



A Woman's Place?
Photojournalist Lynsey Addario in Libya
Epilogue

Photojournalist Lynsey Addario and three *New York Times* colleagues, Anthony Shadid, Stephen Farrell, and Tyler Hicks, were captured by soldiers loyal to Libyan president Muammar el-Qaddafi at a checkpoint outside Ajdabiya on March 15, 2011. They were detained for six days before being turned over to Turkish diplomats, who had helped arrange for their release, on March 21, 2011. For the first several hours of detention, the journalists were held out in the open during a battle with insurgents who fought to halt the soldiers' advance to Benghazi. That night, they were moved west, back toward the capital of Tripoli.

The next day they were taken to Qaddafi's hometown, Surt, and held overnight in a jail cell. On the third day they were driven to an airfield and flown to Tripoli, where they were transferred to officials from the Defense Ministry. During this initial phase of captivity, the four journalists were almost always bound and blindfolded, and were subjected to periods of physical assault, sexual aggression, rough handling, and humiliation, especially at checkpoints and during handoffs to new captors.¹

Shadid, who spoke Arabic, was punched, struck with a rifle butt, and head-butted by the captors, who accused him of being a spy. Hicks was also beaten and taunted; one captor, admiring Hicks's "beautiful head," threatened to take it for his own.² Immediately after the capture, Addario was punched in the face. Over the next three days she was repeatedly fondled and groped over her clothing, particularly on her breasts, buttocks, and between her legs. On the first night, a soldier caressed her hair and face, murmuring, "You might die tonight" over and over; that same night, while she was being transported in an armored personnel carrier, a soldier covered her mouth and pressed up against her,

¹ Jeremy W. Peters, "Freed Times Journalists Give Account of Captivity," *New York Times*, March 21, 2011. See: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/22/world/africa/22times.html?_r=1&ref=africa

² 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

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groping her while warning, "Don't speak."³ Stephen Farrell also was beaten and sexually assaulted, fondled by a captor who tried to insert a weapon between his buttocks.⁴

The periods of mistreatment alternated with periods of solicitude and protection, when the journalists were offered cigarettes, given food and drink, provided with blankets. Soldiers sometimes intervened when others became abusive. One captor pulled Addario out of the hands of a soldier who was groping her, and shielded her from further attack.⁵

After the journalists were turned over to the Defense Ministry in Tripoli, the mistreatment largely ended. A Libyan military intelligence official notified the US State Department that the journalists were in safe custody.⁶ Now held under house arrest, the journalists were given food, drink, and a change of clothing (Addario was given a shirt decorated with teddy bears and the words "Magic Girl"; her underwear read, "Shake it up").⁷

They slept and talked, watched state-sponsored TV, and read Shakespeare plays from books in the house library. One day they were able to change TV channels, and saw a report on their captivity on CNN. Knowing their detention was now public, the journalists pressed their captors to allow them phone calls, which were granted. Shadid, Farrell, and Hicks called family members. Addario, who could not recall her husband's phone number (her BlackBerry™ had been confiscated), called the foreign desk at the *Times*.

Throughout the six days of their detention, the *Times* journalists adopted attitudes of submission and cooperation with their captors. They apologized repeatedly for entering the country without visas; they did not fight, protest, or threaten reprisals from their governments. In the face of the sexual aggression, especially, Addario was physically passive, remaining silent, crying softly, or pleading. As Addario said later, she was "in no position to argue," though she did repeatedly inform her captors that she was married, hoping that Muslim prohibitions about touching another man's wife might make a difference.

Immediately after her release, Addario began speaking publicly about the sexual assault, detailing the groping incidents and expressing her outrage in several publications

³ Author's telephone interview with Lynsey Addario on November 29, 2011. All quotes from Addario, unless otherwise attributed, are from this interview.

⁴ Lauren Wolfe, "Q&A: NYT's Lynsey Addario on Libya Sexual Assault," CPJ Blog, Committee to Protect Journalists, April 4, 2011. See: <http://cpj.org/blog/2011/04/qa-nyts-lynsey-addario-on-libya-sexual-assault.php>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Peters, "Freed Times Journalists Give Account of Captivity."

⁷ Shadid, Farrell, Hicks, and Addario, "4 Times Journalists Held Captive in Libya Faced Days of Brutality."

and at media events. When Shadid asked whether she was sure she wanted to go public with the details of the ordeal, Addario was adamant about denouncing her abusers. "These men are disgusting and this is something that's shameful for them. Why would I not want to make them confront what they've done?" she says.

I guess a lot of people were surprised at how vocal I was... I come from a very open family, you talk about everything. It never dawned on me to not talk about it. Maybe it's because I wasn't raped, so there was a line that wasn't crossed and so I felt a little more comfortable talking about it... I also felt that as a journalist it's my responsibility to be honest... If I'm silent, people are going to infer what they want, people will guess. If you do say something not only does it lay the facts out, it provides a path for other women to feel comfortable and also to talk about it.

Addario also insisted on another point: the abuse she suffered was no worse than the abuse the men suffered. "It was traumatic for all of us," she told an interviewer two weeks after her release.⁸ Elsewhere, she explained, "When I was in Libya, I was groped by a dozen men."

But why is that *more* horrible than what happened to Tyler or Steve or Anthony—being smashed on the back of the head with a rifle butt? Why isn't anyone saying men shouldn't cover war? Women and men should do what they believe they need to do. I don't think it's more dangerous for a woman to do conflict photography. Both men and women face the same dangers.⁹

After their release, all four journalists returned to conflict reporting. Their Libyan driver, Mohamed Shaglouf, who had been missing since their car was stopped at the checkpoint, was confirmed dead in November 2011. Anthony Shadid died of an acute asthma attack on February 16, 2012, while covering an uprising in Syria. Tyler Hicks, who was with Shadid in Syria, brought Shadid's body out of the country over a smugglers' route into Turkey.

⁸ Wolfe, "Q&A: NYT's Lynsey Addario on Libya Sexual Assault."

⁹ Lynsey Addario, "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/>