

# SHOOTING FOR CHANGE

WOMEN PHOTOJOURNALISTS RESHAPE OUR VIEW OF THE WORLD

BY SARAH COLEMAN

Think of a war photojournalist, and chances are you'll imagine someone broad-shouldered and stubble-tinted, a person who charges into war on adrenalin and then, at night, drinks and cheats to forget what he's seen. In other words, you'll be thinking of a man. And no wonder, given that early war photographers like Robert Capa and Larry Burrows set the model, which has been perpetuated ever since in movies like *Salvador*, *Under Fire* and *The Bang Bang Club*.

Times are changing, though. Today, there are a growing number of women photographers committed to exploring troubled situations—from war in Iraq to Ebola in Liberia. Sometimes using their gender to break down barriers, these women travel to global hotspots, bringing back images that are intense, challenging and often disarmingly beautiful. The rewards are high, but so are the costs, which can include sacrificing one's personal life and battling work-related depression.

And then, of course, there's the danger. "Three inches higher, and the bullets would have hit us in the face," says Stephanie Sinclair of the time that her car was attacked by the us military—yes, you read that right. Sinclair was in postwar Iraq when she and her driver pulled up at an army checkpoint just after a bomb had destroyed vehicles on the road ahead. "We didn't stop as fast as they would have liked, and the soldiers were nervous and jumpy," she recalls. In the heat of the moment, Sinclair's first concern was for her driver, Alaa, who'd become a close friend. "If anything had happened to him, I wouldn't have had the money to support his family," she says.

Similarly no stranger to risk, award-winning photojournalist Lynsey Addario was kidnapped in Libya in 2011 and, along with three male colleagues, held in captivity for a week. "There's a survival mode that kicks in," she says of her reaction when pro-Qaddafi soldiers pointed guns at her, ordering her to lie face down in the dirt. "My mind slows down into an almost catatonic state where it's all about enduring whatever I need to endure at that moment. In Libya, one reason we stayed alive is that we stayed calm."

Both in their 40s, Sinclair and Addario forged their careers right after 9/11, when documenting the us-led wars in Iraq and

Afghanistan seemed crucially important. On the war front, both gained a reputation for being relentless. In Iraq, Sinclair refused to play it safe by embedding with the us military because, she says, "I wanted to tell the stories of ordinary people caught in the war, not the story of the us Army."

Younger by a decade, Katie Orlinsky and Glenna Gordon joined the profession more recently. They, too, are conveying world affairs using powerful visual language. Gordon photographed Ebola wards in Liberia in 2014, and Orlinsky has done searing work on child migration and the drug war in Mexico.

So what does it take to do this work? Not great height, apparently—all four women are petite. Nor were they born holding cameras, as one might expect: in fact, Sinclair is the only one with college training in photography; Addario, Orlinsky and Gordon came to photography later and are mostly self-taught. What unites them is a fierce interest in world affairs and a determination to burrow into complex stories and uncover their nuances.

"I have no idea where my interest in foreign affairs came from—I grew up in a family of hairdressers!" jokes Addario, an Italian American from Connecticut who now calls London home. Sitting in a café in the upscale Islington neighborhood, looking relaxed in a soft pink coat ("It was a gift," she says, almost apologetically), she ponders her trajectory from footloose expatriate to one of the world's most celebrated war photographers.

"I didn't set out to be a war photographer; that wasn't in my sights," she says. "It happened because I came of age right after 9/11." In fact, Addario had imagined becoming a UN translator until, after graduating from college with a degree in international relations, she moved to Buenos Aires. There, scrutinizing photographs in the newspaper, she suddenly saw how they overlapped with her studies. It was an epiphany. Soon she was showing up at local newspaper offices, pestering editors until they would agree to pay her ten dollars per photograph.

Orlinsky, born in New York, imagined working for a non-governmental organization or, like Addario, for the United Nations. Accordingly, she prepared by getting a degree in

Right: "Italian sailors rescued 109 African migrants from Gambia, Mali, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Guinea and Nigeria in a rubber boat (above), in the sea between Italy and Libya. Dozens of the refugees boarded an Italian commercial ship en route to Italy (below). The migrants claimed to have left from Tripoli, Libya, the evening of October 3, spending the night moving north. In 2014, more than 120,000 refugees landed in Italy, more than double the total for the entire year of 2013." Lynsey Addario, photographer; Getty Images Reportage, client.



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in 2000, she was part of a team that won a Pulitzer Prize for coverage of problems in the airline industry. That same year, her work on the huge financial and emotional costs of enacting the death penalty in Illinois helped lead the governor to put

political science. But then she moved to Oaxaca, Mexico, and opportunity of a different sort struck when an annual teachers' strike erupted into riots. "People were taking the obvious photos of protestors clashing with the police, but ignoring the fact that old women were coming out every night to sleep at the barricades," she says. She took her camera out and documented the scene, satisfied she was capturing a side of the story that wasn't being told.

For Gordon, who describes herself as "a neurotic Jewish girl from the southern California suburbs" (in fact, when she shows up at a Brooklyn café, she radiates warmth and ease), there were a few false starts. A degree in art history, a stint in publishing and an attempt at writing a novel led nowhere. But in 2006, when she went to Rwanda to visit her aid worker brother, the world opened up. "So many of the other things I'd done up to then felt small and narrow," she says. "In Africa, it felt like the things I was seeing and doing mattered."

As self-taught photographers, these three women struggled to break through while learning on the job. The early years of their careers were intense, defined by work and sacrifice. "I just did it again and again and worked on it forever before I got any good," says Gordon. Addario recalls the toll the drudgery took on her personal life. "When young photographers ask me how to work for *National Geographic*, I have to laugh because it took me years and years," she says. "I spent four years freelancing for the Associated Press in New York, and I'd drop everything at a moment's notice. I left guys sitting at the table at dinner dates!"

For Sinclair, who studied photography in college, the route to success was a bit more straightforward. Lucky enough to graduate at a time when staff positions at newspapers were still plentiful, she went to work for the *Chicago Tribune*, where,

a moratorium on capital punishment. "That was a really big deal in my early career—a lesson in how journalism could effect change," she says.

With the development of their careers, each woman discovered a passion for revealing women's untold stories. Orlinsky has photographed women convicts in Mexico. Addario has done powerful essays on breast cancer in Uganda and on feminism in Afghanistan. Gordon is currently working on *Sin Is a Puppy That Follows You Home*, a project that will upend many people's preconceptions of Islam by revealing a group of Muslim women romance novelists in northern Nigeria. Meanwhile, Sinclair has devoted ten years to documenting child marriage around the world, a project that sprang out of her work on self-immolating girls in Afghanistan.

It's difficult territory, and here's where gender pays: in Muslim and patriarchal countries, female journalists get access to a whole realm that is off limits to men. "In Afghanistan, I could use my gender to access women's hospitals and private homes, places a man couldn't have entered," Addario says. When Orlinsky photographed in a high-security women's prison in Mexico, she says she not only gained access, but also flew under the authorities' radar. "They forgot I was there; they didn't scrutinize me like they might have a man. I wasn't taken seriously, which meant I could get further."

More problematic is the home front, where editors and prize committees still favor men in a male-dominated industry. "I'm not saying there are subjects only women should photograph," says Orlinsky, "but sometimes you'll see a story about victims of sex trafficking assigned to a male photographer, and it's so confusing because there are all these talented women who could do it." She's thinking, perhaps,

This page: Lynsey Addario. Katie Orlinsky. Glenna Gordon. Stephanie Sinclair.

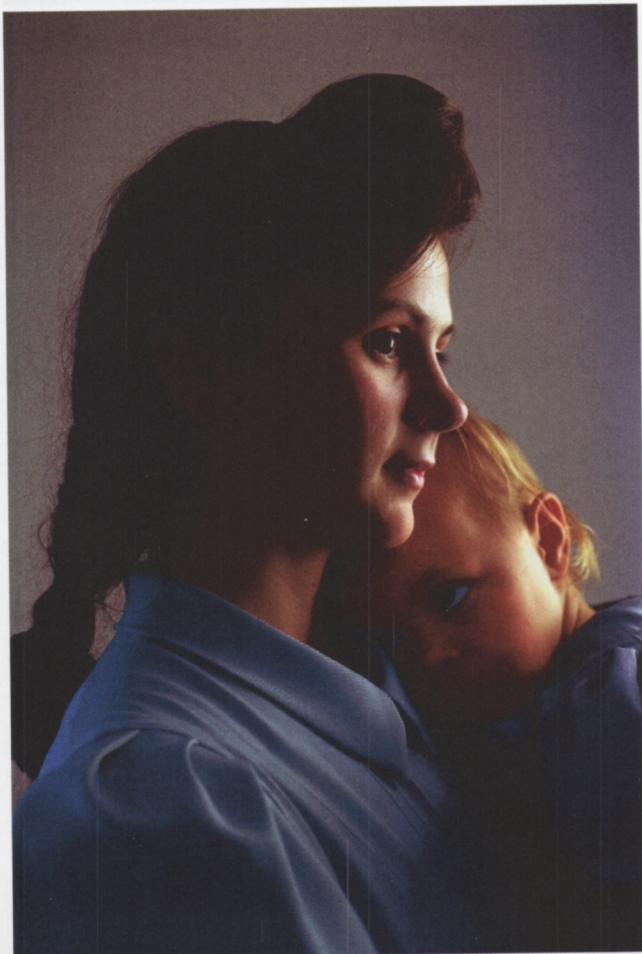
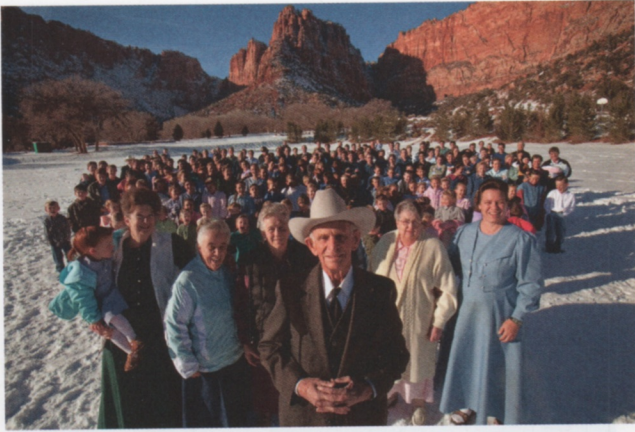
Right: "A coed Islamic school in Bamako, Mali. A predominantly Muslim country, Mali is known for its vibrant culture, rich Islamic history, religious tolerance, and joyful music and dance. Yet much of this culture was at risk of permanent destruction when militant Islamist rebels took over northern Mali in 2011 and 2012. The rebels imposed their own despotic version of religious Islamic law, and women bore the brunt of the crackdown. They forbade women from attending school and working. Many fled; some remained in the confines of their homes for more than a year. In spring 2013, the French army entered Mali and defeated the Islamist militias." Katie Orlinsky, photographer; Smithsonian, client.

"In late August 2013, Mexico's first all-female volunteer vigilante police group was formed in Xaltianguis, Guerrero. The force is made up of roughly 100 women, mostly mothers and grandmothers. Many of these women have lost loved ones to drug war violence or were victims themselves. They have lived in fear for their families, and they've had enough. Here, female citizen police head out on a patrol in Xaltianguis. It is not rare for the women to bring their children along on police duties." Katie Orlinsky, photographer; The Daily Beast, client.





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of hardworking, talented women like Kate Brooks, Nina Berman, Paula Bronstein and Andrea Bruce, among others.

The shrinking of editorial budgets, along with the space for photo stories in traditional publications, is another problem—and when a photojournalist is assigned a story, there's still the obstacle of breaking through the noise of a 24/7 news cycle and the public's compassion fatigue. Sometimes this can be done by using different visual language. In 2004, Addario used blur and unusual angles to bring an abstract quality to images of refugee camps in Darfur, and last year, Gordon isolated the possessions of abducted Nigerian schoolgirls and former ISIS hostages, then photographed them against a black background. Seen that way, the objects—from school uniforms to plastic handcuffs—were eloquent.

These days, of course, there's also the possibility of using social media to garner attention. Sinclair has more than 37,000 followers on Instagram, Gordon has 79,000, and Orlinky and Addario hover around 50,000 each as of press time. All four women see the platform as a way to connect with a younger audience ("You don't know who your followers are, but they're probably not people who read the *New York Times*," says Addario). Images posted online can give new life

Left: Two images from "Too Young to Wed: The Secret World of Child Brides," published in *National Geographic*. "Whenever I saw him, I hid. I hated to see him," eight-year-old Tehani (left) recalls of the early days of her marriage to Majed, when she was six and he was twenty-five. The young wife posed for a portrait with former classmate Ghada, also a child bride, outside their home in Hajjah, Yemen. Each year, 15 million girls are married before the age of eighteen. That is one girl every two seconds—married off too soon, endangering their personal development and well-being."

"Like other kumaris, Kumari Dangol wears special makeup for festivals. But it's more than makeup that changes on these occasions. Former kumaris have described feeling bigger and stronger and said that heat radiates from their foreheads. In Nepal, prepubescent Newari girls known as kumaris are worshipped as **living goddesses** endowed with foreknowledge who are able to cure the sick, fulfill wishes, and bestow blessings for protection and prosperity." Stephanie Sinclair, photographer; Ken Geiger, photo editor; *National Geographic*, client.

This page: Three images from articles on polygamy in America, published in the *New York Times* and *National Geographic*. "At 88, Joe Jessop is an elder of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS), the controversial sect that split from the Mormon Church after the church banned plural marriage. In Hildale, Utah, he has tried to fulfill his duty to build up his '**celestial family**'—5 wives, 46 children and 239 grandchildren. 'I've had a blessed life,' he says. 'I wouldn't trade places with anyone.'"

"After helping bring in the hay harvest, Amber Barlow, sixteen, soars on a **homemade swing** with friends at the 4,000-acre FLDS ranch in Pony Springs, Nevada. FLDS members, even young children, are expected to help with chores—sowing, picking, canning—throughout the year. Despite their conservative lifestyle, most FLDS women drive, have cell phones and are computer literate."

"Veda Keate, 20, and her daughter, Sereena, 4, were among more than 400 church members taken into protective custody after a 2008 raid on the FLDS ranch in West Texas. She is one of the young women suspected of being an **underage bride**." Stephanie Sinclair, photographer; Susan Welchman, *National Geographic*, photo editor; Kathy Ryan, *The New York Times Magazine*, director of photography; *National Geographic/The New York Times Magazine*, clients.

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to an overlooked story or hint of one to come—though Sinclair says journalists are often in a catch-22 because “Instagram is supposed to be instant, but editors don’t want you publishing pictures in advance.” She also points out that as much as social media networking might help photographers, it imperils them, too, because their whereabouts are public. “ISIS is now connected to Boko Haram. If someone like Katie or Glenna was kidnapped in northern Nigeria, she could quickly be transferred to Syria.”

That kind of threat—all too real—is something the women don’t take lightly. Gordon says she was about to travel to northern Nigeria last May, but changed her mind when she heard that Camille Lepage, a 26-year-old French photojournalist, had been killed in the Central African Republic. In 2011, Addario had been out of captivity in Libya for only a month when she heard about the deaths of colleagues Tim Hetherington and Chris Hondros. The news was extremely traumatizing. “I needed to step back and evaluate my life,” she says. Accordingly, she spent the next three years writing a memoir, *It’s What I Do*, which was published to great acclaim early this year.

The others, too, have found ways to step back and balance their lives. Gordon teaches a course at the New School in which she encourages students to critically assess images from the developing world. Orlinsky alternates her heavier work with quirky projects on synchronized swimmers and

This page: “For a couple of years, I crashed weddings every weekend that I was in Nigeria. This is one of my favorite images from this personal project because this guy looks like anyone’s cousin getting down at a **wedding**. Originally, I thought this project would be about class differences and distinct traditions, but as I worked on it, it became clear that it was really about the things we have in common.” Glenna Gordon, photographer.

“I’d been working in Nigeria regularly for several years when news hit of the mass abduction of school girls by the terrorist group Boko Haram. I knew I wanted to cover the story. I was stuck on the challenge of how to photograph girls who were missing—until I thought about using some of their personal items to show their absence. I wanted viewers to understand that they were real people, specific people, the people who wore these **dresses**.” Glenna Gordon, photographer; Michelle Molloy, photo editor; TIME, client.

“After I’d done the work on the kidnapped school girls, I had the opportunity to further explore using objects to tell stories when I worked on a project for the *New York Times* about Westerners who were held hostage by ISIS and Al Qaeda. I didn’t know what they would keep from their time in captivity, but I knew I wanted to find out. Many kept objects that showed the restrictions and constraints of life as a hostage. This **toothbrush** was kept by a French journalist who was imprisoned by ISIS in Raqqa, a town in northern Syria. His captors chiseled down the handle so it couldn’t be used as a weapon.” Glenna Gordon, photographer; David Furst, photo editor; The New York Times, client.

Right: Two images from an ongoing personal study by Glenna Gordon on **life in Liberia** after the civil war. “When I was working in Liberia, I was still learning how to be a photographer. I didn’t really know what I wanted to photograph or what I wanted to say about the country. I spent a lot of time wandering around, talking to people, looking for moments. I was drawn to spaces that were clearly destroyed by the civil war, but where life went on anyway—and if I waited long enough, I might find some beauty or transcendence.” Glenna Gordon, photographer.








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Alaskan dog mushers. “Everything I shoot affects me, and I get sad and have to take breaks because I’m not that stoic,” she says. And Sinclair has launched a nonprofit organization, Too Young to Wed, that has partnered with the United Nations Population Fund in an effort to end the practice of child marriage.

The larger work-life balance question of whether—and how—to fit in children is more vexing, since women working their way up in the field typically spend nine or ten months out of the year away from home. Addario’s son Lukas was born in 2012, and his arrival has changed some things: she now takes shorter trips and skips frontline assignments. Sinclair has chosen a different path and is working toward adopting two toddlers next year. “I chose not to have a child in the height of my international career due to the intense demands of this profession,” she says. “I have no regrets about that. But I do think young female photojournalists who want to have children should start planning early. Freezing your eggs is an option now, whereas it wasn’t for previous generations.”

Ultimately though, despite everything, the rewards of the work keep these women hooked. “When you share someone’s story, you’re validating their experience as being difficult and giving them a voice,” says Sinclair. “To be part of that process is really rewarding.” Gordon agrees, adding, “I want to show a world people don’t know—a world where Muslim women write romance novels ... where there are moments of transcendence even in a broken place. I don’t want to confirm our understanding of the world—I want to expand it.”

“Why do you do this work?” Addario asks herself in her memoir. It is, she proposes, about the privilege of bearing witness and the idealistic hope that “a photograph might affect people’s souls.” But finally, she writes, “When I am doing my work, I am alive and I am me. It’s what I do.” 

This page: “Seven-year-old Khalid sits as a medic with the 173rd Airborne Division checks his wounds from an explosion the day after heavy combat between American forces and the Taliban in the Korengal Valley, Afghanistan, in September 2007. The medic claimed the **boy’s wounds** were not consistent with the timing of us attacks on villages the night before; the family of the boy claimed he was injured in the coalition bombing. This image speaks to the ambiguity of war and civilian casualties.” Lynsey Addario, photographer; Getty Images Reportage, client.

“Thousands of Iraqis fight to enter the bank on one of the two days per week it’s open in the neighborhood of Al Karrada, Baghdad, on June 25, 2003. Months after the end of the war, Iraqis are increasingly frustrated with the poor quality of life in Baghdad. This woman is **gesturing that she is thirsty**.” Lynsey Addario, photographer; The New York Times, client.

Right: “us troops carry the body of **Staff Sgt. Larry Rougle**, who was killed in 2008 when insurgents ambushed his squad in the Korengal Valley.” Lynsey Addario, photographer; Kathy Ryan, art director; The New York Times, client.

“us military personnel help load **injured soldiers** onto a cargo plane en route to Germany from Joint Base Balad, in Iraq. The interior lights of the plane are red because the base is under attack. Since the attack on Fallujah began in early November, hundreds of soldiers have been injured and evacuated from the country.” Lynsey Addario, photographer; Getty Images Reportage, client.

