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The new foreign correspondent at work: Local-national 'stringers' and the global news coverage of conflict in Darfur

Mel Bunce

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Executive Summary

In the past twenty years budget cuts across the foreign news industry have seen the near-demise of Western foreign correspondents posted abroad. In their place, local-national stringers have become increasingly important providers of foreign news stories. Despite their centrality to foreign news production almost no research has been done on local-national stringers or the factors that influence them in the field.

This report contributes to filling the lacunae through a detailed case study of foreign correspondents (FCs) writing on the humanitarian crisis in Darfur. It explores the role played by local-nationals in covering the crisis for global audiences and how these journalists differed from the traditional, Western-born foreign correspondents who worked alongside them. The research draws on two methods: in-depth, semi-structured interviews with FCs in Khartoum, Sudan; and a content analysis of the news articles they produced.

The results show that Sudanese journalists differed from Western FCs in a number of important ways. They worked in greater fear of the government of Sudan, and they had a different understanding of their role as journalists which, importantly, did not include a strong sense of their work as 'watchdog journalism'. The content analysis confirms that these differences matter; local stringers produced news that was significantly less critical in tone, presented fewer competing viewpoints, and privileged the government of Sudan's position.

These findings are important. In Khartoum, the sole correspondents for several major newswires were Sudanese nationals, and these journalists avoided writing reports that were critical of the Sudanese Government. Their stories were then widely disseminated around the world, shaping a global audience's perception of the Darfur crisis.

These results raise serious issues for outlets that manage stringer networks, and points to a potential crisis in the discursive and watchdog nature of contemporary international news – particularly when it relies on local nationals living in some of the most repressive and isolated pockets of the world.

1 Introduction

Foreign correspondents (FC) are regularly depicted as an elite breed of journalists from the West – a cosmopolitan group who globe-trot through exotic lands of difference and danger (usually wearing a fedora). These romantic descriptions obscure the more diverse, complex – and at times, mundane – reality of contemporary international news-gathering. Significantly, it hides the fact that the majority of foreign news is no longer gathered by traditional foreign correspondents posted abroad, but by local nationals who were born and raised in the country they report on.¹

Over the past two decades, news outlets around the world have systematically cut their foreign news budgets, leading to a radical reduction in the total number of Western foreign correspondents posted abroad. Cuts were made with the end of the Cold War (Utley, 1997); and continued throughout the noughties, despite the events of 9/11, and the renewed interest in foreign affairs that accompanied Western military action in Afghanistan and Iraq (Carroll, 2007). Jill Carroll (2007) reports that in just six years, between 2000 and 2006, there was a 10% to 30% decline in the number of American newspaper-sponsored foreign bureaux. Television networks have also been extensively cut; there are no American network bureaux left in Africa, India or South America – regions that are home to more than 2 billion people (Constable, 2007). In Britain, none of the tabloid newspapers have foreign correspondents; and budget cutbacks mean that the handful of remaining FCs have less time and money to leave the major regional cities where they are posted.

Commentators have expressed dismay at the shrinking pool of foreign correspondents posted abroad – assuming that this trend will lead to a decline in the quantity or quality of foreign news coverage (e.g. Utley, 1997; Carroll, 2007; Constable, 2007; Russo, 2010). However, as Hamilton and Jenner (2004b) suggest, foreign news coverage has not dried up entirely; rather, it has started to emerge from more diverse – and cost-effective – sources. New actors, including bloggers, parachute journalists, in-house journalists and local-national journalists now supplement, and often replace, the work of traditionally employed foreign correspondents posted abroad. The authors conclude that we are witnessing the evolution, rather than the extinction of foreign correspondents:

¹ This group is referred to throughout this report as ‘local-national FCs’.

do these perceived declines [in traditional FCs] accurately measure the quantity and quality of foreign reporting that actually exists? We think not. The alarm, we propose, is based on an anachronistic and static model of what foreign correspondence is and who foreign correspondents are. (Hamilton and Jenner, 2004a: 303)

One of the most striking trends in this foreign news ‘evolution’ is the increased centrality and importance of local-national foreign correspondents: journalists who report on their home country for a global news audience. Without the money to fund Western correspondents abroad, news outlets are increasingly contracting local nationals, who live on site, to file news stories. This trend can be seen in rapid changes in the nationality of journalists providing foreign coverage for American outlets. In the early 1990s, Kliesch (1991) reports that 63% of the journalists providing foreign news for American outlets were American nationals posted abroad. Ten years later, a comparable survey found that only 31% were American nationals – reflecting cuts in American nationals posted abroad, and an increased reliance on contract journalists living in the news site (Wu and Hamilton, 2004: 521).

The importance of local-national FCs is particularly marked in Africa, where the vast majority of the world’s news outlets have no permanent correspondents, and rely heavily on newswires to provide their stories (Franks, 2005). These newswires, in turn, gather news through a network of predominantly local-national correspondents. The Reuters newswire, for example, has its East African headquarters in Nairobi, and a network of 16 text journalists in countries around the region. Of these 16 journalists, 13 are local nationals: a Tanzanian national reports on Tanzania, a Burundi national on Burundi, and so on. Similarly, at the AFP newswire, 11 of 13 text journalists in the East Africa region are local nationals.² These local-national FCs are often the only journalists in the field when an important event takes place and their stories are widely disseminated around the world. Their work is also an important agenda-setter for the remaining handful of traditional, Western FCs who cover the African continent from their Nairobi and Johannesburg postings, and are often deskbound (Schlesinger, 2009: 27–8).

Despite their clear centrality to contemporary international news-gathering, little research has been done on how local-national FCs practice their trade. Are they different from traditional Western FCs posted abroad? Does their nationality and background lead to different relationships, journalistic values and, ultimately, affect the stories they produce? The majority of academic research on FC practices has looked exclusively at Western journalists who live or travel abroad to report (e.g. Hannerz, 2004;

² Interview with Andrew Cawthorne, Nairobi Reuters Bureau Chief (2 Aug. 2009); and John-Mark Mojon, AFP News Editor (3 Aug. 2009).

Hess, 1996; Morrison and Tumber, 1988; Pedelty, 1995). Richard Sambrook (2010) makes a valuable contribution to the debate and includes local-national FCs in his discussion piece, *Are Foreign Correspondents Redundant?* But we still lack any ethnographic or interview data on local-national FCs. Without knowing how local-national FCs operate on the ground, we can no longer adequately explain or theorise international news processes.

This report contributes to filling the lacunae through a case study of the media scene in Khartoum, Sudan, where it examines the differences in values and practices of local-national and Western FCs. At the time of the study, four of seven permanent FCs in Khartoum were Sudanese nationals. Semi-structured interviews revealed that these journalists were, indeed, significantly different from their Western colleagues. They worked in greater fear of the government of Sudan; and they had a different understanding of their role as journalists which, importantly, did not include a sense of their work as 'watchdog journalism'. Content analysis of the articles produced by these journalists reveals that there are also differences in the stories they produce. Significantly, the Sudanese journalists were more likely to present and privilege the government of Sudan's view, without including opposing points of view. The implications of this research for both news practices and journalism research are discussed in the conclusion. Although things are starting to change for the better in Sudan, with journalistic persecution on the wane (e.g. Reporters Without Borders, 2010) the case study suggests that, in some contexts, local-national journalists may be vulnerable and compromised in ways that impact the global coverage of conflict.

2 Background: The Darfur Crisis

Accounts of the Darfur conflict often read as follows: in 2003, rebel groups in Darfur took up arms and attacked government buildings in response to years of political marginalisation and neglect. The government of Sudan responded to this insurgency by contracting local nomadic Arab tribes – the ‘Janjaweed’ – to attack rebel villages. In the fighting that followed, millions have been displaced and hundreds of thousands killed (Murphy, 2007: 316). In 2007, increasing rebel fragmentation, banditry and fighting between groups who had not previously fought made the conflict more complex still (UNMIS, 2007; Gettleman, 2007).

Each of these ‘factual’ propositions has been contested by observers in Sudan and in the international community. The government of Sudan (GoS) denies any military involvement in Darfur, and claims there have been only 9,000 deaths; the Save Darfur Coalition claims that the government is directly responsible for up to 400,000 deaths. Academic commentators tend to fall somewhere in between (e.g. Flint and de Wall, 2005) but even they are torn. Evaluating the crisis, Baldo et al. (2004) conclude that the conflict *does not* constitute an asymmetrical attack on civilians; Eric Reeves (2007), a Smith College professor, argues the opposite. The US administration calls the conflict government-sponsored genocide; while the UN describes it as ethnically motivated but non-genocidal violence. The net result is that practically every feature of the conflict is contested, from its causes and scale to its ‘name’ and the actors involved (de Wall, 2007: p. xiii). Journalists attempting to represent the crisis have little choice but to simplify and – more often than not – privilege one interpretation of events.

The international news coverage of the Darfur crisis has been heavily critiqued: from allegations that it decontextualised and depoliticised the issues, exacerbated ethnic clashes, was simple and sensational, included misinformation, made false claims, used poor sources and failed to remain neutral (Crawshaw, 2004; Bacon, 2004; Quach, 2004; Blake, 2005; Knickmeyer, 2005; Morley, 2005; Pronk, 2005; Franks, 2006; Melvern, 2006; Campbell, 2007; Cathcart, 2007). A Reporters Without Borders assessment notes that some journalists broke ‘basic rules of journalist practice’ such as the corroboration of facts, use of contrasting sources, impartiality and objectivity (2007: 13). Hemphill (2007) notes that when these mistakes occurred, they were reinforced and amplified as journalists copied them from one article to another. As of yet, no academic research has been done on the journalists in the field who produced these reports, or why reports read the way they did.

3 Literature Review and Research Questions

In what ways might local-national FCs write on a crisis such as Darfur differently to a traditional Western FCs? Organisational theories argue that a journalist's background and nationality is unimportant – because organisational structures play a greater role in explaining news content than any contribution made by individual journalists. As Schudson summarises:

Who are the journalists in news organisations who cover beats, interview sources, rewrite press releases from government bureaus, and occasionally take the initiative in ferreting out hidden or complex stories? If organisational theorists are correct, it does not matter. Whoever they are, they will be socialized quickly into the values and routines of daily journalism and will modify their own personal values 'in accordance with the requisites of the organisation'. (1989: 273)

But these theories cannot adequately capture the forces that shape foreign news production. Organisational influence operates through daily news-room routines, instruction from editors and socialisation into news values. These mechanisms are not always present or influential when it comes to foreign news-gathering. Distance between the correspondent in the field and their colleagues and editors in the office, particularly if there is limited communication, may translate into less direction from above on what news should be gathered and how, and this may allow greater scope for personal attitudes, values and beliefs to influence content (Reese and Shoemaker, 1996: 91; Hess, 1981). Moreover – and importantly – local-national stringers contracted in the field may never have been trained or socialised by their news outlet, or absorbed its values. In other words, these journalists have very limited exposure to the mechanisms through which organisational influences are said to operate.

Cultural approaches, in contrast to organisational theories, emphasise the agency and diversity of individual journalists and posit their ability to negotiate and contest industry norms. Barbara Zelizer, for example, describing the rise of soldier journalists in Iraq, states: 'journalism changed by virtue of who inhabited its culture. It became, at least for a time, less authoritative, less reverent, in places more critical, more partisan and even ironic' (2005: 208). Morrison and Tumber (1988) reach similar conclusions in their investigation of British journalists covering the Falklands war, arguing that individuals, and their different backgrounds and perspectives, influenced reporting output.

In what ways, then, might local-nationals FCs have a different outlook, background and approach to reporting? Four main differences are suggested

by the limited academic literature and trade writing that exists on this topic. First, local nationals – as citizens in the country they report on – may have a different relationship with the ‘host’ government; secondly, as reporters that were not trained in Western news-rooms, local-nationals may have different levels of professional skills; thirdly, they may have different news values; finally, local-nationals may have better language skills and a wider range of contacts in the nation they report on. These four areas are briefly outlined below, and developed into research questions.

Relationship with the Host/Home Government

The most important relationship of the foreign correspondent in the field is that with the local government (Hannerz, 2004). Governments mediate the context in which journalism is practised, and control access to a range of sources. As Schudson writes, ‘There is little doubt that the centre of news generation is the link between reporter and official, the interaction of the representatives of the news bureaucracies and the government bureaucracies’ (1989: 271).

In many African nations, the press is tightly controlled by repressive regimes willing to coerce and persecute journalists. Where governments forcibly intervene in news production, local FCs may face greater risks than Western FCs. Whereas Western FCs can return to their home country if things become difficult, local-nationals have nowhere to flee, and no foreign nation to intervene on their behalf. This may impact the risk that local-nationals are willing to take in their reporting.

In addition, local-national FCs are more likely to have political allegiances within their home country, or be susceptible to political manipulation. A senior editor commented that this was a common issue in the East African region:

It’s a big – major issue, really. Loads of the stringers are compromised. We had a Rwandan stringer who was a close friend of Kagame. He was being fed a lot of information, which is good for reporting, but he also had them [Kagame and colleagues] saying, ‘don’t send this to your outlet’ or ‘do send this to your outlet’. Which is of course a problem for reporting.³

This literature suggests the first research question.

Research Question 1: Do Local-National and Western FCs in Sudan have a Different Relationship with the GoS?

³ Interview, Aug. 2008. Name anonymous on request.

Professional Skills

Finding, recruiting and training local talent is an ongoing issue for international outlets that rely on local stringers. Generally speaking, news outlets are looking for locals who are fluent English speakers, who can 'sense' news that is of interest to their audience, and who can follow basic journalism conventions, such as locating and corroborating sources. Borden notes that developments in technology and training programmes around the developing world have increased the skill levels of local journalists, and made them more capable of contributing to the global media conversation than ever before. He suggests that the Balkans was the first conflict to be extensively covered for the global media by local nationals, and these journalists performed remarkably well:

With increasing skills and experience...[local-national journalists in the Balkans] demonstrated that professionalism trumped 'national feelings', thus building increasing confidence across the local/international divide. (Borden, 2009: 154–5)

However, in countries where English is not widely spoken, the news media has historically been repressed and there is no tradition of Western journalists regularly visiting and training local journalists to support their work (as 'fixers'), the recruitment of skilled local journalists may be difficult. In the absence of a lively local media scene, new outlets may find themselves contracting translators and teachers, with little or no journalism experience. Alternatively, they may recruit local journalists who are trained according to different values and standards.

Furthermore, the distance between stringers in the field, and their editors in hub cities like Cairo and Nairobi, may make it difficult to support, train and supervise local-national journalists (Schlesinger, 2009: 31). As a result of these factors, locals contracted to provide news stories may not have the same professional skill level as Western FCs, who have historically been among the most educated and experienced reporters in the news world (Hess, 1996).

Research Question 2: Do Local-National FCs and Western FCs Differ in their Professional Skill Level?

Professional Role Perceptions

Local-national FCs may also hold different role perceptions from their Western colleagues. Journalists' role perceptions are an important component of news production; these determine what a communicator thinks is worth transmitting to an audience and how a story should be developed

(Shoemaker and Reese, 1996: 103). Research into journalists' practices reveal that it is through training programmes and work socialisation that journalists primarily learn to internalise a range of professional values, ethics and role identity (e.g. Breed, 1955; Tunstall, 1971; Sigal, 1973).

A considerable body of empirical research shows that journalists from different countries and regions have divergent views regarding their professional role, and the purpose of their work (e.g. Weaver, 1998; Hanitzsch, 2009; Giffard and Rivenburgh, 2000; MacLachlan, 2000; Ramaprasad and Kelly, 2003). In America, for example, Weaver and Wilhouth identify three main journalistic roles: interpreting information, disseminating information and acting as an adversary to government or business (1991: 120–2). The latter is often identified as the most important of these, encapsulating traditional conception of the press as the 'fourth estate' or watchdog of the powerful (Navasky, 1995: 122). Interrogating this typology in African contexts, scholars argue that it cannot account for the range of journalist role perceptions found in Tanzania (Ramaprasad, 2001), Uganda (Mwesige, 2004), Ethiopia (Dirbaba, 2006) or Ghana (Hasty 2006). In these nations, interview and survey data reveal that journalists also valued professional objectives such as explaining government policy to citizens; giving marginalised people a voice; and creating a space for nation-building discourse.

These findings paint a complex backdrop to the work of local stringers. These journalists have likely been trained in the media system of their home nation, but they work for news outlets that emerged in a Western media environment and which may privilege different modes of reporting. Do local-national FCs find that their role perceptions clash with the agenda of their international employers? If so, how do they negotiate this clash? Do their existing values prevail – or does the new outlet succeed in re-educating and 'trumping' their original values?

Peterson (1979) suggests that nationality and cultural background continued to influence local stringers working for *The Times* over and above the values of their news organisation. Peterson conducted a survey of seventy-three journalists working for *The Times* (London). Her survey presented the journalists with a number of paired news items, and asked them to identify the more newsworthy of the two stories. Peterson found that, overall, there were high levels of consensus among the journalists. However, there were some notable differences between stringers who had been educated in Europe/America and those who had not. Peterson concludes that cultural differences seem to explain disagreement on rankings more than organisational position (1979: 125).

Research Question 3: Do Local-National and Western FCs have Different Perceptions of their Role as Journalists?

Cultural Knowledge and Language Skills

Western foreign correspondents have traditionally juggled two competing demands when reporting abroad: on the one hand, to remain an 'outsider' – a Westerner with a strong relationship and understanding of their Western audience 'at home'; and, on the other hand, to immerse themselves 'in the field' – and become something of an insider – to understand the foreign country where a news event occurred. Historically, a foreign correspondent's 'outsider' status has been more highly prized by editors and news outlets, and FCs were expected to share the nationality and outlook of the audience they wrote for. As Wu and Hamilton write:

Editors have long worried about their foreign correspondents becoming out of touch with their readers, viewers and listeners at home. This has been considered a problem even for American-born reporters and has [historically] been a major barrier in hiring foreign journalists who have little direct experience in the US. (2004: 519)

However, the ability to relate to a 'home audience' is less important today than ever before. Increased globalisation has diminished the cultural and professional rift that was once the basic motivation for sending Americans/Europeans abroad in the first place (Hamilton and Jenner, 2004: 313). Moreover, the majority of foreign news is now produced by newswires that serve a global readership. For these outlets, there is no 'home audience', and bias towards the priorities of a particular territory may even be a hindrance.

As 'insiders' to the field they report on, local-national journalists have language skills and local knowledge that surpasses that of Western FCs. They may be better equipped to assess the significance of an event within its local context; they are also more likely to have access to a wider variety of sources, as a result of their deep involvement in local communities and networks. As Anthony Borden comments, 'a local journalist lives and breathes that society and by definition knows it better' (2009: 154). These traits may render local nationals far better equipped to offer a nuanced account of events – one that presents the more accurate, local interpretation, with less reliance on simplification or stereotypes. Indeed, some commentators have hailed local-national FCs as a positive corrective to 160 years of Western views dominating international reporting. For Anthony Borden, 'the real key to inspired reporting on the world is a well-trained, well-supported local journalist who has finally been empowered to tell his or her own story' (2009: 144; see also Cockburn, 2007). Hamilton and Jenner are more cautious, however:

These 'foreign' foreign correspondents offer the potential for greater international perspective in their reporting, but will they deliver, or will foreign nationals instead end up seeing the world through the lens of the home countries of the media companies for which they are reporting, with the only advantage being that they work for less money? (Hamilton and Jenner, 2003: 138)

Research Question 4: Do Local-National and Western FCs have Access to and Use Different News Sources in their Reporting?

These four research questions were operationalised and explored through interviews with correspondents in Khartoum and content analysis of the articles they wrote.

4 Methodology

The literature review generated four research questions for analysis: do local-national FCs vary from Western FCs in terms of their:

- (i) relationship with the government of Sudan;
- (ii) professional skills;
- (iii) professional role perceptions (the purpose of their work);
- (iv) language and cultural skills.

These questions were explored in Khartoum, Sudan, where the permanent foreign correspondents writing on Darfur are based. Two methodologies were employed. First, these questions were explored through in-depth semi-structured interviews with the FCs working in Khartoum between 6 August and 3 September 2007. A 'Foreign correspondent' was operationalised as 'any professional journalist producing news in English for publication in a second country'.⁴ Through a combination of existing contacts, snowballing and triangulation with journalists' sources, a comprehensive list of nine international journalists was made.⁵ The FCs worked for the following news organisations: Ansa, AFP, AP, BBC, *New York Times* (two correspondents) and Reuters (three correspondents). All nine of these journalists agreed to be interviewed and have their quotes included in this report, but asked that their names were not used.⁶ Where quoted in the results section, the journalists' responses have been anonymised (other than reporting their nationality). Interviews lasted from 70 to 160 minutes, with an average of 85 minutes. Questions addressed journalists' training, language skills, work patterns, the sources they used, their relationship with the government of Sudan, their understanding of their role and the extent to which journalists felt their values aligned with those of their news outlets.

⁴ English-language production was selected for ease of comparison, and so that final news copy could be analysed by the researcher. However, in practice, the only non-English correspondent in Sudan was a journalist for the Xinhua newswire.

⁵ A subsequent search of Lexis-Nexis reveals that only one journalist writing international reports from Sudan at this time was not captured by this sampling technique – a casual writer for UPI who filed 200 words in this time period.

⁶ In addition, the respondents subsequently read the transcripts and confirmed that they were happy for the results, and this report, to be published in the public domain.

Table 1. Foreign Correspondents in Khartoum, Sudan, 6 August–3 September 2007

Outlet	Position	Nationality
AFP	Stringer	Sudanese
Ansa	Stringer	Sudanese
AP	Stringer	Sudanese
BBC	Correspondent	British
<i>New York Times</i> *	Correspondent	American
<i>New York Times</i> *	Multi-media	American
Reuters	Bureau Chief	British
Reuters	Stringer	Sudanese
Reuters	Stringer	American

*The two *New York Times* journalists were temporary visitors to Sudan, passing through Khartoum on their way to Darfur. They were usually based in Nairobi.

Semi-structured interviews have limitations; respondents may omit details or exaggerate their accounts. Furthermore, as Bourdieu writes, there is an insurmountable break between practice itself and writing or talking about it; even where respondents give honest answers, these are subjective accounts, reflecting their already established sense of self (1990: 33). One of the methodological advantages of studying journalists is that the product of their 'behaviour' – news texts – is performed over again and is in the public domain, easily accessible to the researcher. It is thus possible and practical to run tests on the links between self-reported behaviour/values and practice.

The second methodology employed in this research is a limited content analysis of all available articles written by the interview respondents on the crisis in Darfur. News articles were quantitatively assessed for the sources they drew upon. Sources are an important component of news production, shaping angles and informing (if not determining) news content. As Schudson writes, 'The story of journalism, on a day to day basis, is the story of the interaction of journalist with official' (Schudson, 1989: 271; see also Gans, 1979). As one of the most fundamental components of reports, sources are a rich area of enquiry, and may suggest important differences between journalists.

As noted above, the Darfur conflict was particularly controversial – with commentators and actors sharply disagreeing on the conflict's nature, causes and developments. Journalists often try to 'outsource' the controversial aspects of their reporting; for example, they do not directly call a crisis conflict, genocide, or ethnic division but rather say: 'what the United States calls a genocide'. Although this may meet journalistic notions of objectivity, it is often far from impartial; if the term that the US uses is

foregrounded, and no others included, the author has essentially given the US administration the power to define and characterise the crisis. In addition, journalists cannot avoid the fact that only a select number of sources can be used and that the conventions of the industry suggest that they should be ordered in terms of importance. The structure and format of a news article – a mimetic device that ‘represents reality’ – privileges a positivistic notion of the world. By its very existence, the news article takes the dominant version of events and presents it as ‘fact’ (rather than interpretation).

Exploring the sources that journalists use in articles can give us a sense how local and Western FCs differed in their overall reporting. Importantly, it can also help to answer several of the research questions above, notably: did Sudanese FCs use more local sources than Western FCs? And did they pursue the ‘watchdog role’ by including competing accounts and sources in their stories?

All available articles written by the interviewed correspondents on the Darfur crisis between 1 August and 31 October 2007 were analysed. The Reuters, BBC and *New York Times* articles were located through searches of the respective website archives, which are easily accessible and searchable. AP and AFP articles, whose websites are more difficult to access, were obtained on the Lexis-Nexis database. News articles were selected for analysis if they were authored by an interview respondent, had a dateline in Sudan and had the word ‘Darfur’ in the title. The total sample group included 96 articles. Ansa articles are not available online and have not been included in the analysis.

Table 2. Content Analysis Sample

Nationality	Outlet	N Articles	N Sources
Sudanese	AFP	15	23
Sudanese	AP	12	37
Sudanese	Reuters	9	30
UK	Reuters	49	225
UK	BBC	6	36
American	Reuters	2	6
American	NYT	3	15

The unit of analysis in each article was a news source – represented by either a direct or indirect quote. Every source was coded as belonging to one of the following categories: Government of Sudan; NGO; UN/AU;⁷ Darfuri Rebel; Darfuri Tribal Leader; Darfuri Citizen; Analyst/Academic; Civil Society; Own

⁷ The United Nations and African Union were jointly managing peace-keepers in Sudan, and their press releases and comments were often jointly released. Thus, they have been included as one category.

Media; Sudanese Media; Other. The numbers of source citings, by category, were then tallied and compared across nationality and outlet.

Several issues face a content analysis of this kind: first, the sample group is very small; secondly, journalists writing for newswires are not always credited for their work; thirdly, journalists may have supplied information to correspondents in other parts of their news outlet to be written up. These factors mean that it is not possible to draw comprehensive comparisons or conclusions from this content analysis. However, it is still possible to use the sample to generate data, which forms a limited triangulation on the journalists' interview responses – to attempt, in a limited way, to close the gap between self-reported behaviour and actual daily practice.

5 Results: Local-National FCs in Khartoum, Sudan

Local-national FCs played a central and important role generating international reports on the Darfur conflict. During the period of fieldwork, a total of nine foreign correspondents were in Khartoum – seven permanent journalists and two visiting (or parachute) journalists.⁸ Of these nine journalists, four were Sudanese nationals. Excluding the visiting journalists from the analysis, Sudanese nationals account for four of seven permanent correspondents – more the half the permanent FC pool.

With such a small pool of journalists writing for the international news media, there was significant scope for an individual FC to influence the global coverage of Sudan. There were numerous occasions when only one journalist attended a news event or reported on a story or issue. Sudan is the largest country in Africa, and one of its most troubled; in addition to the UN-dubbed ‘world’s largest humanitarian crisis’ in Darfur, and the vulnerable and tense peace of Africa’s longest civil war in South Sudan, a range of significant events took place every day. On 28 August 2007, to give an example, there was a humanitarian disaster resulting from floods; a cholera outbreak in East Sudan; fighting in North Sudan; an official visit from the new African Union Special Envoy for Darfur; the president of the Central Republic of Africa visited and held a press conference; and a group of visiting British Members of Parliament held a reception at the British Embassy. Each of these events was attended by, at most, one international journalist, meaning that only one interpretation of the event and its significance would be available to the world’s press.

Table 3. Influences and Relationships of Foreign Correspondents in Khartoum

	Local-national FCs	Western FCs	Hybrid FCs
Government of Sudan	Arrest, job loss, harm, murder Cannot leave	Arrests, expulsion Can leave	Nationality dependent
News values	Dissemination	Watchdog Analysis Dissemination	Analysis Dissemination Watchdog
Relationship with editors	Difficulty and conflict	At ease	At ease
Local language/culture	At ease	Difficulty and conflict	At ease

⁸ The number of journalists was particularly low in this month as a second AFP correspondent was on leave; a Bloomberg correspondent and a Voice of America correspondent had recently left; and the Al Jazeera English bureau had been shut down.

Differences between Local and Western FCs

Sudanese journalists differed from Western FCs in a number of important ways (Table 3). First, Sudanese journalists described living and working in fear of the government of Sudan, and noted that this influenced the extent to which they would criticise the Sudanese regime in their reporting. Western FCs, by contrast, did not. Secondly, Sudanese FCs had a different understanding of their role as journalists which, importantly, did not include a sense of their work as 'watchdog journalism'. Thirdly, Sudanese journalists had higher language skills and better access to government sources.

In addition to 'Sudanese FCs' and 'Western FCs', the interview data suggested that a third group should be separated out for analysis – 'hybrid' or 'mixed' journalists who shared attributes with both the Sudanese and international FCs. This group consisted of one international journalist who had, to some extent, 'gone local' by moving to Khartoum permanently; and one local Sudanese journalist who appeared to have absorbed international news values from his Western colleagues in his office.

The existence of this hybrid category suggests that some of the important differences between local stringers and Western FCs are not based on nationality qua nationality, but rather on attributes that are often correlated with nationality – most importantly, training and work socialisation, and integration with Sudanese society. As organisational theories would predict, the Sudanese stringer who worked closely with a Western-trained colleague had more readily absorbed his organisation's news values, compared to the Sudanese stringers who worked alone and had not been socialised in their outlet's news-rooms.

Relationship with Government of Sudan (GoS)

The GoS has historically placed heavy restrictions on all media in its territory – creating bureaucratic obstacles and arresting journalists that it deemed subversive (Reporters Without Borders, 2007). In this context, local Sudanese journalists faced different and more serious risks than their Western counterparts. Western FCs had been held for questioning by the Ministry of Information, and were occasionally expelled from the country. In 2006, for example, two foreign journalists were arrested and then released after politicians from their respective nations – Slovenia and the US – intervened; and in April 2007, BBC correspondent Jonah Fischer was expelled for 'hostile reporting'. Sudanese journalists, by contrast, were not so lucky. As the Reporters Without Borders Sudan report notes, more than fifteen Sudanese journalists were arrested during 2006 and one was murdered, 'traumatising the whole profession, which was already living in fear of government crackdowns' (2007: 7; see also International Media Support, 2007). The most persecuted group were Sudanese journalists who worked for local Sudanese

news outlets. But Sudanese foreign correspondents were also vulnerable; if they were arrested, they had no outside government to intervene on their behalf, and no prospect of a safe passage out of Sudan.

In interviews, the Sudanese FCs reported that their relationship with the government – characterised by fear and intimidation – influenced their willingness to criticise the regime in their work. One respondent described making the choice to self-censor his writing after being arrested and detained on numerous occasions and he decided to stop taking risks that could endanger his livelihood. This included, he stated, any reporting that presented the GoS in poor light, without the support of a major public source of information.⁹

There were some lower-risk alternative pathways for Sudanese FCs to report on Darfur: by passing information on to other journalists in their news outlets, or by asking for their stories to be printed without a byline. However, the former did not pay and the latter still posed a risk. One Sudanese correspondent described being wary of sharing too much information with his editorial desk – even ‘off the record’ – as he thought they did not understand the severity of the situation facing him in Khartoum.

Sudanese FCs felt that their wellbeing and livelihood were more important than the Western journalists’ objective of holding powers accountable. Western FCs, by contrast, were never required to make this calculus. By virtue of their international citizenship, the most severe consequence they faced was arrest or expulsion; they would not lose their jobs, and they did not have families to worry about in Sudan. Consequently, they did not feel as intimidated by the government or the need to self-censor their reports. One British correspondent stated, for example, ‘You just have to say it like it is and ignore the consequence, and if you get kicked out of the country then that’s that.’

The ‘hybrid’ Sudanese FC, who worked beside a Western colleague, did not articulate the same concerns as his Sudanese counterparts at other outlets. He noted feeling cautious about the risks the government posed, but stated that this did not stop him from producing critical journalism – implying that he had absorbed his organisation’s international values, and that these values trumped the risk posed by falling out with the government (although the content analysis, discussed below, suggests that he was still not as critical as his Western colleagues). The Western ‘hybrid’ FC likewise occupied a middle ground, carefully consulting government sources, but also presenting critical stories.

⁹ It is important to note this was a highly conservative position in the context of Sudan, where very few sources – including major NGOs and multilateral organisations – would speak on the record, for fear of jeopardising their organisation’s in-country operations or ongoing relationship with the government.

In Khartoum, government repression had different meanings for different journalists, depending on their nationality and life situation; in interviews, the journalists noted that this directly affected the stories they were willing to write. These risks, combined with journalists' professional role perceptions (discussed below), determined the extent to which FCs would critique the government of Sudan in their reporting.

Professional Skills

The Sudanese stringers were all fluent English users and competent journalists; they had developed professional skills as journalists and absorbed many conventions of the trade – they described intuitively 'knowing what a story was' without needing to be instructed and knowing how to develop a story (finding sources and structuring the information). However, they did not necessarily possess what Örnebring (2009) refers to as 'organisational professionalism', i.e. the ability to smoothly function within their outlet – to practise their work as their managers would wish them to function. This was illustrated in the clashes these journalists had with their editors over work conditions and expectations. The Sudanese correspondents often stated that the newswires asked too much from their employees; one commented that he felt 'harassed' by his bosses. Another described his coping mechanism: he would 'switch off', ignore his boss's emails and leave the office early.

Hybrid and Western FCs, by contrast, were at ease with their editors and highly motivated in their work. These FCs saw long hours as part of their job and described a mutually respectful relationship with their editors – based more on negotiation than direct orders. These journalists were more integrated in their news organisations and were motivated by a wide range of factors – including, for example, wanting to achieve peer recognition; wanting to advance their career in their organisation; and wishing to build a strong portfolio for future job applications abroad.

Professional Role Perceptions

The Sudanese FCs also had different ideas about the purpose of their journalism than the Western FCs. These differences were not correlated directly with nationality but rather, a closely associated variable – the background training and socialisation of FCs into either Sudanese or Western media norms.

Three of the four Sudanese FCs had never been socialised in a Western news-room environment. These three journalists had their first major jobs in the SUNA news-room – the national, government-run newswire of Sudan, whose main purpose was to relay official information. These journalists had a highly pragmatic approach to reporting; they saw their work as an income generator, and did not express a strong sense of professional identity as a

journalist. One noted, for example, that he would be equally happy working as a translator – if it paid the same amount as reporting. Another described his work as a financial exchange – delivering information for payment. The rules he followed in this work related to staying safe and not the pursuit of professional ideals: ‘Reporting here isn’t about courage, it’s about following the rules so you don’t get in too much trouble. So, for example, stories about the army have to come from the army, and use army sources.’

In direct contrast with Sudanese journalists, the Western FCs had a strong sense of professional identity. In addition to disseminating information, they described the importance of providing analysis, and acting as a watchdog on power – the three components of Western journalism role identity described by Weaver and Wilhout (1991). This last variable – the watchdog dimension of reporting – was particularly important to these journalists. Indeed, some even commented that, without an adversarial or critical component to reporting, the Sudanese FCs were not – by definition – practising journalism. As one Western correspondent stated: ‘If you’re reporting in a way that’s sympathetic to the government so that you don’t get booted out, then you’re not really doing your job.’

The Sudanese correspondents explained their disinclination to write critical reports as a sensible reaction to the risks posed by the government of Sudan. However, the presence of one Sudanese journalist who *did* pursue watchdog stories suggests that socialisation plays a more significant role than nationality. This stringer was the only Sudanese national who worked in a news-room environment – a small office in Khartoum that contained himself, a Western bureau chief and a Western stringer. He had learnt to report in this environment, where he worked closely with the bureau chief, and he described his job in ethical and vocational terms.

The Western-born ‘hybrid’ journalist also occupied an interesting middle space in terms of role perception, feeling distant from the local national FCs, which were perceived as not being critical or providing analysis:

You’ll find the Sudanese here, they’re all the older guys that don’t do any real reporting. They’ll go to the press conferences and turn up late, take a couple of notes, go back and send it to the Cairo bureau.

However, the hybrid journalist also rejected the approach of many Western outlets which were ‘over-zealous’ and overly critical, commenting that: ‘In Darfur, there are no good guys anymore’ and believed that the role of journalists was not necessarily to directly hold powers accountable, but rather, to provide a platform for all views to be presented. This ‘pluralistic approach’ can also be interpreted as a highly pragmatic response to the threat of expulsion – a tactic that helped the FC stay in Sudan:

I have sources absolutely everywhere in government, in military, everywhere. And I will always give them a call and say 'this is what I'm reporting', and ask 'what's your side?' and give them time to get back to me. And I've been told by various people in security that's one of the reasons I haven't been kicked out.

The hybrid journalist had no desire to leave Sudan and was pragmatic about reporting. This represented a different emphasis than the Western FCs in Sudan – a different prioritisation of the roles – but it still fell within the general Western typography.

Local Language and Knowledge

Sudanese reporters believed that their position as insiders made it easier to cultivate trusted sources. One local-national FC thought that being Sudanese significantly improved his relationship with Darfurian rebels, for example, who would ring him and provide important information (although this information, he believed, was approximately '40% fictitious'). Another gave the example of making friends with a man at his local tea stand who, within five minutes, rang an acquaintance, who put a rebel leader on the phone line. While it would be possible for a foreign national to make these connections, he felt it was less likely as the levels of trust that spring from their shared nationality would be missing.

Personal relationships are an important component in reporting, and particularly so in a context like Sudan where the regime is difficult to access and has created distrust amongst informants. In Khartoum, politics are often conducted on a personal basis with very little transparency; access to government information often requires a personal connection. As one FC noted:

If I want to double-check something from a government official here – say I want to call the foreign minister – unless I know him as a personal friend then he won't answer my phone call ... It's the only way: very, very close personal contacts, otherwise you will wait and wait.

Furthermore, several of the Western FCs could not speak Arabic, the local language in Khartoum, and the operational language for the political system. This meant they could not access a number of important events:

Things you need access to like government officials. You can't. And that is something I'm worried about. ... [At Reuters] three of them speak Arabic. So they can go to these different events and things, whereas I can only go to this or that.

Without Arabic, international FCs were dependent on translators, who could be difficult to find, and who varied in quality and transparency.

A range of variables noted above made it more likely that Sudanese stringers would draw on Sudanese sources, particularly the government of Sudan, in their reporting. Their fear of arrest encouraged them to source the government; the relative absence of 'watchdog journalism' norms meant they were less likely to search out alternative perspectives; and their Arabic skills and access made them more able to access regime sources. These findings were tested in the content analysis of journalists' finished stories.

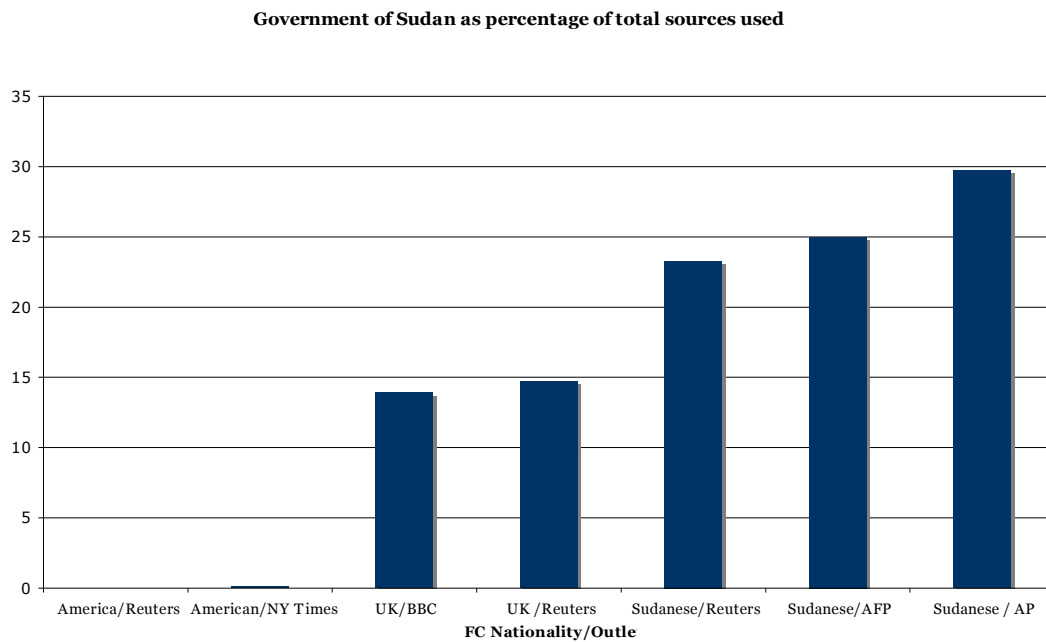
6 Content Analysis Results

Analysis of the articles written by the FCs in Khartoum provides partial support for the interview findings presented above. The content analysis examined the sources used in news articles, and confirms that Sudanese journalists were more likely to use the government of Sudan as a source of information; Sudanese FCs were also more likely to write articles that included only one source; these articles disseminated information but, because they did not include alternative approaches, did not analyse sources' positions or hold powers accountable. Western FCs, by contrast, were more likely to draw on Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) and their Western employees than Sudanese journalists were.

Sources used in articles

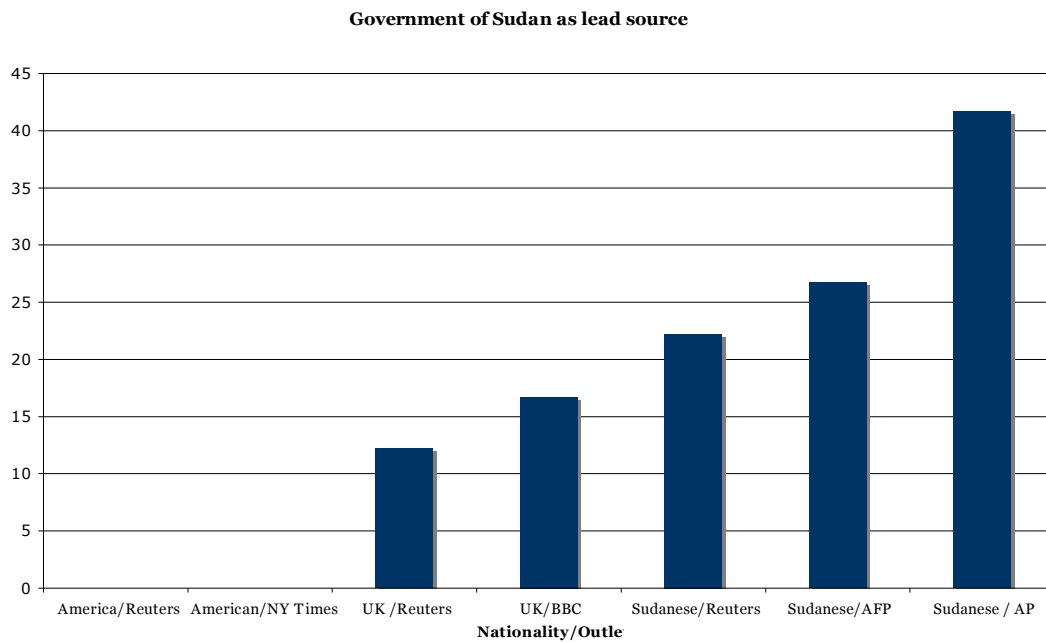
Sudanese national journalists were far more likely than Western FCs to use the government of Sudan as a source in their articles. In the Sudanese AP correspondent's work, the GoS appeared the most, accounting for 11 of 37 total sources used (29.7%); by contrast, the Government accounted for zero sources in the American Reuters correspondent's work, and only one (6%) of the sources for the *New York Times* correspondent.

As the interview responses would suggest, the 'hybrid' journalists at Reuters fell precisely between the two groups – drawing upon the government more than Western FCs, but less than the local Sudanese stringers. The Sudanese stringer at Reuters used slightly less government sources less than his Sudanese counterparts at AFP and AP – suggesting that he had been partially socialised into the 'Reuters' approach to reporting. However, he continued to use more government sources than his Western colleagues at Reuters and the *New York Times* – suggesting that he continued to be cautious of the government in his reporting.

Figure 1**Table 4: Government of Sudan as Percentage of Sources Used**

Nationality	Outlet	N articles	N sources	N GoS sources	GoS as % of sources
Sudanese	AFP	15	23	6	25.0
Sudanese	AP	12	37	11	29.7
Sudanese	Reuters	9	30	7	23.3
UK	Reuters	49	225	33	14.7
UK	BBC	6	36	5	13.9
American	Reuters	2	6	0	0
American	NYT	3	15	1	6.7

Sudanese FCs were also more likely to foreground the government of Sudan's position, by placing government sources at the start of their news articles. At AP, 41.7% of the correspondent's stories lead with a government source; this figure was 26.7% at AFP; and 22.2% for the Sudanese reporter at Reuters – again, this was more than the British and American FCs at Reuters, who had only 14.7% and 13.9% respectively. For the Americans at Reuters, and the *New York Times*, this figure was zero.

Figure 2**Table 5. Government of Sudan as Lead Source in Articles**

Nationality	Outlet	N articles	GoS as lead source	% of articles GoS lead source
Sudanese	AFP	15	4	26.7
Sudanese	AP	12	5	41.7
Sudanese	Reuters	9	2	22.2
UK	Reuters	49	6	12.2
UK	BBC	6	1	16.7
American	Reuters	2	0	0
American	NYT	3	0	0

Sudanese FCs were also significantly more likely to draw on local Sudanese media reports as a source in their news article – local media constituted roughly 13% of the sources in both AFP and AP articles (Table 6). The Western ‘hybrid journalist’ used Sudanese media as a source once, out of 225 sources and, by contrast, the Western journalists never did. Sudanese media outlets at the time were significantly more censored than the international press, and sourcing local news was often equivalent to simply reproducing the government’s position (Reporters Without Borders, 2006). This finding supports further the theory that a conservative position was adopted by local-national FCs in reporting on Darfur.

Another difference between local FCs and Western FCs was the use of NGO and media outlets as sources. The *New York Times* correspondent included NGOs as 20% of his sources, far more than any other FC in the field (Table 6). Although the sample is too small to make this finding significant, it is interesting to note that it confirms the literature on ‘parachuting FCs’, which states that visiting FCs will opt to use Western NGO workers as sources because they are easy to access and speak English. This trend may, in turn, contribute to the ‘humanitarian narrative’ which is often present in international news coverage of ‘dark Africa’ (e.g. Mackintosh, 1996).

Table 6. NGOs and Media Outlets as Percentage of All Sources

Nationality	Outlet	N sources	NGOs	Sudan media
Sudanese	AFP	23	4.3	13
Sudanese	AP	37	0	13.5
Sudanese	Reuters	30	6.7	0
UK	Reuters	225	5.8	0.4
UK	BBC	36	0	0
American	Reuters	6	0	0
American	NYTimes	15	20	0

Interestingly, and in contrast to the interview responses, the Sudanese journalists did not draw upon local sources in Darfur any more than the Western FCs did. Despite suggesting that they would have better access to local Sudanese sources, Sudanese FCs continued to source officials in Khartoum, rather than regular citizens, fighters or leaders in Darfur. In all three of these categories, Western FCs had higher percentages than Sudanese FCs.

Table 7: Local Darfuri Sources as Percentage of All Sources

Nationality	Outlet	N sources	Rebels	Tribal leader	Darfuri citizen
Sudanese	AFP	23	13	0	0
Sudanese	AP	37	10.8	0	2.7
Sudanese	Reuters	30	20	10	10
UK	Reuters	225	20	1.8	6.2
UK	BBC	36	27.8	0	0
American	Reuters	6	33.3	16.7	16.7
American	NYT	15	0	33.3	6.7

Watchdog Journalism

As the interview responses suggested, the articles written by Sudanese journalists were less likely to perform a ‘watchdog role’ compared to Western FCs. The ‘watchdog role’ implies that journalists do not pass political messages straight from political actors to the public without also providing alternative perspectives/comment/analysis (Norris 2000: 29). The Sudanese journalists were far more likely to write news stories that included only one source of information. More than 50% of the articles written by the AFP correspondent had only one source of information – almost always the government of Sudan or the AU/UN peace-keeping mission. These articles often appeared to be rewritten press releases, with little attempt to seek alternative perspective or comment. At AP this figure was considerably lower – only 16.7% of articles had one source – but this was still notably higher than the Western journalists (with the exception of the *New York Times*, whose very small sample of three articles was skewed by the inclusion of a short piece about an aid worker being kicked out of Darfur, which cited the government’s position).

Table 8: Proportion of Articles with Only One Source

Nationality	Outlet	N articles	N articles one source	% of articles one source
Sudanese	AFP	15	8	53.3
Sudanese	AP	12	2	16.7
Sudanese	Reuters	9	0	0
UK	Reuters	49	2	4.1
UK	BBC	6	0	0
American	Reuters	2	0	0
American	NYT	3	1	33

7 Conclusion: A Troubled Future for Watchdog Journalism?

Hamilton and Jenner (2004b) suggest that commentators are premature in despairing at the declining numbers of foreign correspondents posted abroad. Foreign news, the authors suggest, will simply evolve and emerge from more diverse and cost-effective sources. This report has suggested that this 'evolution' will not necessarily be smooth and that the increased reliance on local-national FCs poses a challenge to the discursive nature of reporting at some of the most established and trusted news outlets in the world. A particularly concerning finding of the interviews and content analysis was that the only correspondents at the AP and AFP newswires were Sudanese nationals – and that these journalists were disinclined to write critical reports. At AP, the government of Sudan was a dominant source of information and interpretation; and at AFP, a significant portion of articles contained only one source – despite the highly political and controversial debates surrounding the nature of the Darfur crisis. These news stories were then disseminated around the world to the thousands of news outlets that have cut back their foreign correspondents (or never had them) and rely exclusively on the newswires for their foreign news coverage.

In larger media landscapes, with a greater number of journalists, unbalanced reports would have been contested and moderated by the work of other journalists. In the news coverage of Sudan, however, these alternative accounts did not exist. In August 2007, all reports with a Sudan byline emanated from only nine individuals, resulting in a very small number of total articles. Consequently, if just one journalist did not have access to a certain source, was not motivated to find an alternative account or lived in fear of the government's response to critical reporting, the total news copy written and available to the international press could be skewed in this direction.

Sudan is an extreme case – government repression of the media is high and it is difficult and expensive for Western journalists to visit or for editors to monitor the work of their stringers. However, it is by no means a marginal or irrelevant case – in 2007, Darfur was the 'World's Worst Humanitarian Disaster' and reports on the conflict were widely distributed and eagerly republished by news outlets around the world. The number and range of journalists in Khartoum during the fieldwork may be 'as good as it gets' in the context of contemporary reporting on Sudan.

For news outlets operating stringer networks in repressive countries, this research suggests that care must be taken in selecting, monitoring and, importantly, protecting local national journalists, as well as finding alternative pathways for news to leave the country – through additional visiting journalists, or analysis written from further afield.

For media researchers interested in explaining contemporary foreign news production, the increased use of local-national stringers raises a number of key issues. First, academic research on foreign news production must include local-national as well as Western journalists. Changes in the foreign news corps means that studies of Western journalists alone (e.g. Hannerz, 2004) can no longer adequately explain foreign news processes. Secondly, it is clear that organisational theories alone cannot account for foreign news practices – today's FCs no longer emerge straight from Western news-rooms, with internalised news values. The factors that influence contemporary FCs are difficult to locate – emerging in the field, and through processes of glocalisation, as international news values interacted with local news values. The space between the local and the foreign is today smaller and yet more complex than ever before.

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