



A Woman's Place? Photojournalist Lynsey Addario in Libya

For decades, female journalists struggled for the right to report about war and conflict on an equal footing with their male colleagues. While women had covered World War II and the wars in Korea and Vietnam, only a few had gone to the front lines. By the time the conflicts in the Balkans, Iraq, and Afghanistan broke out, however, women reporters were there—embedded with troops or tracking rebels. This progress came despite the fact that in many places around the globe, there were strong cultural barriers to a woman reporting the news.

But as women won the right to cover fighting, they also paid a price. Female journalists were disproportionately vulnerable to sexual aggression: from armed fighters, government minders, terrorists and militants—even their own sources and fixers. What's more, they paid that price in silence. Women reporters seldom spoke of sexual harassment, partly from feelings of confusion and shame and partly from fear of losing future assignments. Rarely could women war correspondents, for example, discuss openly whether there were circumstances in which they needed to behave differently from their male colleagues and, if so, how? Beneath the silence was the unspoken question: were there parts of the world, and situations, into which it was inadvisable to send female correspondents?

Freelance photographer Lynsey Addario had broken the barrier. For years, she had reported from conflict zones in the Middle East and Africa. She was familiar with the physical and emotional challenges facing women journalists, and had reported widely on regional issues of women's health, sexual oppression, and sexual violence. The MacArthur Foundation in 2009 awarded her one of its "genius" grants for her work on conflict and the lives of women in male-dominated societies.

In late February 2011, the *New York Times* sent Addario to Libya to cover the populist uprising against Colonel Muammar el-Qaddafi, the strongman who had ruled the North African country for 42 years. It was the third act of the drama first played out earlier that year in Tunisia and Egypt, a seemingly democratic insurgency heralded as the "Arab Spring."

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Addario crossed into Libya from Egypt without a visa on February 26. For several weeks, she traveled with a shifting group of Western media colleagues. They watched what was first a spontaneous, largely peaceful uprising transform into violent battles as the tide turned against the rebels. In March, the journalists found themselves under fire from airstrikes, helicopter attacks, mortar rounds, and sniper fire.

On March 15, Addario and three male *Times* colleagues were in the beleaguered town of Ajdabiya when their driver decided to make a dash for the eastern gate of the city—and back to the relative haven of Benghazi. They were unlucky. Just five minutes after a car full of French journalists successfully gunned their way past a checkpoint manned by Qaddafi forces, the *Times* journalists were stopped. Soldiers dragged them from the car and threw them to the ground. Addario had a gun to her head.

On February 11, CBS News chief foreign correspondent Lara Logan had been viciously attacked in a crowded square in Cairo. At the time Addario, while upset, had considered the incident an aberration. But now, in the hands of Libyan soldiers, she was afraid. She tried to think clearly. What did it mean to be a woman in this situation? Would she be raped? Or worse, killed? What did her professional experience and regional knowledge count for now?

Women Covering Conflicts

Women journalists had worked hard and long for the right to cover conflicts. Only one woman was accredited by the US military to serve as a war correspondent during World War I, and she was sent to Siberia.¹ In World War II, 127 women received accreditation, reporting for organizations as different as the *New York Times* and *Women's Home Companion*. But only a handful of them reported from the front lines.² Buoyed by feminism and the civil rights movement, the number of female war correspondents rose to about 70 during the Vietnam War. But their access to soldiers and the battle front was often restricted on one pretext or another: there were no women's bathroom facilities, their presence would distract (or perhaps arouse) the soldiers, the physical challenge of battlefield reporting was too great, protecting female journalists would put an undue burden on commanding officers, and so forth.³

By the 1990s and the conflicts in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan, that had changed. Most news organizations gave female journalists the opportunity to cover conflict, asking them to

¹ Mark Jenkins, "Gal Reporters," *National Geographic News*, December 10, 2003. See: http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2003/12/1210_031210_warwomen.html

² Library of Congress, "War, Women, and Opportunity," description of a Library of Congress exhibit titled "Women Come to the Front: Journalists, Photographers, and Broadcasters During World War II," 1995. See: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/wcf/wcf0002.html>

³ Joyce Hoffmann, "On Their Own: Female Correspondents in Vietnam," *Old Dominion University's Quest*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Fall 1998, pp.2-5. See: <http://www.odu.edu/ao/instdv/quest/FemaleCorrespondents.html>

decide for themselves what assignments they were willing to accept. Major media organizations offered war reporters hostile environment training, field security, peer support, medical attention, and psychological counseling when needed.

The nature of war had also changed. Correspondents saw fewer traditional battles and more guerilla attacks, tribal and ethnic clashes, civil wars and protests, suicide bombings, drug wars, and terrorist operations. The dangers to conflict reporters—both men and women—multiplied. Correspondents were caught in crossfire, abducted, murdered or attacked by mobs. The death toll rose. In December 2010, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) reported that over the preceding 19 years, 847 journalists had been killed, more than a third of them in war zones or covering human rights stories.⁴

Silencing crime. In this new climate of equal access to assignments, women reporters struggled to deal with a different challenge: sexual aggression. There had always been complaints of sexual harassment in the newsroom and on the street. But now journalists covering conflicts—the vast majority of them women—also experienced uninvited sexual advances from sources and fixers, casual groping by strangers, sexual threats from targets of investigations, and deliberate sexual assaults intended as reprisal or intimidation. Sexual assault was dubbed “the silencing crime” for two reasons: its intent was often to quash a story or punish a journalist, and few journalists were willing to talk about it. As one researcher reported:

Journalists from all over the world said they largely kept assaults to themselves because of broad cultural stigmas and a lack of faith that authorities would act upon their complaints. But time and again, journalists also said that professional considerations played an important role; many were reluctant to disclose an assault to their editors for fear they would be perceived as vulnerable and be denied future assignments.⁵

Between the challenges of conflict reporting and the threat of sexual aggression, female journalists were learning to walk a fine line.

Path to Photojournalism

Addario came to photojournalism via international relations, which she studied as an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin (Madison) with the idea of helping people understand humanitarian crises. Turned down for graduate study by the Columbia Journalism School in 1996, Addario took her manual Nikon camera to Argentina. There she landed a job with

⁴ Committee to Protect Journalists, “896 Journalists Killed Since 1992.” See: <http://cpj.org/killed/2011/>.

⁵ Lauren Wolfe, “The Silencing Crime: Sexual Violence and Journalists,” *Special Report of the Committee to Protect Journalists*, June 7, 2011. The report was based on interviews with 50 journalists who had been sexually assaulted. See: <http://cpj.org/reports/CPJ.Sexual.Assault.Journalists.pdf>

the *Buenos Aires Herald* by sneaking onto the set of the film *Evita* and snagging a photograph of its blockbuster star, Madonna. Back in the US a year later, she put in three years as a stringer for the Associated Press, making a name for herself in Cuba, where American business, tourism, and diplomatic activities were strictly limited.

In 2000, Addario went to Afghanistan to document the lives of women under Taliban rule. She went by herself and paid her own way. After the terrorist attacks of September 2001, as the United States took up arms in Afghanistan, she found herself drawn into conflict reporting, first in Afghanistan and Pakistan, then in Iraq, and later in Lebanon, Darfur, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. By 2010, she had covered American women in combat, drought in the Horn of Africa, transsexual prostitutes in New York, opium addiction among Afghan women, genocide in Darfur, maternal death in Sierra Leone, and rape as an instrument of war in Congo. She lived variously in Istanbul, Mexico and Delhi. Her passport bore the stamps of more than 60 countries.

Her photos attracted notice and she developed long-term relationships with several media outlets: *Time*, *Newsweek*, *National Geographic*, the *New York Times* and the *New York Times Magazine*. She worked alone or on short-term projects with writers and videographers. She found her work satisfying. "I am...doing exactly the type of photojournalism I set out to do—covering humanitarian and women's issues, and the toll conflicts take on civilians and soldiers alike," she told *American Photo* magazine at the beginning of 2010.⁶

Advocate. Addario had become a strong advocate for female journalists working in conflict zones around the world. She bristled at suggestions that news organizations should limit women reporters' assignments out of concern for their safety. "To me, that's grossly offensive," she believed. "This is my life and I make my own decisions. If a woman wants to be a war photographer, she should [be]."⁷ She argued that female journalists had privileged access to some people, places, and stories that male journalists could never hope to cover, not only in the Middle East but throughout Africa and South Asia. Many of her best-known pictures were taken in closed-door places: in private homes and domestic quarters, in the maternity ward, at a secret wedding, in a mental health hospital, at a prayer service in the women's section of a mosque, in prisons, and in domestic violence shelters. She noted:

Women offer a different perspective. We have access to women on a different level than men have, just as male photographers have a different relationship with the men they're covering.⁸

⁶ Amy Bedick, "Photography on the Front Line," *American Photo*, February 3, 2010. See: <http://www.popphoto.com/how-to/2010/02/photography-front-line>

⁷ Lynsey Addario, "It's What I Do," *New York Times Lens Blog*, March 30, 2011. See: <http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/30/lynsey-addario-its-what-i-do/>

⁸ Ibid.

But Addario was also a realist. She knew that the demands of conflict photography could be daunting for women, especially for small women (Addario stood 5 feet, 1 inch) and for those working solo. The equipment was often heavy and cumbersome to carry; conditions on the ground were unpredictable, sometimes dangerous. Over the years she had developed a set of rules and regimens to keep her safe and competitive with her male colleagues. She kept fit, running daily and hitting the gym whenever she could. She traveled light. She wore a flak jacket and helmet in combat situations, and she carried her BlackBerry™ everywhere she went.

Personal Conduct Code

Assignments in Muslim countries required special precautions. Ordinarily, Addario wore modest clothing, long sleeved and loose fitting, along with other coverings customary to the region. She had worked in *hijab* (a simple headscarf to cover the hair), in *niqab* (a veil that covered the head and face, but with an opening for the eyes), and in full *abaya* (a head-to-toe garment worn in some Arab states). Once she photographed street scenes in Kandahar from inside a full-length Afghan *burqa*, leaving the grid pattern of the mesh eye panel superimposed on every shot.

When custom demanded, as was usually the case in public places and if photographing Muslim men, Addario traveled with a man and worked with at least one male companion in plain view—a male colleague, a driver, a fixer, or a translator. She took special care in Afghanistan, where Muslim norms were especially conservative, once posing as the wife of *New York Times*' war correspondent Dexter Filkins, shooting pictures from behind a veil while Filkins interviewed a Taliban commander. That story, "Talibanistan," garnered Addario and Filkins a place on the *Times* team that won the 2009 Pulitzer for International Reporting.

Besides providing access to places women did not usually go, such surrogate husbands and brothers provided some protection against the sexual harassment she encountered in the Middle East, especially in Pakistan. Like most female journalists reporting from Muslim countries, Addario dismissed the occasional crude remarks, lewd gropings, and verbal threats she received as occupational hazards: distasteful but unavoidable, nothing to make a fuss over. "I'm not gonna complain every time a guy grabs my butt," she later told a magazine. "My editors are never gonna send me anywhere if I do that. If women are all of a sudden complaining all the time about getting sent to Pakistan, then if I were an editor, I probably wouldn't send a woman either."⁹

For other, more worrisome situations, Addario had developed an appeasement strategy. She tried to play for sympathy, and apologized no matter the circumstances. She tried to defuse tension by being submissive, pleading and crying. She emphasized that she was married, because Islamic law forbade touching another man's wife. She never argued, and she never fought back.

⁹ Abigail Pesta, "From the Front Lines of Libya," *Marie Claire*, June 6, 2011. See: <http://www.marieclaire.com/world-reports/news/photojournalist-lynsey-addario>

"In my experience, when a Western woman is very strong and outspoken and screaming and yelling, it is very counterproductive in terms of the reaction you get from Arab men," Addario says. "Whereas, if you show weakness and you cry and you say 'I'm scared, help me,' then generally you get a much more positive response."¹⁰ This approach had served her well in all manner of difficulty, including an eight-hour detention by armed militants outside Falluja, Iraq, in 2004.

Sexual violence was a subject Addario knew well, but had never personally experienced. Over the years, she had reported on child rape, wife beating, honor killings, self-immolation, and violent punishments imposed on women. In a photograph that attracted widespread attention, she depicted an Afghan teenager whose Taliban husband cut off her nose, ears, and hair after she dared to run away from his daily beatings. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, soldiers and rebels alike raped thousands of women and girls as a weapon of war.

The violence Addario witnessed disturbed her. "While working in the Congo, I spent 10 hours a day for two weeks talking with women who were victims of sexual assault and unimaginable violence," Addario told *American Photo*. "Each woman's story was more violent and raw than her predecessor's. On the final day of that assignment I was a complete basket case, crying all the time and so sad. And I thought, my life is great compared with these poor people. What right do I have to cry?"¹¹

Honors. When Addario got the call to go to Libya, she was 37 and coming off a two-year roller-coaster ride. In May 2009 (a month after winning the Pulitzer), she broke her collarbone in a car accident in Pakistan that killed her driver and seriously injured another journalist. In July 2009, she married Paul de BERNARD, Reuters's New Delhi bureau chief, in a cathedral wedding in France. Two months later, just back from covering the presidential election in Afghanistan, she learned she had won a MacArthur fellowship.

The MacArthur prize, popularly called a "genius grant," was an extraordinary honor conferred on a handful of people each year. The recipients were selected for their creativity, originality, insight and "exceptional promise."¹² The MacArthur Foundation cited Addario's work in Afghanistan, Iraq, Darfur, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, praising her rigorous journalistic approach, her artistic eye, her ability to gain access to people and places often closed to outsiders, and her pursuit of images that told powerful stories in unexpected ways.¹³ The award

¹⁰ Author's telephone interview with Lynsey Addario on November 29, 2011. All further quotes from Addario, unless otherwise attributed, are from this interview.

¹¹ Bedick, "Photography on the Front Line."

¹² The MacArthur Foundation, "About the Fellows Program." See: http://www.macfound.org/site/c.1kLXJ8MQKrH/b.4536879/k.9B87/About_the_Program.htm

¹³ MacArthur Foundation, "2009 MacArthur Fellows: Lynsey Addario," September 2009. See: http://www.macfound.org/site/c.1kLXJ8MQKrH/b.5457999/k.92D9/Lynsey_Addario.htm

came with a \$500,000 cash prize and no strings attached—except, perhaps, the expectation that the recipient “make important contributions in the future.”

Addario told interviewers that the award and the money wouldn't change much for her. “I don't think I'll work any less!” she laughed.¹⁴ In fact, in 2010 she produced a series of photo essays on earthquake orphans in Haiti, tuberculosis patients in India, and female soldiers serving with the US armed forces in Afghanistan. In September, Oprah Winfrey included Addario on her annual list of 20 Most Powerful Women in the category “Bearing Witness.”¹⁵ She finished the year with a collection of photos in *National Geographic* documenting the lives of Afghan women, including some who had tried to escape domestic violence by setting themselves on fire. “I hope that my work helps people,” Addario says. “That's the thing that drives me and keeps me going.”¹⁶

Arab Spring

Meanwhile, a new story was sweeping the Middle East. On December 18, 2010, a fruit vendor in Tunisia set himself on fire to protest the repressive ruling regime—a spark that kindled pro-democracy uprisings across North Africa and in the neighboring Middle East. In January 2011, hundreds of thousands flocked to Cairo's Tahrir Square, demanding the resignation of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak; by February 11, he was gone. Addario followed the events from Sudan, Iraq, and Afghanistan, where she was on assignment for the *New York Times*. Some governments responded with force: demonstrators were killed. In several countries, the government tried to shut down Internet access and stifle the press.

Logan Assault. Journalists became targets. On February 3, the *Times* reported a pattern of harassment of journalists in Egypt that included detentions, beatings, vandalism, and a carjacking.¹⁷ The next day, CPJ reported that a videographer for an Egyptian newspaper had died, shot by a government sniper.¹⁸ On February 11, the day Mubarak stepped down, CBS News' chief foreign correspondent Lara Logan was violently assaulted in Tahrir Square. Logan had been reporting on the celebration for the news magazine *60 Minutes* when she became separated from her bodyguards and crew and was attacked by a frenzied mob. At the time, CBS reported only that Logan had been the victim of a “brutal and sustained sexual assault and beating.”¹⁹ Most journalists, including Addario, assumed Logan had been gang-raped.²⁰

¹⁴ Bedick, “Photography on the Front Line.”

¹⁵ “O, the Oprah Magazine Announces the 2010 O Power List,” *O, The Oprah Magazine*, September 13, 2010. See: <http://www.marketwire.com/press-release/o-the-oprah-magazine-announces-the-2010-o-power-list-1317695.htm>

¹⁶ Pesta, “From the Front Lines of Libya.”

¹⁷ Jeremy W. Peters and J. David Goodman, “Gangs Hunt Journalists and Rights Workers,” *New York Times*, February 3, 2011. See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/04/world/middleeast/04journalists.html>

¹⁸ “Ahmad Mohamed Mahmoud,” Committee to Protect Journalists, February 4, 2011. See: <http://cpj.org/killed/2011/ahmad-mohamed-mahmoud.php>

¹⁹ “CBS News' Lara Logan Assaulted During Egypt Protests,” CBS News, *60 Minutes*, February 15, 2011. See:

The attack on Logan reignited the ongoing debate over the role of women in war reporting. Celebrated photojournalist Harry Benson, who had worked around the globe, blamed Logan's editors for her assault. He wrote:

The last place for a young, attractive woman to be is in the middle of an extremely dangerous situation surrounded by an angry mob. Not only does it put her in harm's way, but it compromises her co-workers as well, since they have to try to protect her as best they can—sometimes an impossible task.²¹

Others defended Logan's right to be there. British journalist Lindsey Hilsum, who was also working in Tahrir Square that day, defended women reporters in conflict zones. She wrote:

Now debate has shifted to old territory about whether men and women run different risks as foreign correspondents. Those who hate to see women reporting the big stories disguise their glee as concern, but their message is the same—you shouldn't be out there. ... It should be taken for granted that men and women will be reporting stories like the revolution in Egypt, the war in Afghanistan and other major international events. The question is whether there is something especially dangerous about being female and on the frontline. For the most part, I believe the answer is no.²²

The Logan attack shocked Addario. In a later interview, she said that in all her years reporting from Afghanistan she had never known of a colleague being sexually abused. But while she considered Logan's experience a "tragedy," Addario said she would not let Logan's experience deter her own reporting. "I don't want to be seen as 'a Woman' and therefore as someone who is in danger of getting attacked while I'm on the ground," she said. "As women journalists, we don't want our gender to get in the way of our coverage."²³

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2011/02/15/60minutes/main20032070.shtml>

²⁰ As later became public, Logan had been viciously manhandled by the mob, and violated by men's hands as onlookers took pictures on their cellphones. After about 25 minutes she was rescued by a group of women and taken to the hospital. Logan recovered and resumed reporting for CBS. "Lara Logan Breaks Silence on Cairo Assault," CBS News, *60 Minutes*, April 28, 2011. See: http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-18560_162-20058368.html?pageNum=2&tag=contentMain;contentBody

²¹ Harry Benson, "Lara Logan: Who's to Blame?" *WowOWow*, February 21, 2011. See: <http://www.wowowow.com/point-of-view/cbs-reporter-lara-logan-whos-to-blame/>

²² Lindsey Hilsum, "Lindsey Hilsum: Equality on the Frontline Is the Only Way," *The Independent*, February 19, 2011. See: <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/lindsey-hilsum-equality-on-the-frontline-is-the-only-way-2219307.html>

²³ Charlie Rose, "Lynsey Addario," April 29, 2011. See: <http://www.charlierose.com/view/interview/11650>

Into Libya

Arab Spring came to Libya in mid-February. It began with demonstrations in the east, far from the capital, Tripoli. By February 20, insurgents had taken control of the country's second-largest city, Benghazi. Qaddafi vowed to crush the insurgency, purifying Libya "inch by inch."²⁴ In a rambling speech on February 22, Qaddafi called the protesters "greasy rats," alleging that they were Islamist militants, al Qaeda operatives, criminals, and misguided youth under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs.

The *Times*, which had sent Addario to cover a pro-democracy demonstration in Bahrain, asked her to go next to Libya. She had been to Libya before, in 2004, to shoot portraits of Qaddafi and his son Seif al-Islam el-Qaddafi for *Time* magazine. This time, the circumstances were very different. Addario could enter Libya legally only as an invited journalist on a state-issued visa. But the *Times* already had accredited journalists in Tripoli reporting under the watchful eye of their Qaddafi minders; it needed reporters with the insurgency. Addario decided to cross the border from Egypt, in defiance of a Qaddafi arrest order issued on February 23 against foreign journalists without proper papers.

Addario debated whether to take her body armor. The situation was tense, but she wasn't expecting much fighting. She had covered the fall of regimes before—the 2001 end of Taliban rule in Afghanistan and the 2003 collapse of Saddam Hussein in Iraq—and neither time did she see combat. Also, the armor might cause problems as she traveled through Egypt. Since the Tahrir Square uprisings, authorities had been confiscating flak jackets at customs, making journalists wait weeks for them to clear. Addario didn't want to waste time or draw undue attention to herself. The flak jacket and helmet stayed behind. "I had that misconception that we would drive in and Qaddafi would fall and then we'd all rush in and it would be this jubilation," she says. "I wasn't mentally prepared for heavy combat."

Addario crossed the Egyptian border on February 26 and made her way to Benghazi, capital of the insurgency. Libya's Arab Spring seemed to be going according to script. Army officers were defecting to the opposition side in Benghazi; the insurgents were forming an interim government.²⁵ Addario's first published photograph showed a group of young rebels straddling the cannon of a captured tank, waving the flag of the insurgency and flashing victory signs. Another showed a wall of graffiti in an outdoor plaza; among the Arabic inscriptions was one scrawled in English: "Game Over."

²⁴ "Muammar Gaddafi Speech Translated (2011 Feb 22)," *YouTube*, uploaded February 23, 2011. See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69wBG6ULNzQ>

²⁵ David D. Kirkpatrick, "In Libya Capital, Long Breadlines and Barricades," *New York Times*, February 26, 2011. See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/27/world/africa/27libya.html>

In Benghazi. Over the next four days, Addario reported from Benghazi alongside a growing number of foreign journalists who had also made their way across the Egyptian border. Among them was Tyler Hicks, a Pulitzer prizewinning staff photographer at the *New York Times* with extensive experience photographing conflicts and war zones in the Middle East, the Balkans, Russia, and Africa. Hicks and Addario had known each other for years (coincidentally, they attended the same high school in Westport, Connecticut). Together with Ed Ou and Scott Nelson, two other photographers freelancing for the *Times* in Benghazi, they took pictures of the usual scenes of protest and insurgency: opposition headquarters, weapons stockpiles, Friday prayers. They were waiting for Qaddafi to fall.

But by early March, it was clear that Qaddafi was not going to back down. Security forces were firing on demonstrators in Tripoli and Zawiya, and government troops were moving on Misrata with tanks. Scores were dead. In a speech on March 2, Qaddafi derided recent sanctions imposed by the US and the European Union, railed against foreign journalists, and vowed to fight “to the last man and woman.” As loyalist forces pushed farther east, fighting broke out in Brega, a port city 125 miles west of Benghazi. For the journalists in Libya, the front line was now within reach. It was an unusual opportunity. As Hicks put it:

Despite what a lot of people think, when you go to a war zone, there are a lot of formalities and difficulties to reach the fighting. You can get *into* a country but to get to where the conflict is happening can be very difficult. This is a very rare situation: complete access to a war, from the opposition side.²⁶

Addario had to make her own calculus. Should she stay in Benghazi or go to the front? If she moved forward, the *Times* would pay her expenses, but could she find food and lodging? Would she be safe without her body armor? Hicks was going on ahead. Would he watch her back? Would traveling with the rebels put her in added danger? Would it compromise her reporting in any way? In any conflict, there were many stories. Which one did she want to tell? The *Times*, *Al Jazeera*, Reuters, and other news organizations, as well as citizen journalists using social media, were telling the Benghazi story. But few were reporting on the fighting—it was mostly rumors. Qaddafi had imposed a media blackout on military operations, and had warned off foreign news organizations.

Addario made up her mind. “The journalist’s instinct is to want to go as far forward as possible,” Addario said in a March 2 interview. “When [a government is] attacking cities and civilians with machine-gun fire and air strikes, that’s an issue that needs to be addressed.”²⁷ That

²⁶ Kerry MacDonald and David Furst, interviewers, “In the Thick of Libya’s Brutal Fighting,” *New York Times Lens Blog*, March 9, 2011. See: <http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/09/in-the-thick-of-libyas-brutal-fighting/>

²⁷ Lynsey Addario, “At a Deadly, Shift Front in Libya,” *New York Times Lens Blog*, March 3, 2011. See: <http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/03/at-a-deadly-shifting-front-in-libya/>

same day, Addario struck out for the front line. That evening, she filed her first picture from Brega. Taken in the hospital morgue, it showed an attendant covering the face of a rebel soldier killed by Qaddafi fire. Addario was no longer covering a protest movement. She was covering a civil war.

On the Front Line

Addario spent the next 13 days on the front line, following the rebels as they battled government troops for control of the territory between Benghazi and Tripoli. She was one of a group of 10-20 journalists, mostly photographers, who covered the conflict firsthand. They were a tight group, veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and Addario knew most of them well. They were operating under dangerous conditions, with none of the support that journalists often receive in high-profile conflict zones—no guards, no translators, no armored cars, no hotel security, no professional intelligence reports. They kept tabs on each other and shared everything—vehicles, drivers, camera lenses, memory cards, food, housing, information. Most importantly, they shared what Addario calls “the same level of fear.” She amplifies:

When you're covering combat you want to be with people who have some experience, who are not going to want to run away the second the fighting starts, because vehicles and drivers are limited and you don't have that much mobility. You need to be with people you trust, who have good judgment, and who are more or less on a par with the level of risk you want to take.

For the first two days, Addario saw little fighting. Hicks went briefly to the front, but Addario stayed behind the lines covering hospital casualties and a funeral. Rebel sympathizers in Brega gave them food and lodging. On March 4 she joined the rebel soldiers, filing a photo of a rag-tag group firing an anti-aircraft gun in a desert wasteland.

Addario had traveled with combat troops before, embedded with US forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, but those were disciplined, professional soldiers. These rebel troops were not; they were mostly untrained citizen volunteers: “doctors, engineers, students, a mishmash of people,” Addario says. They were glad to have the journalists with them as observers, and they treated Addario as an equal, apparently comfortable with her presence as a woman on the front line. Their acceptance allowed her to relax her usual rules about covering up in Muslim countries. “I dressed in long shirts but I wasn't covering my hair,” Addario recalls.

It was clear to me that the rebels didn't care whether or not I had *hijab* on, so I decided not to wear it because it is a pain when you're getting shot at, to constantly be adjusting your headscarf.

By March 5, Addario was under fire much of the time, as rebels battled Qaddafi troops for control of a major oil refinery at Ras Lanuf. This was not like Iraq and Afghanistan, where she

could choose whether to go on patrol or stay back. The fighting became fierce and went on for four and five hours at a time. Qaddafi's forces were throwing everything they had at the rebels: attack helicopters, Grad rockets, machine gun fire, bombs, mortars and other artillery; the rebels had their own rocket-propelled grenades, machine guns, and Kalashnikov rifles. After one engagement, Hicks told the *Times* that he had never seen so much firepower in one day in all his years of reporting.²⁸

As the fighting intensified, it became hard to get vehicles and drivers, harder still to keep them on the front line. Local bilingual drivers were critical assets, especially for those who, like Addario and Hicks, did not speak Arabic. They were the journalists' eyes and ears, relaying the soldiers' shouted exchanges as well as chatter from behind the lines, which they received in a constant stream from friends and relatives on their cellphones. They were also literally the journalists' means of escape. The drivers were committed insurgents, but they were young and untrained and scared, and not always reliable under fire.

On March 6, outside the city of Bin Jawwad, Addario had a moment of panic. Under attack from helicopter gunships and artillery fire, she became separated both from her driver and from her colleagues. As she surveyed the surrounding terrain, she realized there was no place to hide. "There were bullets just flying above my head nonstop," she recalls. "I looked up and I said, 'I have to get out of here. I have to get out of here.'" She made it to the car of other photographers, and they escaped back to Ras Lanuf.²⁹ Her pictures from that day showed panic and disarray. On March 10, Addario told an interviewer that the Libya conflict was the most dangerous she had ever covered.³⁰

In Retreat

By March 14, the rebels had been pushed back some 160 miles from their furthest advance toward Tripoli. Ras Lanuf and Brega were back in Qaddafi's hands; Addario had seen both fall. She and Hicks were holed up in the town of Ajdabiya, along with the rest of the pack of photographers, and there was fighting on the west gate. If Ajdabiya fell, Qaddafi's troops would move on to Benghazi.

²⁸ MacDonald and Furst, "In the Thick of Libya's Brutal Fighting."

²⁹ Another journalist, Jean-Marie Lemaire, a French photographer working for the news station France 24, was shot in the calf during this same engagement; his cameras were also hit. Colleagues had earlier tried to persuade him to leave the front in the packed car Addario had run to, but he had refused. Lemaire survived. "Overview of Recent Media Freedom Violations," International Freedom of Expression Exchange Alert, March 8, 2011. See: http://www.ifex.org/middle_east_north_africa/2011/03/08/media_freedom_violations/

³⁰ Lynsey Addario, "'The Most Dangerous Thing I've Ever Covered,'" *The Daily Beast*, *Beast TV*, March 10, 2011. See: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/videos/2011/03/16/nytimes-photographer-lynsey-addario-reporting-from-libya.html>

Journalists in eastern Libya were also coming under attack. On March 8, CPJ raised a public alarm after a grenade was thrown into the lobby of the Ouzo Hotel in Benghazi, where a large number of foreign journalists had been staying.³¹ The same day, three BBC journalists and their driver were arrested by Qaddafi soldiers at a checkpoint outside Zawiyeh. Detained for 21 hours, they were hooded, handcuffed, beaten, accused of illegal reporting and espionage, and subjected to mock executions.³²

The violence was escalating. By mid-month, rumors began to spread that Qaddafi was promoting rape as a weapon of war; in Ajdabiya, there were intimations of sexual violence near the west gate, and doctors had found Viagra and condoms in the pockets of dead Qaddafi soldiers brought to the hospital morgue—evidence, they told the news network Al Jazeera, of a campaign to commit mass rapes to punish the town and intimidate the opposition.³³

To Addario, the situation seemed increasingly surreal. She knew that she had some strong pictures from her time in Libya, but she worried that a lot of the others were “mediocre.” In an email to CNN correspondent Ivan Watson on March 14, Addario summed up the situation: “qaddafi’s forces heading back east, and the rebels are surrendering along the way... so exhausted. this story has been one of the most dangerous i have ever covered. getting bombed from the air and by land, with no cover, and no flack and helmet.”³⁴ Maybe it was time to go.

Premonition. On the morning of March 15, Addario had what she calls a “horrible premonition,” a strong sense that she would be taken by Qaddafi troops. “I have days when I’m scared and there’s no reason, it’s my intuition or instinct,” she says.

And sometimes I have days when I’m fearless, you know? And the only thing I’ve done over the last 11 years of covering combat is to listen to my instinct and my intuition. That’s the only thing I can do.

Addario worried that Qaddafi troops, already on the western gate, would flank north and south, encircling the town. Hicks disagreed, recalling that in both Ras Lanuf and Brega, the army

³¹ “CPJ Condemns Attacks on Press in Libya, Yemen, and Egypt,” Committee to Protect Journalists, March 9, 2011. See: <http://www.cpj.org/2011/03/cpj-condemns-attacks-on-press-in-libya-yemen-and-e.php>

³² Feras Killani, Chris Cobb-Smith, and Goktay Koraltan, “BBC’s Team’s Libya Ordeal in Their Own Words,” BBC Mobile, March 9, 2011. See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12695138>

³³ Michel Martin, host, Al Jazeera reporter Sue Turton, “Reports Emerging of Rapes by Libyan Soldiers,” NPR News, *Tell Me More*, March 31, 2011. See: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=135011836>

³⁴ CNN Wire Staff, “4 New York Times Journalists Reported Missing in Libya,” March 17, 2011. See: <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/africa/03/16/libya.missing.journalists/?hpt=T2>; Boston Boomer, “Four NYT Journalists Missing in Libya,” *Sky Dancing Blog*, March 16, 2011. See: <http://skydancingblog.com/tag/lynsey-addario/>

had advanced straight ahead, taking the towns only after several days of attack from the west.³⁵ Addario usually deferred to Hicks's greater military experience, but this time she remained uneasy.

In a conversation the night before, she had told the *Times* foreign photo editor she was pulling back to Benghazi; from there she would make her way home. She gave her husband the same news that morning. Addario knew it could be risky to decide to leave but then stay on. "When you've already mentally checked out, it's very dangerous to be in a war zone," she says. "You have to be fully present because things are happening all around you and you have to make decisions every single second, because every second something is changing." She just had to get through the day.

A bomb had exploded earlier on the west side of town. Addario and Hicks went to the hospital, looking for casualties. At noon, they were joined by two *New York Times* colleagues; the group wanted to head to the western gate to cover the fighting. The other correspondents were Beirut bureau chief Anthony Shadid, and Stephen Farrell, a reporter, videographer, and recent editor of the paper's *At War* blog who had been kidnapped twice in Afghanistan.

Checkpoint

When the four left the hospital for the front line, they were in in two cars. But en route, Shadid and Farrell's driver quit. He stopped the car, told them he was done, and offloaded their bags and equipment. Shadid and Farrell climbed into the remaining car with Addario and Hicks. The driver was Mohammed Shaglouf, a 21-year-old engineering student and brother of a BBC driver. Hicks and Addario had hired him less than a week earlier, after a series of other drivers had left them on the front lines. Addario trusted Shaglouf, but the situation made her uncomfortable:

When you're in a situation with four people in a car and you don't have an option of taking a taxi or hiring another driver or getting out any other way, that's it. You're there. I mean you're stuck there.

The fighting got heavier, with many accurate incoming mortar rounds. The journalists decided to pull back from the front line into Ajdabiya, whose narrow streets could offer some protection from bombs and shrapnel. Civilians were fleeing the town, and in the car there was disagreement about when the journalists should leave. Hicks and Shadid wanted to stay a little longer; Farrell and Addario wanted to go. It started to get tense. "All day I kept saying, 'We have to leave. We have to leave. We have to leave,'" Addario recalls.

³⁵ Anthony Shadid, Stephen Farrell, Tyler Hicks, and Lynsey Addario, "4 Times Journalists Held Captive in Libya Faced Days of Brutality," *New York Times*, March 23, 2011.
See: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/23/world/africa/23times.html?_r=1

Now at some point, you know, at some point I don't want to be the girl who is saying 'Come on, I'm scared, we have to go.' So, I just stopped saying 'We have to go.'

Leaving. But eventually the four journalists, plus the driver, decided to leave. Shaglouf turned the car around toward the eastern gate and the road to Benghazi. Ahead of them was a car full of French journalists also headed that way. They were driving a back road, one they hadn't taken before, when suddenly Addario saw uniformed soldiers at a checkpoint about 100 yards in the distance. They were Qaddafi troops.

Should they make a U-turn? The soldiers raised their guns. Should they try to run through the checkpoint? Hicks, in the front seat, said yes: "Drive, drive, drive!" In fact, the French journalists had gunned their way past the soldiers just five minutes earlier. But the *Times* driver had no choice. He stopped the car, shouting "*Sahafa! Sahafa!... Journalists!*"

From that point, it was chaos. Addario ducked down in the back seat, expecting gunfire. The soldiers dragged the other journalists out of the car and tried to wrestle them to the ground. At that moment, rebels opened fire on the checkpoint from behind them. The journalists were caught in a firefight. "No one really knows the script for days like these, and neither did we," the journalists said later.³⁶

Addario pulled the disks from her cameras, and tried to hide them in her bra and jacket; she was wearing jeans, a long tunic-style shirt, and running shoes—no *hijab*. As she jumped from the car, she struggled with a soldier who grabbed at her cameras and waist pack, finally surrendering them in order to break loose of his grip. Shadid was sprawled on the ground. Farrell was gesticulating wildly toward the advancing rebels. Shaglouf was nowhere in sight.

"I saw Anthony trip and fall in front of me," Addario says. "I remember screaming his name for help and I looked at his face and it was completely terrified. At that point I knew no one was going to help us." Addario ran after Hicks, who had made a mad dash for a nearby building. Hicks thought they should keep running—out into the desert, away from the checkpoint, out of range of the crossfire.

Addario wasn't so sure. It was a long way to safety, and there were soldiers and fighting everywhere. Could they make it back to the rebel lines? Should they just surrender to the government troops? Would the soldiers respect their journalism credentials? Was she about to be murdered, like Danny Pearl? Raped, like the women of Congo?

Then soldiers rounded the building, forced the journalists face down on the ground, tied their hands behind their backs, and began arguing heatedly in Arabic. The soldier in charge of

³⁶ Ibid.

Addario flipped her over and began grabbing her chest and groping her body.³⁷ Addario found herself with hands on her breasts and a gun to her head.

³⁷ Judy Woodruff, host, Margaret Warner, interviewer, "New York Times Journalists Recall 'Medieval' Captivity in Libya," PBS, *NewsHour*, April 1, 2011. See: http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/world/jan-june11/nytreporters_04-01.html