



Baghdad bureaux: an exploration of the interconnected world of fixers and correspondents at the BBC and CNN

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Abstract

Post-war Iraq is so dangerous that Western television correspondents have been forced to change their modus operandi and rely more heavily on locally-hired fixers. This article asks if the virtual absence of overseas reporters from Iraq's streets has led to a less authentic news gathering role. Conversely, it may have delivered a more nuanced form of editorial and logistical task-sharing. This research draws on interviews conducted in 2007 and 2008 with twenty foreign correspondents, two senior news managers and five fixers. It employs Bourdieu's analysis of cultural capital as a framework to examine the exchange of different forms of power and expertise between the players. Where trust is now at the forefront of this news gathering relationship, this research deconstructs the methods by which fixers are recruited and deployed. A comparison is made between the news production techniques of foreign correspondents who employ fixers for short-term purposes and correspondents from the Baghdad bureaux of the BBC and CNN.

Keywords

BBC, CNN, fixers, foreign correspondents, international reporting, Iraq, transnational broadcasting

Dangerous days in Baghdad

News gathering in Iraq in recent years has challenged foreign correspondents as never before. How can you report on life in a country when the streets are a virtual no-go zone? And while there is still disagreement about whether Iraq represents some kind of a watershed in terms of danger for journalists, or simply constitutes another rung in a ladder of violence, what is not under dispute is the death toll. According to the International Federation

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of Journalists, 'Iraq remains the world's deadliest country for journalists and media staff' with 284 deaths recorded since the American-led invasion of 2003 (White, 2009: 2). This bald fact has led to major changes in the news production behaviour of journalists as they go about the day-to-day business of covering the story.

Most broadcast organizations in the UK and Australia have taken a tough decision not to parachute in teams to report on the ongoing crisis unless they retain permanent bureaux there. Instead they have scaled back coverage and only go in to Baghdad under particular security conditions – such as embedding with army units or governmental visits. These companies (ITN, Sky, Australian ABC and Channels 7, 9 and 10) are also relying more heavily on the international news agencies and on agreements with other broadcast organizations that have continued to cover the conflict from the inside – such as the BBC, CNN, Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya. According to senior staff in these organizations, a great deal of agonizing went into these decisions, which were based primarily on cost and danger to staff. ITN lost five people connected to its organization during and following the 2003 war. Its International Editor Bill Neely, who still visits Iraq two or three times a year as an embedded correspondent, said the reasons ITN was no longer there on a permanent basis were safety worries, the organization's inability to get insurance coverage, a relatively small annual newsgathering budget of US\$49m and a fear that reporters would not get decent access to the story. According to Neely:¹

I don't think any of us in the media can really hold our heads up and be proud of our coverage of Iraq. Because it is so very difficult to report anything other than second-hand there, I don't think any of us really do it properly. (Neely, 2007)

In late 2008/early 2009 the American domestic networks ABC, NBC and CBS also pulled out their full-time correspondents, despite it being 'a war zone with 130,000 American troops' (Hamilton, 2009). In January 2009, ABC News announced it would rely on the BBC for breaking coverage (Guthrie, 2009). Despite the absence of their media colleagues, CNN and BBC News have elected to stay. Former CNN correspondent and presenter Hugh Riminton argues CNN has to be in Baghdad as it is a company 'for whom global news is its primary purpose'. BBC World News Editor Jon Williams says there is still a huge appetite for Iraq coverage among the BBC's viewers in the Middle East:

The thing that makes the BBC unique, I believe, is our reach around the world, which allows the BBC to take a global perspective on stories. We'd be foolish to start attacking that. We might as well switch off the lights. (Guthrie, 2009)

The BBC's colleagues in other companies understand the BBC's commitment to the story, despite the huge risks. According to Sky's chief correspondent, Stuart Ramsey: 'The BBC has a public service requirement to be in Iraq and in Afghanistan.' This notion of public service broadcasting harks back to the BBC's first Director General Lord Reith, who believed that: 'Broadcasting should be a public service which should not simply entertain, but inform and educate as well' (Kung-Shankleman, 2000: 70). The BBC's former Baghdad correspondent Caroline Hawley agrees:

My feeling is if you have got 8,000 troops in a country, if you have gone to war against a country, if you are a public service broadcaster, you have a duty as well as you can to report the aftermath of that. But there is a question, at what cost? (Hawley, 2007)

The difficulties of covering Iraq have also led to occasional disputes within the journalistic fraternity. One of the main bones of contention has centred on the location of the correspondents' bureaux and their ability to get out onto the streets. In 2006, two well-known international reporters had a public disagreement in the newspapers. Rageh Omaar, who had recently quit the BBC for Al-Jazeera, accused the Western media of perpetuating a 'fraud' on viewers for not making it clear that 'many of the pictures that comprise what are effectively "pooled reports" have been shot by anonymous Iraqi freelancers, whilst the Western journalists have remained inside the protected Green Zone in Baghdad' (Burrell, 2006). The BBC's World Affairs Editor John Simpson took issue with Omaar, arguing that the BBC was not 'cowering' in the Green Zone and was not barred from the streets:

The BBC Baghdad bureau works exactly like each of our other bureaux around the world. We do our own reporting, and, like every major television news organisation, we have access to the work of the two big agencies, Reuters and APTN. (Simpson, 2006)

And while it is correct that the BBC's reporters are not based in the Green Zone, it is hard to agree with Simpson that working in the Baghdad bureau is exactly the same as in any other BBC bureau. As we shall see, in order to retain access to the streets, Western reporters are working more closely with local media workers or fixers. According to former CNN executive Eason Jordan:

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)

Fixers have been hidden in the shadows

Despite the considerable research focusing on foreign reporting over the years, fixers remain relatively unknown outside media circles. Scholars have tended to put the heroic or raffish figure of the foreign correspondent in the spotlight, thereby pushing other members of the media team into the shadows. In Mark Pedelty's (1995) seminal study of foreign correspondents in El Salvador, he concentrates on print reporters, who tend not to use fixers as much as their counterparts in television. Fixers are only mentioned in passing as inconsequential 'logistical aides' to television correspondents (p. 54). In Ulf Hannerz's (2000) research on foreign correspondents he notes the 'critical importance of local helpers in foreign news tends not to be acknowledged' (p. 154). But he does not go on to explore what these fixers do that is so critically important. In 2006, Emily Erickson and John Maxwell Hamilton dedicated a section of their article on foreign reporting to

'the fluid body' (p. 40) of fixers in different countries, who support the reporters and stringers of the Cox News service. However, once again, although they emphasize the importance of these fixers, they do not describe in any detail how they go about assisting the correspondents.

The first academic paper to critically examine the role of fixers was published in 2007 by Jerry Palmer and Victoria Fontan. Here the authors examine the fixers' work chiefly in the area of translation for parachuting foreign correspondents during the 2003 Iraq War. In this article, they list the myriad tasks that fixers routinely handle. These include arranging interviews, basic reporting, background briefings, security assessments and guidance, and local contacts with other media workers. The authors note favourably the fixers' 'access to networks of local contacts' (p. 12) but otherwise are quite scathing about their use. They find that their employment was a necessary evil during the war, like the practice of embedding, due to the danger on the ground and the correspondents' inability to speak Arabic. They conclude that the use of fixers weakens 'the traditional model of the foreign correspondent' (p. 22). However, while this research surveys the basics concerning what fixers did during the war, it is impossible to draw any firm conclusions about the ultimate usefulness of the fixers' work, as correspondents are not interviewed.

Power and the journalistic field

This particular article now continues one of Palmer and Fontan's aims of pulling the fixer into the critical spotlight. More importantly, this research positions the fixer alongside the correspondent in order to reflect on the evolving relationship between the two different roles. As so little has been written about fixers in the academy, it was decided to ask the players, using semi-structured interviews, to reflect on their own skill levels, approaches to newsgathering and the methods they deploy to overcome skills shortages. Twenty British and Australian television foreign correspondents and five fixers were interviewed. The data from all the respondents regarding how fixers are normally recruited and used were then compared with data from a subset of these reporters which deals solely with news gathering in Iraq. According to Cottle (2003), this methodological 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' (p. 11).

In order to analyse the evolving relationship between the correspondent and the fixer, Pierre Bourdieu's field theory is a useful framework in which to situate contests of power between players. It is within this field that players can achieve success through a careful mastery of the rules of the game and an accumulation of personal, social capital. Bourdieu mostly used the field as a metaphor for a space where you can identify 'institutions, agents, discourses, practices, values and so on' (Webb et al., 2002: 86). Although Bourdieu considered the political and economic fields to be the most powerful, he still thought the journalistic field was a powerful one also, because it dealt with 'those agents who possess high volumes of capital' (Benson and Neveu, 2005: 5). Foreign correspondents working for high profile broadcast companies are powerful people within their fields and they have a certain amount of autonomy, which Bourdieu argued derived from working for a

reputable organization, job security, a good salary and reputation, and protection from needing to write 'potboilers and the like' (Bourdieu, 1998: 69).

If a player has autonomy then he or she has agency and can make changes in the field. Bourdieu (1986: 243–8) argued that players have three kinds of cultural capital that they arrive with in the field and that they can then trade. The first is 'embodied' in the form of an investment in self improvement (education, skills, knowledge, etc). The second is 'objectified' capital in the form of one's output (for a television correspondent this would be television news stories). And lastly there is 'institutionalized' capital in the form of prizes and diplomas. With regards to the players we are examining here, television correspondents possess stores of all three of the forms of cultural capital that Bourdieu believed were vital to acquiring respected creative status within the high end Arts field. Correspondents can improve all of their rankings through investment in education, skills and training, through their ability to produce high quality work and through the work's recognition by external markers such as prizes, acknowledged exclusives and promotion. Fixers, on the other hand, have some 'embodied capital' in the form of their acknowledged skills in translation and local contacts, etc. However, they cannot usually lay claim to the correspondent's authored work (objectified capital) or to the prizes that this work might engender (institutionalized capital). This research asks if the particular dangers inherent in reporting Iraq mean that the recruitment and use of fixers is now utterly changed, as fixers are able to improve their stores of capital and autonomy. In turn, does a possible devolvement of power from the correspondent to the fixer mean that news gathering is rendered inauthentic?

Logistics of Iraq coverage at the BBC and CNN

The BBC and CNN are the world's two largest international news broadcasting companies. The BBC has an annual newsgathering budget of US\$501m and operates 41 overseas bureaux (BBC NewsWatch, 2009: 3). According to a report by the Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ), in 2008 CNN had US\$687m to spend on newsgathering and operated 26 overseas bureaux (Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2008: 1) According to Mark Glover (see asterisk in note 1), the BBC's Baghdad bureau manager, the office is staffed by a mixture of locally-hired people, security contractors and volunteer journalists from London or elsewhere, most of whom go in on a monthly or six-weekly rotation. The office is in a secured street in the 'Red Zone'. Glover said that in the office on any given day, you will find two foreign correspondents, one bureau manager, one producer, two camera operators (one western, one Iraqi), a satellite engineer, three security advisers, a dozen local guards, three fixers, four drivers, four cleaners, and between six to twelve journalists from the BBC Arabic Service. The BBC also keeps some stringers on a retainer in other Iraqi cities, whose dealings are via the fixers in the office. The locally employed staff are said to represent all factions and ethnic and religious groupings in the country. The cost of this operation is huge and one that newsgathering heads will not divulge.

According to Hugh Riminton, CNN's compound is in a 'closed-off street in the suburbs', protected by guards and machine-gun nests. CNN correspondent Michael Ware says that, excluding guards, there would normally be 30 to 40 people, of whom a core of between 8 and 10 would be expats. Again most of the latter are brought in under

six-week rotations on a voluntary basis. Ware has an investigative role in the bureau, working on longer format documentary style pieces. Apart from him, there are usually two news correspondents. He said most fixers have had their families evacuated to neighbouring countries and most now live in the compound. According to Riminton, CNN employs Iraqis from every sectarian faction and even from the ranks of the Saddam regime. Riminton said a number of CNN's visiting correspondents and producers are also from Arabic-speaking backgrounds, so that this adds to the sum of local knowledge, making the bureau far less 'Anglo' than detractors might realize.

Recruiting fixers: serendipity versus safety

Some data from this research project (Murrell, 2009) revealed that on typical foreign newsgathering stories all 20 of the correspondents interviewed always hired fixers, except in rare cases, such as when travelling with an in-house producer, working as an embed or when language was not a problem (p. 24). Data for this current article reveal that all 20 journalists have regularly recruited fixers at the last minute, sight unseen. This suggests that correspondents are sometimes prepared to absorb risks to their own security by employing people on the spot if the occasion demands. Ten mentioned serendipity or chance encounters as being behind the hiring decision. Allan Little said he met a medical student in Prague when he fell over in the street. According to Stuart Ramsey: 'Depending on the size of the tragedy, fixers will find you.' Bill Neely said he had hired people who had approached him at airports. Eight mentioned employing their taxi drivers and three correspondents admitted hiring English-speaking teenagers. Several noted that they would use instinct to make a snap judgement about somebody's character. Hugh Riminton said: 'You instinctively get a sense if they have a core integrity; that they are not there to rip you off, or possibly betray you for their politics, or feed you too much of a line.' He added it would then normally take him a further 36 hours to work out if the team was working or needed modifying. Nonetheless, all correspondents agreed that whenever possible they would rather employ someone who was recommended or was a 'known quantity' to either another correspondent or to another fixer. If this wasn't possible, then they would approach media companies first and academics or teachers after that. According to the BBC's Clive Myrie, he once employed the girlfriend of a friend of a fixer in Turkey. He said: 'Three or four phone calls should get you someone.' Some have taken substantial risks, such as ITN's Alex Thomson, who hitched a lift to Somalia's Mog Forty West airstrip near Mogadishu with local Khat dealers acting as impromptu fixers.

Despite many dangerous episodes, the correspondents agreed that Iraq was especially dangerous. The ABC's Tim Palmer, who last worked in Iraq in 2002 said: 'Now Iraq is totally different. I'd rather have no fixer than not have gold-plated references and an understanding of the person's background.' And data from the BBC and CNN correspondents, who still regularly work in the Baghdad bureaux, reveals that the hiring of fixers has become a much bigger investment. The first obvious finding is that fixers are hired by the BBC and CNN on long-term contracts, as opposed to short-term, word-of-mouth deals. According to Glover there is 'a dearth of people' either qualified or willing to work for a Western media organization at the moment. Most of the BBC fixers have stayed

since 2003, but a couple have been hired more recently. All are university educated and are ‘easy to get along with’ (Hawley, 2007). They are people with whom the BBC reporters feel ‘comfortable’. Nonetheless, the concept of a recommendation or a ‘known quantity’ still holds sway. Glover said:

You can’t do any kind of positive vetting worth the name – you’re hoping that the candidates that you are looking for are usually very well known to somebody else you trust and that’s the way we’ve tried to do it ... You do have to monitor it quite carefully and if people start acting out of character you have to try and work out why. It could be they’re coming under terrific pressure that they haven’t been able to tell you about. (Glover, 2007)

Glover emphasized that what is valued most in a BBC fixer is that you know and trust them, they are fluent in English, and have a ‘reasonable sense of perspective and humour’. He thought these attributes were more important than the skills needed for scoops. He said he did not want to hire somebody who would go out of contact while chasing exclusives and come back saying, ‘I nearly got an interview with Moqtada al-Sadr.’ He said he considered such people were a danger to themselves and to everybody else who had to look for them.

Over at CNN, investigative reporter Michael Ware sees his job differently as he is not covering daily news but is instead working on features and searching for exclusives. He insisted on bringing his ‘team of Iraqis’ with him when he joined CNN in 2005 from *Time* magazine. He said his fixers were of ‘different confessions’. Due to the threats made against these people over the years, he has had to help relocate four fixers and their families to the UK, Australia and the USA. He said:

With the particular group of individuals that I have with me now, their honesty and integrity and trust is beyond question, both in terms of life and limb and in terms of editorially. Because these fellows have been with me for so long, if they want to sell me out, they could have already sold me out. Some of them have literally died in my cause. Two of them have been tortured because of me. Several of them have been abducted because of me. (Ware, 2007)

Fixers and news production

In describing how they normally use fixers when parachuting into countries at the last minute, 18 out of the 20 correspondents thought fixers fulfilled a combined logistical–editorial role and only two thought fixers were mainly logistical (Murrell, 2009: 12). The tasks fixers carry out are a mixture of relating the local news, translating, story generation, backgrounding and using their contacts to secure interviews, cars, hotels, petrol and story play-outs. This work is always heavily directed by the correspondent. In terms of extending these roles, only two correspondents outside Iraq (Tim Palmer and Zoe Daniels) mentioned getting their fixers to help film stories, and only because they were also extremely capable camera operators. Two correspondents (Matt Brown and Dominic Waghorn) mentioned their respective Gaza fixers would conduct interviews for them, when they could not get on site themselves. According to Waghorn: ‘We tend to control them quite carefully with a list of questions and how we want the interview to look.’ Only one

correspondent (Adrian Brown) mentioned how his fixer (Dian Estey) was trusted to secure exclusive interviews with high profile Indonesians (such as the controversial cleric, Abu Bakhar Bashir). Estey confirmed that she would conduct some interviews herself with little oversight.

The situation is very different inside Iraq where correspondents for the BBC and CNN bureaux have brought fixers into the heart of the decision-making and news gathering processes. In explaining how journalists go about the business of finding news stories, the answers from both CNN and the BBC were very similar, even in the language chosen. The BBC's Andrew North and CNN's Michael Ware both described the process of generating stories with fixers as 'organic'. In the BBC office everyone gathers together in the morning for a meeting, and news gathering is seen as 'a team job' (Glover, 2007). The fixers explain what they have heard from stringers and contacts about stories in Baghdad, Basra, Mosul and Kirkuk and they also recount what has been reported on local TV, radio and newspapers. According to the BBC's fixer Ahmed Hussein, the correspondents add information from other sources, such as the wires, military or diplomatic contacts, BBC HQ or from another company's fixers. The fixers then check on this information through another round of phone calls before decisions are taken about how to handle the story. Hussein said that in 2005 the job became more editorial, and the Iraqis began to get more involved in suggesting stories and helping to produce them. He said the BBC then changed their job title from 'fixers' to 'producers'.

At CNN, Ware says it is through constant conversation and analysis of data that he and the fixers decide together what angle to take on a story. He said they run things by a vast array of contacts, checking for people who might have had some exposure to the nascent story.

And editorially that has enormous benefits that I can't begin to describe, because then it very much is a partnership. There is no diktat, and so the forum for ideas and for story generation is much more lively and energetic. And, you know, when people feel invested in what they are doing then they are much more enthusiastic. (Ware, 2007)

At both CNN and the BBC the decisions about how to cover a story are infused with a careful process of assessing the current security threat. According to Ware, in the months immediately following the 2003 war, there was 'a certain bubble that wrapped around you', where journalists weren't targeted or seen as being 'worthy of execution'. He added, 'Those days are long gone.' Hussein thought the steps along the timeline in terms of danger for all journalists were December 2004 (after the second American assault on Fallujah), January 2005 (legislative elections) and February 2006 (after the bombing of the al-Askari shrine in Samarra). All agreed that after this it became too dangerous to cover bombings because of secondary devices. North said that even the agencies do not cover bombs anymore. He added that gruesome mobile phone videos would often circulate later from undisclosed sources. He believed that it was one of the ways in which 'messages with intimidation are spread'. For a while the BBC had thought it was safer for Iraqis to film on the streets than it was for Westerners, and so they did assign them that role. But, from 2006, North became 'more and more concerned about that approach of saying, 'Well we can send an Iraqi staff member out there because we are not going to go.' He

thought it was also no longer safe for Iraqis to be seen on the streets with a large camera, although radio equipment was different, being smaller. After 2006, Glover said filming moved indoors to locations that had first been reconnoitred by security. The '20 minute rule' was in place and if you did not get what you wanted in that time, you just left empty-handed.

According to Riminton, CNN did sometimes film for longer than 20 minutes and he mentioned an occasion when he filmed inside a kindergarten complex for two or three hours by 'ringing the kindergarten with guards'. He said that he always tried to do his own interviews whenever possible but that each case was judged separately for safety. At the BBC, fixers have undertaken journalism training and are more than able to carry out radio interviews if it is still felt to be safer for them to do so than it is for Westerners. Hussein said he thought the organization's journalists always preferred to do interviews themselves, but that there were some areas to which they simply could not go. However, if the area was near the fixer's house, the journalist would always do it in preference to the fixer. North and Ware agreed that the interviews that fixers undertook were carefully prepared and planned in advance. At both companies it is stressed and understood that all people involved in going out of the office to film must agree that the story is worth the risk and that the risks have been lowered as much as is possible in the circumstances.

The knock-on effect of fixers making most of the phone calls and going out on interviews is that they then take more initiative in suggesting stories and seeing them through from start to finish. Both North and Ware have encouraged the fixers to come up with their own stories and have made sure that they get credit for them where possible. North talked about that being only fair on stories when, 'I was simply being the mouthpiece. They collected all the information and I put it into an easier to digest format for an English audience.' According to Ware, one of his fixers, Ahmed, gathered a story about a charity that buried unclaimed bodies. He said:

So he thought of it. He went and tested the story. And then he arranged it, and then he went down and shot a lot of the film himself, or oversaw the shooting of the film, and then brought it all back and dumped it in my lap. And then he sat with me as we went through the tapes and developed the framing of the story. I then went off and wrote it and prepared it, but at every stage, even through the editing, Ahmed was involved. (Ware, 2007)

Ware made sure that Ahmed got the credit within the organization. But very often Iraqi fixers do not want external credit for what they do because it is too dangerous to have your work's authorship assigned to you.

All the correspondents who work at the Baghdad bureaux thought Iraq was in a security category of its own. According to Ware, journalists can get killed anywhere, but in Iraq they are 'actively targeted'. Riminton said he thought journalists were 'sweet fruit to a kidnapper'. So all stories are analysed and vetted more carefully than they would have to be elsewhere, in order to pass a test of worthwhile risk. The overseas security consultants always make sure a recce is done to check an area's feasibility for filming, whether by Western or Iraqi teams. News gathering in Baghdad is also very time consuming. Even a trip into the 'Green Zone' to pick up official reaction from Iraqi

government officials, international organizations or the military can add hours to a trip, thereby adding to risk, as security checks have to be undertaken in order for crews to access the Green Zone.

Conclusions

The unique working conditions of the BBC and CNN's Baghdad bureaux mean that the personnel on the ground have a great deal of autonomy in decision-making, and are free from constant oversight by London or Atlanta. Instead, their constraints are those of the street – the danger, the hassle and the problems of filming. The bureaux staff, comprising Western and local media personnel are compelled to trust much more in teamwork to arrive at decisions. On the Baghdad streets, the correspondents would be blind without their fixers' 'eyes and ears'. This is shown by the ways in which the BBC has re-badged the local fixers as 'producers', has employed them long term, has invested in editorial and safety training for them and has moved some of them on to other jobs and bureaux. In a similar way, at CNN, fixers are also employed long term, their families are taken care of, their work is acknowledged within the organization and they are promoted and moved to other bureaux as well. In comparison to their Baghdad counterparts, fixers elsewhere are only employed on short-term, ad-hoc, word of mouth contracts. This shift in power towards the fixers in Iraq means that they have more 'embodied capital' as they hold the keys to the streets and they gain further journalistic skills and training through the ongoing process of long-term work. The fact that they know more about what is going on in the streets and have local knowledge of the security situation means that they are 'de facto journalists'. This will make them more employable in the news business, either through shifting to the company's other bureaux or by becoming correspondents themselves with other organizations.

The fixers can also gain 'objectified capital' by their work on TV news stories being acknowledged within the organization. If they want to, they can claim authorial credit for online stories or as producers on long-form documentaries, etc. However, the high danger levels in Iraq mean that fixers mostly choose to be anonymous in their work. This anonymity makes the acquisition of 'institutional capital', in which their work is credentialled by prizes, impossible. Nonetheless these fixers' stocks of cultural capital are much higher than their colleagues' meagre stocks. Ordinarily, fixers elsewhere gain less 'embodied capital' as they do not have access to any journalistic or safety training. These fixers have no 'objectified capital' as their names never get put on any work and they will rarely even see the work concerned. In the same way, their work will not gain them any 'institutionalized capital' either.

So, does this shift towards giving fixers more power in Baghdad mean that correspondents are involved in less authentic newsgathering? The reporters who are not working frequently in Iraq and who only visit Baghdad on embed missions think this is the case. ITN's Juliet Bremner said these operations lacked 'eye witness reporting'. The ABC's Peter Cave said: 'It's very difficult to feel you're doing your job as a correspondent if you are forced to report second-hand through a fixer or a local cameraman.' But those who staff the Baghdad bureaux feel differently. According to Andrew North, his journalistic skills are still very much in use: 'It doesn't mean to say that you are being led by fixers.'

Your own critical factors are still being employed and you are still doing your job as a journalist but it is a team job.’ According to Glover:

I would say the correspondent is out every day, whether it’s just to go down the road and do a piece to camera or it’s to go and do a series of little set piece filming events which may have been scouted out beforehand by security and by the fixers. It differs from day to day but they’re out there in it, but just not as free as you might be if you were in any other country where you could stay out all evening. (Glover, 2007)

According to Riminton, despite the restrictions, he estimated they still get ‘80% of the story’. For CNN’s Michael Ware: ‘In the Iraq war as in all wars, everyone lies.’ He said the restrictions made it very difficult but not impossible ‘to capture slithers or shards of the truth’ (Ware, 2007).

Bourdieu used Albert Einstein’s laws of physics to describe how strong energy can transform everything in a field. ‘The more a body has energy, the more it deforms the space around it. A very powerful agent in a field can deform all the space; force all the other space to organize itself around it’ (Bourdieu, 1996: 26) In just such a way, the danger of reporting in Iraq has deformed the journalistic field and forced the correspondents and fixers to reorganize how they conduct their news gathering. This has changed the nature of the relationship between the correspondent and the fixer but the players themselves do not believe it has led to less authentic news gathering. This new teamwork approach continues to function in the face of the ever-present dangers. As Glover, a veteran of wars in Bosnia and Chechnya concludes:

What can you actually add by being there? I firmly believe you still can add quite a lot, an awful lot. But it is entirely different and much more dangerous than any situation I’ve worked in before. (Glover, 2007)

Notes

1 This and other interviews were conducted in 2007 and 2008:

Baghdad bureaux personnel of BBC and CNN

- Mark Glover* (Baghdad bureau manager, BBC)
- Caroline Hawley (former Baghdad correspondent, BBC)
- Andrew North (Baghdad correspondent, BBC)
- Clive Myrie (Europe correspondent, BBC)
- Hugh Riminton (former anchor/correspondent Hong Kong, CNN)
- Michael Ware (Baghdad correspondent, CNN)
- Ahmed Hussein* (BBC fixer)

Other interviewees

- Jeremy Bowen (Middle East Editor, BBC)
- Juliet Bremner (former Europe correspondent, ITN)

- Adrian Brown (foreign correspondent, ITN)
- Matt Brown (Middle East correspondent, ABC)
- Mark Burrows (former US correspondent, Channel 9)
- Peter Cave (Foreign Affairs Editor, ABC Australia)
- Chris Clark (correspondent in London, Moscow, Jerusalem, ABC Australia)
- Zoe Daniels (former Africa correspondent, ABC Australia)
- Alan Little (World Affairs correspondent, BBC)
- Brett McCloud (former Europe correspondent, Channel 9)
- Bill Neely (International Editor, ITN News)
- Tim Palmer (correspondent in Jerusalem and Jakarta, ABC Australia)
- Stuart Ramsey (chief correspondent, Sky News)
- Alex Thomson (chief correspondent, Channel 4 News, UK)
- Dominic Waghorn (Middle East correspondent, Sky News)
- Adrian Wells (Head of Foreign News, Sky News)
- Ibrahim Adwan (BBC fixer in Gaza)
- Leith Hashim (fixer in Iraq)
- Pranvera Smith (fixer in Kosovo and Albania)
- Dian Estey (fixer in Indonesia)

* The names of the BBC Baghdad bureau manager and the BBC fixer have been changed to avoid identification.

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