. The wide angle of the photograph, together with the centered upwards perspective, elevates and magnifies the view making it appear very close to the viewer, confronting him with the darkened forest. The detailed layered composition and contrasting warm/cold color pallet presents the aftermath of the event as surreal, difficult to grasp all at once however less frightening since it shows remaining nature in the distance. In this sense, aftermath might suggest the power of the landscape to cope with the crisis simultaneously operating as an aid for collective mourning over the loss, as a way to work through the trauma. Hence, aftermath photograph of the Amazonian image (ill. 6) is visually shocking yet carries lighter emotional

load compared to the aftermath of Siberian fires (ill. 5) since it reveals that there is still some life remaining in the nature. As a result, the two examples (ill. 5 and 6) show what different messages aftermath photographs and what responses they might provoke ranging from soothing and calming effects of the visibility within the aftermath to blindness and unknown, working on personal emotional grounds as well as contributing to the collective memory and mourning of the individuals which can relate to the places of the aftermath. Thus, the visual representation of the aftermath in turn serves as a representation of the place within the event took place exposing the scale of the crisis alongside the consequences, referring to the political power over the nation state of that place. Nevertheless, as discussed by Sontag (2003) the repetition of traumatic photographs may also present a threat to the meaning of the view, since they present a heavy emotional load which in turn numbs the viewer, anesthetizes. Thus, photographs as the one depicting Siberian fire aftermath (ill. 5) may appear as usual illustration rather than narratives of loss in turn making it easier to forget the event or diminish the meaning of it, while aesthetic, rich and saturated photograph of Amazonian fire aftermath (ill. 6) shows the power of the landscape and its nature in turn uniting the public over the common will to fix it and therefore remains within collective memory of the event. As a result, the representation of the aftermath can be also seen to be adding to the memory of the event within the place and consequently - the place itself.

Late photographs of the burned forests can be seen to work as a confrontation with the traumatic event and its emotional charge which is being inscribed into common memory and determines how the event is going to be remembered as aftermath images work as archives of traumatic memories, sites for remediation or reflection on the event. In this regard, visual framing of presented landscape and aftermath photographs can be seen to bear a capability to provoke different responses in turn shaping particular understanding of the representation. Since landscapes contain the ability to reflect on the power, the representation of it along with the viewer's self-positioning when looking at it might evoke the feeling of greatness or on the contrary diminish the perception of the site, expose its weakness or exaggerate the weight. In geopolitical context then the representation of the landscape is closely tied up with the power of the state as it forms national character, unites the individuals with the collective familiarity of the place as well as common memory of the trauma related to the place. Being rather unique

photographic genres, the landscape and aftermath photographs require more than just a moment of mediation, their specificity lies within the ability to captivate attention, providing a number of possibilities for interpretation and mediation of the scene largely drawing on the viewer's personal background of experiences and beliefs (Fesser, 2012, 318). Hence, the analysis of the visual representation reveals how landscape photographs are being directly tied up with the interpretation of the place they depict as well as the history of the place which has been built upon common memory, while aftermath images provide space for reflection on and acknowledgment of the dramatic events narrated by the photographic images, serving as an archive of the traumatic memories. Nevertheless, both landscape photographs as well as aftermath photographs present underlying geopolitical aspect which largely determine how the event is represented by the media and also received by the media users, presenting a contemporary phenomenon of news popularization. Consequently, due to historically established geopolitical notions some of the events remain more visible than others, building their significance on the collective familiarity of the region, this way accumulating large amounts of visual content and dismissing other equality threatening ecological, political or social issues coming from the less known, more politically distanced or less technologically advanced regions.

## Conclusion

Since contemporary news language is largely built upon imagery, photography has taken the main role in contemporary news representation as a direct reflection of truth, closely bound with social and political changes within society (Gynnild, 2017, p. 25-39). Therefore, as this research argues, the visual analysis of the photographs presented on mass media may reveal the role of geopolitics within the representation and global acknowledgement of the news. As the example of Amazonian and Siberian fires shows, there is a notable difference in how the two environmental crises have been represented yet causing different media user engagement and concern about the cases. Hence, some of the photographic images of Amazonian rainforest fires presented on media platforms, present rather shocking, war-like views, which highlight the disastrous effects on the rainforests caused by the fires. Particularly framed and greatly effective photographs capture the attention and leave the observer to question the extent of the disaster simultaneously leaving a wound in memory, scattered visual experience of the site which cannot be grasped all at once, just as traumatic memories remain fragmented and surreal. In contrast to Amazonian rainforest fire's representation, Siberian wild-forest fires have received notably less attention not only from the public, but mass media platforms themselves. As the examples of Siberian wild-forest fires photographs showed, its representation does not appear to be intended to shock the viewer, photographs are mostly plain in appearance, low in quality and dull in colours, suggesting the absence of exaggerated visual framing, at the same time revealing mass media view on the matter as being less significant for the international public. In this regard, it suggests the attitude of the authorities towards the visibility of the state's local news outreach alongside with or the lack of visual material coming from the far away areas such as Siberia. Referring to the general image of Russia in the eyes of the West, the photographic representation of the event may be alluding to the general views of the place, unfamiliarity with it, the otherness and distance from it. Thus, reading news photographs within geopolitical contexts, it can be seen how political positions between the both nation states determine the way they are being represented by the Western media and thus acknowledged by the international public.

Combining the findings of this research, it can be seen that one of the popular myths of the contemporary visual society, the claim that the image is a border-less world which is freeing every individual and society at large and enabling free flow of knowledge and information, has still not faded away and is continuing to mislead the media users in regards to the information frames distributed by online mass media sources still being largely dependent on the global geopolitical views. The understanding of truth is then replaced by the flows of photographic images, some of which are shaped by media channels to be more appealing than the others, this way managing public interest and knowledge (Aouragh &Chakravartty, 2016, p. 565). Yet, as this research shows, photographic images also reveal underlying geopolitical conditions greatly contributing to the visual representation and public perception of the events. The news agencies in the field of contemporary media are being constantly pressured by far-reaching and rapid transition processes, combined with heavy investments in technological development, expanding communication networks and growing competition for instant photo reports (Gynnild, 2017, p. 26). The amount of information reaching the global media, then, contribute to the meaning of the event, since visibility of the event on media channels renders popularity within the viewers and in turn shapes particular views on the events and the places related to those events (Vasterman, 2005, p. 509). Hence, the visual frames of the photographs regarding the news on local, national, regional and transnational reveal the new ways in which popular expression, imagination and cultural production are positioned or naturally position themselves, often in line with political notions of space and power (Burkart & Christensen, 2013, p. 4). The mass production and re-reproduction of news photographs and growing networks of communication enable every media user to participate in media content flow. Simultaneously, new patterns of prioritizing event continue to emerge, one of them being the accumulation of visual media news content, consequently popularizing particular events and leaving other topics unnoticed often despite their actual importance on the global scale. Therefore, the comparison between Amazon rainforest and Siberian wild forest fires representations serves as an illustrative example of such processes. As Vasterman (2005) discusses, there are many meanings of the popularity surrounding news waves, such as amplification, exaggeration, and even distortion, however, as the research shows, not only the

amount of visual content, but rather the quality of its visual representation and the political position of the state within global social context determines which event is more likely to draw public attention and how are they going to be represented by the mass media (p. 511).

In terms of geopolitics, Brazil has been showing political openness, cultural colorfulness, and historical closeness to the West when compared to Russia, which in turn has guaranteed Brazil a favorable position within Western public. Being an exotic tourist destination, fascinating with its culture and wildlife of iconic Amazon rainforests, Brazil has also been putting effort in order to establish communication networks and become a global player in economics as well as geopolitics. This being a priority on Brazil's agenda for decades, has evolved into significantly more open communication networks as well as general knowledge about Brazil outside of its borders. In addition, Amazon rainforests often seen in the media has become the unifying symbol within international community which shares common belief in its significance. Therefore, the photographs of the iconic rainforests burning has evoked emotional response, generating devastating linguistic narratives, further accumulating within media channels and progressively gaining popularity. However, such exaggerated narratives not only overshadow other significant news but also create false understanding of them. In contrast, Russia has been perceived as distant, politically aggressive and closed country, building its power upon its geographical size and limiting the outreach of any unfavorable information, which can be seen to influence its visibility to the world even today. As the overview of Russian geopolitics as well as visual communication of the Siberian case has shown, the country still restricts news distribution and in turn distances itself from the global audience. In terms of power, both places are significantly large in their geography, which already grants certain position within international politics, although Russia, differently from Brazil, employs it along with military force, creating a general image of a politically aggressive neighbor. What is more, in terms of media representation, the Siberian region has never been promoted as much as the Amazon, which makes it even less meaningful for the Western public, lacking any familiarity or emotional attachment to the place.

In addition, the context for media infrastructure is also highly determined by colonial history as well as variable or even shattered capitalism which is directly tied up with the

outreach of the information regarding nation states and regions. The earlier means of communication technologies, such as telephone cables, telegraph or other physical networks as well as recent digital media technologies are equally valuable fragments of fractured urban infrastructures. Drawing from works of critical geopolitics (Graham and Marvin, 2001; Larkin, 2008) these infrastructures are positioned as material presentations of the new concepts of what power and communication is. Nevertheless, these reconfigurations likewise characterize geopolitical concerns (p. 564). Proximity and distance in this case, both physical or social, play a crucial role in the construction of ethical concern for others. Even though Amazon rainforest is far away, with the repetition of images it becomes closer and better known, creating empathy and a sense of belonging. Yet, it is not for the wilderness and ecological concern but rather geographical place established by political history. Consequently, even though both events are by no doubt of the same importance in terms of environmental issues, underlying geopolitical and cultural aspects can be said to be highly affecting their perception and accumulation on media, leading to popularization of the news, while other less known regions remain under-reported and thus unnoticed.

As the larger amount of news today comes from official media channels and sources which are established as well as reinforced by the authorities, new media displays the place of approved experts of the knowledge in the knowledge systems of society meanwhile communicating certain expertise that gives them this particular place. On the other hand, events that are not represented by any particular authorities are lacking general coverage, as seen in contemporary news media, leading to public ignorance of certain social, political or environmental issues or even exclusion (Schmieder, 2015, 582). Hence, as the analysis of the two cases showed, visual framing of the events combined with the theories of both countries' technological and political development reveals how rarely seen yet crucial geopolitical factors contribute to the construction of photographic representation of the events on the media and accelerate audience engagement with the events, providing seemingly more sympathetic visual material on Amazonia compared to Siberia, notably based on pre-existing historical, political and social notions. As a result, the example of the two events presented by this research illustrates an alarming contemporary media phenomenon of news prioritization caused by underlying geopolitical factors, which are often overlooked within visual analysis of media

representation, yet play a critical role in news distribution, public perception and general establishment within historical context. Popular media news as discussed so far can then be referred to as self-inflating, media-driven and fear provoking. It tends to create certain patterns of representation of the events, such as fear-driven or similar in its content including topics like culture, science, environment or public opinion, where everyone is subjected to the sense of something new (Vasterman, 2005, p. 511). Therefore, the lack of representation and in a way one sided opinion creates a tendentious image of reality and maintains pre-established power relations as well as socio-economic hierarchies which are often not included in academic debate (Schmieder, 2015, 582).

The research on the role of geopolitics in constructing visual representation on mass media conducted by this dissertation may contribute to the field of media studies due to the fact that scholarly work in media and communication, according to scholar of urban studies and geography Paul C. Adams (2017) today seems to be unstable and rather disorganized in its nature which, perhaps, has to do with a plethora of medium's fluidity, bringing a number of discourses to look into. Although questions of communication have been touched upon within different disciplines, including media theory, journalism, anthropology, sociology and philosophy, geography works related to politics until now have been less concerned with it, since new communication is lacking an approach competing the continuity of the new mobility model (Adams, 2017, 366). Questions of representation in recent years are becoming crucially central in geographical studies, although debates quite often shift far beyond representation and combine a number of new theoretical concerns set around the suggestion that communication is much more than just an exchange of information between agents and places. It has to be said that communication and visual communication in particular is also an event where agents encounter each other and are being left swayed or altered by the event, even if just slightly. Even though "digital turn" or in other words the shift from analogue media to digital technologies has visibly changed the operational patterns of the news agencies worldwide by commercializing and industrializing visual content, little research has been done in order to investigate to what extent do these processes effect users of the online news images (Gynnild, 2017, p. 25). Therefore, as presented by this thesis, contemporary mass media, being as free and accessible as never before, still shows rather biased views on the global events,

representing the events through East/West prism, further building on historical hierarchies and political powers. Nevertheless, at the age of visual culture, the expanding communication networks together with growing community of amateur photojournalist, photographic framing of mass media content can be seen as a fruitful field for academic research, providing insights on underlying conditions for emerging contemporary media phenomena and changes within social practices of media consumption.

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## Illustrations

1. Donat Sorokin/TASS via Getty Images. Bloomberg  
<https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2019-siberia-russia-wildfires/>
2. Victor Moriyama for The New York Times  
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