# "Parachute Journalism" in Haiti: Media Sourcing in the 2003-2004 Political Crisis

## Isabel Macdonald York University

Abstract: The Canadian media's reliance on parachute and wire agency journalists during the lead-up to the 2004 coup d'état in Haiti exemplified the trends associated with recent cuts to foreign news. A content analysis of the Globe and Mail, plus interviews with journalists, reveal that the deadline pressures and hotel journalism associated with these trends contributed, in the absence of coherent official messages on the Haiti crisis, to journalists' reliance on sources from a U.S. and Canadian government—supported political movement spearheaded by Haiti's business and media elite that sought to overthrow the democratically elected Haitian government.

Keywords: Content analysis; News production studies; Newspapers; Interviews; Media sources; Haiti

Résumé: Dans les jours menant au coup d'état de 2004 en Haïti, la dépendance des médias canadiens envers des journalistes d'agence de presse ou des journalistes parachutés provisoirement dans la région illustre bien les tendances associées aux coupures récentes infligées sur la couverture de l'actualité internationale. Une analyse de contenu du Globe and Mail ainsi que des entrevues avec des journalistes révèlent que ces coupures ont entraîné une sorte de journalisme d'hôtel et un besoin de rencontrer de très brèves échéances. Ces circonstances ont contribué, en l'absence de messages officiels cohérents sur la crise haïtienne, à une dépendance envers des sources provenant d'un mouvement politique cherchant à renverser le gouvernement élu démocratiquement du pays. Ce mouvement était mené par l'élite commerciale et médiatique haïtienne et appuyé par les gouvernements américain et canadien.

*Mots clés* : analyse de contenu; études sur la production des nouvelles; journaux; entrevues; sources médiatiques; Haïti.

The cuts to overseas news bureaus over the past two decades have exacerbated the pressures that are typically thought to make journalists more dependent on official sources. Increasingly, media organizations are relying on deadline-

Isabel Macdonald conducted the research for this article for her MA thesis in the Joint Programme in Communication and Culture at York University, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON M3J 1P3. Email: isamacdonald@yahoo.com.

pressed news wire agencies and "parachute journalists," or journalists flown into a foreign country on a temporary assignment to cover breaking news. Canadian English-language media coverage of the political crisis in Haiti in 2003-04 exemplified this trend. Yet, while this trend is assumed to privilege official sources, during this crisis, there was no single unified official line for journalists to fall back on. In this context, who did the journalists covering the crisis for the Canadian media rely upon, and why? This question is addressed by combining a content analysis of the *Globe and Mail* with interviews with Canadian journalists and international wire service journalists who were working in Haiti during the crisis. This article documents a prevalence of sources from the movement seeking to topple Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in the *Globe and Mail*'s coverage of Haiti in 2003-04. Wire service and parachute journalists' deadline pressure, the spatial organization of news gathering, and journalists' networks of contacts all contributed in this instance to privileging Aristide's opponents as sources in the Canadian media.

### From overseas bureaus to parachute journalists: The transformation of foreign news production

In recent years, there have been dramatic changes in the way international news is produced. In the context of the increasing global concentration of corporate ownership of media, and the rise of the Internet, there has been a general decline in the print stories and broadcast time devoted to foreign news, except during crises (Hamilton & Jenner, 2004; Hannerz, 2004). This pattern has been particularly well documented in the Canadian media landscape since the mid-1980s (Soderlund, Lee, & Gecelovsky, 2002).

One of the cost-saving alternatives increasingly used by large media organizations when they do cover a foreign story is the use of parachute foreign correspondents dispatched temporarily to cover a major story (Hamilton & Jenner, 2004). Media organizations, including Canadian newspapers, are also relying more exclusively on the small number of giant corporations that dominate the international news wire market for more of their international stories (Boyd-Barrett, 2000; Hannerz, 2004; Soderlund, Lee, & Gecelovsky, 2002). The advent of global network TV news and the proliferation of news websites has also had a huge impact on international news coverage, as journalists face increasing pressure to keep up with CNN and with Internet news sources (Hess, 1996).

The trend toward the use of parachute journalists, the increasing prevalence of wire service agency reports, and the "CNN effect" can all have the effect of contributing to journalists' reliance on official sources. For instance, some wire-service journalists have reported that pressures for increased wire service output have meant that they have to spend more time in their offices and rely more on official sources, particularly those who are able to physically deliver timely information to journalists and those who are easily accessible by telephone (Pedelty, 1995). The increasing reliance on parachuters is also seen as a factor that leads to greater reliance on officials. It has been argued that "fewer correspondents and fewer foreign bureaus means more reliance on Washington bureaus means more reliance on government and greater opportunity for government to influence both the news agenda and its content" (Montalbano, 1994). Moreover, anthropologist

Mark Pedelty, who studied the international press corps in El Salvador, observed that parachuters, who move from country to country, often not speaking the local language, often try to cure their resulting "sense of vertigo" with "quick-source therapy, visiting bureaucratic centers of power that are all too willing to condense complex situations into easily digestible bites" (Pedelty, 1995, p. 111).

Meanwhile, there is increased pressure today for journalists to stay on what Bernard Cohen dubbed "the continuing big story," a single story defined as the most important on one day, which becomes the frame of reference for stories the following day (1963, p. 62). In the context of home editors' increasing access to and reliance on news from wire agencies and 24-hour cable news, journalists are under renewed pressure to eschew independent first-hand reporting in favour of staying on the main story other media are covering, which they know their editors will also be following closely (Hannerz, 2004). Meanwhile, local media are often extremely important sources for today's foreign correspondents (Hannerz, 2004). Pedelty (1995) observes that the "local press is a primary source of information for the foreign press corps" (p. 117). Local journalists are also important sources for some foreign correspondents (Hannerz, 2004). For parachuters, the local journalists and resource people known as "fixers" play an indispensable role supplying background information, translating, interpreting, providing relevant contacts, and assisting with logistical problems faced by the newly arrived foreign correspondent. Hannerz describes fixers as "the kind of multipurpose local resource person who so often is essential to the work, and at times even survival, of a correspondent in a new setting" (Hannerz, 2004, p. 47).

It has long been acknowledged that the spatial organization of news gathering has a huge impact on journalists' news judgment and source selection (Tuchman, 1978). As Gaye Tuchman observed, "Occurrences are more likely to be defined as news when reporters witness them or can learn of them with little effort" (1978, p. 22). Mark Pedelty's study suggests that such observations are particularly relevant in journalists' sourcing practices in developing countries, where they are often working primarily in hotels (Pedelty, 1995). Journalists' sourcing is also influenced by the credibility they attribute to personal sources, which has particularly significant ramifications in contexts in which they are foreigners (Gans, 1980; Pedelty, 1995).

This research relies on the methods of both content analysis and long-form interviews. The articles examined in the content analysis—which totalled 95, including news particles written by staff reporters, news wire reports, op eds, and editorials—were located through a search of all *Globe and Mail* articles about the political situation in Haiti published between January 1, 2003, and March 17, 2004, in the Factiva database<sup>1</sup>. This study enumerated all of the sources cited either directly or indirectly in these articles. The *Globe and Mail* was selected for the content analysis because it is the national newspaper considered the prime agenda-setting newspaper for other Canadian media. The *Globe and Mail* has been used in past studies of Canadian foreign policy issues as a way of gauging broader patterns in the Canadian media, although the findings of this particular study do not necessarily apply to the French-language press (Klaehn, 2002).

This study relied on open-ended interviews, conducted in person. Where pos-

sible, these interviews were conducted in a context that allowed for observation of relevant journalistic practices—during a period of intense international news coverage of Haiti, at the time of the February 7, 2006, presidential elections. The journalists selected for the interviews were the Canadian journalists and international wire service agency journalists whose work had appeared in the Englishlanguage Canadian media around the time of the coup, including journalists from the CBC, the Globe and Mail, the Montréal Gazette, the Associated Press (AP) and Reuters, as well as local journalists and "fixers" who were employed by these journalists' media organizations. Spokespeople from some of the most prominent organizations of the anti-Aristide movement, which received extensive coverage in the Canadian media in the lead-up to the coup, were also interviewed, including a spokesperson from the Convergence Democratique coalition (the coalition of opposition parties that had been defeated in the 2000 election), several leaders of the anti-Aristide coalition known as the Group of 184, and spokespeople from the mercenary force that identified itself (and was identified in the international media) as a "rebellion," which launched a campaign of armed destabilization in early 2004. A total of 19 journalists and fixers were contacted by telephone or in person at press conferences or in the provisional electoral council's media centre in Port-au-Prince,<sup>2</sup> and spokespeople from the anti-Aristide groups were contacted by telephone. In total, 19 interviews with journalists, fixers, and sources are cited in this study (see Appendix for a list of interviewees, as well as their institutional affiliations).<sup>3</sup>

### Democracy undone: The destabilization and ouster of Aristide's government

In 2000, Haiti's first democratically elected president, Jean Bertrand Aristide, was re-elected in Haiti's presidential elections, at the helm of his Fanmi Lavalas (FL) political party. The U.S. and Canadian governments immediately cut aid to the elected Haitian government, and the U.S. government blocked \$500 million of Inter-American Development Bank loans that had previously been promised to Haiti. The official rationale for this aid embargo drew on the opposition candidates' criticisms of the electoral process by which the opposition candidates had been defeated in legislative elections in May 2000. Aristide's political party won these elections with an uncontested majority in a process the Organization of American States described as "a great success for the Haitian population, which turned out in large and orderly numbers," amidst "very few incidents of fraud or violence" (Organization of American States Electoral Observation Mission in Haiti, 2000). The OAS subsequently characterized the process as flawed due to a contested vote counting process used for eight Senate seats (Delahunt, cited in United States, House of Representatives, 2004). Following their legislative defeat, the opposition politicians banded together into a new coalition, the Convergence Democratique (CD), and declared that the vote had been fraudulent (Hallward, 2004).

As a result of the embargo, the Haitian national budget—slated to provide for the needs of Haiti's population of 8 million people—was reduced during this period to a mere U.S.\$300 million per year (COHA, 2004). Meanwhile, the U.S. and Canadian governments redirected aid from the elected Haitian government to

NGOs and elite-based "civil society" groups who were working to oust Aristide (USAID, cited in United States, House of Representatives, 2004; CIDA, 2004). One particular controversy of the foreign-funded Haitian "civil society" initiatives were the training workshops for the Haitian opposition parties that had been spearheaded, since the 1990s, by the International Republican Institute (IRI), which, in the view of the U.S. ambassador to Haiti, was explicitly carrying out a campaign "[that] risked the U.S. government being accused of attempting to destabilize the [Aristide] government" (B. D. Curran, cited in Bogdanich & Nordberg, 2006, p. A1).

From late 2003, in Haiti's capital city, Port-au-Prince, there were street demonstrations led by the "Group of 184," a media savvy organization that included a host of IRI trainees and a number of long-time recipients of U.S. and Canadian government funding for "civil society," as well as the CD (Hallward, 2004; Pina, 2003). As the CD's spokesperson stated, this movement sought "to convince the international community that there was an enormous movement against Aristide" (Evans Paul, interview, 2006). However, as the AP observed, until late 2003, most of the Group of 184's demonstrations simply fizzled out, and none of their self-proclaimed "civil society" leaders showed any signs of popularity (Dodds, 2004).

The largest Haitian commercial media owners' association, Association nationale des médias haitiens (ANMH), was formally a member of the Group of 184. The Group of 184 and their affiliated anti-Aristide groups were able to obtain special advertising rates, or complete fee waivers, from the ANMH media (Lucien Joseph, interview, 2005; Michel Soukar, interview, 2005). According to one Group of 184 steering committee member, who was also an owner and director of one of Haiti's largest media companies, the ANMH acted as a space of collective "decision making, enabling the different commercial media outlets to forge agreements" and enabling a "very strong impact on public opinion" (Leopold Berlanger, interview, 2005). Anne Marie Issa, a representative of the Group of 184 communications committee, stated that "it was us [in the communications committee] who made sure that the news rooms were there to relay the information well" about the Group of 184's mobilization activities (Anne Marie Issa, interview, 2005). This task was made easy for the Group of 184 because the ANMH, of which Issa was the vice president, "made it our job to cover all the demonstrations." Issa stated that the ANMH had to ensure that their journalists were at all the demonstrations and covered them "correctly" because the movement against Aristide was a "noble cause" and "it was our own way as the media to combat the dictatorship."

In this spirit of supporting the "noble cause," many of the 184-affiliated media organizations had a policy of refraining from identifying the anti-Aristide demonstrators' numbers (particularly if they were not impressive). As one ANMH media owner explained, "We always support the pro-democracy demonstrations," and "Sometimes we advance fantastical numbers because we don't want the public to draw the wrong conclusion" (Sony Bastien, interview, 2005).

In February 2004, the Group of 184's campaign for Aristide's resignation escalated with an invasion by a band of ex-officers from Haiti's disbanded mili-

tary (Chomsky, Farmer, & Goodman, 2004). The commander of this armed group later revealed that he was recruited and financed by members of Haiti's business and media sectors, and also depended heavily on the business sector for logistical support (Guy Philippe, interview, 2005). The spokesperson for this mercenary group explained that the goal of their operations was psychological warfare; they "wanted to instigate a great disaster" that would reflect badly on Aristide's government (Winter Etienne, interview, 2006; anonymous international wire service journalist, interview, 2006). On February 5, 2004, this mercenary force clashed with armed government forces in the town of St. Marc, where journalists present observed three casualties (anonymous international wire service journalist, interview, 2006; Neatby, 2006). The National Coalition for Haitian Rights (NCHR)— Haiti claimed that the clash had in fact been a massacre, intellectually authored by Aristide's prime minister, Yvon Neptune (Pierre Esperance, interview, 2006), however, they never produced evidence to support the claim, and after an investigation, the UN confirmed that it had merely been a clash between two armed groups (Neatby, 2006; Skerrett, 2005).

By mid-February, the anti-Aristide mercenaries admitted they were running low on ammunition and had lost a number of their members (Philippe, interview, 2005). However, seeing their operation as primarily "psychological warfare," they continued to represent themselves as a strong force, and even claimed that they would attack Haiti's capital by the month's end (Etienne, interview, 2006). Commander Guy Philippe stated:

When we took [the city] Cap [Haitien], I said, "I thought we were going to be fighting for several days but in less than 30 minutes we took the city!" This was false; we had lost three men. But I wasn't going to say to the press that we had lost three men! Otherwise, Aristide's troops would have said, "Ah!" That we are not as good as they say. So it is for this that I said to the press that it was too easy, that it was quite easy to take the city, and ah, that we are waiting for Aristide to send reinforcements so that we can win all over again! But it wasn't true! We were not strong, we had no more ammunition, but we wanted to make Aristide afraid! (interview, 2005)

Similarly, while "the rebels" had been threatening to attack the capital at the end of February, Philippe admitted that "I do not know if, on the 29th, we would have had the capacity to attack Port-au-Prince because we did not have enough ammunition."

The mercenaries' efforts were strongly supported by Haitian commercial media owners, who omitted from their coverage information about "the rebellion" that might be counterproductive from the standpoint of the communications goals of the movement against Aristide. As one radio station owner stated, "The press was not interested in reporting what happened because there was a strong mobilization against Aristide" (Jean Robert Lalanne, interview, 2005). Similarly, an ANMH-affiliated radio owner stated that "in the independent press, we had no interest in saying what quantity of people were armed . . . it was part of a strategy of psychological warfare. . . . We had an interest in saying nothing because we wanted Aristide to leave" (Bastien, interview, 2005).

The spokesperson for the CD sought to capitalize on this radio rumour. He recalled that the rumour that Guy Philippe was going to enter Port-au-Prince "contributed to destabilizing the power. The impact of the information created a wave of panic. Everybody repeated the same thing—that they were going to enter. Journalists used politicians to say what they themselves couldn't say" (Paul, interview, 2006).

Against the backdrop of this campaign of psychological warfare, Aristide came under pressure from the U.S. government to leave Haiti to prevent "a bloodbath." Aristide's private American security firm, the Steele Foundation, stated that it would no longer provide for the president's security. In the pre-dawn hours of February 29, five U.S. government agents arrived at Aristide's residence, to fly the Haitian president out of Haiti into a forced exile in the Central African Republic (Slevin & Wilson, 2004). A new interim government of Haiti, led by Gerard Latortue, was immediately recognized by the United States and Canada (Engler & Fenton, 2005).

### Official sources, mixed messages

It has been observed (see Cohen, 1963; Hess, 1996; Weaver & Willnat, 2003) that foreign correspondents' relations with their home governments, and with the governments of the country of their assignments, play an important role in their work. The destabilization of the Haitian government in 2003-04 made the context in which journalists in Haiti worked quite unique. Notably, there was no clear official consensus communicated to journalists on the Canadian policy course in Haiti. Moreover, in the context of the economic aid embargo, there was a distinctive lack of the powerful official bureaucratic institutions that play such an important role as sources in wealthier countries in furnishing information to foreign journalists. Moreover, the Aristide government's communications appeared to be actively undermined by the Canadian and French embassies.

The prevalence of government authorities in news coverage of foreign policy crises has been noted to vary depending on the degree of official consensus that exists about a particular foreign policy issue (Hallin, 1986). During the lead-up to the 2004 Haiti coup, the Canadian government was not putting forth a coherent official line on foreign policy in Haiti. Contradictions and changes in the "official" positions of the U.S., Canadian, and French governments meant that there was no coherent official position emanating from the officials that journalists would normally be expected to rely upon. The Montréal *Gazette*'s Sue Montgomery reported that some officials themselves appeared to be confused at the rapid turnaround in Canadian policy tactics in Haiti at the time of the coup (Montgomery, interview, 2006).

The limited resources that the Haitian government had at its disposal for communicating with international journalists is important in understanding the sourcing practices of Canadian and wire service journalists. One country where host country officials prevail as the most frequently cited type of source is, arguably not coincidentally, also the wealthiest country in the world—the United States, which operates government press offices that play an important role for newly arrived foreign journalists in the United States (Hess, 1996; Weaver & Willnat, 2003).

Poorer countries' governments have been observed to be less equipped to deal with the international press (Hannerz, 2004; Hess, 1996). In the case of Haiti under the embargo, the Aristide government held press conferences, and there was an official spokesperson and a designated foreign press liaison. Journalists reported that these contact people were reasonably accessible by telephone. However, as the *Globe and Mail*'s Paul Knox observed, "Obviously, in the poorest country of the Americas, the government is going to have fewer resources at its disposal to mount a PR exercise or offensive than if it feels itself besieged . . . obviously it's not the White House" (Knox, interview, 2006). Reuters' correspondent in Haiti in 2004 remarked that "as foreign journalists, it was very difficult to do in-depth journalism, partly because of a totally opaque government" (Amy Bracken, interview, 2006). Both under Aristide's government and the "interim" government that replaced it, this wire service journalist said she found police spokespeople to be reluctant sources of information.

What efforts the Haitian government was able to afford, in the midst of the aid embargo, in terms of communicating with the foreign press were countered by the actions of diplomats at the Canadian and French embassies. Montréal *Gazette* journalist Montgomery recalled being given anti-Aristide disinformation when she called the Canadian embassy immediately after she had been held up by armed men while driving through Port-au-Prince days before the coup. Canada's ambassador to Haiti, Kenneth Cook, told her, "We've got word that Aristide has given the order to the *chimeres*<sup>4</sup> to do this kind of thing to international journalists because he's not getting any support" (Montgomery, interview, 2006). According to Montgomery, Cook had urged her to tell the other international journalists who were staying at the same hotel: "I think you should let all your colleagues at the Montana know that it's not safe for them." Montgomery estimates there were approximately 150 international journalists staying at the same hotel at the time.

Similar anti-Aristide communications were undertaken by the French embassy's political analyst, Eric Paul Bosque, who had worked from 1989 until 2000 as the press secretary for the office of the French president. Bosque saw Aristide as "a communications problem" and began a campaign of "sensitizing the media" in late 2002 (Bosque, interview, 2006). He says he sought to publicize the anti-Aristide student demonstrations among international journalists, a strategy that implicitly undermined the legitimacy of the Aristide government. Bosque noted that the FL government claimed it did not use violence, but "days before [the journalists] would have seen the students" being beaten by police at a demonstration.

#### Journalism under pressure

The interviews with journalists working for the English-language Canadian media and international wire services highlighted the severe constraints under which parachute and wire service journalists operate. Most of the journalists working for Canadian media and international wire services did not speak Haiti's dominant language, Creole. One journalist had received only two days of notice from her employer, CanWest Global, about her assignment to cover the crisis in Haiti (Montgomery, interview, 2006). Predictably, the lack of notice about her

assignment contributed to her feeling disoriented upon her arrival. Such feelings of disorientation, Pedelty observes, typically make journalists easier to manipulate by their home embassy. While in retrospect, Montgomery realized the absurdity of Ambassador Cook's disinformation about how Aristide was urging his supporters to use violence against the international press, at the time, she was still in shock after the traumatic car-jacking, and exhausted from several nights of not sleeping. She immediately began spreading the word to other journalists in the hotel that Aristide's supporters were attacking international journalists.

The interviews suggested that the pressures facing wire service reporters in the contemporary news industry are particularly extreme. As one senior journalist at an international news agency explained, there are "expectations from . . . headquarters, where you can wake up and turn on TV and see what the headlines are" (anonymous international wire service agency deputy bureau chief, interview, 2006). He added that the agency headquarters translates those expectations into requirements for the agency's Haiti office, where they are much more difficult to fulfill. Specifically, the agency's head office requires that every morning by 6:30 a.m. the Haiti office produce what are known as "schedlines," or "stories that would be of interest to the world."

### The "official types" who weren't: Anti-Aristide-movement sources in the Globe and Mail

In the context of these increased pressures, who did journalists rely upon as their sources in Haiti? Table 1 represents the results of a content analysis of the sources cited in the *Globe and Mail* over a period of 14 and a half months in the lead-up to the *coup d'état* and in its immediate aftermath. Between January 1, 2003, and March 17, 2004, Haitian non-official sources from the movement against Aristide were the single most frequently cited sources in all of the *Globe and Mail* about Haiti (a total of 95) located through the Factiva search engine and database; these sources were even slightly more frequently cited than were Canadian officials. Although journalism professionalism can and often does dictate that statements

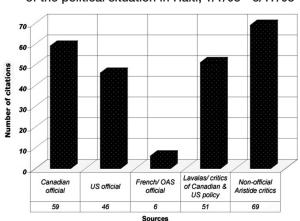


Table 1: Most frequently cited sources in *Globe and Mail* coverage of the political situation in Haiti, 1/1/03 - 3/17/03

by officials are legitimately newsworthy, regardless of whether or not they are true, a similar pattern emerged in the Canadian media's coverage of the movement against Aristide.

Claims by the anti-Aristide movement that the 2000 elections were fraudulent were treated to extensive coverage in the *Globe and Mail*. The charges of fraud were so far removed from the reality observed by the OAS, the main body of international observers at the elections, that a U.S. congressperson who had served on the OAS observer team complained before public hearings that such remarks were misleading to the American public (Delahunt, cited in United States, House of Representatives, 2004).

Despite the baselessness of the charges of electoral fraud, the Aristide government's critics were cited five times in the *Globe and Mail* between January 1, 2003, and March 17, 2004, claiming that the 2000 elections were rigged or marred by fraud. The charges of electoral fraud were also represented as facts in the newspaper on occasion; one op ed published in the *Globe and Mail* made reference to "Mr. Aristide's election rigging" (Malone, 2004) and a news article stated that the elections had been "marred by vote-counting fraud" (Jimenez, 2004).

The claims of the anti-Aristide Group of 184 to represent the whole Haitian population were treated with a great deal of legitimacy, despite a lack of evidence that this was the case. The day after the *coup d'état*, the *Globe and Mail* proclaimed that "when Mr. Aristide finally fled . . . many Haitians . . . said good riddance" ("Time to Help Haiti," 2004). One of the newspaper's two international columnists further speculated that Aristide would find it hard to even maintain the minimal level of domestic political influence from exile enjoyed by other discredited leaders, because he "may lack . . . the support of a large part of the country's population" (Saunders, 2004).

Similarly, protests staged by anti-Aristide activists such as the Group of 184 were treated with a great deal of legitimacy through extensive coverage. Anti-Aristide protests staged by the opposition to Aristide were mentioned 30 times between January 1, 2003, and March 18, 2004, in the newspaper's coverage of the crisis in Haiti, and these protests were described as "popular" (Knox, 2004c). In contrast, pro-Aristide demonstrations were mentioned only nine times. Student leaders from the anti-Aristide movement stated in interviews that the size of their demonstrations had been quite limited until late 2003, and this observation was corroborated by the AP (Joseph, interview, 2005; Dodds, 2004). However, the *Globe and Mail* claimed that Aristide "had spent most of" his five-year term "besieged by protest" (Knox, 2004a).

Even some of the claims of commander Philippe, a former Haitian police chief accused of masterminding several deadly attacks against Haitian law enforcement institutions since 2001 (Goodman & Scahill, 2004), were treated at face value. The mercenaries' claim that they had proclaimed their independence from the rest of Haiti and had chosen a new president for Haiti were repeated in two articles. Philippe's claim about how he was planning to attack the Haitian capital city on February 29, which he admitted was a bluff, was repeated uncritically in three articles. The latter claim was repeated as fact in one article, which stated that the "rebel forces were closing in on the capital" (Saunders, 2004). The

bands of former soldiers financed by opposition politicians and wealthy Haitian businessmen, which were acknowledged even by one of the unsuccessful presidential candidates who financed them to be a "simulated armed movement" (Paul, interview, 2006), were represented as a popular and powerful force in some of the coverage. The *Globe and Mail* published an AP report that compared "the rebellion" in Gonaives with the 1986 uprising that saw the overthrow of the Duvalier dictatorship, implying similarities between Philippe's band of ex-soldiers financed by consistently unpopular presidential contenders and a powerful popular movement that overthrew a fiercely repressive U.S.-backed dictatorship (James, 2004).

Similarly, NCHR—Haiti's groundless claim of a massacre was cited uncritically in the *Globe and Mail* (Jimenez, 2005). Although this claim was used by the interim government to illegally imprison Haiti's prime minister, Yvon Neptune, for over two years with no charges, the organization has never produced any evidence that the massacre really happened (when asked for evidence, the organization claimed that the bodies must have been "eaten by dogs"), and the allegation has drawn such controversy that the New York-based parent organization of NCHR—Haiti has publicly distanced itself from the Haiti branch (Skerrett, 2005). In the judgment of the UN, which investigated the incidents that occurred that day in La Syrie, St. Marc, what transpired was a confrontation between "the rebels" seeking to overthrow the Aristide government and armed Aristide supporters (Neatby, 2006).

This treatment of sources from the movement against Aristide fits with Tuchman's (1978) observation that in the absence of official sources, journalists rely on non-officials, and, through their practices, elevate them to the status of legitimate spokespeople. For instance, the Reuters Miami bureau chief referred to non-official sources from the movement against Aristide as "official types," implying that they possessed, at least in the minds of senior journalists, the kind of legitimacy that would normally be reserved for government officials. He explained that Reuters had relied on the U.S. embassy, the Group of 184, and Aristide's people as sources during the lead-up to the coup because "talking to the official types is very important" in wire service journalism (James Loney, interview, 2006). Given that, unlike the officials in Aristide's government and at the U.S. embassy, the Group of 184 had no official status, it is to say the least interesting that Reuters saw them as being akin to "official types."

The great deal of access enjoyed by Haitian non-official sources, and the fact that they were regarded by at least Reuters as "official types," requires some explanation. What kinds of professional ideology, practices, and routines guided Canadian and international wire service journalists in their decisions about source selection and about how to treat the claims of the movement against Aristide? The interviews with journalists sought to cast light on this question.

### The sources of parachute and news wire journalism

The *Globe and Mail* journalist Paul Knox, who had worked several times in Haiti, stated that many journalists find it very difficult to establish the facts in Haiti. He explained this was partly a result of the lesser role of print media in the Caribbean nation (Knox, interview, 2006). In the absence of daily newspapers in Haiti,

Knox, Montgomery, and the *Globe and Mail* reporter Marina Jimenez reported that they had relied on Haitian radio stations affiliated with the Group of 184's ANMH; CBC journalist Neil Macdonald, on the other hand, stated that he would not trust these radio stations. As Knox, who said he sometimes relied on Radio Metropole, put it, "Sometimes if something happens at 6:00 p.m. and you have a radio report, then you say it's a radio report and you go with it" (Knox, interview, 2006).

One of the major international wire service agencies also relied extensively on the 184-affiliated stations; their reporter "relied heavily on radio . . . Metropole, Apaid's radio station" (anonymous international wire service deputy bureau chief, interview, 2006). This news wire's deputy bureau chief explained that the extreme pressure of deadlines was an important factor in the news wire's reliance on radio. In order to meet the "schedlines," the ANMH radio was granted heightened credibility. He explained that it was "much more difficult to determine the story of the day" if you did not rely on radio:

We're faced every day with this deadline, of what is the story of the day? You turn on the radio . . . some propaganda . . . some lies. . . . We call it every day "feeding the beast." So every day it's, where's the story? Haiti's in the news. Something has to be happening. So there is this artificial drive.

This "artificial drive" created by the organizational deadline contributed to making journalists working in Haiti more reliant upon the Group of 184's radio stations—to the detriment of accurate reporting, in this senior journalist's view. He explained: "I became aware of it because something would be reported on radio and I'd run off to check it, and it would turn out to be a complete lie." In particular, he recalled the NCHR's story of the alleged massacre in St. Marc. The deputy bureau chief was in St. Marc "on the day of the massacre. We were there . . . it was a confrontation that went bad." However, it was definitely not a massacre, according to this senior wire service journalist, who claimed that there were only three bodies. "Suddenly it made me wonder if we could trust any of what we'd been reporting, because it was all [the Group of 184–affiliated radio stations] Radio Vision 2000 and Metropole. Taking something off the radio is absolutely nuts, if you're trying to report the truth."

Sourcing by Canadian journalists during the political crisis in Haiti appears to have been extremely reflective of the tendency for journalists—and particularly parachuters—to rely upon news wires. When I asked the *Globe and Mail* reporter Knox and the Montréal *Gazette* reporter Montgomery about the sources for some particular claims that reiterated the anti-Aristide sources' claims as facts, without attribution, they simply pointed back to past news wire articles (Knox, interview, 2006; Montgomery, interview, 2006). Montgomery reported that she relied on news articles that had been published about the political situation in Haiti to brief herself in the short period of time she had to do background research. She stated that she had used background material, particularly AP and other news wires, without checking facts; "This has been reported, by god. . . . You just assume that the journalists who have covered this before you" have the correct information. Knox stated that the source for a particular claim about anti-

Aristide demonstrators being attacked that appeared in an article he had written from Mexico "was undoubtedly wire services."

Canadian journalists' reliance on Group of 184–affiliated radio stations as sources, and their reliance on international news wires that depended heavily on the ANMH stations, could arguably have been a contributing factor in the frequency with which activists from the movement against Aristide were cited in the Canadian media. Some of the demonstration coverage relied upon the Group of 184's own media reporting, which, according to organizers, tended to vastly exaggerate the size of the demonstrations (AP, 2004; Knox, 2004b).

The self-perpetuating nature of big stories, which is largely a product of bottom-line pressures from news organizations, and which is particularly pronounced in the context of foreign news coverage in regions typically neglected in North American commercial press coverage, also played an important role in journalists' reporting in Haiti. Reuters stringer Bracken stated that after extensive international media coverage of an anti-Aristide demonstration at which there were violent clashes at the State University of Haiti on December 5, 2003, which the anti-Aristide protesters and the U.S. State Department blamed on pro-Aristide demonstrators, she felt compelled to attend every single anti-Aristide demonstration. "After that, I really need to be going to all of them. . . . There is the possibility of things getting crazy, so you have to be there" (Bracken, interview, 2006).

Knox meanwhile described similar pressures influencing his decision not to go into the countryside to observe the advance of "the rebels" for himself:

It would also have been good to be able to get out really deep into the countryside, up north, as they were moving through. But again. . . [inaudible] . . . what are you gonna do? Are you gonna cover the main story in Port-au-Prince, or are you gonna drop that work for two or three days, which may turn out not to be a story. . . . In the long haul . . . I felt that it was important to stay on top of the running story, and I wasn't getting any opposition to that from my editors. (Knox, interview, 2006)

Notably, such a venture could conceivably have played a role in challenging the anti-Aristide sources' public relations line about "the rebels" being a strong military force—damaging the movement's credibility. However, due to the pressures journalists faced to produce timely stories on topics that were already in the international headlines, the unfounded claims of the anti-Aristide movement went unchallenged.

Journalists' information gathering often centred in the hotel where international journalists were staying. Montgomery recounted:

You're in a hotel with at least 150 journalists from all over the world. . . . And, you know, you're in this feeding frenzy all day. Like, who? What are you doing? What story are you following? Where are you going? And you don't want to be the one to miss the story. (Montgomery, interview, 2006)

Both Montgomery and Knox said they found out about opposition demonstrations from word of mouth in the hotel. "A lot of it was word of mouth, like, all of a sudden, word would spread through the hotel that there was this demo going on," said Montgomery. Similarly, Knox stated that the hotel journalists' sharing of information about the anti-Aristide demonstrations was so routine that it was impossible for him to recall exactly how he had heard about any particular one.

There's hundreds of journalists there and you meet them all the time, and to remember which [demonstration] you heard about because you actually saw the press release or because somebody called you or some public relations person called you and which one you heard about because it got passed on through a chain of people at breakfast, I mean. (Knox, interview, 2006)

Journalists' own networks of contacts, which often included officials as well as personal acquaintances, appear to have also contributed to the credibility with which the anti-Aristide sources were viewed by Canadian journalists. One journalist explained that he had come to identify Radio Metropole as a reliable radio source based on his network of contacts: "You're going on reputation, from people who you know, who live in Haiti and cover the situation often" (Knox, interview, 2006). Similarly, Neil Macdonald of the CBC described how he had identified the director of the NCHR, Pierre Esperance, as the most credible human rights source in Haiti through asking various people that he knew: "I asked a number of people who they considered to be reasonable human rights organizations" (Macdonald, interview, 2006). He stated that as an experienced journalist "you start to realize who the serious people are." Montgomery also obtained contacts for local organizations in Haiti from her husband, who works in the field of international human rights and development (Montgomery, interview, 2006).

The interviews revealed that journalists' contacts with people working in the Canadian foreign policy establishment appear to have played a particularly important role in helping journalists identify appropriate "legitimate" sources. One Radio Canada International journalist the author encountered at the Montana Hotel explained that his high regard for the ANMH had come from the director of the CIDA-funded organization Réseau Liberté, which enjoyed a partnership with the ANMH, and of which he was a temporary employee (Guy Fillion, interview, 2006). This journalist's experience working for Réseau Liberté had led him to view the Group of 184's commercial media owners' association as being committed to the national Haitian interest and to journalistic neutrality. He described the people who "formed the ANMH" as "neutral . . . as much as it can be said in this country."

The Canadian ambassador was one of the people another public broadcast journalist, Macdonald, consulted to determine that Esperance was Haiti's most credible human rights source (Macdonald, interview, 2006). He added that he thought that the Canadian government was "one of the most authoritative sources on conflict resolution in the world". He said his most trusted sources for background information in Haiti were from Canadian diplomatic circles, and especially CIDA employees. "I know these people and I have a lot of respect for them," he told me, and "they are remarkably well informed." In fact, he said that one of his own cousins works in a high-ranking position at CIDA's Washington office and is in charge of several country desks. In explaining how an experienced

journalist would come to regard NCHR—Haiti's director, Esperance, as the most credible human rights source in Haiti even after the scandal that had forced the organization to change its name, it is essential to consider this journalist's high regard, and close association with, CIDA employees.

Similarly, Montgomery's source of contacts for local organizations in Haiti that she used as the basis for a story about women's rights in Haiti—her husband—worked for the Canadian government—funded organization Equitas. Through her husband's Canadian government—funded contacts, Montgomery was put in touch with human rights and women's groups, who she says contributed to giving her the impression that Aristide was unpopular. "Groups that you'd consider to be quite progressive... were saying it was a good thing, like they wanted Aristide out of there, they wanted him out of there, so you just started to think, well, then, I guess, you know, people want him out of there" (Montgomery, interview, 2006). When this journalist made contact with the women's organizations that her husband's organization was in touch with, she observed that "even there, when I talked to women's groups, they said Aristide was terrible for women, you know, so they wanted him out."

Journalists' practice of sharing information also seems to have contributed to the access that anti-Aristide sources gained to the media. This tendency seems to have played a large role in granting the non-official anti-Aristide sources greater legitimacy in Canadian foreign correspondents' eyes than they otherwise might have had. The journalists interviewed looked to what other journalists were saying in order to form their own evaluation of the situation in Haiti. The journalists that they turned to included international journalists with extensive experience in Haiti as well as fixers. Notably, many Haitian fixers also worked in the Group of 184's ANMH media.

Macdonald noted that his fixer was one of the people he consulted to determine that NCHR director Esperance was the most credible human rights source in Haiti. The Montréal Gazette reporter Montgomery and Reuters stringer Bracken both emphasized that fixers and Haiti-based journalists played an important role in forming their impression that Aristide was unpopular. Montgomery recalled that one of the factors that had led her to believe that there was a powerful opposition movement to Aristide was that fixers she spoke with "said Aristide was awful" (Montgomery, interview, 2006). Reuters' Bracken, meanwhile, arrived in Haiti after exposure to perspectives that cast Aristide in a positive light. "If you hate the Republican Party . . . it's easy to see things in terms of black and white," she said (Bracken, interview, 2006). Once she got to Haiti, however, and talked to foreign journalists there, she was told of the perception of Aristide on the ground, which was that Aristide was a "madman." She said that her perspective quickly shifted from her previous "black and white view." Similarly, Montgomery's adherence to the non-official anti-Aristide sources' representations of Aristide supporters as "gangs" or chimeres appeared to have stemmed in part from the account of a journalist (Montgomery, interview, 2006). She told me she acquired her understanding of the term *chimere*, which she used in her articles, from her photographer, who explained to her that the people with arms were "Aristide thugs."

The relative ease of speaking with Aristide's elite opponents—who spoke good French and were also often fluent in English—was mentioned by two of the Canadian journalists interviewed. A senior wire service journalist said about the Group of 184 that "it was easy to speak to them because they could speak English" (anonymous international news wire deputy bureau chief, interview, 2006). Likewise, the Globe and Mail's Knox stated that with some of the radio stations, such as Radio Metropole, and "the Group of 184, those guys speaking Creole, you can practically understand them—it's almost like French. He described a very different situation in the Port-au-Prince pro-Lavalas slum Cité Soleil, stating, "You go into the Cité and can't understand a single word" (Knox, interview, 2006). Similarly, when asked how she had gotten in touch with the non-official sources critical of Aristide, Montgomery replied: "I was very surprised to find how easy it was to get in touch with people to talk to people, way easier than Montréal, for example" (Montgomery, interview, 2006). She described quite a different experience of getting quotes from Aristide supporters at their demonstrations. In contrast to the easy time she had getting in touch with the Group of 184 demonstration organizers, for whom she had cellphone numbers and many of whom could be regularly found at her hotel, she had come across a pro-Aristide crowd quite by chance, and the experience had made her a bit nervous at first.

### Covering (up) the coup

Due to Canadian news organizations' heavy reliance on parachute and news wire journalists during the February 2004 *coup d'état* in Haiti, media sourcing practices were affected by the constraints that are a corollary of foreign news gathering in the wake of severe cuts to overseas bureaus. The strict deadline pressures that wire service journalists faced, and the fact that parachute journalists didn't speak Creole and were based in a luxury hotel, contributed to journalists' reliance on sources who were able to provide them with timely information. Although in many circumstances, these pressures disproportionately favour official sources, who are often the most able to provide timely information to journalists, in the case of the Haiti coup, the lack of any coherent official line provided an opening for a well-heeled movement spearheaded by Haiti's business and media elite. Spokespeople from this movement were elevated in the media to the status of quasi-official sources, and even their least substantiated claims were presented with a degree of legitimacy.

While Canadian officials were cited less frequently than activists from the anti-Aristide movement, the findings of this study nonetheless strongly corroborate the argument that cuts to foreign news bureaus make journalists more susceptible to manipulation by official agendas. The sourcing practices prevalent among the parachute and wire service journalists who covered the coup raise questions with profound implications for democracy both in Haiti and Canada. By giving legitimacy to an elite minority that claimed to represent Haitian "civil society" in calling for the overthrow of a government elected by the majority of Haitians, these sourcing practices contributed to obscuring the Canadian government's role in reversing the results of a democratic electoral process in Haiti.

#### **Notes**

- 1. Editorials and op eds were included in this study in order to offer a broader picture of overall sourcing patterns in the newspaper's coverage of the political situation in Haiti. The inclusion of these opinion and editorial page articles alongside the traditional news articles allows us to quantify both the sources cited by the journalists who wrote the news articles, and the sources cited by op ed writers and editorials whose writing often referred to the political events and sources mentioned in the news articles. Articles were initially located through browsing through all articles generated by a search in the *Globe and Mail* using the keyword "Haiti" in the *Factiva* search engine. Listings of foreign exchange currencies were excluded from the final results, as were articles from the arts and entertainment and travel sections of the newspaper, and articles that made no mention of the political situation in Haiti.
- 2. As the staff journalists assigned from the Globe and Mail and the Montréal Gazette were not working in Haiti at the time of the 2006 election, they were subsequently contacted via email and interviewed. The Globe and Mail's reporter Marina Jimenez was the only journalist who answered the interview questions by email. Knox subsequently left the Globe and Mail and has taken up the post of chair of Ryerson University's School of Journalism.
- One international wire service journalist requested that neither he nor his agency be named in this study.
- 4. The term chimeres is commonly used by the anti–Fanmi Lavalas Haitian elites, and it means violent pro–Fanmi Lavalas thugs. In my interviews with members of source organizations that opposed Aristide's government, this term was used indiscriminately to refer to all Fanmi Lavalas supporters who engaged in public protest. One member of the opposition to Aristide typified chimeres in extremely racialized and class-based terms; he said that chimeres typically are young men with dreadlocks, who live in the slums.

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### Appendix: List of Interviewees\*

Sony Bastien. Owner of *Radio Kiskey;* Member of the Group of 184-affiliated *Association nationale des médias haïtiens* [Interviewed, 2005].

Leopold Berlanger. Group of 184 steering committee member; Owner and director of *Radio Vision 2000;* Member of the *Association nationale des médias haïtiens* [Interviewed, 2005].

Eric Paul Bosque. Political analyst, French embassy in Haiti [Interviewed, 2006].

Amy Bracken. Reuters stringer in Haiti in 2003-2004 [Interviewed, 2006].

Winter Etienne. Official spokesperson of the 2004 armed destabilization [Interviewed, 2006].

Guy Fillion. *Réseau Liberté* journalism trainer working in Haiti in 2006; Journalist at *Radio-Canada International* [Interviewed, 2006].

Anne-Marie Issa. Group of 184 steering committee and communications committee member; Owner and director of *Radio Signal FM*; Vice president of the *Association nationale des médias haïtiens* [Interviewed, 2005].

Marina Jimenez. Journalist at *The Globe and Mail* [Interviewed, 2005].

Lucien Joseph. Spokesperson for Group of 184 member organization *Fédération des etu*diants universitaires d'Haïti [Interviewed, 2005].

Paul Knox. Journalist at The Globe and Mail [Interviewed, 2006].

Jean Robert Lalanne. Activist in Group of 184 member organization *Initiative citoyenne*; Owner of *Radio Maxima* [Interviewed, 2005].

James Loney. Miami bureau chief of Reuters [Interviewed, 2006].

Neil Macdonald. TV journalist at the *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation* [Interviewed, 2006].

Sue Montgomery. Journalist at *The Montreal Gazette* [Interviewed, 2006].

Evans Paul. Convergence Démocratique spokesperson [Interviewed, 2006].

Guy Philippe. Commander of the 2004 armed destabilization of Haiti [Interviewed, 2005].

Chantal Regnault. Fixer and freelance photographer [Interviewed, February 2006].

Michel Soukar. Group of 184 steering committee and communications committee member; Journalist at *Radio Signal FM* [Interviewed, 2005].

\*An additional journalist, who worked as the deputy bureau chief at an international wire agency, did not wish to be named.