



## Crisis from Afar. Media Conceptualisations of Events in Brazil after the 2022 Presidential Election

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**ABSTRACT:** The proximity (localness) of the reported events is closely correlated with their relevance to the audience of media reports—and so the fact that it may be “our business”, that the thing may also affect us, becomes crucial to the decision to deal with the topic in question, but also to the way in which it is dealt with. In this article, we are interested in media conceptualisations of a crisis that is far away, that is “alien”, “foreign”, and thus cannot be narrated through reference to social and receptive experience. We look

at the ways in which the exoticisation of distant places and events can be reduced, and thus at strategies for convincing the Polish audience that these are issues that are relevant and worthy of attention. We will look at whether the divisive, deeply political fractures in media narratives also apply to the storytelling about events on the other hemisphere, and whether the ideological filters common in Polish media are also imposed on what is unknown.

**KEYWORDS:** exoticisation, crisis, news values, generalisation, analogy, metaphor, broadcaster.

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## 1. Introduction

Media information is subject to a number of factors that determine whether an event makes it into the stream of news disseminated by news broadcasters. The relationship between the type of medium, its technological features or world-view characteristics and the selection of events presented to the audience is clear. These multifactorial interactions are important when examining the contents of media, especially those with an explicit news character, as they have, as Paul Lazarsfeld wrote, a particular potential to establish lists of the most relevant events [Lazarsfeld et al. 1944]. Thus formulated observation leads directly to Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw's agenda-setting theory, according to which the public recognises the importance of events presented in the media [McCombs, Shaw 1972; McCombs 2008]. The transfer of validity that occurs in the reception of media messages causes the media audience to assume the relevance of events according to the order in which they are presented in the news media, which is influenced by, among other things, the need to perceive the world as a comprehensible whole, to orient themselves in it and the need for the audience to connect with the events presented. Not without significance are also the properties of human nature associated with a sense of uncertainty, which is partly offset by media reporting, but at the same time fuelled by it.

As Tomasz Gackowski and Marcin Łączyński note, the agenda-setting theory can be very successfully verified in relation to the news media, which "tell their audience what to think and dissertate about" [Gackowski, Łączyński 2011: 93]. It seems that the contemporary use of media, including news media and their digital variants, especially the concept of information bubbles, requires a reformulation of news-generating categories. The same is true of opinion-forming media, whose task is not only to provide information but also to explain or, more broadly, to correlate, which involves reducing the complexity of the world through its interpretation. Opinion weeklies bring material that is different from dailies, social media or news portals, for which the chief criterion is topicality and the resulting strong pressure to update data. This is not to say that weeklies do not develop such a relationship, but the drawn-out process of their creation shifts the significance of the state of expectation of change to other areas—it is the broadening of horizons, the creation of opinions, commenting, setting in various contexts, and explaining phenomena by means of a multi-faceted reference to in-depth knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Current news appears on the websites of weeklies or on their social media accounts.

## 2. Distance as a news-generating category

An important category for our argument is distance, and its multidimensionality became the impetus for considering the conceptualisation of post-election events in Brazil.<sup>2</sup> The first initial observation concerned the presence in the Polish media of texts describing events in Brazil; the second was that these were representations that fit into a certain repetitive pattern. Consequently, a fundamental question arose for this text: what made the events in such a distant country arouse the interest of the Polish media? We reviewed many available media materials of different periodicity types and confronted them with theories of information selection, and in particular we referred to the parameter of distance, always understood as the arrangement of various values on a near-far axis.

Among the factors influencing the selection of foreign information that can be linked to the category of distance are those resulting from the following [Galtung, Ruge 1965; Rosengren 1974; Wu 2003; Harcup, O'Neill 2001, 2017; Harrison 2006; Brighton, Foy 2007; Palczewski 2009]: geographical distance; pattern of political and economic interactions (the closer the relationships, the shorter the distance); national and cultural ties<sup>3</sup> (the tighter the ties, the shorter the distance); availability of information (the more frequent and direct the reporting,<sup>4</sup> the shorter the distance); audience interest (the greater the match between the content and the audience's interests, the shorter the distance); hierarchy of values in the information (the more the values presented are shared by the audience, the shorter the distance). Thus, if the distance at different levels approaches the values associated with the "close" pole, then news-generating practice indicates a greater likelihood of a given news item appearing in the media. Of course, we are aware of the influence of many other news values (including topicality, relevance, negativity, personalisation, elitism, entertainment, surprise, drama, similarity to other news, etc.) in determining the final list of issues presented by the media.

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2 An anecdotal incident was of particular importance to us—when, following media reports by Polish broadcasters, our Poznań acquaintance, disturbed by the description of the events of 8 January 2023 after the presidential election in Brazil, called his colleague (professor) in Brazil to ask for a direct report; the latter did not even know that such incidents had taken place. The Brazilian people's scant interest in these events was subsequently confirmed during our visit in January/February 2023 to Curitiba, at the Federal University of Paraná.

3 Such a factor is, for example, the presence of a particular minority in a given country (e.g. Brazilian Polonia), phenomena linked to emigration, such as the development of cultural relations or the presence and recognisability of elements of one culture within another (e.g. the presence of Portuguese translations of Polish-language authors).

4 The presence of a media envoy, reporter or other representative in a given place influences the perspective of the description and the way it is constructed.

### 3. Context—Brazilian presidential election

Let us outline a chart of the central events in the discourse of interest. It will help in interpreting the material we are analysing and in understanding the underlying pattern of political forces or cause-and-effect relationships.

On 2 October 2022, the first round of the presidential election was held in Brazil. Of the eleven candidates, Jair Bolsonaro (the incumbent president at the time) and former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva won the most votes. The two candidates in third and fourth place received 4% and 3%, respectively, the others less than 1%. Therefore, it was clear from the start that the electoral battle was between two candidates representing extreme views and backgrounds. Jair Bolsonaro is a retired soldier born in 1955, a right-wing nationalist [Wallenfeldt, accessed 2023], a declared supporter of military dictatorship, opponent of gender equality, homophobic, racist, misogynist, and opponent of environmental policies. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was born in 1945, has been a member of the left-wing Workers' Party for several decades, and was president of Brazil from 2003 to 2011. When he left office, due in part to his successful programme to combat poverty and the introduction of many pro-social measures, he enjoyed support of around 90%. Convicted of corruption and sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment, he spent a year and a half in prison (2018–2019). Subsequently, he was released, and his sentence was annulled due to procedural irregularities.

The politicians represent extremely diverse beliefs in many areas of public life and are very distinct figures, which seems to influence the media potential of topics related to the elections and post-election events in Brazil. The term “Brazilian Wałęsa” has been used in the media for many years, apparently exposed for its legibility in the 1990s (his working-class background or trade union leadership allowed for such analogies, especially at times of important political events in Brazil—Lula da Silva has run for the presidency several times since 1989). Interestingly, “the Brazilian Wałęsa” is a term coined locally to reinforce the position of the Brazilian union leader. Bolsonaro, on the other hand, was dubbed the “Trump of the Tropics” during his 2018 presidential campaign (also in English; while in Brazil, the term “Trumpinho”—“little Trump”—is used).

A second round of the elections was held on 30 October, with Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva emerging as the winner, beating Jair Bolsonaro by less than two percentage points (50.9% to 49.1%). The small difference in votes, the strong social polarisation and the contradictory views of the two politicians on many issues provided the impetus for the belief that the election results were rigged to gain many supporters, and it also became easier to call for Lula not to be recognised as president-elect. The insinuations fuelled by the losing president and his supporters led to the events that unfolded on 8 January 2023. In Brazil,

supporters of Jair Bolsonaro caused riots and stormed the presidential palace, Congress, and the Supreme Court, damaging the furnishings of these buildings and calling for the military to stage a coup.

#### 4. **Locally, intercontinentally, globally—familiarising in multiple dimensions**

The Polish media coverage of political events in Brazil (in a wide variety of media—radio, television, various Internet portals on 8 January and the press on 9 January and the following days) is arranged in several planes related to the geographical distance: local (Brazil), intercontinental (the Americas), and global (the world). All these perspectives are launched by the media broadcasters, firstly to convince the audience of the relevance of the media reports, and secondly (functioning like a reverse side) to anchor the news in a familiar area the audience is familiar with, something they already know, understand and remember.

The local representations in the relays, for which the category of remaining up to date is crucial, are short texts, most often dating back to the day of the events, constructed primarily from quotations in various forms (most often apparently direct and direct as well as narrated speech [Grzelka, Kula 2012]). These texts are arranged chronologically (from the attack on Congress, the Supreme Court and the presidential palace, through the interventions of the services, to the statements of Lula and Bolsonaro), with the background (i.e. information about the autumn elections and their outcome) appearing at the end. In some of these, an analogy with the events at the Capitol also appears immediately on 8 January, thus activating a figure that would later be used by almost all journalistic texts. This association is explained to the audience by the media using the aspect of time, e.g.:

The current protests are reminiscent of the storming of the Capitol, organised on 6 January 2021—almost exactly two years ago. [Kublik 2023—wyborcza.pl, 8 January 2023]<sup>5</sup>

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5 In parentheses after the quote, we indicate the broadcaster and the publication date; in the footnote, on the first occurrence of a particular source, there are: a full title of an article, a link to the source, and the access date if the material comes from the Internet. If the article was published in print, we cite its title in the footnote, and the full bibliographic address is included in the references section. Here: *Znowu szturm na Kongres. Teraz w Brazylii* (Another Assault on Congress. This Time in Brazil)—<https://tinyurl.com/znowuszturmnakongres> (accessed: 14 April 2023).

They also exploit a thematically linked element which highlights the disagreement of the supporters of the losing president to accept the victory of another one:

The events in Brazil are reminiscent of the attack on the Capitol by Donald Trump supporters two years ago. [*Szturm zwolenników Bolsonaro... 2023—TVN24.co.uk*, 8 January 2023]<sup>6</sup>

[...] they may have given the impression of a re-enactment group reenacting the attack on the Washington Capitol almost exactly two years ago. [*Mazzini 2023—polityka.pl*, 9 January 2023]<sup>7</sup>

Bolsonaro supporters in Brazil copied Trumpist aggression from the US. [*Domoślawski 2023a—polityka.pl*, 12 January 2023]<sup>8</sup>

Expert opinions are also used to embed this similarity on scientific grounds as well, e.g.:

“The situation is very unstable and reminds us a bit of what happened on 6 January 2021 in Washington,” Artur Wróblewski, a political scientist from Łazarski University, told TVP Info. [*Zamieszki w Brazylii... 2023—www.tvp.info*, 8 January 2023]<sup>9</sup>

The intercontinental American perspective also includes the themes evoked by the connections describing Bolsonaro as the “Trump of the Tropics” or the “Brazilian Pinochet” (the latter appellation is directly related to Jair Bolsonaro’s recognition of Pinochet as the closest politician to him and his belief

6 *Szturm zwolenników Bolsonaro. Zaatakowali najważniejsze instytucje w kraju* (Assault by Bolsonaro Supporters. They Attacked the Country’s Most Important Institutions)—<https://tinyurl.com/brazyliazszturmzwolennikow> (accessed: 14 April 2023).

7 *Brazylia. Szturm fanów Bolsonaro na parlament to początek większej i groźnej batalii* (Brazil. Bolsonaro Fans’ Storming of Parliament Is the Beginning of a Larger and Dangerous Battle)—<https://tinyurl.com/brazyliazszturmfanow> (accessed: 14 April 2023).

8 *Brazylia po szturmie. Bolsonaro musiał wiedzieć. Ktoś za to przecież zapłacił* (Brazil after the Assault. Bolsonaro Must Have Known. Someone Paid for It after All)—<https://tinyurl.com/brazyliaposzturmie> (accessed: 14 April 2023).

9 *Zamieszki w Brazylii. Tłum wtargnął do kongresu i pałacu prezydenckiego* (Riots in Brazil. Crowd Invades Congress and Presidential Palace)—<https://tinyurl.com/zamieszkiwbrazyliai> (accessed: 14 April 2023).

in the effectiveness and sensibility of military dictatorship rule). The analogy evoking the figure of Donald Trump is presented as an arrangement of similar relationships:

Jair Bolsonaro, dubbed the “Trump of the Tropics,” drew inspiration from his American counterpart, especially in terms of governing style and shaping the narrative during his four-year presidency. He radicalised his voter base, primarily communicated with the electorate through social media, and targeted progressive forces. He accused the left and liberals of cultural neo-Marxism, trading Brazil’s national interest, and serving corporate interests. For a long time, he denied the threat posed by the coronavirus pandemic, even though he himself contracted it. [Mazzini 2023—polityka.pl, 9 January 2023]

Through the reference to the Capitol, also the global plan of the Brazilian narrative is introduced—and so the “assault on Congress” is equated with the “assault on the Capitol” and finally the “assault on democracy”:

Brazil. The assault on democracy has failed. Just for now. [Stasiński 2023—wyborcza.pl, 9 January 2023]<sup>10</sup>

The attempted coup and assault on Brazilian democracy weakened the coup plotters. However, democrats must remain vigilant. All it takes is one shot. [Domoślawski 2023b—polityka.pl, 20 January 2023]<sup>11</sup>

Bolsonaro supporters in Brazil copied the aggression of Trumpists in the USA—they stormed the buildings of the highest authorities and vandalised them. Are these the last throes of the defeated or the beginning of a movement that threatens democracy? [Domoślawski 2023a—polityka.pl, 12 January 2023]

The attack on democracy seems to be the most common global reference in the context of the described events, imposing an order on many narratives (such as the quoting of international leaders: Joe Biden, Emmanuel Macron, Andrzej Duda, who consistently refer to the inviolable rules of democracy in their

10 *Brazylia. Szturm na demokrację się nie powiodł. Na razie* (Brazil. The Assault on Democracy Has Failed. For Now)—<https://tinyurl.com/brazyliaszturmnademokracje> (accessed: 14 April 2023).

11 *Patrzmy na Brazylię. Bolsonaryzm i trumpizm plenią się wszędzie* (Let’s Look at Brazil. Bolsonarism and Trumpism Are Proliferating Everywhere)—<https://tinyurl.com/patrzmy nabrazylie> (accessed: 14 April 2023).

statements and declare support for President Lula, who was elected in accordance with these rules. What is interesting in this context is that the same argumentation related to the need to respect democratic rules was also used by Jair Bolsonaro when, in a post on Twitter (now X), he distanced himself from those who had invaded Congress and other buildings in the Three Powers Square:

“Peaceful demonstrations, in their legitimate form, are part of democracy. However, the incursions into public buildings that took place today, and were also practised by the left in 2013 and 2017, go beyond this rule,” emphasised the Brazilian president. [Przybylski 2023—“Do Rzeczy”, 16 January 2022]<sup>12</sup>

The global plan often mentioned in the coverage of Brazil’s political situation is associated with the opposition constructed against democracy:

More than half of the world is currently governed by various populists “by the will of the people.” Even if one of them loses in one place, like Trump in the USA or recently Bolsonaro in Brazil, they win elsewhere, like Meloni in Italy, Netanyahu in Israel, or presumably Trumpists in the congressional elections. But despite numerous differences, this authoritarian international says more or less the same everywhere. [Domoślawski 2022—“Polityka”, 9 November 2022]<sup>13</sup>

The biggest mistake of the defenders of globalisation was that they did not make it safe for the weak. That is why so many countries are now closing down. From China and Russia, to Trump’s America and Johnson’s Britain, to Kaczyński’s Poland, Orbán’s Hungary, Mrs Meloni’s Italy, Bolsonaro’s Brazil or Modi’s India. [Żakowski 2022—“Polityka”, 31 October 2022]<sup>14</sup>

The “collections” presented have a common denominator, which is primarily constituted by authoritarianism, populism and nationalism. Enabling the conceptualisation of reality in terms of a specific set of values also involves extracting the very distinct elements, the “strongest” representations, thereby many a time the most entrenched in social consciousness and stereotypical ones. A different field of valuation is activated in the case of a right-wing oriented broadcaster:

12 Jacek Przybylski, *Koniec “Trumpa tropików”? (The End of “Trump of the Tropics”?)*.

13 Artur Domoślawski, *Zadziwiający powrót Luli (The Surprising Comeback of Lula)*.

14 Jacek Żakowski, *Globalny remont kapitalny [wywiad z Markiem Leonardem] (Global Capital Overhaul [interview with Marek Leonard])*.



The pathetic attempt at an illegal “return to power” by supporters of the former right-wing president Bolsonaro will complicate the conservative comeback not only in Brazil but also give the global left a new weapon against right-wing candidates. [Przybylski 2023—“Do Rzeczy”, 16 January 2023]

The right (conservatism)—left opposition brought to the surface of the statement is reinforced by the term *deplorable*, which explicitly assesses the actions of the Brazilian rebels, further emphasises the form of protest as *illegal* and uses inverted commas. Such a beginning of the text converges with its ending, which clarifies the meaning of the message:

Unfortunately, the left won this battle by a hair’s breadth. The behaviour of Bolsonaro’s radical supporters, like the behaviour of Trump’s radical supporters two years earlier, is not making it easier but more difficult for conservatives to regain power. [...] In turn, the attacks on government institutions in the USA and Brazil in the electoral struggle will be used by leftist leaders not only in America, but also in Europe [Przybylski 2023—“Do Rzeczy”, 16 January 2023]

The author anticipates pre-election events not only in places where public institutions have been invaded, but also speculates that, in the course of election campaigns in European countries, they may become handy arguments for the left in the political struggle.

The global plan often comes full circle—and the media return to the local layout, but no longer referring to Brazil, but to Poland. It seems that familiarising the topic by drawing analogies to the nearest environment (political, social) is the best way to arouse the interest of the audience. However, due to a number of factors which may exoticise the topic (geographical distance, size of the country, unfamiliarity with Brazilian history or political conditions, social incompatibility of problems), it seems more effective to first use the mechanism of generalisation in order to find elements of this generalised description also in Polish reality.

### **5. Poland like Brazil—fields of analogy**

The texts we went through sorted out the plans of reference. However, due to their diversity, they did not allow for an in-depth analysis, the texts were too repetitive and presented contexts heterogeneously. Therefore, to study the mechanisms of taming the events in Brazil, we chose texts from the weekly opinion magazines: “Polityka”, “Do Rzeczy”, “Gazeta Polska” and “Tygodnik Powszechny”. No texts on the topic of our interest were published in “Newsweek”

or the weekly magazine “*Sieci*.”<sup>15</sup> The materials selected for research in this section are not news, but are its current interpretations, and contain richer conceptualisations of the events of 8 January 2023. Our analysis is subject to several research fields around which representations of the events are arranged. These are mechanisms based on the reduction of exoticism through the introduction of context, familiarisation of events through analogy, generalisation, or allusion. The distance produced in the process of exoticisation emphasises the difference, otherness, distinctiveness, incomprehension, and ambiguity [Kapferer, Theodossopoulos 2016]. Hence, the aspiration of broadcasters becomes to bridge the distance and construct messages in relation to the “near” pole, connecting to the direct experiences or observations of the audience.

The Polish local context is introduced by linking events in Brazil to political life in Poland, and these do not have to be based on factual associations (as in “*Polityka*” or “*Tygodnik Powszechny*”) but rather (as in “*Gazeta Polska*”) on speculations, clearly directed reinterpretations, assumptions, or apparent coincidences.

The latter weekly reads:

What does the storming of Brazilian ex-president Jair Bolsonaro’s supporters on Brazilian government buildings have to do with PiS? Seemingly nothing. Yet for opposition politicians the connection is obvious. The fact that the events in Brazil involve a right-wing president and his supporters is enough to spin visions designed to frighten public opinion that a similar scenario could happen in Poland soon. [Galarowicz 2023—“*Gazeta Polska*”, 18 January 2023]<sup>16</sup>

Representatives of the opposition decided to comment on the events in Brazil in their own style. [...] It does not matter whether something is happening in Poland or on the other side of the world—opposition politicians share fears and conspiracy theories. [Galarowicz 2023—“*Gazeta Polska*”, 18 January 2023]

The media which are close to a conservative worldview, interpret the events in Brazil through the prism of their own political interests. They see the events as having local effects, but—interestingly—equip the opposition with arguments. The author notes that it is opposition politicians who link the events in Brazil (“on the other side of the world”) with the possible similar behaviour of the

15 Information on the events in Brazil appeared on [newsweek.pl](http://newsweek.pl) on 9 January, but was not elaborated upon or published in “*Newsweek*.”

16 Leszek Galarowicz, *Uderzyć Brazylię w PiS* (Striking at PiS with Brazil).

supporters of the current<sup>17</sup> government in the event that it loses the elections. The valuation here is clear: opposition politicians “spin visions”, frighten the public, share fears and spread conspiracy theories—they are therefore detached from reality, have no real cognisance of the situation, and are using events in Brazil for the current political struggle.

“Gazeta Polska”, in relation to the protests in Brazil of 8 January 2023, recalls the occupation of the Sejm rostrum in the Polish Parliament from 16 December 2016 to 12 January 2017 referred to in Polish right-wing media as “Ciamajdan” (the name is referred to in the text):

On 16 December 2016, PO MP Michał Szczerba walked out onto the Sejm rostrum and then flagged it down, and as he did not respond to Marshal Kuchciński’s admonitions, the latter excluded him from the session. In response, opposition MPs blocked the Sejm rostrum. For a month, an embarrassing spectacle continued in the Sejm, performed by PO and Nowoczesna MPs who refused to leave the plenary chamber. Opposition MPs denied that their action had anything to do with the putsch. It was only Grzegorz Schetyna who admitted outright that the Sejm events of 16 December were an attempt to seize power by force, organised by Mr Szczerba. [Galarowicz 2023—“Gazeta Polska”, 18 January 2023]

For the author, the difference in the scale of the two events juxtaposed is not important, what matters is their minimal similarity, which is used to interpret the Brazil’s events in a clear, propagandist spirit. The key terms used in the articles analysed and referring to the events in Brazil are arranged in an expression field composed of the following elements: *putsch*, *coup d’état*, *assault*, *riot*, *rebellion*. They are stylistically homogeneous, synonymous and refer to associations related to force, violence, illegality, disruption of the normal rhythm, destruction of order. With reference to the events in the Sejm in Poland in 2016, Leszek Galarowicz uses the terms: *Ciamajdan*, *attempted putsch*, *occupation of the Sejm rostrum*. A stylistic incongruity is perceived here: *Ciamajdan* refers to two words: the colloquial, pejorative *ciamajda* ‘a persona that is slow, clumsy and unable to cope with life’ [WSJP PAN] and *majdan* ‘a square or a whole lot of things’, although it seems that in this case the verbal motivation was different and rather goes by the name of the square in Kyiv, Majdan, which become a place of rallies and protests. The ridiculous, ironic term is aimed at the Polish opposition.

17 In our analysis, the qualifier *current* (“current government”, “current struggle”) refers to the time of the creation of the media texts—the year 2022 and the beginning of the year 2023.

Artur Domosławski in *Polityka*, on the other hand, juxtaposes areas of anti-democratic influence, putting them metaphorically. He uses the illustrative and universally recognisable motif of a virus that multiplies and spreads regardless of territory:

The viruses of Bolsonarism, Trumpism and other varieties of them first seethe in the minds. That they falsified, that they stole, that there is gender, that there was a birch. If the conditions in which the viruses multiply are not changed, the next Washingtons and Brazils will happen—possibly more violent and bloodier. [Domosławski 2023b—*polityka.pl*, 20 January 2023]

The author uses the metaphor of a virus that spreads under certain conditions, can be dangerous, deadly and global in nature (as the coronavirus pandemic has convinced us). The virus is politicians with anti-democratic views, moving towards the far-right areas of the political scene. The author mentions among the signs of infection elements from the Polish public space—*gender* and *birch* refer to political and social discussions on the meaning of the term *gender* (a discussion subordinated to various ideological fractions, distorting its meaning) and the debate on the causes of the Smolensk catastrophe, which is still being fought. Thus, worldview viruses have a universal power of destruction, independent of borders, latitudes or geographical distances. In addition to the metaphor, the author adds metonymies (*Washingtons and Brazils*), which in turn have the power to generalise.

In “*Tygodnik Powszechny*”, the Brazilian-Polish analogy appears in a column by Stanisław Mancewicz, who writes:

It must be said that the assaults by the admirers of either Mr Trump in the USA or Mr Bolsonaro in Brazil raise obvious fears that the same could happen in our country if the Host and his people lose this year’s elections. [Mancewicz 2023—*tygodnikpowszechny.pl*, 21 January 2023]<sup>18</sup>

And, recalling the figures from the events in Washington, he applies a close analogy, relating the events of the attack on the Capitol to the Polish reality:

Here it is not the American buffalo but its Polish cousin the bison that will be rushing around the extinct Polish parliament, waving flags, smashing doors and

18 *Mancewicz: Wartość* (Mancewicz: Value)—<https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/182068> (accessed: 14 April 2023).

furniture in exasperation, despairing about Poland's fate and shouting slogans—be they football fans, anti-elite, anti-vaccination or whatever. [...] Inevitably, we will then hear new definitions of Polish identity and patriotism, which, by the way, will not be shocking, as these definitions are constantly becoming outdated and new versions of them are being created. [Mancewicz 2023—tygodnikpowszechny.pl, 21 January 2023]

In this text, supporters of forceful solutions have roots in fan culture, display anti-elitist tendencies, and are associated with anti-vaccination movements. They are thus identified as groups linked to the current authorities in Poland. The analogy is supported by the visual juxtaposition of the American symbol of the attack on the Capitol—the buffalo man—and its possible Polish equivalent—the bison man. This parallel is as comical as it is tragic.

In “Tygodnik Powszechny” there is a comparison of the events in Brazil to the attack on the Capitol and, further, to the situation in Poland in December 1922 after the election, which Gabriel Narutowicz won:

Bolsonar supporters launched an attack on government buildings in the capital city. The protests were reminiscent of the infamous assault on the Capitol after Donald Trump's defeat, but also, it is worth recalling, of the violent riots that swept through the streets of Warsaw almost exactly one hundred years ago after the election of Gabriel Narutowicz. [Napiórkowski 2023—tygodnikpowszechny.pl, 22 February 2023]<sup>19</sup>

This analogy is not developed in any way, it is just a kind of reminder. The author draws attention to a fact from his native history, which may be more readable to the Polish audience. However, it is worth noting that the quoted passage is merely a signal, it is treated in the text as an exemplary recollection serving the author to reflect on another subject.

Sometimes the Polish context is also introduced indirectly, by highlighting those mechanisms of action or those views of Jair Bolsonaro that are strongly associated with the Polish context, with elements of the “struggle for the rule of law” raised by both sides of the dispute in Poland:

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19 *Syndrom Kopernika: dlaczego uważamy, że wszyscy się mylą?* (Kopernik Syndrome: Why Do We Believe That Everyone Is Wrong?)—<https://tinyurl.com/syndromkopernika> (accessed: 14 April 2023).

He waged a systematic campaign of hatred directed at, in general, the idea of democracy in Brazil. He undermined the independence of judges, considered investigations into his own case as a conspiracy to remove him, a man of the people, from power. [Mazzini 2023—*polityka.pl*, 9 January 2023]

Democracy is thus argumentatively used as a common, shared value, which is not local in nature, but is the foundation of every modern rule of law. Targeting the independence of the judiciary becomes a marker of anti-democratic authorities and is almost always accompanied by large public demonstrations—this is the case not only in Poland, but also, for example, in Hungary or Israel.

### **6. Expanding contexts as a mechanism of familiarisation**

An important element of the conceptualisation of events is to build a broad historical background to current events by recalling the events directly influencing or triggering those currently being described (the recent past). In the example we are analysing, this is the presentation of the description of the two rounds of the election:

In the first round on 2 October, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the left-wing Labour Party (PT) received 48.43 per cent of the vote, while conservative Jair Bolsonaro of the Liberal Party (PL), who was fighting for re-election, won the support of 43.2 per cent of voters. Pre-election polls prior to the 2nd round gave Lula a slight lead over Bolsonaro (47 per cent on average for the left-wing candidate and 45 per cent for the Brazilian right-wing leader). In the end, the results differed slightly from these predictions. Officially, Lula won the support of 50.9 per cent of voters, while 49.1 per cent voted for Bolsonaro. [Przybylski 2023—“Do Rzeczy”, 16 January 2023]

Even poorly informed audience immediately have knowledge of the initial situation, which allows them to assess the consequences of this reporting. Hence, sharing historical context serves as an action towards reducing ignorance, thereby sparking interest in the matter, providing a basis for understanding the described events, and equipping the audience with necessary insights into the given situation.

Another element of extending the historical context to introduce knowledge and build background to the main events is to evoke the political history of the two candidates, their entrenchment in the Brazilian political scene:

Lula began his career in the 1970s as a trade union leader. In 2003, as the leader of the Workers' Party, he became president of Brazil for the first time, serving until 2010. He pursued strongly left-wing policies. He had to step down as a result of a corruption scandal. He was sentenced to 2 years in prison, but was eventually rehabilitated. [Galarowicz 2023—"Gazeta Polska", 18 January 2023]

The authors also recall facts from the distant past, not directly related to the events of 8 January 2023. These are excerpts introducing different historical contexts—all of which apply to Brazil, its history (actually going back as far as the "discovery" of the new land) and the past actions of its authorities, the effects of which can be seen today. The presentation of the origins of the actions against indigenous peoples appears in "Tygodnik Powszechny", which makes the appointment of indigenous women representatives to the Brazilian government by President Lula the main theme in the text (here the events of 8 January 2023 are in the background):

When the Portuguese sailed into what is now Brazil in 1500, the area they "discovered" was inhabited by 3 million indigenous people. What followed as a result of the European invasion is today referred to as the genocide of the indigenous population (o gencidio indigena). The mechanisms of colonisation here were similar to those in other parts of the world: looting of indigenous lands, expropriation on a huge scale, destruction of natural resources, imposition of a change from collective to individual ownership, armed conflicts, and, finally, lack of support from the colonial government for the indigenous population. [Kania 2023—tygodnikpowszechny.pl, 22 January 2023]<sup>20</sup>

Further on, there is a reference to the Constitution of the Brazilian Empire of 1824 and the one of 1988, as well as to the institutions protecting indigenous peoples. The historical context is essential for the author's condensed but detailed description of the path that led to indigenous women representatives taking up positions in government. In addition, an effect of uniqueness is thus achieved and the groundbreaking nature of these appointments emphasised.

In the weekly magazine "Do Rzeczy", the historical context is provided by images relating to the 1964 coup in Brazil:

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20 *Brazylia: konsekwencje zamieszek i pierwsza rdzenna kobieta w rządzie* (Brazil: Consequences of Riots and the First Indigenous Woman in Government)—<https://tinyurl.com/brazyliakonsekwencje> (accessed: 14 April 2023).

Admittedly, this was nothing new in Brazilian history—in 1964, in an armed coup, the military overthrew President João Goulart, who was seeking to bring communism to the country, and generals with strong support in Catholic Church circles took power. “Transitional” governance quickly turned into a military dictatorship that ruled Brazil until 1985. [Przybylski 2023—“Do Rzeczy”, 16 January 2023]

The events mentioned above are framed within the “it was nothing new” context, so that a reference is established, events from Brazilian history that are similar to the current ones, in which the relationship between “then” and “today” is grasped. The described public mood in Brazil, the expectations of the Brazilian people in relation to the elections and the two possibilities—Bolsonaro’s staying in power or Lula da Silva’s victory, for example—are also important background elements.

In turn, the 2022 presidential election was the most emotional since the overthrow of the military dictatorship in the 1980s. [Przybylski 2023—“Do Rzeczy”, 16 January 2023]

They broke through the flimsy police blockade, broke into the presidential palace, Congress and the Supreme Court—and began to demolish. They called for the military to stage a coup. They screamed that the election had been stolen from them, that they were communists, that they were thieves... And that they themselves were the defenders of freedom. Apparently, people from the popular and lower middle classes. Generally, men, but there were also women among them. Wrapped in Brazilian flags, dressed in national football team jerseys. The message was clear: Brazil is us; we are the patriots. They took advantage of the calm of Sunday and the absence of President Lula da Silva. [Domosławski 2023a—polityka.pl, 12 January 2023]

Brazil is dramatically divided—an ad hoc restoration of order will not change that. Reaching the minds infected by a fake vision of reality and political flat-earthism seems today a Sisyphean task. The last man who united the Brazil split in half was Pele, but he was buried last week. [Domosławski 2023a—polityka.pl, 12 January 2023]

Interestingly, the last two excerpts are from a direct report by a reporter from São Paulo; Domosławski, who was in Brazil, recreates the atmosphere from the scene (dynamic action, lots of verbs of motion, *verba dicendi present*),



and describes in detail the actions of Bolsonaro's supporters preceding those of 8 January 2023. The taming of these incidents is also served by the figure of Pele, who has become perhaps the most recognisable Brazilian in the world. He represents a kind of universal reference—in the text under analysis, Pele is the object of a political game who, despite pressure and encouragement, chooses independence. His figure again operates within the mechanism of metonymic allusion: Pele is football, and football is like politics. Referring to the well-known rules of football, the author juxtaposes them with the rules adopted in political skirmishes:

Pele wanted to change the rules of football—for example, by taking throw-ins with a kick, and free kicks without a wall of defenders. He would not have liked the rules under which a striker has the right to kick a goalkeeper, and a defender to break the legs of a striker—and still get a bonus. Bolsonaro and his fanatics see the rules of politics in more or less this way—and depending on their mood, they call it democracy or freedom. [Domosławski 2023a—polityka.pl, 12 January 2023]

What works here is the power of simple, though not obvious juxtaposition, pictorial situations that are easy to imagine: the kicking of a goalkeeper by an attacker or the breaking of a defender's legs by an attacker are called democracy or freedom. The suggestiveness of the text offers a chance to recognise a situation that may seem complicated.

The authors build audience involvement, also by bringing closer the reactions of people, such as presidential candidates, protesters, journalists, observers, representatives of institutions, etc.:

Lula, who immediately ordered the restoration of order in the capital, accused Bolsonaro of inspiring the attack on democracy. [Domosławski 2023a—polityka.pl, 12 January 2023]

Bolsonaro's fans asked "hackers and IT experts" to "invade all government systems" and armed people to "protect the patriots". They also invited reservists from the army and police to "share their tactical experience and lead the seizure of Brazil and its fake government". [Rybczyński 2023—"Gazeta Polska", 18 January 2023]<sup>21</sup>

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21 Antoni Rybczyński, *Brazylijski kryzys cieszy Kreml* (The Brazilian Crisis Pleases the Kremlin).

It is true that Bolsonaro, after losing the presidential election, publicly winked at the officers, saying how good it was for him to govern the country together with them, but his supporters were aware that the former president did not have enough support from the generals, businessmen, clergy or the middle class to decide on such a risky move. [Przybylski 2023—“Do Rzeczy”, 16 January 2023]

Some Brazilian commentators have argued that the discretion with which Bolsonaro has planned his departure from the country may indicate that he has concerns that he will become a target of persecution from the circle of Brazil’s new left-wing president once the Lula administration takes power. [Podlaska 2023—newsweek.co.uk, 9 January 2023]<sup>22</sup>

Interestingly, the attitudes of individuals, including entire groups of individuals (supporters of one or another politician or commentators) bear the hallmarks of various forms of citation of alien words. These are precise or implicit quotations, mainly in the form of pseudo-quotation or narrated speech, which are difficult to verify, but which offer great possibilities for constructing meanings. They are strengthened by the use of inverted commas, which weaken the reader’s vigilance by suggesting to the audience that they are dealing with an independent quotation. This is because the broadcaster can use people’s statements quite freely, modelling their text according to their assumptions (e.g. the verb of talking *to order* refers to the introduction of order, *blinking an eye*, on the other hand, introduces elements of a colloquial communication game).

Indications describing Brazil’s economic and social problems (tasks for the new president) are also sought for the events of 8 January:

The situation in Brazil—and Latin America’s most populous and largest country—is difficult even without coup attempts. The politically divided country is trying to extricate itself from the worst recession in its history. Economic growth is still too low, while inflation continues to rage. On top of this [...] the COVID 19 pandemic has led to a spike in unemployment and poverty, while social inequality has increased the most of any Latin American country in Brazil since 2014. [...] more than 62 million Brazilians, or almost one in three of the country’s inhabitants, live on the brink of poverty. The country still faces

22 *Szturm na budynki rządowe w Brazylii. “Spiskowcy zostaną zidentyfikowani i ukarani”* (Assault on government buildings in Brazil. “The Conspirators Will Be Identified and Punished”)—<https://tinyurl.com/szturmnabudynki> (accessed: 14 April 2023).

nightmarishly high crime rates. [...] Armed robberies, kidnappings for ransom, and rampant corruption are also a nuisance. [Przybylski 2023—“Do Rzeczy”, 16 January 2023]

On the one hand, the expansion of the socio-economic context deepens the audience's knowledge; they learn a great deal of background information about Brazil. It is easier for the audience to understand the public mood and the motivations behind the actions of the different sides in the political dispute. The description exploits colloquial vocabulary: *uproar*, *frenzy*, *nightmare*, *affliction*, *reign*. However, on the other hand, in the passage quoted, the author only focuses on the negative aspects of the situation in Brazil, and shows the great challenges facing the new president. In doing so, he reinforces the stereotypical portrayal of the country as an area of great problems, poverty, and crime. What is revealed here is the kind of exoticisation we read about in the volume *Against Exoticism. Toward the Transcendence of Relativism and Universalism in Anthropology*, in the context of the construction of Otherness there are representations operating on the imagination based on danger or demoralisation [Kapferer, Theodossopoulos 2016].

## 7. Conclusions

The proximity (localness) of reported events is closely correlated with their significance for the audience of media reports. The category of distance, arranged in relation to values on the near-far axis, allows for the formulation of several observations relating to the mechanisms governing Polish media coverage with regard to distant places and events that are generally unrecognised.

- A. In the Polish news media, i.e. in reports for which the category of topicality is crucial, the principle of separating information from commentary operates, as well as classic “strategic rituals” for the information process are used [Tuchman 1972]. One of these is the abundance of quotations, especially in direct speech.
- B. Broadcasters present events in several dimensions, from the local, through the intercontinental, to the global. The local dimension is concerned with news reporting, for the intercontinental one the comparisons of events in Brazil to those in the US are key, while the global dimension makes use of several universal categories, which in the material studied include the metaphor of the virus and the category of democracy, presented in a generalisation that allows it to be recognised as a universal value.
- C. The ideological filters governing the Polish socio-political media, superimposed on what is Polish, EU, European, function differently in

relation to the events in Brazil. Interpretations of the events of 8 January 2023 in relation to the Brazilian context are uniform, while the local context changes when the media refer to the analogy “Poland like Brazil”.

- D. One of the more common mechanisms for reducing exoticism is familiarising what is distant through the use of analogies. Generalisations, metonymies, and the broadening of contexts (historical, social, economic, political) are employed to familiarise what is distant and unknown. Emphasis on similarities (Brazil—Washington; Lula—Wałęsa; events in Brazil—occupation of the parliamentary rostrum, riots after the election of Narutowicz), often apparent, superficial or related to indicators of structural coherence only, minimises distances and facilitates understanding and memorisation.

The mentioned practices constitute a set of repetitive tools, leading to a situation that would perhaps require reflection on the condition of the Polish socio-political media. It seems that the audience, convinced that they are familiarising themselves with events and contexts of Brazilian politics (as evidenced by strategic text positions, photographs, keywords), are nonetheless receiving texts rooted locally, once again preventing a thorough understanding of what is distant.

*Translated by Ewa Kisiel*

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