Conflict zones and non-physical risks to journalism practice

Notes from Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo

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The physical dangers for journalists in conflict zones are real. The 2015 Reporters without Borders annual round-up tallied 110 professional journalists killed, 54 journalists held hostage and 153 journalists detained (RSF 2015), countless others carry emotional scars. There is still much work to be done caring for the human beings who run into places others run from. However, my research deals with journalism practice during drawn out conflicts when guns are not blasting in the immediate vicinity, and the particular risk this paper examines is the risk to quality international reportage inherent in the production of journalism that takes place in those increasingly entrenched and segregated international zones that exist within countries in crisis; zones alternatively described as Aidlands (Mosse 2011a) or Peacelands (Autesserre 2014).

Aidlands can be defined as places in the world where the concentration of international non-government organisations (INGOs) and UN or Wold Bank affiliated organisations is so great that it creates its own cultural geography within the city, while at the same time effecting the overall cultural geography of the host city. Peacelands include all of the latter, plus peace-keepers, and international relations/conflict experts – the peace industry – and are linked to the new drawn-out dynamics of conflict, with places within nations, like the east of the DRC, existing in "*not war but not peace either*"

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(Ramalingam 2013, p. 32). I use the hybrid term aid/peacelands given the increasing interconnection between humanitarianism, development and conflict (Duffield 2007). A key point is the level of segregation from the local community and conversely connection to other aid/peacelands around the world. Their existence, and the knowledge dynamics these spaces foster, has been an issue of growing concern and critique in postcolonial, development and international relations literature (Autesserre 2014; Duffield 2007; Jackson 2005; Mbembe 2001; Mosse 2011a; Ramalingam 2013; Wallace, Bornstein & Chapman 2007). Given that foreign correspondents also use these spaces, the critiques from these neighbouring disciplines must be taken seriously. This paper asks: how do aid/peacelands – as spaces – contribute to forms of journalistic knowledge that create risks for quality journalism? I examine these dynamics through the aid/peaceland situated in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo.

Background to this research

This paper has come out of my wider PhD project searching for enablers to help foreign correspondents more-often present complex and nuanced reporting of crisis situations, and furthermore, represent the victimhood of people (especially in sub-Saharan Africa) without reducing those people to two-dimensional objects to be consumed. My research focused on foreign correspondents because it follows the argument of eminent ethnographer Ulf Hannerz (2004) that foreign correspondents can be significant agents of normative cosmopolitanism.

It has already been noted that journalists, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, will often deal with physical, economic and emotional insecurities, through embedding themselves with western International Non-Government Organisations (INGOs). The dangers to quality reporting, with journalists becoming "*a cog in the world's humanitarian machine*" (Balzar in Hannerz 2004, p. 46), has been discussed for some time, especially by Africa experts. Similarly, in development literature, a concern with the symbiosis of media and aid driving negative stereotypes has existed since the late 80s (Benthall 2010, pp. 182-184). These concerns are further backed up by media, postcolonial and other scholars who criticise foreign correspondents for creating simplistic and stereotyped representations of sub-Saharan Africa (Granqvist 2012; Gruley & Duvall 2012; Hintzen 2008; Lindqvist 1997; Madondo 2008; Mamdani 2007; Mamdani 2009; Mbembe 2001; Muspratt & Steeves 2012; Wainaina 2005, 2012). These critiques focus on Anglo-American reportage and my research also focuses on Anglo-American reportage. However, the concerns I develop in this paper regarding aid/peacelands are relevant to all internationals who enter such spaces.

Scott (2015) suggests that critiques of Anglo-American reporting of sub-Saharan Africa may be over-stated as they are based on a small set of empirical examples. This critique is important to pay attention to. However, given my focus on foreign correspondents' *practice*, the most important consideration for my research is the fact that many foreign correspondents, when they write of their time in Africa, particularly Sub- Saharan Africa, feel the need to engage with, and to some extent correct, the common media representations that they, and/or their colleagues, and/or their news organisations, have helped to create (Dowden 2009; French 2005; Harden 1991; Hunter-Gault 2006; Keane 2004; Sara 2007; Zachary 2012). The repetition, particularly of an element of *mea culpa,* produces its own body of evidence, separate to content and textual based analysis.

Scott (2015) further argues that the empirical data critiquing reporting is based narrowly on elite, especially US, newspapers. This criticism is no barrier to this research as the important point about elite newspapers is the fact that *"quality news media and the individual journalists writing for them play a tremendously important role in informing both policy-planning and decision-making as well as the allocation of attention to countries and issues"* (Otto & Meyer 2012, p. 206). The interplay with policy is particularly important to pay attention to as part of the dynamics of the aid/peaceland of Goma – as will become apparent below.

Once having introduced the methodology and theoretical framework the analysis in this paper will begin with a description of the aid/peaceland of Goma, focusing particularly on how it is an international space, and how this space produces its own doxa entrenching northern knowledge dominance. The paper will then focus in on the key relationships for journalists within these spaces – their relationships with INGO workers and, more importantly, for the new arguments of this paper, their relationships with fixers – and consider how the space impacts these relationships. Various risks to quality journalism production will become apparent.

A limitation of this paper is that hard news from conflict zones increasingly depends on "*unsalaried, uninsured, and often politically vulnerable stringers who are nationals of the countries affected*" (Sterling 2009, p. 645) however, this paper does not deal specifically with the significant role of agency news

media, except in regards to two points specifically concerning the aid/peaceland space. Firstly, news-agency stringers exist on the periphery of aid/peacelands, entering and exiting its space, and in the specific case of Goma, DRC, sometimes swapping between the role of fixer and stringer. Secondly, news-agency and international broadcast media head-offices will sometimes deploy extra (usually salaried) personnel to the same areas assigned to a stringer, and these deployed journalists, like other travelling foreign correspondents, are likely to utilise aid/peaceland spaces as their base.

Methodology

As part of my PhD I reported from Goma, DRC for 21 days in August and September 2014 with articles published on my blog and for the Australian publication *Crikey*. I arrived in the DRC at the end of August 2014 just as ebola was confirmed in that country but not in the immediate vicinity. I left just before the Peace One Day concert was held at Goma airport. The exact timing of the visit was random. However, the fact that it was book-ended by two significant news events, one associated with the '*Heart of Darkness*' trope and the other the more recent, INGO-dominated 'Africa Rising' news frame (Wright 2016) helps demonstrate the richness of the research site for examining problematic representations of sub-Saharan Africa by Anglo-American media.

Initially I planned to follow the usual practice of freelancers and pitch stories to editors before travelling. However, I found that the process of pitching was significantly curtailing my freedom around the type of stories I might pursue. Given the lack of fixed story (and income) I chose not to employ a fixer. I did employ a translator but this person was not found through the usual circle of expat recommendations. My wider research argues that journalists working on international conflict stories should engage with former-refugee communities living in multicultural cities like Sydney. My translator in Goma, a part-time English teacher and local radio journalist, was found through the links I established in Sydney's east DRC community. The fact that my translator was not a member of the aid/peaceland community of Goma turned out to be significant.

The main focus of my research was producing journalism features for publication while engaging in auto-ethnography. A secondary concern was taking advantage of the trip so as to conduct semi-structured, and exploratory, qualitative, research interviews around media production processes with local and international NGO workers, local and international journalists, and with fixers. Early on in that process two international workers, particularly concerned with policy development, highlighted the importance of fixers in the news production process and interviews with fixers came to form a key empirical feature of my research. I used my translator for the journalism stories and, following usual practice, all interviewees were named unless anonymity was requested for safety reasons. The research interviews were conducted by myself and in English. Following the stipulations of my ethics clearance these research interviews remain anonymous.

Finally, of particular importance to this paper, is the fact that my 20 nights in Goma were split equally between two hotels. The first hotel existed outside of the peaceland space and I was the only westerner there for the entire 10 days. In contrast, the second hotel was run by an INGO, packed with expats and local elites, and very much part of Goma's aid/peaceland. Comparing my auto-ethnographic field notes of the two periods, both in terms of my affective experiences, and in terms of the conversations I was having, and people I was having those conversations with, led to my interest in the effect of space as a risk to quality journalism production. This then led to the discovery of the inter-disciplinary aid/peaceland literature mentioned above.

The conceptual analysis of the aid/peaceland which follows draws upon the empirical evidence of my auto-ethnographic field notes however, given the limits of auto-ethnography in terms of the extreme specificity and subjectivity of the data, this analysis is supplemented with literature on aid/peacelands. I will also refer to evidence from my six interviews with fixers (five male, one female, ages ranging from early 20s to mid 40s). While six interviews is a significant number for the small community of Goma, the research sample is again small, and so these results will also be discussed in relation to other literature on fixers from around the world.

Theoretical framework

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of doxa, and from social geography, the idea of social practices as regulated by the way we conceive of space and time make up the theoretical basis of this analysis.

Eminent historian Fernand Braudel in his work *The structures of everyday life: the limits of the possible* (1981) shows us everyday practices like what you eat and how you pass the time are structures in our lives that situate us in a certain system of living.

Similarly, social geographer David Harvey, quoting Nancy Munn, tells us "*socio-cultural practices 'do not simply go on in or through time and space,' but they also 'constitute (create) the spacetime … in which they go on." Actors are, therefore "concretely producing their own spacetime*" (1996, p. 215). Analysing my experiences in Goma while embedded in aid/peace land spaces I will argue that a particular *international* spacetime can be discerned which entails risks to the quality production of journalism in Goma.

In the final journal article of his life, published posthumously, the eminent French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu described a new international economic field visible through the politics of structural adjustment, which disproportionately disadvantaged African economies (Bourdieu 2001, p. 6). Bourdieu says that within this field there are sub-fields at work (p. 4) and although Bourdieu didn't elaborate on these sub-fields in that article, surely the field of aid-development-peacebuilding is one of these sub-fields. Indeed, this has been argued by Jeffrey Jackson who, in his ethnographic study of Honduras, titled *The Globalizers: Development Workers in Action* classes both journalists and development/aid workers as 'Globalizers' he identified in response to Bourdieu's article (2005, p. 3).

The field will be subject to internal pressures, and external pressures with the external pressures relative to the autonomy of the field. Despite this struggle at any one time there is a doxa and this is a shared "*universe of tacit presuppositions that organize action in the field*" (Neveu & Benson 2005, p. 3). Doxa is not just an idea it is also the creation of practices, which legitimize the dominant ideas, or orthodoxy, of the field. Bourdieu contends: "*The social world doesn't work in terms of consciousness; it works in terms of practices, mechanisms and so forth*" (Bourdieu & Eagleton 1992, p. 113). Bourdieu's long-time collaborator Loic Wacquant has taken this argument further examining the inter-related role of practices, doxa, habitus, affect and particular spaces (Wacquant 1995).

Thus, if fields are a site of struggle, and doxa is constantly under-review and reformed through the practices in the field, I argue that the synchronicity in changing practices exhibited by the development field and the international reporting field, combined with the shared work and social space of aid/peacelands, is creating doxa. Given the "*very low autonomy*" of the journalism field as a sub-field within the field of power (Bourdieu 2005, p. 41) the dynamics of this doxa creation must be carefully considered. In particular, I suggest the international spacetime of aid/peacelands, in conjunction with the synchronicity of practices, is helping to reconstitute a particular northern-international doxa in the field of foreign correspondence and that doxa entails risks for quality reporting, particularly in drawn-out conflict situations like the east of the DRC.

The spacetime of Goma's aid/peaceland

In conceptualising the aid/peaceland of Goma it may be useful to think of a network of connected nodes dotted throughout the city. These nodes are spaces of work and leisure – offices, homes, hotels, cafes, restaurants and clubs. The connection between these nodes are also constituted specifically as part of aid/peaceland, you do not take any old transport to get around. Instead the transport is securitised and chauffeured giving rise to the ubiquitous stereotype of INGO workers in white Toyota four-wheel-drives[1]. Not each node is equal; certain spaces at certain times are particularly powerful creators (and creations) of the aid/peaceland. At my time of visiting these powerful spacetime nodes included: the all-you-can-eat buffet and cheap cocktails at the lakeside restaurant/bar, Le Chalet, on Wednesday nights; the nightclub Coco Jumbo late on Friday nights; the trilingual monthly trivia event at Riviera; and the new boulangerie, Au Bon Pain, anytime during the day but especially on weekends. This network of spaces was visualised in 2014 in cartoon format and can be found at the expat-oriented website *Living in* Goma https://livingingoma.com/2014/10/23/goma-by-anne-francewhite/. The *boulangerie* is a particularly good example given the excitement it was still generating at my time of visiting. It had opened in May and was attracting expats and local elites in droves. In the cartoon map it is captioned *"talk of the town – good bread at last!"*.

The *boulangerie* typifies the international connection and local segregation. Like an expat moth to flame I discovered it on my very first foray into the city, and on weekends expats would travel from the next major city, Bukavu, with the express intention of checking out this 'talk of the town' – yet many moto drivers (local motorbike taxis) hadn't heard of it. My translator too had never heard of it and when, after I had introduced him to it, I asked him to meet me there one day I found that, arriving before me, he did not go inside but instead waited outside with the security guard. The *boulangerie* was obviously for internationals and elites, not everyday locals. At times it resembled nothing so much as a packed co-working hot-desk space. Strangers would share tables, tapping away on their laptops for hours, and of course they weren't strangers by the end of the visit. People would come and go and greetings and introductions were manifold. These interactions

were based not just on the particular space of Goma but connected to the international world of aid/peacelands. Several of my research interviews resulted from introductions made at the *boulangerie* and three of my research interviews took place there. At one point an interviewee, despite knowing me to be a journalist and researcher, asked if I was part of the *"UN family"* (Interview F) clearly implying a distinct international and mobile tribe, mobile both in terms of moving between locations and moving between strands of international knowledge-work.

Another major feature of the aid/peaceland space is the sense of danger. In my experience discussions around security were constant – partly fuelled by my repeated transgression, especially at first, of normal INGO security protocols. These conversations about danger, however, were not in relation to the risks of war. Goma is not immune to actual warfare, as shown during the M23 Rebellion take-over of the city in 2012. However, in general, it is protected from the impact of blasting guns. The danger discourse instead revolved around violent urban crime which, it has been argued, has been created because of, and particularly targets, expatriates in Goma (Büscher & Vlassenroot 2010, p. S266). As a walking dollar sign you are a target and the conflict plays a part here too. Twice in my 21 days I dealt with crime situations, both times the perpetrators were young men who appeared to be drug-addled and also left me with the impression they were former combatants. These situations came about because I was outside of the aid/peaceland space and in the local space however, they were also resolved through the local community. In the second, more serious instant, where the young man followed me for some time and when confronted told me that I was to *"come with him"* I was eventually able to hop into a local bus and, in my limited Swahili, ask the conductor not to let the young man in.

Even if the dangers are real, the effects of this discourse of danger should be considered. I found that during my stay, and especially after I changed to the second hotel I was less willing to step out of aid/peaceland spaces. Like other gated communities aid/peacelands breed separation, and more importantly they breed comfortableness with that separation.

Of course, this is not to suggest foreign correspondents stay completely bunkered, if they did how would they get any reporting done? However, the trips to the field are highly orchestrated, often involving the use of INGOs or fixers, and specific security arrangements. Such 'deployments' into 'the field' may in fact only strengthen the existing aid/peaceland relationships.

INGO- journalist relationships

In recent years, former and current sub-Saharan Africa based foreign correspondents, have expressed their concerns regarding the long-established symbiosis between the humanitarian/development profession and foreign correspondents (Balzar in Hannerz 2004, pp. 45-7; Dowden 2009, pp. 4-9; French 2005, p. 59; Polman 2010; Rothmyer 2011). This has led journalism scholars to conclude that foreign correspondents, especially in reporting humanitarian crises, are effectively embedded with aid organisations and that this may entail "*similar trade-offs to going on location with the military*" (Franks 2010, p. 79).

In journalism literature the critique of this embedded practice is that western foreign correspondents "*rely on NGO 'ex-pats' working overseas to provide perspective*" (Moeller 2006, p. 188) and the result, particularly for Africa, is the perpetuating of negative stereotypes which correspond with the funding priorities of NGOs (Dowden 2009, p. 7; Franks 2010; Rothmyer 2011) and because of time, space and funding constraints, the ignoring of other stories (Rothmyer 2011). Furthermore, that western foreign correspondents are perpetuating a view of 'white angels of mercy' with African actors relegated to backdrops (Franks 2010, p. 75; French 2005, p. 59; Keane 2004). These concerns correspond with the critiques of representations of sub-Saharan Africa put forward by postcolonial scholars such as Hintzen (2008), Lindqvist (1997), Madondo (2008), Mamdani (2007; 2009), Mbembe (2001), Muspratt & Steeves (2012) and Wainaina (2005). On the flip side the INGO-journalist relationship has also been problematised as contributing to simplistic 'Africa Rising' framing (Wright 2016). More recently critiques of these representations have been linked to foreign correspondents' lifestyles (Sundaram 2016; Wainaina 2012). Sundaram writes about the disconnect from local reality saying: *"…journalists are often lodged in expensive bungalows or five-star hotels. As the news has receded, so have our minds"* (2016, p. 99).

My focus on aid/peacelands builds on these existing critiques. The particular concern that I will now develop is how these international relationships and spaces impact our relationship (or lack there of) with locals and the risks this entails.

The risk of lost locals

In the first place let's consider what happens when we lose locals (or reduce them to backdrops)

inherent in the traditional understanding of embedding – that is logistical and safety support getting to the 'frontline' of villages under attack, and refugee camps. Former Africa correspondent Richard Dowden describes this process of embedding with INGOs as a *"deal"*, which excludes the effort of locals. He writes:

"*The deal, mostly unspoken but well understood, is that aid workers tell journalists where disaster is breaking. The aid agencies provide plane tickets, a place to stay, vehicles, a driver, maybe a translator – and a story. In return the journalists give the aid agencies publicity, describing how they are saving Africans and using images of distress and helplessness to raise money. The deal excludes the efforts of local people to save themselves. It is easier – and more lucrative – to portray them as victims dependent on Western charity.*" (Dowden 2009, p. 7)

Thus logistical embeds create a reporting risk: the misrepresentation of the overall truth of the situation that occurs when local initiatives are excluded from stories; in fact most refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) are helped by locals in the community – around Goma only 25% of IDPs are in camps (Giotis 2015). Ordinary people helping IDPs is part of the broad local reality, not witnessed in aid/peacelands – whether staying inside the main network of securitised space, or travelling in a four-wheel drives outside it.

Expanding our understanding of embedding to include our time spent in aid/peacelands means that we can highlight the international and specifically – *not local* – element of the embedding experience. My experiencing an international space, segregated from the local, mirrors the findings of ethnographers of aid/peaceland spaces (Apthorpe 2011; Büscher & Vlassenroot 2010; Eyben 2011; Harper 2011; Jackson 2005; Mosse 2011b; Rajak & Stirrat 2011).

It was only in my first hotel, a hotel very much open to the local community, whose water tank was in fact used by local shopkeepers on the frequent occasions when water and electricity were cut off, that I was able to gain any sense of the 'everyday'. It was here my local phone credit seller battled valiantly to improve my Swahili, I bantered with the hairdresser next door and I discussed the state of Goma with the young doctor from Kinshasa over our simple, yet beautifully presented, one-egg, one-banana, (and occasionally one-passion fruit) breakfast.

The risk of journalists not giving readers a sense of normality in their reports has been recently highlighted by philosopher Alain de Botton. In his 2014 book *The News,* he argues that BBC website figures of 2.52m readers for 'Bowie Comeback Makes Top Ten Singles Chart' and only 4,450 readers for 'East DR Congo Faces Catastrophic Humanitarian Crisis' are not explained by a lack of compassion but a lack of engagement resulting from a lack of understanding about the reality of the everyday. He says the average western consumer of media can not engage with a catastrophic humanitarian crisis in the DRC because they have no sense as to this being out of the ordinary "*We don't know whether anyone has ever had a normal day in the Democratic Republic of Congo, for no such thing as ever been recorded by a Western news organisation*" (de Botton 2014, p. 84). A similar argument is made by Ben Rawlence author of *Radio Congo* who says to create new knowledge of a place "*you need to get the balance right between reality, which is horrific, and the encompassing reality, which is human and normal and mundane*" (Rawlence in Taylor 2012, p. online).

Bringing this discussion home to the particular dynamics of the conflict in the east of the DRC we can consider if the invisibility of much of the local reality may be blinding foreign correspondents to important local societal structures. In particular, the focus in the foreign media on western intervention and sanctions regarding conflict minerals means that there has been scant attention paid to the issues surrounding artisanal miners (Fahey 2009). The introduction of the humanitarian legislation Section 1502 of the Dodd-Frank Act was hailed as a step forward in the dominant narrative of stopping the trade in conflict minerals but there were hundreds of thousands of artisanal miners who relied on the current arrangements for their survival who were pushed to one side.

As predicted by Easterly (2006), when one is focused towards the west, grand plans for positive change can leave devastation in their wake. In the case of Section 1502, a key organisations pushing for the legislation was U.S based INGO the Enough Project. The Enough Project acknowledged the plight of artisanal miners (Bafilemba, Mueller & Lezhnev 2014, pp. 10-1); however, the organisation argued, with the help of a particular case study, that the western mines taking over would provide development support for the local community even as tens of thousands of locals lost their livelihoods. Unfortunately, the exemplar pointed to has turned out to be less than exemplary, a small area which was meant to be set aside so that artisanal miners could continue work in an accredited conflict-free zone is still to be set up (Alphamin Resources 2016).

The plight of artisanal miners hasn't been ignored by foreign journalists all together[2]. However, the scale of attention paid to this issue does not match its crucial importance to hundreds of thousands of Congolese. Belatedly, journalists are realising this and recently an Al Jazeera documentary on the issue was nominated for an Emmy (un-named reporter 2016). However, the underlying risk of ignoring important societal structures effecting locals (like 75% of IDPs helped in the community or hundreds of thousands surviving via artisanal mining) remains when journalists are missing out on the fabric of local life.

A NORTHERN-INTERNATIONAL DOXA IN AID/PEACELANDS

Of course another explanation as to why the plight of artisanal miners was downplayed is simply that the Anglo-American journalists accepted the international view of the situation, with that international view including the taken for granted of assumption of the need for intervention.

Jeffrey Jackson, in his in-depth ethnography of development workers, argues that the "*first thing*" you have to realise is that they live in an "*international space*" (2005, p. 52) nurturing their capacities as "*promoters of global agendas and builders of transnational institutions of governance*" (2005, p. xii). These global agendas have also been described, in development literature, as "*travelling orthodoxies*" (Mosse 2011b, p. 7). Of particular concern in conflict situations is the documented top-down approach has also been linked, with the DRC used as an example, with a circular logic which always favours intervention (Koddenbrock 2012). This does not mean that every analysis offered by international experts will be faulty but foreign correspondents must be aware of the documented bias towards international interventions shown by travelling experts; forewarned is forearmed.

The practices dominant inside aid/peacelands strengthen the doxa of the international perspective variously, through: connection with an international world via social media; discussions of postings around the world, with those postings linked to the constant of career progression; and *accountability links*, whether for aid programs or articles written, which do not flow into the local community but instead head 'back' to the 'centre' in New York, London, and Sydney. There is also the valuing of the international worker over the local worker in concrete salary-based ways; local NGO professionals are offered employment on different pay scales from their expat colleagues. Jackson describes this process of different pay scales in depth, viewing it as one of the structures of globalization disempowering people's knowledge in developing countries because, as one of his interviewees puts it, their knowledge "*comes cheap*" and is therefore not valued (Jackson 2005, p. 114). All of these elements contribute to the taken for granted presupposition in the field that knowledge is thematized, transferable and held by travelling experts.

In the development profession the privileging of technical or thematic expertise has been described by Professor Emeritus and former Director of the Global Insecurities Centre, Mark Duffield, as moving from the 1970s when "*learning the language, making friends and trusting people*" was the norm to the conditions for 'Ground Truth' and 'Area Expertise' to be devalued "*Westerners with area expertise now appear abnormal, even threatening*" (2014, p. S84). Ben Ramalingam has described this move to technical or thematic expertise as the "*The 'Best-practicitis' Epidemic*". (2013, p. 24).

Anyone who has followed changes in the coverage of foreign reporting will recognise a parallel process having taken place in the journalism profession with technical expertise, meaning the ability to quickly put together a story package, being valued above knowledge of the place and the ability to speak the language. A decade ago US ABC *Nightline* stalwart Ted Koppel said "*…the age of the foreign correspondent, who knew a country or region intimately, is long over*" (Moeller 2006, p. 188). In their place came the parachutist who was able to "*hit the ground running [and trained to] come up with some semblance of information and some basic components of the story*" (Pintak in Ricchiardi 2006, p. 47). In this version of international journalism the value of the westerner is their technical knowledge, their "*familiarity with their news outlets' needs and procedures…those sent are skilled in crisis coverage, not educated in the politics, culture and language of a region*" (Moeller 2006, p. 187). Or put another way parachutists "*know a great deal about covering crises but not necessarily much about the crisis they are covering*" (Hess in Palmer & Fontan 2007, p. 21). Of course foreign correspondence, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, and concerning Anglo-American reportage, has long been subject to this critique of parachuting in without much knowledge. The point I am making here is that these practices, instead of being cast away, are being reconstituted by new reporting dynamics, and these dynamics mirror changes in a neighbouring field.

The dominance of technical or thematic knowledge, in both the development and journalism pro-

fessions, equals a lack of respect for the complexity of conflict, a problem which intersects with a complaint made by many scholars (French 2005, pp. 128-129; Gruley & Duvall 2012; Mamdani 2007; Mbembe 2001; Mudimbe 1994, p. 238; Muspratt & Steeves 2012; Wainaina 2005) of the representation of Africa in western reportage "*where neither history nor motivation is thinkable*" (Mamdani 2007, p. online). In development literature it has been noted this lack of respect for local specificity and complexity has led to a "*long roster of development disasters*" (Ramalingam 2013, p. 8). There have also been significant *reporting* disasters influenced by this lack of respect for the complexity of local reality.

As Franks has detailed, the Ethiopian crisis of the mid 1980s was "*reported as a straightforward famine, caused by lack of rain…Yet the reality was very different… the consequence of an ongoing civil war and a brutal regime*" (2010, p. 81). The politics of war underlying the famine was reported in the original BBC Michael Buerk documentary that turned the world's attention to Ethiopia, however, subsequent reporting did not follow up on this important element "*…as the story reverberated around the media it was picked up in an increasingly simplistic way*" (Franks 2013, p. 101). Reporting of the Rwandan genocide and the Darfur conflict has also been criticised for the lack of local understanding shown by Anglo-American reporters (Gruley & Duvall 2012; Mamdani 2007; Mamdani 2009).

In the DRC it has been argued that the urge to simplification evident in reporting has in fact contributed to the simplification of development initiatives. Autesserre and others describe a process whereby it became the accepted truth that the DRC conflict was not receiving enough attention in the international media because it was too complex[3]. This meant that international actors focused on specific issues like conflict minerals and war-rape and simplified the dynamics of these issues so as to attract attention. However, given the strong symbiosis between media attention and policy priorities, it then became difficult to shift focus to other important issues, or indeed add complexity or nuance to the situation for it was those particular issues that were attracting both funders and readers. (Autesserre 2012; Eriksson Baaz & Stern 2013; Ramalingam 2013, pp. 32-35).

The important point to come back to here is that simplification is helped along when a deep understanding of local dynamics is devalued. Furthermore, the fact that the doxa of the field in which both professions are engaged is privileging technical/thematic knowledge over local area knowledge helps explain how it has come to be seen as normal for foreigners, whether they are INGO workers or journalists, to fly in and pretend to know everything there is to know. In this respect aid/peacelands can be understood as zones reinforcing the larger structure of northern-knowledge dominance in the field of international development (Kothari 2006). For foreign correspondents the specific professionals, to be found in aid/peacelands, crucial to keeping alive this myth of know-all flying internationals – are fixers.

The risks of a hierarchical international tribe

Paulo Nuno Vicente quotes a freelance journalist in Kenya as saying it's both "*patronizing*" and "*nonsensical*" that "*Western media send their reporters parachuting into other countries and expect them to have the best reports*" (2013, p. 45). It's true, it is patronizing and nonsensical – but of course that's not what happens – because those journalists turn to the knowledgeable local fixer for help. Fixers are an incredibly important part of the international reporting scene. They are also an incredibly important part of aid/peacelands – but they belong to the 'compradore' class.

Rajat and Stirrat describe the compradore class as "*intermediaries between the host population and the foreign development workers who control communication and usually produce what is expected of them.*" (2011, p. 168). In the case of INGOs, locals routinely hold together offices in the long term while their expat superiors come and go. In the case of foreign journalists fixers keep hold of the contacts and knowledge needed for reporting. Yet, existing as they do as part of a compradore class, most audience members don't know that such a thing as a fixer exists and so what they see is this westerner coming in and summing up the situation. It is not unreasonable to believe the subtext for some audiences could involve a variation on the theme of 'see all it takes is a little western know-how and analysis and everything could be worked out'.

At times this lack of naming fixers may have to do with protecting the safety of the fixer, after all western journalists have the safety of their passport, local fixers do not and at least one of my interviewees had been forced to flee the DRC for a time because of reporting he had helped with (Interview H). However, at other times, it is hard not to assume the motivation is hiding the role of the fixer from the public. The majority of fixers I interviewed in Goma took the lack of acknowledgement as par for the course even if there was a sense of sadness about this. The exception was when it came to documentaries. Here one fixer quite rightly pointed out that

he expected to be acknowledged in the credits, and indeed he hoped he would be for this would help him get extra work. He told me that once, when he was not acknowledged, he asked the documentary maker why he had not been credited and he was not given a clear explanation. The fixer then suspected that the foreign correspondent's "*ego*" was the reason (Interview C).

Although still not generally known to the public, one place where the role of fixers has been discussed more than other places, is Iraq, where, in part, because of the extreme security risk, fixers have been converted into local stringers or "*proxy journalists*" (Palmer & Fontan 2007, p. 6). There is an ethical issue here in that western journalists' lives seem to be valued more than local journalists' lives. Palmer & Fontan point out the gruesome statistic that in the first year after the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the body count for media personnel was split roughly half-half between foreign and Iraqi nationals. However, as time went on, the vast majority of those killed have been Iraqis (2007, p. 6). The practice of western journalists retreating behind secure compounds may be justified by the belief that western journalists in Iraq are more targeted than locals (Veis 2007, p. online) however it is difficult to find ethical justification for the silence around the role taken on by locals.

Preparing an article on the role of Iraqi fixers/stringers/journalists Greg Veis found himself rebuffed by nine of the US's biggest news organisations. One former Iraqi reporter for a major U.S newspaper told Veis he felt those organisations were hiding the bravery of Iraqi journalists so American journalists could get the credit (Veis 2007, p. online).

Acknowledging the role of the fixer means better analysis of the potential benefits and pitfalls of the journalist-fixer relationship – a process that has begun in academic literature (Davies 2012; Murrell 2009, 2014; Palmer & Fontan 2007). Both Murrell (2009 and 2015) and Palmer and Fontan (2007) have pointed out that the fixer's role includes editorial input. There are obvious advantages to this, especially in the suggestion of story ideas that might otherwise not be picked up (Murrell 2009, p. 11). However, this scenario of supplying off the beaten track story ideas is more likely be the case when the fixer is on retainer and is starting to act more as a local producer, and, to underscore the difference, Murrell found BBC personnel, especially in Iraq, who saw their colleagues in this way would use the term "*local producer*" not fixer (Murrell 2009, p. 13).

The question to ask then in relation to this research is how likely is this partnership model to come about in the structures of aid/peaceland? When asked directly none of the fixers interviewed in Goma called the working relationship a partnership and the international structure of the aid/peaceland space is likely contributing to this lack of partnership. Bunce, in examining the international newsrooms in Nairobi found that while local news workers were highly valued *"ultimately, however, the Western voices in newswires enforced through hierarchical chains of command, prevailed over and above dissenting opinions of local journalists"* (Bunce 2015, p. 50).

Bunce further found that one of the main restrictions on the content produced by correspondents is the need to sell stories to a western audience (2015, p. 48). Fixed frames expected in the west acting as a stumbling block was specifically mentioned by one of my interviewees whose main source of employment was as a stringer for an international news agency (interview D). These findings align with the fears of Hamilton and Jenner who asked: "*Foreign nationals may offer the promise of greater international perspective in foreign reporting but will it turn out that way? Will foreign nationals end up seeing the world through an American lens, with the only advantage being that they will work for less?*" (Hamilton & Jenner 2004, p. 315). In Murrell's research she found:

> *These fixers… know what kinds of stories will work for the various journalists from different broadcast companies. Globalisation has made possible this tribe of news gatherers (be they correspondents or fixers) who have more in common with each other than with the general populace of the country in question.* (2015, p. 151)

This creates a risk when fixer's believe that they know what western audiences want in terms of stories so they exclude information in their translation of quotes, or their interpretation of the situation, which doesn't fit the previously defined frame. However, in Palmer and Fontan's research it is only recognised as a danger by a minority of journalists (2007, p. 17).

I concentrated on this element of the fixer's professionalism and found that there was a strong sense from fixers that they understood western news values, especially among the more experienced fixers. It is worth noting here that the most experienced fixers had been in the job for almost 20 years, almost as long as the conflict in the east of the DRC had been raging. The two most experienced estimated that they had worked on upwards of 300 stories each (Interviews H and I). The most experienced estimated he had worked

with 40 western news organisations, reeling off the biggest names in the business (Interview H).

Given this wealth of experience is it any wonder that fixers feel that they have a strong sense of what constitutes news for western audiences? However, their understanding has no theoretical element, it is completely formed through their experience of previous news stories and thus there is an obvious bias towards repetition of what has worked in the past. As an example one, very experienced fixer, who also worked as a stringer, said to me "*Today there is a moto [motorcycle taxis – the main form of taxis in Goma] strike – that is not international news*" (Interview I). However, it could be international news. It could spark a story about civil unrest in the light of continuing state failure and questionable democratic reforms. I believe that this fixer did not see it as an international story because the state of the DRC's democracy is not one of the key storylines that has interested Anglo-American media recently[4].

Bravery redefined: the risk of inflexibility

The tendency towards the repetition of storylines is heightened by the fact the correspondent briefs their chosen fixer on their objectives for the reporting trip well before arriving – so where will the idea for the brief come from? Often from new takes on previous stories. One fixer told me that so attached was a documentary team to the idea for a story they had seen in another documentary that they refused to believe the fixer when he told them that the situation on the ground had changed in the year which had elapsed since that first documentary was made (interview J). This may be an extreme example but all the fixers I spoke to said that the western journalists arrived with an idea and it was their job to make that idea come about. I wish to make this point perfectly clear because it is easy to underestimate its importance. In all journalism you arrive at a story with some sort of idea as to what the story will be. The crucial difference in this situation is that everything about the structure of the reporting experience mitigates against the normal flexibility with which initial story ideas are treated reporting, say, the education round for a national paper. Arriving in a place like Goma, you have limited knowledge, limited time, in that limited time you have limited contact with locals and limited if any language skills so you can't eavesdrop in the marketplace or "*read the graffiti*" (Palmer & Fontan 2007, p. 21) , you are under extreme stress, your fixer is doing everything they can to fulfil the original brief, and you will have probably sold that original brief, that tried and tested story for the western market, to your editors back home who are making this trip possible. In short everything is working against the likelihood of changing the story dramatically, including your own psychology, for the last thing you want is to introduce more uncertainty into an already highly uncertain situation. One interviewee, a Congolese journalist working for overseas news organisations and as a fixer, said that the western journalist changing the pre-determined storyline required an act of "*bravery*", and more often than not foreign correspondents saw their storyline was flawed, and they acknowledged as much in their conversations, but they didn't change it (Interview D).

The need to find stories that can be sold to a western market of readers mirrors the process of finding development projects that can be sold to a western market of charity donors. And in both cases locals need to work in with the processes of the western organisation. Given the power inequality is it any wonder that researchers in this area of development found that "*in Uganda the colonial image of 'black faces, white masks' was used several times to describe the negative aspects of the relationships that were being created around aid funding*" (Wallace, Bornstein & Chapman 2007, pp. 173-174). It is not unreasonable to suppose that the field of international reporting might also entrench power relations which are structured around discourses of power which imply racial inferiority as described by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986 [1952]).

The risk here is that existing in the aid/peacelands, which has already normalised the devaluing of local knowledge and power inequality this uncritical evolution new practices are developed. One such potentially problematic practice has already occurred in Iraq. Quoting research from Orville Schell, Murrell describes a situation in Iraq where much of the basic reporting is now done by Iraqis, while writing and analysis is done by westerners and goes on to say "*if this were to become the enduring model for correspondence, than the traditional foreign correspondent would morph into a 'foreign affairs correspondent' who would proffer analysis while the practical eyewitness reporting would be done by cheaper means*" (2015, p. 154). Murrell calls this the "*final step in the outsourcing… of international news gathering*" (2015, p. 154) however, is this not also the outsourcing of danger? I do not wish to downplay the danger but this can be debated both ways and is probably contingent on specific times and places – indeed in the DRC several of my interviewees discussed how foreigners were needed to report what locals can't and one mentioned how he would act as a fixer but not as a journalist, following the death of one of his journalist friends (Interview J). In any case, the type of ethics

being practiced must be questioned. At the very least it is not a practice designed to build a sense of solidarity; how will this privileging of the western life impact the analyses offered by the 'foreign affairs correspondent'? It is worth noting again there is a similar trend in international development with 80% of "*all victims of violence, fatal or not, among the staff of western aid organisations in war zones residents of the country in question*" yet "*[t]here is barely any discussion of the ethics of this in the humanitarian world*" (Polman 2010, p. 153).

In relying on the social and material infrastructure supplied by aid/peace land have we run the risk of uncritically mirroring the general modes of being and social relations between internationals and locals in conflict zones?

Conclusion

Westminster Lobby and Washington's Capitol Hill are recognised as places of power and their dynamics are analysed and discussed in both academia and popular culture. Those discussions and representations include concerns that a shared social world might lead to a shared social view of the world at large "*that journalists might broaden their minds if they were not living cheek by jowl with the politicians*" (Grattan in Simons 1999, pp. 79-80). We need to include this same consideration for journalists and aid workers and in discussing the hotels, cafes, clubs and restaurants of Goma as part of aid/peaceland these too can be recognised as scenes of power where limited frameworks of interpretation can take hold.

Correspondents step into the internationalised spaces of aid/peacelands to protect against the physical and emotional risks of conflict zones but, once inside the bunkers and international hotels, different risks emerge: there is the risk of missing important local structures; there is the risk of over-emphasising the international perspective with its propensity for intervention; there is the risk losing the empathic effect of the average and everyday from our descriptions; there is the risk that we strengthen our acceptance of the technical/thematic doxa in foreign correspondence, a doxa which values technical crisis reporting not understanding local complexity; there is the risk of accepting the colonial echoes apparent in a hidden, undervalued, compradore class of fixers and stringers; and in the relegation of fixers and local stringers to a compradore class there is the risk they will continue to produce what is expected of them in terms of fixed, well-worn frames for a western audience.

None of these risks have an easy fix. A safety alternative to the bunkered life of aid/peaceland sometimes discussed in international development is community based acceptance strategies, in other words, embedding with locals rather than segregation, however, this has remained mainly at the level of debate (Duffield 2012, pp. 485-486). A version of this which foreign correspondents could try is embedding themselves with local journalists rather than in aid/peacelands – this is something that should be considered and taking ourselves out of expat comfort zones would also have the advantage of making reporting cheaper while perhaps providing learning opportunities for both the travelling reporter and the local. At the very least, by learning from other disciplines, there is one thing we can and must do right now, we must begin discussing the non-physical risks inherent in reporting from conflict zones thanks to our embedding in aid/peacelands. This paper aimed to stimulate that discussion.

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Notes

1. Creative names for aid/peacelanders are tied to their cars *"In Afghanistan… they are known as the 'Toyota Taliban'. In Sudan they're called the 'white ooze'"*(Polman 2010, p. 206).

2. For example in 2009, the issue was discussed, at least to some extent, in a program broadcast on Australia's ABC as part of their flagship foreign news series *Foreign Correspondent* (*The Congo Connection* 2009).

3. It is perhaps worth noting here that all wars are complex and one wonders how much this 'answer' as to why the DRC was a forgotten conflict was fueled by an echo-chamber effect. Boyd-Barrett (2004) suggests that the main issue was not complexity but rather the involvement of proxy-forces as they mess with the typical genre of war reporting (p. 27).

4. A recent content analysis (Bunce 2016) shows that strikes have indeed fallen out of favour as a frame in Anglo-American (and Australian) reporting of Africa. Conversely there has been a dramatic increase in conflict frame reporting, much of it driven by coverage of the DRC. Yet the state of the DRC's democracy and the state of its conflict are intimately linked.

Interviews used in this paper

Interview C, fixer and stringer, 05/09/2014, Goma, DRC

Interview D, journalist, stringer and fixer, 24/08/2014, Goma, DRC

Interview E, INGO worker, 26/08/2014, Goma, DRC

Interview F, UN worker, 29/08/2014, Goma, DRC

Interview H, fixer and stringer, 06/07/2014, Goma, DRC

Interview I, fixer and stringer, 07/07/2014, Goma, DRC

Interview J, fixer, 07/07/2014, Goma, DRC

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Abstract | Resumé | Résumo

Conflict zones and non-physical risks to journalism practice
Notes from Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo

Zones de conflit et risques non physiques pour la pratique du journalisme
Notes de Goma, République Démocratique du Congo

Zonas de conflito e riscos não-físicos à prática do jornalismo
Notas sobre Goma, República Democrática do Congo

En. Conflict zones around the world are accompanied by spaces designed to service the internationals whose careers intersect with conflict – professionals such as foreign correspondents. These increasingly entrenched and segregated internationalised zones – alternatively described as aidlands (Mosse 2011a) or peacelands (Autesserre 2014) have been the subject of recent critique in postcolonial, development and international relations literature for fostering limited and flawed types of knowledges of the countries and conflicts in which they exist. This paper argues the urgent need to take account of these critiques given that foreign correspondents use of these same aid/peace lands while on reporting assignments constitutes 'embedding' in the humanitarian and international development field. A series of potential risks arising from this embedding are detailed with risks defined here as non-physical challenges to quality, ethical, international reportage. The research is practice-led drawing on auto-ethnography and interviews conducted in Goma, DRC as well as inter-disciplinary literature. Bourdieu's concepts of doxa and, from social geography, the idea of social practices as regulated by the way we conceive of space and time, will be used to highlight the importance of engaging with these risks right now given the current state of flux in international reporting. This flux makes the profession vulnerable to the uncritical adoption of practices designed for, and set by, the powerful humanitarian and development fields.

Keywords: Foreign correspondents, embedding, humanitarianism, Bourdieu, fixers

Fr. Les zones de conflit à travers le monde sont accompagnées d'espaces dédiés aux étrangers, les professionnels tels que les correspondants à l'étranger, dont les carrières croisent les conflits. Ces zones internationalisées, de plus en plus retranchées et séparées, aussi désignées comme des « aidlands » (Mosse 2011) ou « peacelands » (Autesserre 2014), ont récemment fait l'objet de critiques dans la littérature sur les études postcoloniales, le développement et les relations internationales, suspectées d'encourager une connaissance limitée et erronée des pays et des conflits dans lesquelles ils se trouvent. Cet article défend l'idée d'une prise en compte urgente de ces critiques étant donné que l'utilisation faite par les correspondants à l'étranger de ces zones de aid/peacelands lors de leurs missions de reportage constitue une imbrication dans le domaine de l'action humanitaires et du développement international. Les risques émergeants potentiels dus à cette imbrication sont détaillés ici comme des difficultés non matérielles qui remettent en cause la qualité et l'éthique du reportage international. Cette recherche est fondée sur la pratique faisant appel à l'auto-ethnographie et des entretiens conduits à Goma, la RDC ainsi qu'à une littérature interdisciplinaire. Le concept de la doxa de Bourdieu et, issue de la géographie sociale, l'idée que les pratiques sociales seraient conditionnées par notre manière de concevoir l'espace et le temps, seront employés afin de mettre en lumière l'importance de prendre en considération sans délai ces risques compte tenu du flux actuel de correspondance internationale. Ce flux expose la profession à l'adoption non critiquée de pratiques élaborées et mises en place par des puissants domaines de l'humanitaire et du développement.

Mots-clés: correspondants à l'étranger, imbrication, humanitarisme, Bourdieu, accompagnateurs

Pt. As zonas de conflito em todo o mundo veem acompanhadas de espaços concebidos para apoiar estrangeiros, cujas carreiras se entrecruzam com o próprio conflito – isso inclui profissionais como os correspondentes estrangeiros. Essas zonas internacionalizadas, cada vez mais arraigadas e segregadas, podem ser descritas como *«aidlands»* (terras de ajuda) (Mosse 2011) ou *«peacelands»* (terras de paz) (Autesserre 2014). Elas têm sido o objeto de recentes críticas da literatura pós-colonial e da literatura sobre desenvolvimento das relações internacionais por fomentarem conhecimentos limitados e equivocados sobre os países e os conflitos nos quais elas atuam. Este artigo discute a necessidade urgente de se levar em consideração essas críticas, já que o uso que os correspondentes estrangeiros fazem dessas terras de ajuda/paz em missões de reportagem, constituem uma «imbricação» no campo da ação humanitária e do desenvolvimento internacional. Uma série de riscos potenciais decorrentes desta imbricação são detalhados neste artigo. Eles são definidos aqui como dificuldades não-materiais que acabam por questionar a qualidade e a ética da reportagem internacional. A pesquisa é conduzida por me iode auto-etnografia e entrevistas conduzidas em Goma, RDC. Também recorrer à literatura transdisciplinar. O conceito de doxa, de Bourdieu, e a ideia de que as práticas sociais seriam condicionadas por nossa maneira de conceber o espaço e o tempo – originária da geografia social – serão empregados para destacar a importância de se levar em consideração os riscos envolvidos no fluxo atual das atividades dos correspondentes internacionais. Tal fluxo torna a profissão vulnerável à adoção acrítica de práticas concebidas e estabelecidas pelos poderosos campos humanitários e de desenvolvimento.

Palavras-chave: correspondentes estrangeiros, imbricação, atores humanitários, Bourdieu, *fixers*