

Running head: GETTING INSIDE A CULTURE

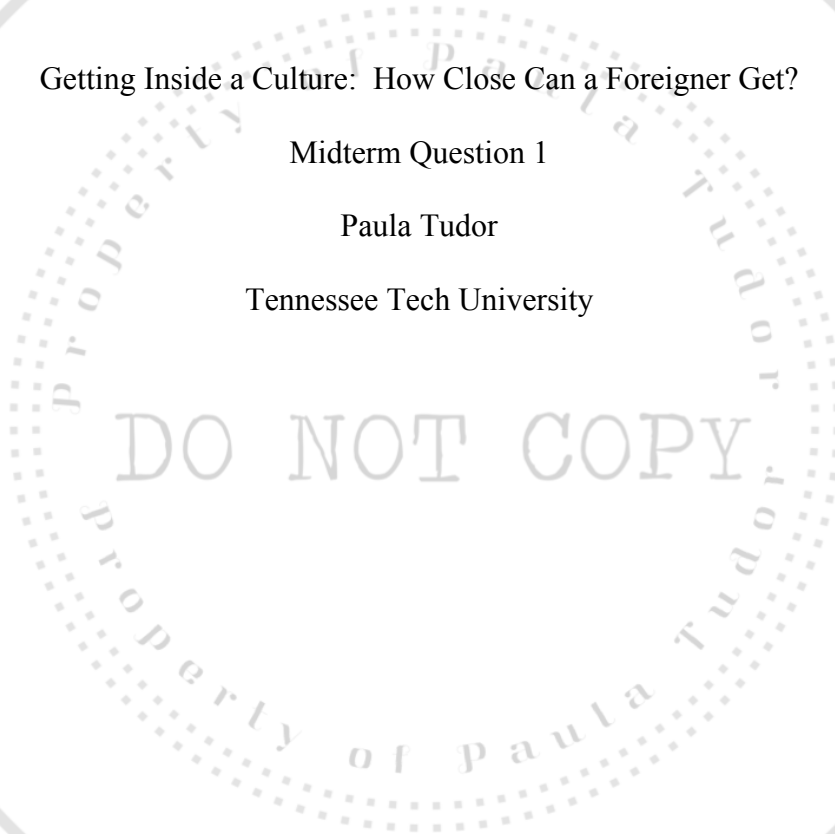
Getting Inside a Culture: How Close Can a Foreigner Get?

Midterm Question 1

Paula Tudor

Tennessee Tech University

DO NOT COPY



In order to gain insight and tell the most truthful, compelling stories possible, many journalists try to get as close as they can to the subjects of their stories. This typically proves to be beneficial to their storytelling, but can become problematic for foreign correspondents who often find themselves surrounded by cultures far different from their own. When telling a story from the perspective of someone from another culture it is often necessary for foreign correspondents to immerse themselves in that culture to fully grasp a particular viewpoint. The degree in which these correspondents are able to do this largely depends on the culture itself and the correspondents' ability to remain objective (van Ginneken, 1998).

There are many preparations journalists must make to successfully assimilate into other cultures. One of the most important preparations is an education about the area and culture they are going to be reporting from. This education is crucial in terms of establishing basic communication within a particular culture. This point is proven in the films *Lawrence of Arabia* and *The Quiet American*. Lawrence's knowledge of the Arabian culture forms the basis of communication with everyone he encounters. Likewise, the majority of the people that Fowler communicates with in *The Quiet American* are natives of the Southeast Asian culture, of which he is knowledgeable. This knowledge is only part of the equation in cultural assimilation as "there is no single person that completely fits everything one can learn about a culture." (Hall, 2005, p. 21) Foreign correspondents must keep this fact in mind as this will allow them to be flexible in their interpretations of every situation they encounter. The more fully reporters immerse themselves into a particular culture, the more likely they are to understand these subtleties. After all, "no research can completely cover every possible exception or possible nuance of meaning that exists within a culture." (Hall, 2005, p. 20) This is exhibited in both of

the aforementioned films, as much of the knowledge on Lawrence and Fowler's respective cultures derives from their interactions with people within those cultures (Hall, 2005)(Horberg, Ahrenberg, & Noyce, 2002)(Spiegel & Lean, 1962).

While cultural assimilation can provide a means for more effective communication and by extension a more accurate story, it is not without its share of risks. Cultural assimilation can also mean a loss of objectivity. Correspondents must be careful not to immerse themselves into a culture to the point of losing this objectivity. Every story that a correspondent reports on depends on their ability to remain objective. Reporters must present each of their stories for a specific audience and allowing themselves to become influenced by another culture can compromise their ability to do this. If a correspondent becomes too influenced by another culture, they can sometimes find it difficult to even relate to their own culture. In *The Quiet American*, Fowler becomes so immersed in the Southeast Asian culture that he finds it impossible to return to his home in London. The film *Lawrence of Arabia* also made it clear that Lawrence had difficulty relating to the people within his own culture after almost completely immersing himself in the Arabian culture. This inability to relate to one's own culture is not unlike what happens when "immigrants try to freeze their culture in an effort not to lose it in a new land, [a] practice [that] invariably leads to surprise and often disappointment when they get a chance to return to their homeland years later." (Hall, 2005, p. 8) For a foreign correspondent this can mean losing the perspective of the audience they are trying to reach and can affect how they present their stories to this audience (Hall, 2005)(Horberg et al., 2002)(Spiegel & Lean, 1962)(van Ginneken, 1998).

To ensure the accuracy of their stories many foreign correspondents share information with one another. This practice can be both beneficial and problematic as reporters have to be able to trust those whose information they acquire and be able to distinguish fact from fiction. This becomes even more difficult when language barriers are involved and journalists have to rely on the local people to relay information to them. In these situations it is critical that correspondents are able to find honest and trustworthy individuals to help them gather accurate information for their stories. In *The Quiet American*, Fowler encountered several individuals who were less than honest with him. This influenced how he approached his stories because it effectively hid certain aspects of them. This was primarily due to the fact that Fowler allowed himself to become too close to these individuals which affected his ability to think objectively and skewed his perspective (Horberg et al., 2002)(van Ginneken, 1998).

Despite the risks involved in being a foreign correspondent, those who choose this profession have few options other than to assimilate into the cultures they are exposed to so they can communicate effectively. Correspondents must learn to rely on their instincts and journalistic skills to determine just how fully they must immerse themselves in other cultures to do their jobs accurately and effectively. Every reporter must weigh the risks and benefits of cultural assimilation in every new situation they find themselves in against the value of the story they want to tell. Foreign correspondents must keep this in mind because “culture is something that [people] learn; [they] are not born with it.” (Hall, 2005, p. 12) Correspondents can be easily affected by every culture they are exposed to, and the longer they are exposed to a particular one the more likely they are to allow themselves to become influenced by that culture. However, correspondents who can effectively balance these risks with the benefits of cultural assimilation

have the ability to tell stories that can open people's eyes to the world around them (Hall, 2005)(van Ginneken, 1998).



References

- Hall, B.J. (2005). *Among Cultures: The Challenge of Communication* (2nd ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Horberg, W., & Ahrenberg, S. (Producers), & Noyce, P. (Director). (2002). *The Quiet American* [Motion picture]. United States: Miramax Films.
- Spiegel, S. (Producer), & Lean, D. (Director). (1962). *Lawrence of Arabia* [Motion picture]. United States: Columbia Pictures.
- van Ginneken, J. (1998). *Understanding Global News: A Critical Introduction*. London: SAGE Publications.

Running head: WESTERN MEDIA

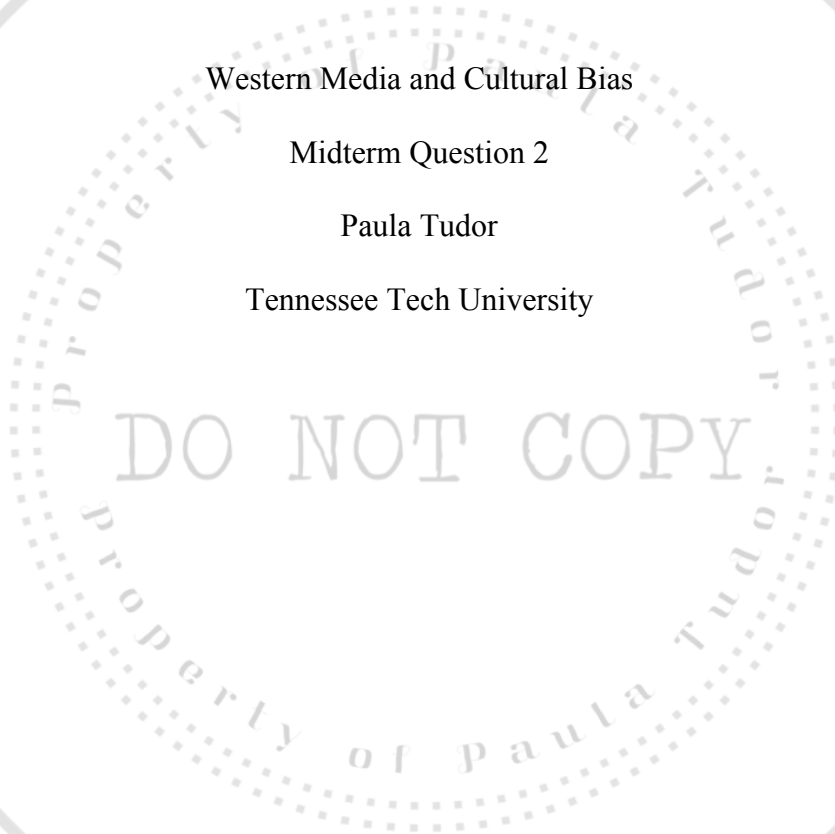
Western Media and Cultural Bias

Midterm Question 2

Paula Tudor

Tennessee Tech University

DO NOT COPY



The field of journalism and the art of capturing newsworthy events around the world are typically defined by the ability to cover all of the angles of every story in an objective manner. This becomes a much more difficult concept to realize when one considers what those angles are and what they actually mean across cultural boundaries. This issue is further compounded by the fact that advertising giants propel the existence of the few influential media outlets in existence around the globe. Mostly Western, these advertising agencies, along with the media outlets, seek out specific audiences for the framing of their stories. Many developing nations believe this system allows for too much bias and causes their issues to receive inadequate attention on the world stage (van Ginneken, 1998)(Willis, 2004).

Every foreign correspondent positioned in various parts of the world has the responsibility to tell the most accurate stories possible, however because of the way news is distributed they have certain obligations to frame these stories for a specific audience. “Western media organizations active on a global scale will first of all cater to Western media audiences and their values.” (van Ginneken, 1998, p. 44) Journalists within these organizations and others all over the world are also products of their own cultural upbringing. This simple fact fuels the formation of preconceived notions about other cultures, therefore a certain amount of bias in every news outlet is inevitable. There are, however, ways of minimizing the effects of biased opinions to convey accurate representations of the cultures these journalists must report in (van Ginneken, 1998)(Willis, 2004)(Willis, 2005).

Most foreign correspondents make an effort to learn as much as they can about the cultures they are going to be surrounded by before ever filing stories that concern those cultures. Cultural assimilation usually follows once they arrive at their respective destinations, which

minimizes bias. Despite these efforts, many developing nations feel this is not enough because of the focus that Western news tends to place on negativity. They fear this focus on the negative hinders their countries' efforts at advancement. Most developing nations prefer that news focuses on the positive aspects of their country to promote growth and stabilization. Negativity aside, most Western news organizations defend their abilities to remain objective and fair when presenting stories that concern these nations, citing the public's right to know (van Ginneken, 1998)(Willis, 2004)(Willis, 2005).

The concept of objectivity in Western news coverage is also the subject of much debate because of the tendency for news organizations to gear their content toward specific audiences. For this reason objectivity is sometimes referred to as "an economic device." (van Ginneken, 1998, p.43) The idea of objectivity being an 'economic device' through attempts at creating favor within a specific group of people only fosters the idea of bias for developing nations. They want media outlets that will play an active role in their countries' advancement, rather than placating to target audiences from a detached perspective (van Ginneken, 1998)(Willis, 2004)(Willis, 2005).

Developing nations are typically poor nations that are struggling. This puts them at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to having their own influential voice in which to present their issues and concerns to the world. "The strongest media groups have their home base in those media markets which are not only the largest in their category, but also the richest." (van Ginneken, 1998, p. 47) These, of course are typically Western media markets presenting news for Western audiences. In addition to framing the news for the Western audience, these media outlets are also under certain obligations from the advertisers who supply much of their income.

This only lends credence to the idea of objectivity as an economic device, as advertisers typically align themselves with media outlets that can reach the widest, most economically stable audiences. This promotes the idea of preferential coverage to certain audiences within these outlets. Furthermore, as these advertisers reach developing nations, Western ideals overtake those of developing nations fueling even more criticism (van Ginneken, 1998)(Willis, 2004)(Willis, 2005).

It is unlikely that developing nations will ever fully embrace the Western news format simply because these media outlets cannot concentrate all of their resources on the stabilization and advancement of these nations. They are not designed to take on this sort of advocacy role for the world. Every journalist working within these outlets has an inherent obligation to report the truth as best they can because many reports considered too negative by many developing nations, have the potential to affect their audiences. Many, if not the majority of these news outlets make every attempt at offering the most objective viewpoint possible while fulfilling this obligation. Western news outlets do not stand alone in their struggle against presenting biased information to the public. Everyone is affected and shaped by their own cultures, therefore every journalist working within every media market must strive to maintain objectivity in the face of misconceptions about unfamiliar cultural environments (van Ginneken, 1998)(Willis, 2004)(Willis, 2005).

References

van Ginneken, J. (1998). *Understanding Global News: A Critical Introduction*. London: SAGE Publications.

Willis, J. (2004). *International Reporting* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from https://elearn.rodp.org/d2l/lms/content/viewer/main_frame.d2l?ou=890784&tId=1047906
5

Willis, J. (2005). *Global Mass Media* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from https://elearn.rodp.org/d2l/lms/content/viewer/main_frame.d2l?ou=890784&tId=1047907
1

DO NOT COPY

Property of Paula Tudor

Running head: FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE

Finding the Right Balance:

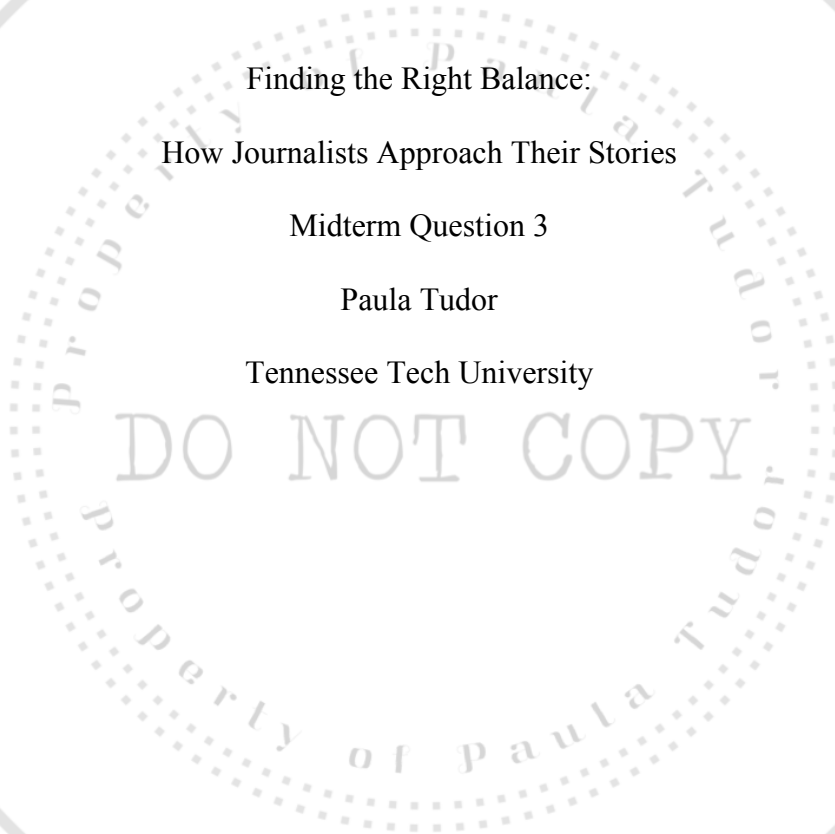
How Journalists Approach Their Stories

Midterm Question 3

Paula Tudor

Tennessee Tech University

DO NOT COPY



There are several ways in which journalists can cover their stories. Many journalists prefer to approach all of their stories in similar ways, while others change their approach according to the circumstances surrounding their stories. Foreign correspondents undoubtedly face the most difficulties in deciding which approach to take in covering their stories, as they are often met with unusual challenges within unfamiliar cultural systems. No matter how each journalist approaches their stories, they must take into account the situation and adjust accordingly. They may even have to explore other ways of approaching their stories as is seen so often when journalists report on foreign news stories (van Ginneken, 1998)(Willis, 2005)(Willis, 2006).

When reporting within foreign cultures, journalists have a variety of ways in which they can approach their stories. Journalists typically follow one of two methods in approaching their stories, sometimes incorporating other orientations along the way. Most journalists, however, consider themselves to be either detached or involved reporters. When reporting from foreign cultures both of these approaches can serve journalists and their audiences well, provided that they assess the circumstances surrounding their stories accurately and adjust their method as they see fit (Willis, 2005)(Willis, 2006).

In the film *The Quiet American*, Thomas Fowler was determined to stay a detached reporter, relaying information about what he witnessed from within the Southeast Asian culture. This method proved effective for a while until he stumbled onto a story that was too closely linked to both his assistant and an American acquaintance who was eventually revealed to be a CIA agent. With both of these men on opposing sides of the same story, Fowler was forced to become involved and found himself caught between two different cultures. This involvement

had lasting consequences on Fowler's life, as he decided not to return to his native London upon siding with his assistant, a decision that resulted in the death of the CIA agent. While this is an extreme example of the consequences that can result when a reporter becomes too attached and involved in pursuit of a story, it outlines the fact that journalists must be mindful of how involved they become. A more likely outcome of journalists becoming too involved can be seen in the film *Lawrence of Arabia*, where Lawrence, a British army officer, assimilates himself so completely in the Arabian culture, he cannot relate to his native culture on the same level. When this happens to reporters they have a tendency to lose their objectivity and the perspective of their intended audience. This is one of the most significant disadvantages of using the attached approach when reporting from foreign cultures. However to report within these cultures, journalists must become somewhat involved in order to communicate. In *Lawrence of Arabia*, Lawrence communicates with the Arabian people quite effectively simply because his prior knowledge of their culture coupled with his assimilation into that culture promoted more effective communication. Because effective communication is vital to every journalist, particularly those within foreign cultures, they must be prepared to immerse themselves in these cultures so their stories can be as accurate as possible. Ultimately, journalists following either one of these approaches when reporting from foreign cultures must find the right balance between them in order to gather the most accurate information (Horberg, Ahrenberg, & Noyce, 2002)(Spiegel & Lean, 1962)(van Ginneken, 1998)(Willis, 2004)(Willis,2005).

Journalists may find that certain situations require them to follow other approaches when gathering their stories from foreign cultures. Some stories may require that journalists approach them from a "larger truth" perspective in order to relay information to the public about the social

climate within a particular culture. Journalists may also add an element of storytelling to their reporting either alone or in conjunction with this method, in order to offer insight into the people that make up any given culture. Taking the storytelling perspective one step further, journalists can also follow a sort of “village” approach when gathering their stories. This method requires more involvement with the people within a particular culture, adopting their lifestyle, and reporting on their experiences. In *The Quiet American*, Fowler interacted with the people within the Southeast Asian culture regularly, effectively blending in with that culture even adopting certain cultural distinctions. While this approach can be effective in offering a more in-depth look at certain cultures, this requires that journalists take a more “attached” approach. The disadvantage of this sort of involvement can be seen in the examples of how both Fowler and Lawrence had difficulties returning to their native culture after assimilating so fully in their respective foreign cultures (Horberg et al., 2002)(van Ginneken, 1998)(Willis, 2005)(Willis, 2006).

While journalists may find that they can follow many different approaches when gathering their stories from within foreign cultures, some are less likely to work in these types of situations. Investigative reporters, for instance, may not be able to report effectively from within foreign cultures. This approach requires a great deal of time and can become expensive. And as money can be an issue when reporters are sent to foreign countries, it is unlikely that most media organizations will want to spend money on reporters following this particular approach. Also there is a certain amount of danger that can exist in using this approach, particularly from within a culture one may not be altogether familiar with. In *The Quiet American*, Fowler’s investigation

into one of his stories led to his near execution and eventually, by extension, the death of the CIA agent (Horberg et al., 2002)(van Ginneken, 1998)(Willis, 2005)(Willis, 2006).

Another approach that is unlikely to work when reporting from foreign cultures is taking on a sort of “friendly eye” perspective. Most journalists who are reporting from foreign cultures do so during times of crisis and this approach denies that reporters can interpret the actions of people involved in crisis situations. To a certain extent journalists have to be able to interpret such actions so they can relay information on vital changes in social climates to the public. This is particularly important when reporting from foreign cultures because of the international consequences involved in many of these crisis situations (van Ginneken, 1998)(Willis, 2005).

Using one’s own impressions can also be a disadvantage to a journalist. Reporters following this approach are less likely to get an accurate picture of the subjects in their stories, as it relies heavily on personal interpretations of the people within cultures. This can be particularly problematic for foreign correspondents who are working within unfamiliar cultures. Their interpretations may not always be accurate or may be too biased based on their own cultural preconceptions. Using this approach may make for a more colorful story, but the facts are likely to become lost in the details (van Ginneken, 1998)(Willis, 2004)(Willis, 2005).

Reporting from a sort of “populist” standpoint can also present many problems, as this approach requires journalists to rely more heavily on the opinions of local people than on official sources. This can be effective if journalists are able to find reliable sources and can see how people are directly affected by the actions of their governments. On the other hand finding these reliable sources can prove more difficult in foreign cultures simply because of language barriers and an overall lack of intercultural communication (van Ginneken, 1998)(Willis, 2005).

Some journalists take the involved angle one step further and take on an advocacy role. This too can present many problems for foreign correspondents. While some cultures may prefer journalists in this role, provided they are acting as their advocates, this approach can be potentially catastrophic. In certain situations and with the right journalist, this approach has the potential to promote positive changes, however someone who practices this approach without fully understanding the situation can bring about negative changes as well. This can be particularly dangerous and destructive within unfamiliar cultural systems. In *The Quiet American*, Fowler took this sort of stance when he sided with his assistant over the CIA agent. He did not fully understand the circumstances with which he was operating and trusted his assistant's judgment without hesitation, never realizing his intent to kill the agent. In *Lawrence of Arabia*, Lawrence began to express many viewpoints and actions associated with the Arabian culture. As a result, it was often unclear where his loyalties lied or how those loyalties were going to be presented. Because of their involvement in their respective cultures, both Fowler and Lawrence became caught between two cultures not really belonging to either of them in the end (Horberg et al., 2002)(Spiegel & Lean, 1962)(van Ginneken, 1998)(Willis, 2004)(Willis, 2005).

When journalists become overly concerned with the economics of their stories, more emphasis tends to be placed on their monetary value than their relevance and at times, their accuracy. Sometimes stories are covered specifically for the response they will elicit from their target audiences, or re-created on television for dramatic effect. For the most part this type of journalism is still considered credible and can belong to any one or more of three orientations, economic, pseudo, or virtual. They would not, however, be appropriate for covering stories from within foreign cultures. This type of journalism has more potential to offend other cultures than

perhaps any other type. Also journalists reporting from foreign cultures have to be much more focused on effective communication because of language barriers and possible intercultural misinterpretations. This leaves little room for focusing on entertaining an audience (van Ginneken, 1998)(Willis, 2005).

If a journalist focuses too heavily on their stories' entertainment value, ignoring the facts, or more importantly creating facts that do not exist, they are said to approach their stories from an amoral standpoint. Journalists following this approach usually do so to advance their own careers. This is an inappropriate orientation to follow no matter where you are reporting from and often carries serious consequences for the journalists practicing this method. This was seen in the film *Shattered Glass*, which chronicles the brief career of journalist Stephen Glass who fabricated virtually every story he submitted for publication. Glass was eventually caught and fired, all before the age of thirty, effectively ending his future in journalism. Had Glass been reporting from a foreign culture when these indiscretions came to light, the outcome could have been far less forgiving (Baumgarten, Merims, Hirsch, & Christenson, 2003)(Willis, 2005).

While journalists have several options in how they approach their stories, only some would be appropriate or effective for covering stories within foreign cultures. This can be seen in the aforementioned films *Lawrence of Arabia*, *The Quiet American*, and even *Shattered Glass*. Journalists have to be mindful of the situations they find themselves in and adjust their approach to compliment those situations because different situations require different degrees of involvement. In adjusting their methods when surrounded by an unfamiliar culture, journalists will undoubtedly gain a better understanding of that culture and quite possibly their own

(Baumgarten et al., 2003)(Horberg et al., 2002)(Spiegel & Lean, 1962)(Willis, 2004)(Willis, 2005)(Willis, 2006).



References

- Baumgarten, C., Merims, A., Hirsch, G., & Christensen, T. (Producers), & Ray, B. (Director). (2003). *Shattered Glass* [Motion Picture]. United States: Lions Gate Films.
- Horberg, W., & Ahrenberg, S. (Producers), & Noyce, P. (Director). (2002). *The Quiet American* [Motion picture]. United States: Miramax Films.
- Spiegel, S. (Producer), & Lean, D. (Director). (1962). *Lawrence of Arabia* [Motion picture]. United States: Columbia Pictures.
- van Ginneken, J. (1998). *Understanding Global News: A Critical Introduction*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Willis, J. (2004). *International Reporting* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from https://elearn.rodp.org/d2l/lms/content/viewer/main_frame.d2l?ou=890784&tId=1047906
5
- Willis, J. (2005). *Journalistic Orientations* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from https://elearn.rodp.org/d2l/lms/content/viewer/main_frame.d2l?ou=890784&tId=1047907
7
- Willis, J. (2006). *The world is watching* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from https://elearn.rodp.org/d2l/lms/content/viewer/main_frame.d2l?ou=890784&tId=1047905
8

