

Toward a Relational Sociology of the Production and Diffusion of Transnational Cultural Goods. *The Case of Transnational Journalistic Information*

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Abstract: *This article applies Pierre Bourdieu's relational sociology to uncover the complex mechanisms governing the production and circulation of journalistic information in the era of transnationalization. Drawing on fieldwork conducted in Turkey with French journalists, the author analyses how international news emerges from the dynamic interaction between three social spaces: the national space of origin (Turkey, as the source of information), the national host space (France, where the information is disseminated), and the transnational journalistic space.*

The text begins by dismantling the illusion of a homogeneous transnational media space. This space is deeply hierarchical, with a handful of countries (United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France) and media corporations (Reuters, AFP, Bloomberg, CNN, Al Jazeera) controlling the production and dissemination of information. These "wholesalers" of news impose their logic on national media, which remain dependent on their raw material. Turkey, a semi-peripheral country in this landscape, perfectly illustrates this dynamic. Its media importance has grown with internal political transformations and geopolitical upheavals (Middle East wars, 9/11 attacks), making Istanbul a strategic hub.

The analysis then demonstrates how the national space of origin shapes the work of correspondents. In Turkey, the concentration of media in Istanbul, the reliance on 24-hour news channels, and the close ties between the journalistic field and political power directly influence media coverage. Foreign journalists, often unable to read Turkish, rely on pre-filtered local sources, which inevitably reinforces selection biases and perpetuates entrenched stereotypes. Conversely, transnational media like AFP can also exert political influence in the countries they cover, particularly on sensitive issues, thereby helping to shape local debates.

However, it is in the host space that the final stage of this "migration" of information takes place. In France, "international news" is never neutral: it is nationalized, selected and framed according to France's geopolitical interests, cultural references, and editorial priorities. Preferred topics focus primarily on former colonies, neighboring countries, or areas where France is militarily engaged. In this context, mainstream media devote limited coverage to international news, leaving the field open to more elitist or press agencies. Correspondents must anticipate the expectations of their newsrooms.

Keywords: relational sociology; transnational journalistic space; international news production.

This article demonstrates the value of Pierre Bourdieu's relational sociology tools for understanding the processes of transnationalization in the production and circulation of cultural goods. It builds on the programmatic perspectives developed in two texts by the French sociologist on this subject (Bourdieu 2000 & 2002), the work of several colleagues, particularly on literature (Casanova 1999; Boschetti 2010, pp.7-53) and, more broadly, on cultural exchanges (Heilbron 1999 & 2001; de Swaan 1998). Based on an exploratory, highly localized study – namely, the "international news" produced and disseminated by "French"

media¹ journalists in Turkey² – this article programmatically³ suggests how import-export logics can be understood by connecting multiple social spaces that are often analyzed separately: the space of the country of origin, the space of the host country⁴, and the transnational journalistic space or its regional sub-spaces.

Previously, the transnational production processes of this collective output had been analyzed primarily from the national and/or transnational spaces where the information was received, particularly from the headquarters of pan-European and French media or a European news exchange agency (Baisnée & Marchetti 2004; Darras & Marchetti 2004), as well as in a personal article (Marchetti, 2005). These locations are important because “international news” is processed – and, above all, *reprocessed* – there, based on raw material produced by others, notably “wholesale” media (press agencies, international TV channels, etc.) that dominate the transnational journalistic field. However, drawing on one of the main frameworks of Abdelmalek Sayad’s sociology of immigration (Sayad 1995), the analysis needed to be broadened to include the *emigration space* of the information – that is, the national space of origin – to better understand its *immigration*. Studying the *in situ* practices and outputs of the “brokers” of cultural transnationalization (de Swaan 1998) – here, the foreign media correspondents, who form a strategic fraction of the news wholesalers (Baisnée 2003; Bourdon 2009; Dauvin 2006; Hannerz 2004; Pedelty 1995) – allows us to grasp the very general processes of transnational division of labor (Feldman & Roux 2015) and the struggles they generate (Mattelart 2014). By connecting some of the relevant properties of the fields in which these “brokers” operate and/or on which they depend, we can understand, through a highly localized case study, the very general logics of transnationalization (Bourdieu 2002; Duval 2023).

¹ This term is used in the sense that their headquarters are in France and they primarily produce in French.

² This chapter is based on two short-term missions in 2008–2009 to Istanbul, Ankara, and Diyarbakır, conducted with Fadime Deli. In addition to a week-long observation at the Agence France-Presse (AFP) offices in the political capital, 19 interviews were conducted with current or former correspondents for French media (print, radio, and television) as well as Francophone and Anglophone journalists from the bureaus of this international agency. We extend our gratitude to all the journalists who agreed to meet with us, as well as to Ümit Sevgi Topuz and Nilgün Tural, without whom this survey would not have been possible.

³ This article is a translated and revised version of a chapter from a collective work published in French (Marchetti 2015).

⁴ The national space of origin is the one on which the transnational media information focuses, while the national host space is the country where it is disseminated.

Restoring the Hierarchies of the Transnational Journalistic Space

Analyzing the production and circulation of widely disseminated cultural goods first requires understanding the position of the country of origin within the transnational field. For our purposes, journalists producing for a foreign national audience in a given country depend on that country's position in the hierarchy of nations within their transnational professional space. Like stock markets, the position of most regions can vary significantly over time in the market for "international news" produced by journalists. However, even at a given moment *T*, this position can be characterized – if only roughly – by the numerical presence of foreign media on the ground. For example, between the 1990s (and especially the 2000s)⁵ and today, Turkey occupies an intermediate – and thus relatively dominated – position in the space of transnational news production, likely homologous to its position in international political and economic spaces. It is not part of the dominant poles, such as the United States, Israel (due to the conflict with Palestine), China, Russia, the most populous EU countries (Germany, the United Kingdom, France), or, to a lesser extent, Belgium (for the EU) and Italy (notably for the Vatican). Studies on major news capitals (Washington and New York, Brussels, London, Jerusalem, etc.) (Baisnée 2003; Bourdon 2009; Hess 2005; Morrison & Tumber, 1985) highlight the importance of the corps of foreign correspondents in these locations. Conversely, Turkey is also not part of the pole consisting of the vast majority of countries where foreign media have no correspondents, except those working for major press agencies.

It goes without saying that the notion of a transnational journalistic field used in this work does not imply that it is a complete autonomous universe. Rather, it refracts – with its own logics – the internal struggles of other social universes or between them. In other words, a country's position in this transnational universe depends on highly varied and complex internal and external transformations. Taking the case of Turkey at the time of the survey, we can mention the gradual and relative decline of the military authorities' position in the functioning of the field of power, political and economic liberalization, and their effects on international exchanges in the broadest sense – particularly since the rise of the AKP, the Islamo-conservative party, in the early 2000s – and the successive stages of the EU accession process.

⁵ To give a very general idea, in 2007, Turkey was the subject of 242 news items in the early evening news broadcasts of France's six main generalist TV channels, representing 2% of the volume of items on countries with at least 10 occurrences that year. It ranked 15th in a classification dominated by the United States (1,329 items, 10.8%), the United Kingdom (7.2%), Israel-Palestine (6.6%), and Germany (6.3%). However, this figure is heavily skewed by the strong interest in Turkey in Arte's binational news program.

Additionally, the focus of international news since the Gulf Wars, and even more so since September 11, 2001, has been on certain majority-Muslim countries, functioning as the “main framework for interpreting international relations” (Mattelart 2007). Thus, successive conflicts in Iraq, Syria, or Iran have been or are still partially covered by journalists based in Istanbul. These transformations in the national space of origin explain the increased presence of foreign media on the ground in the 2000s, despite unprecedented budget cuts. At the beginning of our survey in 2007, Turkish authorities had accredited 160 foreign media outlets from 38 countries, and by 2012, this number had risen to 216 from 46 countries. However, the country of origin is strategically important to varying degrees depending on the media spaces of the host countries and the sectors of activity.

Understanding a transnational cultural production like journalistic information also means characterizing the highly unequal power relations between different types of media. These, in turn, refract – at least in part – political and economic struggles between countries to assert themselves within the transnational journalistic space since the late 19th century. In many capitals around the world, transnational “wholesale” media are overwhelmingly dominant. Most of their headquarters are based in historically dominant national spaces within this universe (the United States, a few Western European countries—primarily the United Kingdom and Germany—and, since the 1990s, a new pole embodied by Qatar and Saudi Arabia). As in other fields of cultural production (Heilbron 2001), these few countries are the main suppliers of raw material in the news market for images, texts, and photographs, thus heavily influencing the process of news selection. The mechanisms of “circular circulation” of information described in national journalistic spaces are found, *mutatis mutandis*, in the space of transnational news. The “choices” of events selected by these news “wholesalers” have effects on national media spaces. For example, a significant portion of the work time of senior executives in French national media is spent monitoring these text and image databases to which they subscribe. Equipped with resources far superior to those of ordinary correspondents, these structures are the only ones with multiple journalists on the ground. To illustrate this with the case of Turkey, the major transnational multimedia press agencies present on the ground include Associated Press, Agence France-Presse (AFP), Bloomberg, and Reuters, as well as national agencies with transnational distribution (Italy’s ANSA, Germany’s DPA, Spain’s EFE, Egypt’s MENA, China’s Xinhua), and the main international news channels and radios (Al Arabiya, Al Jazeera, BBC World, CCTV, CNN International, Deutsche Welle, Euronews,

France 24, Radio France Internationale, Sky News, etc.). Nearly half of the media or audiovisual groups present in Turkey are transnational or have transnational branches. Added to this group of wholesalers are the major English-language newspapers with transnational circulation (*Christian Science Monitor*, *Financial Times*, *New York Times*, and *Wall Street Journal*).

Depending on the media's position in the national and transnational space of activity, some produce effects, while others are more likely to undergo them-or both. This hierarchy of media is largely a hierarchy of the political and economic capital they have accumulated, as illustrated, for example, by the conditions under which they produce their reports (number of journalists, budget for fixers [Dauvin 2006, p. 62; Berger 2025], etc.), their dependence on these "wholesalers," and so on. This position varies depending on the geographic areas of distribution. For example, agencies do not occupy the same position in different regional transnational markets: AFP historically dominates in Francophone areas, just as Associated Press does in North America and in regions where Arabic is the majority language (55% of newspapers published in Arabic have an AFP feed)⁶.

This transnational news space itself is composed of sub-spaces linked to media formats (text, video, and photography) and thematic domains. For example, the news video market is dominated by the British agency Reuters and the American Associated Press Television News (Paterson 2011), while for text and photography, AFP occupies a position comparable to its counterparts (Laville 2010). The position of "wholesalers" can also vary significantly depending on the themes: Reuters and, more recently, Bloomberg compete to increase their market share in the highly lucrative field of economic and, above all, financial news. AFP has historically dominated the sports news market.

Restoring the Properties of the National Space of Origin and Their Effects

The transnational practices of foreign media correspondents also depend on the functioning of the media space of origin and what it refracts from the social space as a whole. After all, this is where they draw most of their raw material. Without claiming to cover such a broad subject exhaustively, we can highlight a few essential dimensions of national universes that have significant effects on their work.

⁶ Source: Recording of a speech by AFP CEO Emmanuel Hoog at the "Assises du journalisme" in Strasbourg on November 16, 2010.

The first is the degree of political control the national state exercises over the entry and work of foreign media. The scale varies widely: some countries require visas, effectively prohibiting or discouraging any long-term foreign presence, while others subject accreditation to strict control or allow relatively free movement for journalists working for foreign media (Sakr 2010).

The second set of research operations involves restoring how the structure of this media space of origin and its power relations influence the practices of foreign media correspondents. The national agency is often one of the dominant media for them. This is especially true in countries where state authoritarianism has historically been strong. In such cases, as the official voice of the authorities, the state press agency not only helps discover events but also – crucially – officializes information from so-called “reliable” sources. National TV channels and major daily newspapers retain a more or less important position in the professional space of the country of origin, depending on the configuration, particularly in terms of exclusives and themes covered. This is the case in Turkey, for example.

However, at least in the so-called most “developed” and/or “emerging” countries, a major new development is the rise of 24-hour news channels since the 1990s, particularly television, which embodies one of the dominant definitions of *news*. For example, while journalists working for foreign media in Morocco cannot rely on 24-hour news channels, these are one of the dominant media in Turkey. Thus, in the Turkish case, a significant portion of the material used by foreign media correspondents comes from a few channels (such as CNN Türk and NTV, which journalists from AFP, for example, monitor continuously). These channels not only provide the latest information but also – and above all – immediate images for TV channels and websites. The material and human resources of these media companies, which are far superior to those of their French counterparts, and their fierce competition often provide foreign journalists with an ideal way to “experience events live” for hours, in front of their TV screens. Thus, the daily life of a foreign correspondent in Turkey increasingly resembles that of their colleagues working in the major capitals of Western Europe, the United States, etc. Because the media offering is so extensive, most stories are syntheses produced directly from the office and by monitoring major media.

The third variable to consider is the type of relationships between the journalistic space and other social fields, particularly politics and the economy (Baisnée 2003; Benson 2013; Hallin & Mancini 2004; Saïtta 2006). For example, the dominant structures of the Turkish

journalistic field are strongly linked to dominant fractions of the political field and, *de facto*, the economic field (Gül 2011; Kaya & Çakmur 2010). Thus, the rise of an Islamo-conservative party to power in the early 2000s in Turkey led to the emergence of new titles or the renewal of older ones, which now have a very large circulation and embody a pole of the political space that had previously been only marginally represented in the journalistic field. This structural subordination explains why, for foreign media, beyond finding stories to propose, reading the daily press is above all a way to capture the (often highly opposing) opinions and decisions of important political parties on a given event. The weight of this “press review” and the reuse of headlines are not uniform among journalists, if only for political and linguistic reasons. Indeed, some correspondents do not read or read very little Turkish and rely on press reviews translated into English or on the English versions of two Turkish dailies. In Morocco, this is also significant because the linguistic division between Arabophone and Francophone press reflects a social division. The composition of this specific capital produces similar effects in the “sources” chosen.

Another property of the journalistic fields of origin is that they are often highly centralized around one or two cities, which affects transnational circulations. In Turkey, Istanbul – the historical, religious, cultural, and economic capital – contrasts with Ankara, the political and administrative capital established with the creation of the Republic in 1923. The presence of foreign media illustrates this tropism: in 2012, three-quarters of foreign media accredited in Turkey were based in Istanbul. In 2008, 57.4% of photos (n=2076) taken in Turkey and available on the AFP Images Forum database were taken in Istanbul, compared to 22.8% in Ankara⁷. In other words, Turkey is essentially seen through the lens of this city, with funded travel being rare for journalists from foreign media, where the headquarters of major Turkish media are also concentrated.

It goes without saying that the relationship between foreign media (and their producers) and the national space of origin does not work in only one direction, as some of them – particularly transnational “wholesale” media – can, in turn, produce significant political effects there. This is especially true for dominated countries in various respects, such as Morocco and, to a lesser extent, Turkey. The gaze of the foreign press holds strategic political and economic importance for the field of power. Comparing these two examples, the words used to characterize “sensitive” subjects are a recurring issue, whether it concerns religion (Islam), minorities (Amazigh and Kurdish), the historical representative of the nation (the king and Atatürk), or

⁷ This data is borrowed from Fadime Deli’s work on this medium.

national sovereignty over territory (“Sahara” and “Kurdistan”), etc.

Understanding the “Nationalization” of Information by the Host Space

Finally, the production and diffusion of transnational cultural goods can be understood by restoring the logics at work in the national host space. Not only do foreign correspondents primarily address this space, but it is also where most of them were trained⁸. Thus, we must understand their position within the structure of the national journalistic field based on several properties—the following list makes no claim to exhaustiveness.

The first of these is the audiences targeted by the media for which these “brokers” of transnational information work. With the exception of agency journalists, most of them produce primarily for very specific fractions of the national host space—those with high cultural and/or economic capital. Research on the transnationalization processes of cultural goods, like certain studies on rural environments in France, often falls into the realism of delimiting groups by geographic space (Champagne 2002), overlooking their properly social dimensions (Wagner 2007). For example, in France in 2007, two of the main daily newspapers in the “intellectual” pole – *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde* – had 70 and 60 journalists (from headquarters or correspondents) in their International sections, respectively, representing 17.3% and 14.9% of the professionals covering this news in national dailies, news magazines, generalist radios, and TV channels in France⁹. With the exception of a few major countries, “French” media with correspondents abroad fall into only two categories of outlets targeting high social classes: first, transnational distribution outlets – beyond Agence France-Presse, whose clients are highly varied, these include Radio France Internationale, France 24 (in French), and Arte; second, the three major national dailies (*Le Figaro*, *Libération*, and *Le Monde*).

As the Turkish example illustrates, French mass media such as national TV channels or radios specializing in news, generalist peripheral radios, or the popular daily *Le Parisien* devote less space to foreign news. They are heavily dependent on major press agencies. As Olivier Baisnée (2003, pp.154 et seq.) noted in his study of media present in Brussels, unlike their

⁸ In the case of correspondents for “French” media in Turkey, almost all of them come from this national host space, being French nationals and having all previously worked in France, with the exception of two, who are the least published. The case of AFP, which serves a broader market, is different: three out of seven local contractors (including two English speakers) were recruited in Turkey and are Turkish nationals.

⁹ This data was calculated from a database we created by listing journalists working on international news in France’s main generalist media, relying on relatively comprehensive files from the *Argus des fichiers presse* containing the journalists working in these newsrooms in 2007.

German, Italian, and Swedish counterparts – which have offices in Istanbul – French generalist TV channels rarely maintain a permanent presence on the ground. Professionals in this group of media occasionally use correspondents and/or, more often, work from Paris or very occasionally send journalists to Turkey.

Furthermore, the position of these “brokers” is heavily influenced by the position of the country of origin in the hierarchy of countries within the national host space. What is called “international news” varies from one national media space to another. A qualitative analysis we conducted on the content of the International section in the evening news broadcasts of France’s six main generalist TV channels during September 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001, and 2003 shows that, beyond the United States and the Middle East, foreign events are “nationalized” in the sense that they occur in countries with frequent contact with France for historical reasons—former colonies (Algeria, Congo, Ivory Coast), major neighboring countries (Germany and, above all, the United Kingdom), or countries where the French military is engaged (Kosovo, Timor, Ivory Coast). Other occurrences are selected in the “news” because they are part of a process in which France is involved (e.g., referendums on the euro). In contrast, during the survey periods, Asia – and even more so Latin America and Anglophone Africa – were almost invisible in the news broadcasts of TF1, France 2, France 3, Canal Plus, and M6. This is much less the case for Arte’s news program.

The statuses of correspondent journalists are good indicators of this geopolitical hierarchy. With the exception of journalists expatriated to a few major capitals, foreign media correspondents are highly dominated. Not only are most of them isolated from the centers of editorial power, but they are also not salaried employees attached to newsrooms. Instead, they are paid per task or on a flat-rate basis. Except for those at AFP – where contracts are highly variable – they are subcontractors, not integral parts of a “bureau,” a term that signifies not only the provision of a workspace but also assistants, dedicated infrastructure, a salary with bonuses, etc., which characterize major media. They generally freelance for multiple employers.

This geopolitical hierarchy has significant effects on the logics of transnationalization. Thus, it is highly debatable to analyze the logics of transnational production and diffusion as if they operated in only one direction—from the country of emigration to the country of immigration. Correspondents are heavily dependent on dominant *gatekeepers* (White 1950) – that is, the senior executives based at headquarters. For example, while freelance correspondents in Turkey may propose story ideas, many of these are either “commissions” from their employers

at headquarters or anticipations of what they might request, as lamented by two Turkish journalists working for a transnational medium: “You always have to think about stories you think they would like, and maybe sometimes you have to misrepresent to make it more interesting. It’s not the best way”; “I learned one thing: to get a dispatch published, you had to either overturn prejudices or reinforce them. Both extremes work; the middle ground, no, it falls into the void.”

In the case of journalists working for press agencies, such as AFP, the first “audience” for journalists is the bureau chief. It is no coincidence that this person is always sent from headquarters—that is, they represent the newsroom of the distribution space. This expatriate is almost never born in the country they cover and, with rare exceptions, does not know it beforehand. In contrast, except for the videographer, the other staff members have signed so-called “local” contracts, and, except for one, all are Turkish nationals. Furthermore, as in newspapers, the division of labor once again underscores the primacy of the host space: copy is always validated at the desk in Paris. In the case of AFP, final proofreading and editorial decisions for French copy are made at the English desk and the Europe-Africa desk.

The primacy of the national space, as well as the weight of Anglo-American “wholesalers,” thus influence the content produced by correspondents. To cite the Turkish example again, this content is strongly tied to a few thematic poles (Tutal 2007; Marchetti 2014). Often interconnected, they form, in the words of one correspondent, the “taboos” of Turkey as seen by Western media: “Kurds, Armenians, Army, Islam.” A colleague sums it up humorously and ironically: “Sometimes the joke is, if tomorrow Turkey becomes more democratic, we pack our bags! Because if there’s no Kurdish question, if there’s no Armenian question, what do we do? I’m exaggerating, but in reality, there’s such a bias in how we look at Turkey.”

It goes without saying that this relational structural analysis of the production and circulation of this type of widely disseminated cultural good only makes sense if these practices—at the intersection of three spaces—are analyzed in light of the social trajectories of the agents involved. Thus, we must characterize these trajectories to better understand the degree of belonging to the national host field, the field of origin, the transnational field, and what this entails. What, for example, is the significance of the importance of binational couples, agents from cross-border areas, children from families with high international capital, or those who have lived in former colonies? Only fine-grained sociographic data can, for example, sociologically analyze the social relationship established between correspondents and their

hierarchies, which is one of the entry points for understanding the logics of transnationalization *in situ*. Thus, to take elements from our exploratory survey, a bureau chief's affinity for Turkey (or Armenia) or, conversely, their rejection of the country's EU accession can have non-negligible effects on the volume and, obviously, the type of coverage. Similarly, sharing a common professional socialization in the same journalism school or the same correspondent position abroad, or having stronger or weaker linguistic skills in English, French, or the language of the country of origin, will influence worldviews, etc. Finally, beyond these classic variables, the study of the religious variable deserves to be deepened because it is likely as determining as it is difficult to grasp.

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