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Fixers and foreign correspondents: news production and autonomy

Colleen Murrell

Abstract

The television foreign correspondent's licence to roam and generate news is increasingly under threat. This paper concentrates on the micro production processes of today's correspondent as he or she goes about the job of newsgathering "on the road", and considers the changing nature of the correspondent's autonomy. It inserts the missing character in foreign newsgathering – the locally hired fixer – and explores how this person affects the correspondent's autonomy. An analysis of interviews with 20 foreign correspondents and five fixers leads to the conclusion that the foreign correspondent is rarely the sole editorial figure on the road but is instead the main actor representing the creative interplay of a succession of fixers or "local producers". This deconstruction of the ways in which a correspondent builds an ad-hoc newsgathering team each time he or she lands in a new place allows for a deeper understanding of the modus operandi of reporters.

Introduction

When it comes to sharing the credit, I think that it is one of the high crimes in journalism, for western and non-western producers and fixers and translators to not share the credit. Because obviously with foreign correspondency and also with television, it is team work, it is not a single individual. (Ware, 2007)

This paper examines the autonomy of today's television foreign correspondent in reference to his or her ability to generate stories and cover them away from base. It asks the question: how is the correspondent able to function as an effective and independent news gatherer while on the road abroad? It begins by reviewing the academic ethnographic literature on the role of the correspondent in order to unpack how the role has changed in recent times. The originality of this study lies in its bringing to the fore the forgotten "fixer" in the newsgathering equation and deconstructing the important role this person plays in newsgathering. Through an evaluation of the relationship between staff correspondent and locally hired fixer, it is possible to understand how the two can work in tandem as a newsgathering unit. This paper also acknowledges and contextualises the correspondent's working life in relation to wider political-economic and cultural frameworks.

These include such phenomena as country-of-origin foreign policy imperatives, “the significant growth of wholesale television news services” (Boyd-Barrett & Rantenen, 1988, p. 20); the technical and human “burden” engendered by 24-hour news cycles (Baker, 2003, p. 243); dwindling budgets causing foreign bureaux “to fall like dominoes” (Ricchiardi, 2008); and the explosion of camera-toting citizen journalists or “common correspondents” (Hirst & Harrison, 2007, p. 255). However, this “extra media” level (Reese, 2001, p. 182), although important, is not the focus of this paper, which will instead concentrate on the mechanics of news production as carried out by the correspondent and the fixer and which have, to date, remained under-explored.

Methodology and theory

This research uses semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data in order to examine the news-generating capacities of the correspondent and fixer. In agreement with Bowd, the author believes this mode of interviewing is best understood by journalists and represents “a mid-point between the inflexibility of structured interviewing” and the “lack of consistency in data which may arise from unstructured interviews” (Bowd, 2004, p. 118). Interviews were conducted during 2007-2008 with 10 Australian foreign correspondents (two of whom were working for CNN), 10 British foreign correspondents, two senior news managers and five fixers, who were all working in television newsgathering. In theoretical terms this paper emphasises what Cottle calls a “middle way” between political economy and cultural studies – namely the importance of analysing news production (Cottle, 2003a, p. 4). Cottle argues that this approach can reveal “something of the normally concealed internal workings of the ‘black box’ of news production and the routine professional practices and organisational and cultural norms informing its operation” (Cottle, 2003b, p. 11). This corresponds fairly closely with Reese’s hierarchy-of-influences model (Reese, 2001, pp. 173-187) and in particular to the “individual” and “routines” levels of influence. Both of these perspectives suggest that a complex of forces and constraints becomes enacted and negotiated in the moment of journalistic production and that there is more contingency, and possibly less determinism, at work than is sometimes suggested by leading theoretical approaches in the field of journalism. In examining autonomy as a symbol of journalistic power, this study draws on the work of Bourdieu concerning autonomy in the creation of artistic production.

Power as autonomy

Bourdieu saw the journalistic field as part of the “field of power” within society, as it concerns players who “possess high volumes of capital” (Benson & Neveu, 2005, p. 5). At one end of the field is the “cultural” pole, which concerns “High Art” or small circulation journals, and at the other, the “economic” pole, which concerns mass-circulation entertainment (Benson & Neveu, 2005, p. 5). Bourdieu believed that the players with the most capital or power were those who possessed an important degree of autonomy. To paraphrase from *On television* (1998), Bourdieu claimed autonomy could be related to job security, the media organisation’s position in the marketplace, the journalist’s position within the newspaper, his or her reputation or salary and a certain amount of protection from having to write “potboilers and the like”. Finally, he said, the journalist’s “own capacity for autonomous production of news must be taken into account” (1998, p. 69). Bourdieu believed players have three kinds of cultural capital. The first is embodied capital, in the form of an investment in self-improvement. The second is objectified capital, in the form of goods such as books, pictures, and so on. And last there is institutionalised capital, in which a person’s efforts are “credentialed” by external markers (Bourdieu in Richardson, 1986, p. 243, 244, 248).

This paper explores the autonomy and power of today’s correspondents, with the expectation that persons in this role are likely to possess significant degrees of all three kinds of cultural capital. A correspondent’s “habitus” consists of mastering or manipulating his or her embodied, ob-

jectified or credentialed capital in order to negotiate a creative space within the journalistic field. Most of the correspondents interviewed work for organisations which Bourdieu would consider to have a high “position within the marketplace” from either a cultural or economic point of view. These organisations are sufficiently well funded to keep international bureaux. In terms of the “position within” the organisation, the foreign correspondent equates to the top tier of reporters: it is only the most experienced and highly regarded reporters who are based in bureaux abroad. According to a survey of United States foreign correspondents, they are “more experienced than their domestic counterparts” and “significantly more senior than the average US journalist found by Weaver and Willhoit in 1996” (Wu & Hamilton, 2005, p. 522). These are elite reporters, who are sufficiently trusted to be allowed a degree of autonomy from newsroom supervision.

The heroic image of the foreign correspondent

The perception that foreign correspondents operate as autonomous and independent loners comes to us first from reporters’ autobiographical tales of derring-do. The hero generally writes of being swept up by great events and overcoming them by individual cunning and skill. There are precious few working partners in these tales, and other people are mere bit-players in the action. Australian war correspondent turned author, Phillip Knightley, examined the popular mythology of foreign correspondents as heroes and mythmakers. He described the golden age of corresponding as dating back to 1865-1914:

[Archibald] Forbes and his colleagues were tough and resourceful. No major events involving violence occurred anywhere, however remote, during this period without at least one of them being there to report it. They travelled by horse, donkey, camel, sled, steamer and train. These reporters carried letters of credit, gold pieces, laissez-passers and often a brace of pistols. (Knightley, 2002, p. 45)

They would be recognisable today in the raggle-taggle corps of 21st century journalists that roves from one world crisis to another. Chasing wars still comprises a large part of the reporter’s workload in some postings, and the same goes for those reporters based in their home country who parachute into other countries to cover their crises. The job of foreign correspondent is considered by many to be the pinnacle of one’s career. Foreign postings for journalists are akin to diplomatic postings for politicians: they are gifts from managers or proprietors for years of good service. According to Weisberger, an historian of American newspapers: “While the city beat might have its exciting side, the peak in reporting circles was reached when a writer could don a felt hat, riding boots, and a knapsack and swagger off to cover a war or a revolution.” (Weisberger, 1961, p. 161)

Heroic tales seeped into the collective subconscious of many an aspiring writer, as evidenced by journalists’ biographies detailing the fantasy lives they would weave as children. According to Philip Caputo, a veteran foreign correspondent and Pulitzer Prize winner for the *Chicago Tribune*, his early motivations were pure adventure and escapism:

I took up a foreign correspondent’s itinerant trade and spent five years vagabonding through lands with intemperate climates and politics. Those two words, “marine” and “foreign correspondent”, bore a powerful magic. They signified the glamour I was after, shouted above the noise of commuter traffic, TVs, and weekend lawn mowers – the whole quotidian racket – that it was still possible for an adventurous young man to live out a myth. (Caputo, 1991, p. 2)

Ethnographies of foreign correspondents and the forgotten fixer

Scholars investigating foreign correspondents either ignore or do not adequately reflect the part played by locally hired media workers or fixers. More often they stress the idea that correspondents operate as a Westernised pack, endlessly recycling rumour and misunderstanding the terrain (Van Ginneken, 1998, p. 134). Sometimes correspondents are portrayed as fumbling parachutists who have little comprehension of the people they meet on their journeys (Van Ginneken, 1998, p. 135). This interpretation ignores the interactions that occur during the story chase and which are brought about through the working relationships formed between correspondents and local fixers. These people are regularly hired by correspondents in situ to help with newsgathering. This can involve purely logistical tasks such as translating, interpreting, driving or setting up satellite feeds and play-outs. At other times fixers might also perform editorial tasks such as story generation, editorial and cultural backgrounding, supply of contacts and on-the-road investigation.

The main academic texts that closely define the role of the correspondent and also make references to fixers are those by Pedelty (1995), Hannerz (2000), Hamilton and Jenner (2004) and Erickson and Hamilton (2006). In this literature, one can trace an evolutionary process that shows a gradual fracturing of the correspondent's role from that of purely elite staffer into multiple types, such as parachutist, stringer or locally hired. With regards to the fixer, the evolution of the role moves from that of purely logistical helper to a more central editorial position.

Pedelty's ethnographic study of foreign correspondents in El Salvador charts many different groups within the correspondents' pack, and he deconstructs the roles of elite staffers, stringers and local journalists. He sees the stringers as performing a helping role for the staffers and calls their roles "interdependent". The Salvadoran journalists who also help out are "expected to produce news material and facilitate the reporting of foreign correspondents, but are rarely taken seriously in terms of creative input" (Pedelty, 1995, p. 211). Fixers, a group he sees as separate to local journalists, he dismisses as "logistical aides". The lack of importance he ascribes to fixers can partly be attributed to the fact that he concentrates on print journalists, rather than the television variety that employ fixers more often.

In 2000, Hannerz examined the world of the international correspondent through interviews and short periods of observation. Like Pedelty, Hannerz concentrated on the work of print journalists, and thus while he acknowledges fixers in passing, they are not dealt with in any detail in his study. Tellingly, however, he notes: "As in anthropology, where over the years the field workers' multipurpose local research assistants have mostly been left invisible in the resulting ethnographies (cf. Sanjek 1993), the critical importance of local helpers in foreign news work tends not to be acknowledged." (Hannerz, 2000, p. 154) Hannerz sees fixers mostly as employees of the correspondent's bureau who may use the job as a "stepping stone to a journalistic career". He muses that the category of fixers is "polymorphous" and suggests this may be why it is a difficult and overlooked category of analysis.

Hamilton and Jenner's (2004) article is useful in that it continues the deconstruction of the correspondent's role into different categories. The authors argue that there is no longer just the one type of elite correspondent, but many different versions to suit different marketplaces, including traditional foreign correspondent, parachutist, local-foreign, foreign-foreign, foreign-local, in-house-foreign, premium-service and amateur-foreign. In some of these categories, such as "foreign-foreign" and "foreign-local", the roles covered by the (then new) cut-price correspondents resemble those of the types of fixers who are now beginning to assert themselves as editorial, rather than just logistical, employees of international news organisations.

A 2006 paper by Erickson and Hamilton departs from previous studies by establishing a special category for fixers, and dedicating an entire section to them. Again the paper punctures myths

about the elite correspondent who only appears to work alone: "As part of their image as elites, professional foreign correspondents are typically viewed as loners who travel light and fast and set their own agenda. But in moving from one country to another, as they so often do, they have support systems." (Erickson & Hamilton, 2006, p. 40) The authors go on to describe the "fluid body" of fixers used by reporters and stringers for the Cox News Service in America: "Supporting them in their peripatetic reporting were fixers in 37 countries. These fixers, generally paid on an as-needed basis, brief reporters when they arrive, arrange interviews and transportation and translate when language is a problem. The Cox bureau chief calls fixers 'critically important'." (p. 41) The paper is useful for this study as it is the first academic work to make reference to the use of fixers as important cogs in the chain of newsgathering. In devoting an entire section to fixers, it also promotes them as a separate category of media worker, and differentiates them from stringers. However, it does not describe in any detail the types of editorial help they give, assigning them a merely logistical role.

Correspondents and fixers since 2003

Information about the work of fixers in newsgathering has been coming to the fore in recent years, mostly through the internet and in newspaper articles about media issues. One of the reasons for this is the war in Iraq, which has seen correspondents less able to go about the daily business of newsgathering and having to rely increasingly on locally hired fixers. These fixers have taken on a more primary role in newsgathering and some have graduated to being correspondents themselves. As former CNN executive Eason Jordan writes: "In Iraq, more so than in any previous war, the distinction between journalist and media worker is blurred because Iraqi media workers are de facto reporters, serving as the eyes and ears of foreign correspondents who, because of the extreme danger, rarely venture out among the Iraqi masses." (Jordan, 2006) The large number of fixers or local media workers who have been killed has also put them in the spotlight, as news companies have come under pressure from organisations such as the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) to regularise their employment, give them safety training and provide them with equipment such as flak jackets.

Journalists' memoirs are also beginning to reflect more interest in describing the various ways in which fixers help reporters. In books by international correspondents such as the ABC's Mark Willacy (2007), the BBC's John Simpson (2004), *The New Yorker's* Jon Lee Anderson (2005) and *The Sydney Morning Herald's* Paul McGeough (2003), portraits are emerging of the valuable help that correspondents are given by fixers. In his autobiography *In Baghdad*, McGeough gives a detailed account of his daily reporting, working alongside a changing team of fixers. Before the war broke out in 2003, these fixers came courtesy of the Saddam regime, were known by the correspondents as "minders" and were obligatory government add-ons to the job of reporting. As the war played out and Saddam was overthrown, McGeough re-trained some of these media workers to operate under different rules. He attempted to turn the "minders" into "fixers," who wouldn't quail in the face of assignments that question and probe the status quo.

Correspondents gain 'access all areas'

For this research project, correspondents with extensive and sustained foreign newsgathering experience were sought out for interviewing. Chosen interviewees worked in senior positions for well-funded organisations. They represent the elite of the profession and all work for high-profile Australian, UK and US companies – the ABC, Channel 7, Channel 9, BBC, ITN, Sky News and CNN. All of the interviewees are full-time staff reporters who either are, or have been, correspondents based abroad, with good salary packages, offices and budgets for travel to cover stories of interest. When these correspondents are overseas they also have a degree of editorial "autonomy"

from head office and a certain licence to roam within financial constraints. For example, these Australian and British correspondents do not need to get “copy approval” from executive producers prior to satellite. According to ITN’s Alex Thomson: “You are totally trusted to go out and see the situation as you see it with your eyes and report on it at the end of the day.” (Thomson, 2007) Of the organisations represented here, only Atlanta-based CNN demands final copy approval over wording from its news correspondents.

These 20 reporters took part in semi-structured one-on-one interviews lasting approximately an hour each. The questions were grouped into the following areas: (1) general/background; (2) production – locating fixers; (3) identifying the kinds of help that fixers provide; (4) crisis coverage; and (5) stories/editorial. The data examined for this paper come from question areas (3) and (5). The first question asked whether the correspondents always employed fixers when away from their base bureau or headquarters. There was universal agreement among the correspondents that they always hired fixers, except in rare and specific circumstances. When asked what these rare circumstances might be, they said when they were “embedded” with the army (McCloud, Ramsey, Thomson); when they might put fixers in danger by crossing ethnic lines (Cave); when they were part of a media pack travelling with a governmental organisation (Neely); or when they were attending an international summit (Neely). Some British journalists stressed that they did not always employ fixers if they were already travelling with a company producer from the organisation’s headquarters, the correspondent’s own bureau or the bureau in the country they were visiting (Bowen, Bremner, Myrie, Neely, Waghorn). Myrie noted that he often travelled with a “video producer” from the BBC, this being a new job description which combines the roles of camera operator and producer. Another reason correspondents might not employ a fixer was if the country was English-speaking (Myrie, Ramsey, Waghorn). One TV correspondent, who had previously worked in print, said that as a newspaper reporter he had not always used a fixer (Ware). Nineteen out of 20 correspondents said they needed fixers for language reasons. Baghdad reporter Caroline Hawley said that although she spoke fluent Arabic and thus did not need a fixer in the Middle East for language purposes, she always employed one in Iraq for cultural reasons, to carry out “social introductions” (Hawley, 2007). Hugh Riminton said he often employed fixers as “cultural interpreters”:

Fixers are everything to you. They will explain what that billboard means on the side of the road, and they will explain to you why these guys wear this headdress, why the guy herding the sheep wears this headdress, and the other guy who is still driving the tractor is wearing a different headdress. Why is that? Is it significant? It may not be significant. It may mean life and death. You don’t know. (Riminton, 2007)

The second question analysed here was whether the fixer’s role was editorial, logistical or a mixture of both, because it was important to test if previous scholarly findings that the role was entirely logistical were supported. The question therefore sought to uncover what “cultural capital” fixers could bring to the newsgathering equation. The firm conclusion was that fixers’ roles are best described as a mixture of logistical and editorial functions, with 18 of the 20 respondents choosing this mixed category. Nobody interviewed chose the category “editorial only”, and two chose the category “logistical only”. One of the two who chose the latter category remarked that he frequently used drivers as fixers, and these people were definitely logistical (Ramsey). The other said he thought they were more logistical and that it was simply a bonus if they were also editorial (McCloud). Of the group who chose the mixed category, one qualified it by saying “editorial under supervision” (Cave). Another chose mixed, but nonetheless said it was “mainly logistical” (Waghorn). Another from this group said it depended on the individual fixer (Bowen). Two BBC correspondents (Hawley and North), who were adamant the role was a mixture of logistical and editorial, offered the word “producer” rather than “fixer” to describe these people.

The third and fourth questions for consideration in this paper were whether or not fixers suggested stories and whether they gave reporters ideas or contacts that enabled them to produce great stories. These questions attempted to probe the extent to which fixers were involved in mainline editorial tasks, as this information was previously not known. All the correspondents agreed that fixers did suggest stories, although put on the spot a couple could not think of a particular story. Among the answers concerning powerful stories suggested by a fixer or obtained because of the work of a fixer were:

- Access to an Al-Qaeda training base in Iraq and the first suicide bomber video (Ware);
- Interview with a suicide bomber in an Afghan jail (Thomson);
- Kuwaiti mistreatment of Palestinians during the Gulf War of 1991 (Little);
- A feature on orphans in Baghdad (North);
- An exclusive interview with Abu Bakar Bashir in Indonesia (A. Brown);
- Exclusive Bali bomber footage (Burrows);
- An interview with a US hostage in Iraq (Cave);
- Exclusive access to a war criminal in Argentina (Neely);
- Poignant stories about children in Sadr City (Riminton);
- Spanish villagers saving oyster farms from an oil spill (Bremner);
- A number of powerful stories about tsunami refugees in Aceh, which earned three Walkley awards (Palmer).

The importance of the stories listed above shows that fixers are helping correspondents to gain exclusives that lead to an increased reputation for the latter, and even to valuable prizes. There is therefore an important transferral of cultural capital (through ideas, creativity and local knowledge) that allows the correspondent to “access all areas” and benefit enormously from this working relationship. Michael Ware explained in detail how his fixer helped him to make contact with Al-Qaeda by combing through the contacts of all his old, disgruntled army friends until he found people who led him to Ware’s goal. He believes this is what prompted the organisation to give him access to a training camp and the first suicide-bomber video broadcast from Iraq. Ware said:

It wasn’t put onto the internet, it wasn’t given to an Arab channel, and it wasn’t given to an Iraqi journalist, but was given to some bumbling hack from the back-blocks of Brisbane. It never ceases to amaze me. And that came through my Iraqis, ultimately the same path that led me to stand in an Al-Qaeda training camp in Iraq and be with them as they fired missiles on American marines. (Ware, 2007).

When Palmer first struck out for Aceh following the Asian tsunami in 2004, he did not wait for his camera operator, but instead went with only his fixer, Ari. Between them they interviewed and filmed a series of dramatic and exclusive stories that led to three Walkley awards in 2005, including the Gold Walkley, Australia’s top journalism award. Palmer’s recollection of the news production process is as a shared newsgathering activity: “The first two interviews we did, that Ari and I did, in this mosque were a husband and wife who had held their two children, aged two and five, in their arms as the water came and felt them pulled from their grasp” (Palmer, 2007). Mark Burrows related how his fixer saw someone filming outside a restaurant in Bali at the time of the 2002 bombings. The fixer gave to Burrows the exclusive video which showed one of the Bali bombers walking into the restaurant and detonating a bomb. He said: “For any journalist that is once-in-a-lifetime stuff, that’s gold, total gold for us. Horrific to see, unbelievable but all her work.” (Burrows, 2007)

In other interviews where correspondents could not suggest particular stories, they mentioned how fixers added significant editorial insight on the stories through contacts or guidance. One talked of “political layering” (Clark), another about “original vision” and “original talent” (M. Brown). Myrie mentioned that fixers helped get improved access to interviews and tricky places and Bowen spoke of “editorial guidance”. Ware said coming up with ideas for a news story with his fixer in Baghdad was “a very organic process. I mean we’ve been together so long that it is through conversation that we come to a sense of what the next story shall be” (Ware, 2007).

Fixers barter local access for employment benefit

Using Bourdieu’s analysis of cultural capital as a frame to look at fixers, these people could be said to have significant “embodied capital” which enables them to barter their skills for significant gain, mostly for short-term or daily word-of-mouth contracts. This embodied capital is highly sought-after by correspondents at times of crisis in the country they are visiting. While the fixers may have less objectified or institutionalised capital, the value of the embodied capital that they possess rises in proportion to the level of crisis or the importance of the story the correspondent is covering.

The interviews with the five fixers were carried out in the same way as those with the correspondents. These fixers were all working or had worked in areas of crisis reporting. Their employment conditions ranged from casual day-to-day hire to long-term contract work. Pranvera Smith worked in Kosovo for a range of companies; Laith Hashim worked in Iraq for an American media organisation; Ahmad Hussein worked in Iraq for an international organisation; Ibrahim Adwan worked in Gaza for the BBC and Dian Estey worked in Indonesia for a range of mostly Australian media organisations. Both the fixers from Iraq have been given assumed names for safety reasons. The questions put to the fixers covered the same area headings as those for the correspondents and once again the data being analysed in this paper come from the topic areas (3) and (5).

The first question asked whether fixers thought their jobs were logistical, editorial or a mixture of the two. The aim was to discover if the fixers’ answers mirrored those of the correspondents. The next question asked whether or not they suggested story ideas. All the fixers said their jobs were a mixture of logistical and editorial roles and had evolved over time. All had done translating and considered this to be logistical. Other skills they mentioned included getting contacts, arranging interviews, sorting out satellite feeds and setting up filming (Adwan) and “putting everything in context” (Smith). All except Smith stressed that they did suggest stories. Smith nonetheless described distinctly editorial tasks, such as carrying out full interviews by herself and only translating them afterwards. But she considered the most important aspect of her editorial work to be tracking down the exact person the correspondent wanted to interview on a particular story.

At the other end of the spectrum, Estey from Indonesia was adamant that her role was “mainly editorial”. She had consciously honed her journalistic skills, had learned to operate a camera and actively chased exclusives. She had raised her fixing fees accordingly and explained to correspondents:

If you just need somebody to take care of you logistically or just to say yes to whatever you said, then yes it should be cheap because it is very easy. But if you want someone to give an insight on the story or to be able to get you to different places or whatever then it will cost more. (Estey, 2008)

Hussein from Baghdad talked a great deal about teamwork and felt he was acknowledged by his organisation for the important role that he played. He was also called upon to carry out interviews in Baghdad when the situation became too dangerous for the Western correspondents.

Hashim, the other Iraqi fixer, said he had been “too intimidated to actually push ideas” early on in his role but this had changed. He said that after a while he got to do editorial work and other local employees did the translating. He said:

It also shows in the payments they are paying you. You’ve got these people who are very reliable for translation but if there is a story a journalist wants to develop, you would actually sit with him for a while and you would talk about it and see where to go. And they would listen to your ideas. Again it depends on the person you are working with. Sometimes it’s great, sometimes it really does feel like it is teamwork. You know there is a lot of trust from the journalist to the fixer and you can actually add, have some input. [...] If they’re just not interested in your ideas – “just translate”, then you will just translate, you will be that person. (Hussein, 2007)

Teamwork is the key to newsgathering success

The findings from the data dispel the myth that the correspondent is a lone character operating solely on his or her wits when abroad. Instead the data show that correspondents need fixers in order to achieve relative autonomy in story production. They need them to be their “eyes and ears” on location (Bowen). According to Palmer, in crisis newsgathering, “fixers are 90 per cent of what you’re going to achieve” (Palmer, 2007). The hiring of a fixer leads via language access to local media and networks, contacts and cultural and historic perspectives. The two players bring their own cultural capital to the game: there can be tension in the relationship, but this mostly leads to creativity. They need to work together as a team to achieve results. Through the loan of the fixer’s embodied capital, the correspondent can increase his or her objectified or institutionalised capital through winning significant awards, such as a Walkley, or through promotion, prestige and therefore ultimately economic gain. In recent years, correspondents have begun to signal the help they receive in winning awards. In 2003, Paul McGeough acknowledged his fixer to his journalist colleagues on receiving his Walkley Award for work in Baghdad. In 2005, Tim Palmer did the same. These moves towards transparency address what Ware considers to be “one of the high crimes in journalism”, when members of the television team are not given credit for the joint production (Ware, 2007).

The ready marketplace of fixers allows correspondents to pick and choose from the talent on offer, mostly – but not always – without commitment. The dangerous situation in Iraq has made the BBC change its practices of hiring fixers in Baghdad from short-term to long-term contracts. The fixers have also begun to play a more important editorial role in the shared newsgathering process. As if to underline this change, correspondents and fixers from this company have begun to use the term “local producer” rather than fixer. According to the BBC’s Baghdad correspondent, Andrew North:

The ones that I have worked with most closely we have ended up hiring them very clearly with contracts as producers and that is what we call them, local producers. Because they are there to arrange, to fix interviews, but they are also providing eyes and ears and the best of these locally hired people are providing stories. Then as they get trained they will end up in some cases also writing the stories as well, so they are then very much part of the team. (2007)

The finding that correspondents almost always use fixers may surprise scholars of international newsgathering who have not focused on the news production behaviour of correspondents on the road. The only reasons cited in these data for not using fixers are fairly prescribed, such as when travelling in an official media pack, when attending an international conference or when travelling to countries such as the US where English is the main language. This means that for

most countries affected by crises, correspondents are using fixers. This fact is largely unknown by TV viewers and is acknowledged by North: "I think there are too many people who actually hide behind, you know who don't acknowledge the role of the local journalist on the ground and how important it is." (2007)

Another finding is that correspondents from Britain sometimes do not use fixers if they are travelling with a producer from headquarters, their resident bureau or a bureau in the country they are visiting. This reflects that British journalists still have access to producers who travel with them, at least on big stories. BBC journalists also have a high number of overseas bureaux which they can call on to boost their newsgathering resources. These correspondents sometimes hire fixers for specific local knowledge even when they already have travelling producers with them. By the same token, Australian correspondents do not mention travelling with producers, except for Riminton and Ware, who both worked for CNN at the time of the interviews. In Australia, the producer is no longer part of the travelling team, and the role has been absorbed by the correspondent and camera operator with the aid of an ad-hoc fixer. In the interviews with Australian correspondents, money was often mentioned in regard to travelling cheaply and being forced to pay lower wages to fixers. Clark said the result was that it was not possible to compete for the better fixers with richer organisations, and Palmer said this meant correspondents were often "left with the driver".

The correspondents' answers to the questions about the nature of the fixing role reveal that it is overwhelmingly a mixture of logistical and editorial components. This suggests that it is the sheer adaptability of the fixer role that makes it so enduring. Correspondents see the mixture as changing depending on the story, the location or the fixer employed. This contrasts strongly with the findings from the fixers, who all saw a clear evolution in the nature of the role, moving from mainly logistical beginnings towards the editorial end of the spectrum in more recent years. This was put down to the fixer's experience over time (Smith and Estey); the dangerous situation in Iraq (Hashim and Hussein); and the changing demands and rethinking of the role by particular media organisations (Adwan and Hussein).

From the findings it is clear that fixers provide a window on to the local landscape. Through translation, interpretation, cultural and political explanation, contacts and ideas, they give the correspondent the opportunity to boost his or her cultural capital and gain plaudits, awards and promotion. The judicious borrowing of this capital enables the correspondent to appear to be autonomous and to have power in story creation. However, in reality this autonomy can be ascribed to a shared team-playing role. From a successful partnership, the fixer gains economic advantage and capital within the media organisation but rarely gains external credit or prizes. From such an apparently ad-hoc relationship the correspondent is given a chance to make his or her work stand out from the material delivered by other reporters. This notion is best summed up by an appreciative correspondent:

Even if fixers don't understand TV it doesn't seem to matter because they just provide this wonderful shop window into which you can walk and browse as a correspondent and say fine, we need this, we don't need that [...] But they're putting this stuff up on offer and that's just critical. I mean you would be lost without it completely. (Thomson, 2007)

This paper reports an interesting tension between the forms of cultural capital mobilised by foreign correspondents and those mobilised by their fixers. Where foreign correspondents largely see themselves as news experts they nonetheless cannot deploy their expertise in foreign locations without the local expertise of the fixers. This is particularly the case in Iraq, where the level of danger for media workers is great.

Notes

1. The majority of interviews were conducted face to face in Melbourne, Sydney, Hong Kong, Paris and London in 2007-2008. Two were done on the phone to Istanbul and Jerusalem.

- Jeremy Bowen (Middle East Editor, BBC);
- Juliet Bremner (former Europe correspondent, ITN);
- Adrian Brown, (foreign correspondent, Network 7);
- Matt Brown (Middle East correspondent, ABC);
- Mark Burrows (former US correspondent, Channel 9);
- Peter Cave (foreign affairs editor, ABC);
- Chris Clark (correspondent in London, Moscow and Jerusalem, ABC);
- Zoe Daniels (former Africa correspondent, ABC);
- Caroline Hawley (former Baghdad correspondent, BBC);
- Alan Little (world affairs correspondent, BBC);
- Brett McCloud (former Europe correspondent, Channel 9);
- Clive Myrie (Europe correspondent, BBC);
- Bill Neely (international editor, ITV News);
- Andrew North (Baghdad correspondent, BBC);
- Tim Palmer (correspondent in Jerusalem and Jakarta, ABC);
- Stuart Ramsey (chief correspondent, Sky News);
- Hugh Riminton (anchor/correspondent Hong Kong, CNN);
- Alex Thomson (chief correspondent, Channel 4 News, ITN);
- Dominic Waghorn (Middle East correspondent, Sky News);
- Michael Ware (Baghdad correspondent, CNN).

2. Four of the interviews with fixers were carried out in London, and one was done on the phone to Jakarta. The names of the Iraqi fixers have been changed to avoid identification.

- Ahmed Hussein, Iraq
- Ibrahim Adwan, Gaza
- Leith Hashim, Iraq
- Pranvera Smith, Albania, Kosovo
- Dian Estey, Indonesia

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