



World News Order: Structures and Conditions of International Communication, 1859-1914

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The project proposes to examine the tense relationship between differently structured national spheres of influence within a global communication network. It focuses on the four largest news agencies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Havas, Reuters, Wolff, and the Associated Press) and thus deals with the very foundations of the modern order of international news. The proposed timeframe extends from 1859, when the news agencies' initial agreement of cooperation divided the world into geographically-defined news monopolies, to 1914, when their collaboration was put to a previous stop by the outbreak of World War I.

This world news business was supposed to ensure full access to information for every client, but the growing political tensions on the eve of World War I made this model increasingly difficult to sustain. The reliability of news issuing from countries now considered as enemies came into question, and more and more newspapers were appalled at the idea of publishing enemy propaganda. With the outbreak of war, collaboration between the agencies finally became obsolete. As early as 1914, the circulation of news was placed under the control of the press departments of the ministries of war. Walter Nicolai, chief of the German press department during the war, noted in his memoirs that "direct and carefully planned channels of communication were opened with Wolff in the war's very first days."¹

The paper will probe the paradigm of the strictly objective news report, which all four agencies claimed as the linchpin of their activity during the period at hand, and on which their credibility and profitability depended. What were the shifting meanings of "objectivity"

¹ "... in der ersten Kriegstagen unmittelbare und besonders sorgfältige Verbindung mit dem Wolffschen Telegraphenbüro eingeräumt." Walter Nicolai, *Nachrichtendienst, Presse und Volksstimmung im Weltkrieg* (Berlin: Mittler und Sohn, 1920), 54.



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in the daily practice of these organizations? How did specific historical contexts influence the production, transmission and communication of news items, which were presented at all times as value-free facts? Through what process were local events transmuted into world news? And what role was played by the simultaneous competition and interdependence of international actors, who were all in various degrees subjected to the authority of national governments? Special attention will be paid to the relationship between the political and commercial criteria underlying the news agencies' selection of newsworthy reports on the one hand and their rhetorical presentation on the other.