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STORIES FROM THE FRONT LINES:
FEMALE FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS IN WAR ZONES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the experience of women who cover war and conflict zones, with a special focus on those reporting in Iraq and Afghanistan. When western female war correspondents work in male-dominated cultures and situations of war, they encounter different challenges and advantages than male war correspondents. The level of danger associated with the assignments these women take on is evaluated in this thesis. Anecdotes from female war correspondents themselves, combined with outside analysis, reveal the types of situations unique to female war correspondents. More women choose to follow the story and witness history in the making by covering today's war and conflict zones. This trend parallels the greater presence of women in newsrooms, today. This thesis will shed light on what it means to be a female reporting on and working in dangerous conditions.

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PART 1 INTRODUCTION

"On Friday February 11, the day Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak stepped down, CBS Correspondent Lara Logan was covering the jubilation in Tahrir Square for a *60 Minutes* story when she and her team and their security were surrounded by a dangerous element amidst the celebration. It was a mob of more than 200 people whipped into a frenzy.

"In the crush of the mob, she was separated from her crew. She was surrounded and suffered a brutal and sustained sexual assault and beating before being saved by a group of women and an estimated 20 Egyptian soldiers. She reconnected with the CBS team, returned to her hotel and returned to the United States on the first flight the next morning. She is currently in the hospital recovering.

"There will be no further comment from CBS News and Correspondent Logan and her family respectfully request privacy at this time."¹

CBS released this statement quickly after the attack on CBS Correspondent Lara Logan. Just as quickly the public launched its comments on the incident. The very first comment on the NPR post announcing the attack on Logan was by Mark P. and now says, "This comment has been removed because it did not meet the NPR.org Community Discussion Rules."² Two comments later, Kristopher Vilammaa, responded, "Mark, what "situation" are you talking about? What we should be taking away from this is NOT that we have to keep female journalists out of "situations". And who is the "they" you are blaming for this tragedy?" Kathleen B.

¹ "CBS News' Lara Logan Assaulted During Egypt Protests - 60 Minutes - CBS News." *CBS News*. 11 Feb. 2011. Web.<<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2011/02/15/60minutes/main20032070.shtml>>.

² "CBS News' Lara Logan Was Attacked, Sexually Assaulted In Egypt : The Two-Way : NPR." *NPR : National Public Radio*. 11 Feb. 2011. Web. <<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2011/02/16/133785179/cbs-news-lara-logan-was-attacked-sexually-assaulted-in-egypt>>.

followed, “Nice support of Rape Culture, Mark P. I suppose women should stay locked up in their houses.” Mark P. wrote back, “Kathleen, would a male reporter have been beaten AND sexually assaulted? You have a crowd of mostly men, who are anti-American, and you send a small-frame blonde women in there working for an American news company? Seriously?”³ The debate continued for another 405 comments. NPR took down many of the comments and closed the discussion on the story by the end of the weekend.

A week later, NPR’s ombudsman, Alicia Shepard, wrote on her blog, “NPR Struggling with Crude Behavior by Some Users of its Website.” Shepard began, “People have said appalling things online about CBS Correspondent Lara Logan since the news came out that a Cairo mob attacked her.”⁴ Shepard believed many of the comments were taken down because users found Logan’s attack a way to belittle, mock and ridicule female correspondents who venture into risky, male-dominated situations.

The public’s, or the blogosphere’s, response revealed that many thought Logan should not have been in the middle of a such a potentially dangerous mob and that more precaution should have been taken by CBS to ensure her safety. This outraged response demonstrated the public’s surprise at the amount of women actually working in these dangerous conditions, bringing attacks on female journalists to the public’s consciousness. But Shepard wrote, “She was in Cairo as an experienced foreign correspondent who has covered wars and all manner of mayhem. And it would indicate offensive sexism for CBS to not send her to Cairo simply because she happens to be an attractive blonde.”⁵

³ "CBS News' Lara Logan Was Attacked, Sexually Assaulted In Egypt : The Two-Way : NPR."

⁴ Shepard, Alicia. "NPR Struggling with Crude Behavior by Some Users of Its Website : NPR Ombudsman." *NPR : National Public Radio*. 18 Feb. 2011. Web. 2011.

<<http://www.npr.org/blogs/ombudsman/2011/02/27/133838118/npr-struggling-with-crude-behavior-by-some-users-of-its-web-site>>.

⁵ “NPR Struggling with Crude Behavior by Some users of Its Website.”

Overall, Logan has 18 years of experience reporting from war zones. When the U.S. military invaded Baghdad in 2003, Logan was the only journalist from an American network within the city. Since, Logan reported from the frontlines of Afghanistan, alongside the Green Berets searching for al-Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden, and on a dangerous road to the airport in Baghdad. Logan became the CBS News chief foreign correspondent in February 2006.⁶

Among the most appalling responses to Logan's attack, include Freelance journalist Nir Rosen's suggestion via Twitter that the attack 'wasn't that bad.' Rosen resigned his NYU fellowship with the Center of Law and Security shortly after realizing his remarks crossed the line.⁷ In his defense, Rosen said he didn't realize it was a sexual assault when he first 'tweeted' and he really remarked on his assumption that a western journalist would now get more attention by the western media than the actual Egyptian women casualties.⁸

Worse yet, right-winged blogger Debbie Schlussel wrote, "So sad, too bad, Lara. No one told her to go there. She knew the risks. And she should have known what Islam is all about. Now she knows. Or so we'd hope." Readers responded with enraged comments, prompting Schlussel to post an update. Schlussel said she in no way supports sexual assault by her original comments and rather suggested that Logan should have known that Muslims are violent and could do this to her.⁹

⁶ "Lara Logan." *CBS News*. Web.

<<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/12/02/broadcasts/main531421.shtml>>.

⁷ Lewis, Matt. "Nir Rosen Resigns as NYU Fellow After Trashing Lara Logan on Twitter." *Politics Daily*. 20

Feb. 2011. Web. <<http://www.politicsdaily.com/2011/02/16/nir-rosen-resigns-from-nyu-after-trashing-lara-logan-on-twitter/>>.

⁸ "Nir Rosen to Anderson Cooper." *Mediabistro.com*. 16 Feb. 2011.

<http://www.mediabistro.com/tvnewser/nir-rosen-to-anderson-cooper-theres-no-defense-for-what-i-did_b53477>.

⁹ Schlussel, Debbie. "How Muslims Celebrate Victory: Egypt's "Peaceful, Moderate, Democratic" Protesters." *Debbie Schlussel*. 15 Feb. 2011. Web.

<<http://www.debbieschlussel.com/33031/how-muslims-celebrate-victory-egypts-peaceful>>

Regardless, Logan's assault brought the topic of women in conflict zones to the forefront, especially among women in the same profession. Susan Milligan, who covered the wars in the Balkans and the economic transition in Central and Eastern Europe, wrote in a blog post on the U.S. News and World Report website, "I've reported in a number of war zones, and never felt particularly at risk as a female journalist. Yes, I was more likely to be raped, but I was also less likely to be targeted for murder."¹⁰ Milligan's comments are similar to those of the female conflict correspondents interviewed for this project. Often, these women felt much safer because they weren't seen as a threat because of their gender.

Vanessa Gezari, a foreign correspondent who covered Afghanistan and South Asia for the *Chicago Tribune*, commented via e-mail, "To me, the salient things about the Lara Logan attack and the response to it are, first, how little most Americans know about who's actually covering combat and conflict today. In the region where I work, many if not most of the newspaper correspondents are women and as reporters for big papers with demanding deadlines, they do some of the toughest work."

Today, according to the *American Journalism Review* there are eight full-time female foreign correspondents employed by U.S. newspapers covering war and conflict zones (Baghdad, Kabul and Cairo) versus the 13 men.¹¹ But countless other women are sent off on assignment when conflict strikes, much like Logan was when Egypt erupted.

In addition to these war correspondents stationed at bureaus across the Middle East, there are journalists "embedded" with the U.S. troops and coalition forces. According to Bill

moderate-democratic-protesters/>.

¹⁰ Milligan, Susan. "Lara Logan Assaulted--and Then Blamed." *US News & World Report*. 16 Feb. 2011. Web. <<http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/susan-milligan/2011/02/16/lara-logan-assaulted-and-then-blamed>>.

¹¹ Kumar, Priya. "Foreign Correspondents: Who Covers What | American Journalism Review." *American Journalism Review*. Web. 10 Jan. 2011. <<http://www.ajr.org/Article.asp?id=4997>>.

Katovsky, author of “Embedded”, journalists were ten times more likely to die in Iraq than the 250,000 American and British soldiers, making embedded reporting the most dangerous for women covering war and conflict zones.

With more women in the field, are they being treated equally to their male counterparts? Does this treatment and outside perception affect the ability of these women to do their jobs? How big of a role does safety play in the assignments female correspondents pursue? What is the level of danger these women face in order to get their stories?

Researching this topic revealed little evidence that female journalists are restricted because of their gender. These results focus on the experiences of western female war correspondents and those women reporting for western media. More women are choosing to follow the story and witness history in the making. However, there are advantages and disadvantages to being a woman in a conflict zone, which will be discussed by female correspondents and their editors, male and female, throughout this paper.

PART 2

Dealing with Danger

According to the *Committee to Protect Journalists*, 852 journalists were killed worldwide from 1992 until today. The beat covered by the most victims was politics at 39 percent, but war follows close behind as the beat of 34 percent of victims. These deaths resulted from a variety of causes including murder, crossfire/combat and dangerous assignments. Of all journalists killed since 1992, seven percent of victims were female. In the sections that follow, dangerous incidents women reporters have faced in Iraq and Afghanistan are detailed, along with the way these women dealt with the dangers.

IRAQ:

The number one “deadliest country” for journalists according to *The Committee to Protect Journalists* is Iraq with 147 confirmed deaths. Among the causes of journalists’ deaths there, 36 percent occurred from crossfire or combat while 63 percent were murder. In Iraq, eleven female journalists were killed there, while 138 men were killed.

At the advent of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the quantity of journalists embedded with the troops met unprecedented numbers. Embedding involves a journalist being placed with a military unit – living and breathing the same conditions as the soldiers around them. The Pentagon issued 2,700 media credentials just before the invasion of Iraq. U.S. Marine Corp. Col. Dave Lapan said via email, nearly 800 journalists were embedded with U.S. and coalition forces at the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom. While Lapan didn’t have a breakdown by gender, MarineParents.com, Inc. compiled a list of journalists embedded with the marines in Iraq. According to their list, there have been seven women compared with 60 men. This information suggests that about 12% of embedded journalists in Iraq have been female.¹² Keep in mind this list includes journalists in Iraq only up until July 2007.

Ten percent of all media credentials issued for embedded journalists at the beginning of the Iraq War were reserved for foreign media, including *Reuters*, *BBC* and *El Corriereo* – the seventh most popular general interest newspaper in Spain, with a circulation of 119,000. *El Corriereo* is based out of Bilbao in northern Spain.

Mercedes Gallego, the U.S. correspondent for *El Corriereo* asked to be the journalist embedded with the marines from her newspaper. She thought it was a great opportunity for her

¹² "Marine Moms and Dads: List of Embedded Journalists and Marine Units." *MarineParents.com*. 5 July 2007. Web. <<http://www.marineparents.com/usmc/embedded.asp>>.

and *El Correo* to be out there reporting with the “big guys”, Gallego said in a telephone interview.¹³

Before heading to Iraq, Gallego attended boot camp for journalists at the Marine Corps Base Quantico in Virginia. She said all of the journalists intending to embed spent a week there doing a short version of the Marine’s boot camp. “They spent a lot of time telling us how dangerous it would be. About weapons of mass destruction, bombs, biochemical warfare, nuclear warfare – a lot of journalists backed out and decided not to go,” Gallego said.

Gallego said female journalists were definitely the minority at this boot camp, but she remembers a lot more women when she arrived in Kuwait. Below is a picture of a soldier measuring Gallego for her uniform in Kuwait. Gallego said this picture circulated around the world on newswires because women are such a rare sight in this arena.



¹³ "Mercedes Gallego." Telephone interview. 17 Apr. 2011.

Gallego embedded with the First Marine Division Headquarter Battalion of 5,000 when they invaded Iraq. While she doesn't know specific statistics, she said women were a significant minority. "The percentage of women in the military is very low. Of all armed forces, the Marines have the lowest percentage of women," Gallego said.

During her first three weeks in Iraq, before the war started, Gallego lived in a tent with the Marine women. In the whole camp, women only lived in two tents. The women in the Marines looked out for her. "Before going to war, I was mentally prepared to be killed, to lose a leg or to be victim to weapons of mass destruction," Gallego said, "I was shocked to discover that the women in the Marines are often the victims of sexual assault. I wasn't prepared to be scared of the soldiers I was living with."

Gallego learned the Marine women never walked around the camp alone -- even to go to the latrines -- and they always carried their weapons even if they went with a buddy. "The women noticed I wasn't taking the same precautions and warned me of the dangers of sexual assault," Gallego said. She has long dark hair, as seen in the picture above, and would just tie it back in a ponytail. All the women covered their hair because they didn't want to excite the men. Out in the desert like that, Gallego said anything feminine could turn men on. She said all the women tried to minimize any kind of feminine attractiveness by covering themselves completely with their uniforms.

When the war started, Gallego said they would sleep on the ground in the desert in sleeping bags or in the vehicles. At that point there was no separation from the men. Gallego said they had to sleep in their boots with their gas masks in case the enemy attacked at night. She said this often happened. One of her scariest nights, she tried to sleep without her boots to actually get

a good night's sleep and the battalion was attacked. Luckily, she found the trenches and survived the night.

One of the hardest aspects of being a woman around so many men was the change of moods. Gallego doesn't drink coffee so one of the sergeants there took a special liking to her and brought her tons of tea bags. The very next day, that same guy yelled at her for publishing "confidential" information, which Gallego said really wasn't off-limits. "They [the male Marines] would turn on you and be extremely mean if you weren't giving them what they wanted -- the sexual favors they were really trying to get by being nice to you," Gallego said.

A lot of the guys also offered to carry Gallego's backpack for her and did other favors for her. Once, Gallego and a few other Marine women attempted to wash their hair in a box of water with a plastic bag and those same men caught them. Then the soldiers went to the commander and told on the women for using the water to wash their hair. "You never knew who to trust," Gallego said.

When the war started the Marine women could not go to the front lines and into the combat areas, but since Gallego is a journalist she went. She found this part of her experience the hardest because she didn't have women around to share intimate stories and talk about the issues of being a woman around so many men. "No one could understand that as a woman I needed to wash my hair," Gallego said.¹⁴ Within one span of three weeks, which Gallego remembers well, she only had two opportunities to wash her hair. Once she took a shower, which is just a term she said, because it involved a plastic bag dripping water.

Going to the bathroom around so many men caused issues almost every time. "When the other women were around, we would go in a group to find a spot to go to the bathroom," Gallego

¹⁴ Mercedes Gallego." Telephone interview. 17 Apr. 2011.

said, “But when it was just me, by myself, the male soldiers would yell at me if they saw me wandering by myself to find a spot. Sometimes I didn’t want to tell them what I was doing.”

Gallego said other people who encountered the battalion thought she was a prisoner because it was so rare to see a woman in such adverse conditions in the war.

Today, instability continues to plague the landscape of Iraq, keeping its designation as the “deadliest country” for journalists and media workers. In 2010 “at least five journalists and three media support workers were killed in relation to their work, reflecting a persistent level of insecurity”.¹⁵ However, many of the journalists and editors targeted for murder are men and mostly of Iraqi nationality. According to Col. Lapan, journalists still embed with the troops in Iraq but there are certainly not as many as the beginning days of the war.

¹⁵ Committee to Protect Journalists. *Attacks on the Press in 2010 A Worldwide Survey*. Committee to Protect Journalists, 2011. Print. 240.

AFGHANISTAN:

Afghanistan is the tenth “deadliest country” according to *Committee to Protect Journalists’* statistics, where 22 journalists have been killed since 1992. The deadliest year, with nine deaths of journalists was 2001, the same year the U.S. Armed Forces launched Operation Enduring Freedom and invaded Afghanistan. Since the invasion 20 journalists have been killed, five female and 15 male.

Michelle Lang represents the small group of embedded journalists in Afghanistan. Media embedding began during the early part of the war in Afghanistan but on a smaller-scale than embedding in Iraq. Lang, a print reporter for the *Calgary* and *Canwest News Service* (both news organizations in Canada), was killed while traveling in a military convoy on December 30, 2009. She was travelling with four other soldiers when their vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb about two miles south of the city of Kandahar. The soldiers were also killed, along with another Canadian civilian. Lang was the first Canadian journalist killed in Afghanistan. She was reporting on a team of soldiers and social workers working with Afghan civilians to repair and reconstruct war damage, according to the *Committee to Protect Journalists*.

Overall, 13 foreign journalists have been killed in Afghanistan since the 2001 U.S. invasion. Currently, there are several full-time foreign correspondents employed by U.S. newspapers in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. According to the *American Journalism Review*, the women stationed in Kabul today include Laura King of the *Los Angeles Times*, along with Alissa Rubin and Carlotta Gall of *The New York Times*. This count obviously doesn’t include the numerous freelance journalists and those reporters on special projects in the country.

Vanessa Gezari is one such special assignment reporter, who has written numerous pieces for *The Columbia Journalism Review* and *The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting* on

Afghanistan. During 2002 and 2003, Gezari covered Afghanistan on assignment for the *Chicago Tribune*. Currently, Gezari is writing a book on Afghanistan.

Gezari left for a freelance assignment in India on Sept. 10, 2001, the day before the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. She admitted if her flight was just a few days later, she probably wouldn't have gone and recalled her mother telling her to come home right away.¹⁶ But, Gezari stayed and immediately began reporting on Indian Muslims' reactions to Sept. 11 and what was happening very quickly with talk of war in Afghanistan. Then, as war commenced in Iraq, the *Chicago Tribune* asked Gezari to run its Kabul bureau as a "super-stringer", while Liz Sly set up a bureau in Iraq.

"I think one of the myths about journalists doing this kind of work is that we're really brave. I would gently suggest that's not exactly true," Gezari said of dealing with dangerous and intimidating situations, "But there's something that happens when you're actually out there doing your work and it enables you to be in certain situations you wouldn't normally be in. I think what's interesting about the act of reporting is that it forces you to be quite clinical about what's going on around you. You start thinking in a slightly different kind of way. You're not just a bystander, which might be quite dangerous. I'm not saying that it isn't dangerous to do this kind of work but when you're out there and know what you're after – you're in the zone and occupy a kind of special fearless place."¹⁷ Gezari related her foreign reporting experiences in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Kashmir to just as dangerous assignments she's covered in the United States. She referenced a time she covered a murder in a dangerous neighborhood in Chicago as a metro reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*. "I've had some creepy experiences reporting in the

¹⁶ Gezari, Vanessa. Telephone interview. 24 Feb. 2011.

¹⁷ Vanessa Gezari. Telephone interview. 24 Feb. 2011.

United States that rival some of the things I've experienced in places like Afghanistan, Pakistan or Kashmir where people are shooting and blowing themselves up," Gezari said.

With that said, the most dangerous situation Gezari experienced while on assignment in Afghanistan happened while covering a riot in Kabul. One person started throwing bricks and soon everyone around her was throwing bricks. She feared the boisterous crowd would hit her in the crossfire. "That's when you know you have to get out of there because things become very chaotic, very quickly," Gezari said. Another dangerous experience occurred once in Kabul when a man threw a brick at a military vehicle that was stuck in the middle of a crowd and the windshield was covered in blood.

"What's interesting about all these experiences is that is what you think. This is what you're expecting me to tell you," Gezari said.¹⁸ Gezari hesitated to lead readers to believe all Afghans were bad people. Afghans always took great care of her and there is a lot more to their culture than meets the eye, she said. "Because there are strong traditions of hospitality in their culture and because they see a young, foreign woman traveling alone at a difficult, violent time and they want to make sure that something doesn't happen that will make people think worse of them," Gezari said.

The kindness and hospitality that Gezari received helped her to realize that once she learned the culture and the way people worked, she knew how to deal with the other dangerous situations she found herself in. While to an outsider or an American interpreting Gezari's experiences, the chaos of these situations may seem too much to bear, but to Gezari things looked much different.

"It's an advantage to be a women reporter in a place like Afghanistan," Gezari said, "I found the fact that I was a women in Afghanistan always allowed me to be not as much of a

¹⁸ Vanessa Gezari. Telephone interview. 24 Feb. 2011.

threat to people. A lot of times really important men – warlords and commanders – would talk to me. Like I would just show up and it’s like they thought I could never write anything bad about them.”¹⁹ Gezari admits she really thought being an “innocent” looking girl reporting in Afghanistan at age 25 and 26 really helped to get her in the door and acquire key interviews. She believed a lot of her male colleagues got a very different view of Afghanistan than she did for a few reasons. One includes that in the Afghan culture, especially in the villages, most men won’t allow unfamiliar men, journalists, in to talk with their wives or sisters. Gezari on the other hand could get this view of Afghanistan easily because she is also a woman. Another reason Gezari believes male journalists get a different view is because they are seen as more of a threat and therefore probably have more difficulty getting interviews. “I think the view female reporters get of a country like that [Afghanistan] is much more textured. But, I’m of course not speaking for everybody,” Gezari said.²⁰

Upon the completion of her time as a super-stringer for the *Chicago Tribune*, Gezari wanted to find a way to give back to the Afghans in return for their hospitality among other reasons. She paired up with the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, a non-partisan, non-profit based in London that trains journalists in developing countries and conflict zones. “You know, we write stories and we hope that they will help but you know, whatever, a lot of times you don’t really know if they do,” Gezari said.²¹ In the Spring of 2004, Gezari then worked in Mazar-I Sharif as a mentor for seven to eight Afghan journalists. Despite the trend of increasing Western female correspondents and reporters, Gezari saw “many, many more men than women Afghan reporters.” Gezari said this isn’t very surprising because there aren’t very many women working out of the house there. But, she believes it is much more dangerous for the local reporters than

¹⁹ Vanessa Gezari. Telephone interview. 24 Feb. 2011.

²⁰ Vanessa Gezari. Telephone interview. 24 Feb. 2011.

²¹ Vanessa Gezari. Telephone interview. 24 Feb. 2011.

for her, because she can always just buy a plane ticket and leave if things are becoming too much to bear.

Gezari's said today when she goes back to report the book she is writing on Afghanistan, it is much more dangerous to move about the country. "When I'm in Kabul now, I really don't even walk in the city. I take taxis or have cars that take me everywhere because it's become too much of an issue to attract too much attention to yourself," Gezari said.²² Today, there is a "lucrative" kidnapping business, according to Gezari. Many people can make a lot of money if they get a hold of a foreigner. Gezari said from 2002 to 2004 when she was reporting in Afghanistan for the *Chicago Tribune* she could go hiking in the hills that surround Kabul and sometimes venture to the local market on her own. "But, it's definitely not the place you go jogging," Gezari said. Another aspect Gezari said she had to adapt to is that the Afghan culture is a much more conservative culture even than many other Muslim countries, "as a foreign women, it's very hard to go outside much," she said. In that sense, Gezari believes mobility within the country is much easier for men. They don't have to be as conspicuous.

Susan Glasser of the *Washington Post* (while reporting in Afghanistan) seconded Gezari's point. "Some women journalists faced resistance because they wore Western clothing. I never wore a burqa. I refused to even try one on. But yeah, I wore a shalwar kameez and a black head scarf in Tora Bora every day, which was absurd to me. Like going off to war in a dress," Glasser said.²³ Glasser also believes being a woman helped her work in Afghanistan. She was stationed at the Marine's command staff headquarters, while her husband, Peter Baker, was an embedded journalist.

²² Vanessa Gezari. Telephone interview. 24 Feb. 2011.

²³ Katovsky, William. *Embedded*. Guilford, CT: Lyon, 2003. Print.

“Not surprisingly, the Afghans were very interested to talk to a women reporter. There’s not really a category for professional women except for prostitutes. So I felt a sort of unwanted attention from the Afghan warlords,” Glasser said.

Today, deteriorating security conditions are affecting both western journalists, along with Afghan journalists. The Afghanistan NGO Safety Office said in September 2010 that the country was at its most dangerous level since the 2001 U.S. invasion. In 2010, two journalists were killed and kidnappings remain an on-going hazard. Two male French journalists are currently held captive. Reports claim they are alive and “well.”

PART 3

Sexual Abuse, Harassment and Assault

Most recently in Libya, four journalists from the *New York Times* were held captive and faced days of brutality. This group consisted of three men and one woman. At the time of captivity they were heading towards the front line of a rebel stand against the advancing forces of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, the authoritarian leader of the Libya who came into power 40 years ago. Rebellion against his power has been on-going since February 2011. This group of *New York Times* journalists covered the fall of two other rebel-held towns and recognized a pattern. In each of these towns, Ras Lanuf and Brega, the government bombed the towns for days before making a “methodical assault”. Each time the assault began, journalists and rebels would flee the city. As Ajdabiya began to fall the journalists knew they must flee the country to remain safe and alive. During their attempted escape they were stopped by Qaddafi’s soldiers.

In the hectic moments that followed, all four of the journalists found themselves behind a one room house cornered by the soldiers. While Lynsey Addario was being bound by a soldier using the very shoelaces he took from her shoes, she whispered to Steve, one of the male journalists, “God, I just don’t want to be raped.”²⁴

That first group of soldiers was generally hospitable to their captives. “These are the morals of Islam,” one of the soldiers said to journalist Anthony Shadid, “These are the morals of Qaddafi. We treat prisoners humanely.” The journalists received blankets, mattresses and sparse food items from their captors. Then, the soldiers transferred the journalists to a new group of Qaddafi’s soldiers. “A new group seized us, and they were rougher. They blindfolded us, tied our

²⁴ Shadid, Anthony, Lynsey Addario, Stephen Farrel, and Tyler Hicks. "4 Times Journalists Held Captive in Libya Faced Days of Brutality." *The New York Times*. 22 Mar. 2011. Web. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/23/world/africa/23times.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=journalists%20kidnapped%20in%20libya&st=cse>.

arms and legs and beat us. They then stuffed us into an armored car, where Lynsey was grouped. She never screamed but pleaded. A soldier covered her mouth, tracing his hands over her body. 'Don't speak,' he warned."²⁵ This wasn't the only groping Lynsey received. This was the worst of the sexual harassment she received while held captive.

Sexual abuse, harassment and assault are very real fears for women reporting in war and conflict zones. Many of the female correspondents interviewed for this project admit that sexual abuse, harassment and assault happen much more frequently to women of this profession than the public is aware of. In the sections that follow, a picture of Tahrir square and the events in Cairo will be painted by a female correspondent who covered the events there. Her story will address the Egyptian culture of sexual harassment that may have contributed to Lara Logan's assault. Also, the fear and reluctance of female war correspondents to admit they were victims of sexual harassment, abuse or assault will be presented.

²⁵ Shadid, Anthony, Lynsey Addario, Stephen Farrel, and Tyler Hicks. "4 Times Journalists Held Captive in Libya Faced Days of Brutality." *The New York Times*. 22 Mar. 2011. Web. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/23/world/africa/23times.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=journalists%20kidnapped%20in%20libya&st=cse>.

CAIRO:

Linda Davidson found herself jetting to Egypt quickly at the end of January 2011. A photographer for *The Washington Post*, Davidson was reporting on the economic situation in Europe. She was in France at the time. Her editors asked her to take the next flight to Egypt to cover the events of the Egyptian revolution that began on January 25, 2011. As thousands of Egyptians demanded an end to President Hosni Mubarak's nearly 30 year rule, many journalists ventured to Egypt to cover the protests and violence.

The only two female reporters a part of *The Washington Post's* team of several journalists covering the events in Egypt, Davidson travelled with Leila Fedel, *The Washington Post's* Baghdad correspondent. This was the first time Davidson covered conflict. "I've covered riots here and there in the United States, but I hadn't covered any international conflicts," Davidson said.²⁶ Yet, her experience in Cairo certainly showed her some of the extremes that female conflict correspondents face.

In relation to being a woman in this Egyptian conflict zone Davidson recalled the scene in Tahrir square. Her overall impression of the people focused on their kindness and interest in being photographed. "On the other end of that, there's the groping. There were so many people in the square that I was constantly in close contact with the people around me," Davidson said, "These hands come and grab you in very personal places. They touch you on the top and on the bottom and make it seem like they are helping you move through the crowd. First I was shocked and I said. 'Okay, I knew this was coming.'²⁷ The first few times this unwanted touching happened, Davidson said she turned around and yelled but everyone just looked at her innocently like it wasn't them. When she first arrived in Egypt she covered a pro-Mubarak rally, even

²⁶ Linda Davidson. Telephone interview. 30 Mar. 2011.

²⁷ Linda Davidson. Telephone interview. 30 Mar. 2011.

though most of these supporters didn't like foreign media. A group of men bumped in to her and groped her, stealing her iPhone and a few flash cards containing pictures she shot for *The Washington Post*. Besides being very angry that the men unnecessarily took her primary means of communication, Davidson was offended by the unwanted touching. She went back to her hotel and read of up on groping to discover that it isn't really intended as a sexual thing in Egyptian culture. "It is more of a power thing and the men were trying to put me in my place, much like they do to Egyptian women and try to keep them oppressed through sexual harassment," Davidson said.²⁸

Davidson was not in the square at the exact time of Lara Logan's sexual assaulted, but rather was in her room filing photos. After speaking with some of her colleagues she believes incidents like what happened to Logan fester in the mentality of a mob. When people are protected by the cloak of a mob, they seem to be willing to do these inconceivable and aggressive things that they normally only have in the back of their heads, Davidson said.

Experienced foreign conflict correspondent, Judith Matloff, wrote "Safety Tips for Female Correspondents" for the *Columbia Journalism Review* in response to Logan's assault. Matloff acknowledges what happened to Logan is a "worst-case scenario for many female reporters."²⁹ Her tips range from setting up facades like wearing a wedding ring or a band that looks like one and dressing conservatively and frumpy (especially in crowds and mobs) to practical solutions like always having a plan of escape in a large crowd and carrying the cell phone number of someone senior in the army or police.

²⁸ Linda Davidson. Telephone interview. 30 Mar. 2011.

²⁹ Matloff, Judith. "Safety Tips for Female Correspondents : CJR." *Columbia Journalism Review*. 22 Feb. 2011. Web.
<http://www.cjr.org/campaign_desk/safety_tips_for_female_corresp.php>.

The assault on Lara Logan brought the biggest difference between male and female correspondents to the international community's attention. Women are at a heightened risk of sexual abuse, harassment and assault in conflict zones where lawlessness and chaos are prevalent. The Islamic countries and their cultures, where most of the conflicts are today, also presents a clash between ideologies about the treatment and status of women. Where western women are viewed differently by the Islamic men in the countries they are reporting on, it sometimes interferes with the ability of these female war correspondents to do their jobs. Without adhering to the dress code of women in that culture, unwanted attention is garnered by western reporters. While Logan allowed CBS to reveal what happened to her, many women reporters in her position avoid the publicity of such incidents. According to many seasoned correspondents sexual harassment, assault and abuse still remain a sort of taboo within their profession.

STATUS:

Over her 20 years as a female conflict correspondent, writing for publications as *The New York Times*, *Newsweek* and *The Economist*, Judith Matloff has encountered the depth of issues that stem from sexual harassment, abuse and assault. In a piece she wrote for the *Columbia Journalism Review* in 2007, Matloff relays the story of a few women affected by this issue. An experienced photographer in South Asia, who asked Matloff to keep her name confidential, was on an assignment in India. She was swept into a ditch by a mob of men, who began to tear her clothes off. Fortunately, someone who saw the scene unfold pulled her out of the group and over to the policemen who were watching (without intervening) before the mob succeeding in getting her pants off. “Alone in her hotel room that night, the photographer recalls, she cried, thinking, “What a bloody way to make a living.” She didn’t inform her editors, however. ‘I put myself out there equal to the boys. I didn’t want to be seen in any way as a weaker.’”³⁰

Despite the advancing role of women in the war and conflict reporting profession, Matloff believes the one area women differ from men is sexual assault. Through her own relationships with reporters she knows of a dozen assaults. “Eight of the cases involve forced intercourse, mostly in combat zones,” Matloff wrote. Besides personal knowledge, it is difficult to quantify and assess the frequency of sexual harassment, assault and abuse on female correspondents. Many of these women keep the incidents to themselves for fear of being seen in a different way.

In 2004, the *International News Safety Institute* conducted a survey of 29 female war reporters. Over half of the respondents revealed they experienced sexual harassment on the job, while two said they experienced sexual abuse. “The shame runs so deep and the fear of being

³⁰ Matloff, Judith. "Unspoken." *Columbia Journalism Review*. 1 May 2007. Web. <http://www.cjr.org/on_the_job/unspoken.php>.

pulled off an assignment, especially in a time of shrinking budgets, is so strong that no one wants intimate violations to resound in a newsroom,” Matloff wrote.³¹ The area of sexual harassment, abuse and assault is the most significant disadvantage facing female war correspondents. It’s a threat brought on by gender and something women can’t necessarily control but can only prepare for.

“The general reluctance to call attention to the problem creates a vicious cycle, whereby editors, who are still typically men, are unaware of the dangers because women don’t bring them up,” Matloff wrote. Matloff’s call to action in “Unspoken” simply advises women looking for tips to protect themselves from this type of abuse to take a hostile-environment training course. Matloff also regularly teaches a course in covering conflict at the Columbia Journalist School to prepare students for situations they might face. In terms of getting the word out about these dangers, perhaps Logan has steered the trend towards higher awareness that can create more caution.

³¹ Matloff, Judith. "Unspoken." *Columbia Journalism Review*. 1 May 2007. Web. <http://www.cjr.org/on_the_job/unspoken.php>.

PART 4:

Summary

The tales and experiences of female war and conflict reporters shared above, demonstrate the complex nature of what it means to be a women reporting in dangerous conditions. Often the dangerous situations women conflict reporters face are similar to those of their male counterparts. Revealed through statistics, danger or death appears to be a greater reality for male war correspondents, while women faced a higher likelihood of sexual harassment, abuse or assault.

In assessing the level of danger, some countries like Afghanistan and Iraq are among the most dangerous world-wide for journalists. This does not necessarily mean these countries are the most dangerous for western correspondents reporting there. Many of the anecdotes peppering this thesis reveal that female war correspondents occupy a privileged position and almost always have the option to leave when things get too rough. This makes their likelihood of death much lower compared to the local journalists reporting on the war within their own country.

Through the female correspondents consulted for this thesis, reluctance by editors never stuck out in their minds as a hindrance on their ability to do their jobs or their access to the opportunity of reporting in dangerous conditions. This assumption possessed at the beginning of the research for this paper is much more complex than first thought. Often the disadvantages women face in this profession come more from sources and the people affected by war and conflict -- And in the case of Gallego, the *El Correo* embedded journalist, the soldiers around her.

The Islamic countries where most of the conflicts are today also affect the experiences of women war correspondents. Women reporters, who spent an extended amount of time covering

the people in Afghanistan and Iraq, revealed that being a female was an advantage that gave them increased access. But, the cultures of these Islamic countries are also creating clashes between women war reporters and the people they report on. Women in these countries are more conservative about the way they dress, and many males expect western reporters should also dress that way. The conservative culture in regards to the behavior of women is something all western war correspondents must adapt too. Often this is one of the most difficult aspects of their time reporting in these countries. The instances faced by women correspondents in Egypt and Libya relating to sexual harassment, abuse and assault demonstrate a clash between the western and Islamic world-view. In all of these cultures, many women don't work outside of the household, let alone go running around in battle fields and conflict zones with a camera and notebook. For this reason, many female war correspondents experience increased attention, unwanted or not.

This goes for female journalists embedded with the troops, as well. Sexual harassment, abuse and assault remain one of the most frightening aspects of this type of reporting according to the interviews for this thesis.

Overall, there are many more women reporting on war and conflict zones than first thought. A greater presence of women in conflict zones reflects the increased amount of women in the field of journalism today – a trend that the public has proved to not be aware of. Naturally, there are more women in conflict zones today not because there is something about these dangerous environments that intrigue women but because there are simply more women in newsrooms.

With the current quantity of conflicts abroad combined with the advancing role of women world-wide, researching this topic revealed that female journalists aren't being restricted because

of their traditional role or a perceived “delicateness.” More women are choosing to follow the story and witness history in the making, even if that involves dangerous or intimidating locales.

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Vanessa Gezari. Telephone interview. 24 Feb. 2011.

Appendix A

Academic Vita of Jennifer Connor

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Jennifer.ann.connor@gmail.com

Education

The Pennsylvania State University, 2007-2011

Major: Bachelors of Arts, Print Journalism

Minors: Anthropology and International Studies

Schreyer Honors College

Thesis: "Stories from the Frontlines: Female Correspondents in War Zones"

Journalism Experience

CollegeMoneyMag.com, Editor at large

1/2011- 3/2011

Description: Started CollegeMoneyMag.com with another intern from *Kiplinger's Personal Finance* after our internships ended. Strategically planned editorial calendars to maximize traffic from Google searches. Composed daily well-reported service blog posts. Utilized key terms for search engine optimization (SEO).

Kiplinger's Personal Finance, *Editorial Intern*

5/2010-8/2010

Description: Wrote a "Question and Answer" piece for the November 2010 issue of *Kiplinger's Personal Finance* magazine. Wrote a story on charitable giving for the December 2010 issue of the magazine. Wrote a piece on buying textbooks for Kiplinger.com that received most e-mailed for three weeks. Updated staple financial advice pieces in the "Basics" section of Kiplinger.com.

Penn State University Office of Global Programs, *Writing Intern*

8/2010-12/2010

Description: Interviewed and wrote stories on international happenings on all Penn State campuses. Coordinated high school International Poetry and Essay Contest for International Education Week. Organized the prize for the student winners from State College High School to meet author Rita Golden Gelman.

Montgomery County "Ticket", *Editorial Intern*

5/2009-8/2009

Description: Interviewed and wrote stories on events coming to Montgomery County area. Wrote a piece on Valley Forge's appearance in National Geographic's book "USA 101". Attended a press conference on 'Napoleon' exhibit at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia.

Related Coursework

International Reporting Class, trip to Cape Town, South Africa from March 4 – 12, 2011
Advanced Multimedia Production
Photojournalism
Reporting Methods
News Writing and Reporting
International Communications
News Media Ethics
Media Law

Honors and Awards

W. LaMarr Kopp International Achievement Award
Penn State Freshman Award, for a 4.0 during first semester of freshman year
Dean's List recognition every semester, 2007-2011
Schreyer Honors College, enrolled in 2009

Grants Received

Gundaker Undergraduate Grant, District 7450 Rotary Club, 2009-10
Schreyer Ambassador Travel Grant, 2011
Africa and Latin America Grant-in-Aid, 2011
College of Communications Journalism Fund, 2009-10 and 2010-11
Penn State Abington Honors College, 2007-09

Study Abroad

Florence, Italy – spring 2009