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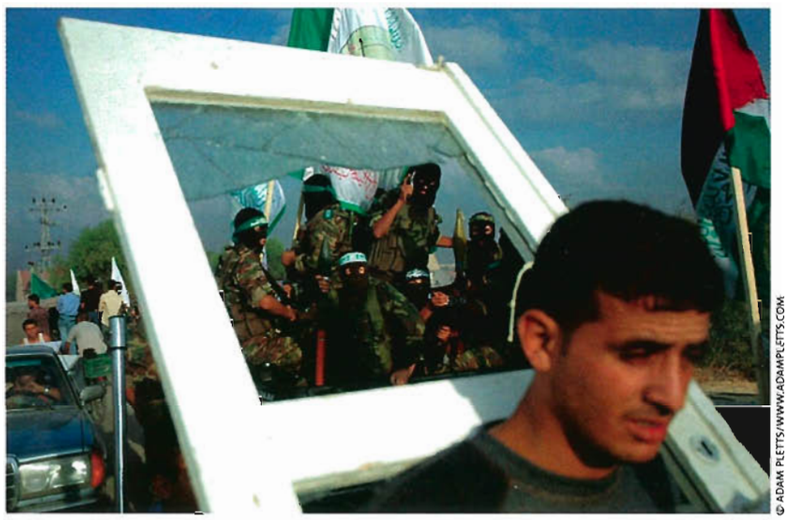

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Top, right: Photographer Adam Pletts, who was kidnapped in the Gaza Strip, by a group demanding jobs. Above: Pletts's image of a Palestinian climbing down a a wall separating Gaza from Egypt. It had previously been guarded by Israeli soldiers. Right: Armed members of Hamas look on as a Palestinian man salvages a door from the ruined remains of an Israeli settlement in Gaza.

OCCUPATIONAL

AS PHOTOGRAPHERS FACE GROWING RISK OF KIDNAPPING OR DETENTION, WE GET ADVICE ON PREVENTION—AND RECOVERY.

BY SARAH COLEMAN

The prison cell was dark and stiflingly hot. Bugs skittered across the floor, and photographer Bradley Clift's bravado was dissolving into panic. Two days earlier, he'd been shooting photographs of refugees in the Darfur region of Sudan when he was ordered to a police station—and promptly arrested.

"You're trying to make Sudan look bad," an interrogator accused him. "I told him, I think Sudan's done a pretty good job of that itself," Clift says, adding, "I probably shouldn't have said that."

For his insolence, he was taken outside, pushed down onto a chair and told to confess that he was a spy. "Someone brought a bucket of water out," he says. "All of a sudden they lifted my hands up, grabbed my head and forced it under the water. I

took water into my nose and my lungs. They had me under there three times, and my heart felt as though it was going to give out."

When he finally looked up, he saw the interrogator smiling down at him. "Welcome to Sudan," the man said. "We intend to see you hanged."

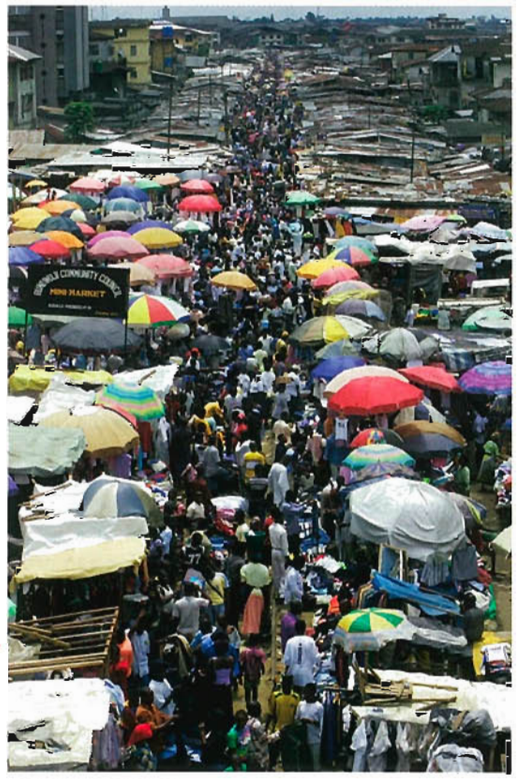
Cut to the Gaza Strip, where several months later six masked gunmen accosted British photojournalist Adam Pletts and another journalist, Dion Nissenbaum, as they drove along a highway. Pletts's kidnappers were amateurs: Their one-handed driver rounded a corner too fast and the car got stuck in the sand. Eventually, they arrived at a "safe house" where the two journalists could see children being hustled off to school through the back door. At one point, the kidnappers left Pletts and Nissenbaum alone in a bedroom with some loaded AK47s.

"We decided it would have been a bad idea to try anything," Pletts said. "We knew we weren't in too much danger. The only time foreign journalists have been hurt in Gaza—not counting Israelis—is in crossfire."

Though they differ in scale and severity, Clift's and Pletts's stories are both examples of a disturbing trend: More photojournalists are being detained and kidnapped in foreign countries than ever before. Since 2004, 41 journalists have been kidnapped in Iraq alone. Last month Italian photographer Gabriele Torsello was released three weeks after he was kidnapped by the Taliban in Afghanistan.

A rise in violent conflicts, along with a wider understanding of the influence of images, has put photojournalists at greater risk. Growing hostility around the world toward the United States may put American journalists at particular risk.

"Foreign correspondents have lost their neutral observer status," says Joel Simon, executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). "Previously, when journalists got into a tight situation, they could talk their way out by saying, I'm here to present all sides of the story." That argument doesn't always work anymore.



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HAZARD

COURTESY ED KASHI

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Right: Ed Kashi was arrested while photographing an oil flow station in the NIger Delta and was detained for four days. Upper right: The main market in the old town of Port Harcourt. The city is the center of Nigeria's oil industry. Below: In the oil town of Afiesere, local Urohobo people bake tapioca in the heat of a dangerous gas flare.

GOVERNMENT INTIMIDATION

Both governments and terrorist groups understand the power of images. Governments often create red tape and detain journalists to prevent them from getting embarrassing images that could galvanize world opinion. Journalists consider it futile to go through official channels for entry visas in such circumstances.

Clift chose to slip into Sudan in April 2005, for instance, because the government there has made it almost impossible for journalists to enter the country and document the plight of Darfur refugees.

"You'd think the worst thing they'd do is fine you and destroy your disks—but no, they were threatening me with death," says Clift. After 16 excruciating days and multiple interrogations, he was arraigned in front of a judge who released him without explanation and told him he had 24 hours to get out of the country.

"As a journalist, there are often times when you

OCCUPATIONAL HAZARD

have to work outside the rules because the rules don't make any sense," says photographer Ed Kashi, who endured a harrowing detention by the Nigerian government for four days last June while on assignment for *National Geographic*.

Right: Police carry off a wounded officer in Saravena, a city in Arauca Department, Colombia, not far from where Scott Dalton was kidnapped. Below: Dalton and Ruth Morris wait to be released by rebels of the ELN, National Liberation Army, in Arauca.

Kashi was arrested while photographing an oil flow station in the Niger Delta. Opposition to foreign oil companies in that area has made the Nigerian government ultrasuspicious of journalists. Kashi says he began to panic when he was bundled into an army helicopter with his hands cuffed.

"I was thinking, am I going to die of a heart attack in this helicopter? Are they going to drop us out of here, into the jungle? And if so, who would know?" He and his Nigerian fixer were flown to the state capital, and Kashi says, "Nobody was telling us anything. It was spiraling, getting worse and worse."

Detained in such a situation, says Clift, "You might think the U.S. Embassy is going to swoop down and save you, but it's not." In jail, he was visited by a representative from the U.S. Embassy who told him, "There's not much I can do for you because you broke the law."

The U.S. State Department eventually intervened on Kashi's behalf, but not until his wife and activist friends in Nigeria had got the story onto Reuters and the BBC. "The media attention really helped," says Kashi.

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THE MURKY MOTIVES OF TERRORISTS

In the case of kidnappings, motives are less clear. Some kidnappings are financially motivated; others are purely political. In many cases, what kidnappers are seeking more than anything else is publicity—which is why journalists, who often have the backing of large news organizations, make good targets.

Pletts was taken by a group of freelance kidnappers who were demanding 50 jobs with a Palestinian security agency. "I don't think it occurred to them that going around kidnapping people wasn't the best way to apply for jobs," says Pletts. After eight hours, the kidnappers released Pletts and Nissenbaum.

"We were told that ours was a political kidnapping—they didn't want money," says Scott Dalton, who was kidnapped by a rebel group in Colombia in 2003, shortly after newly elected President Alvaro Uribe had vowed to crack down on rebels. Dalton had been traveling with a colleague, Ruth Morris, in Arauca, where they intended to do a story on how rebels were using civilians to drive car bombs into military checkpoints. When they were captured, Dalton says, his blood ran cold.

"THEY HAD DEMANDS THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS NEVER GOING TO MEET," DALTON SAYS OF HIS KIDNAPPERS. "WE WERE A BARGAINING CHIP."

"They had demands that the government was never going to meet. They wanted to use us as a bargaining chip, to buy time with the government." Dalton and Morris were held for 11 days, at which point the rebels realized their demands wouldn't be met and negotiated a release with the Red Cross.

Some journalists aren't so lucky. Who can forget the photograph of Daniel Pearl hunched over with the barrel of a gun at his head—or his horrific murder? Most kidnappings don't result in death, however: Many more journalists are killed in crossfire. Of the 31 journalists killed during the first 10 months of 2006, 8 were abducted first.

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COPING WITH THE AFTERMATH

As freelance photojournalist Molly Bingham observes, "Death is only one of the awful choices

© MOLLY BINGHAM/WORLD PICTURE NEWS

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Above: Molly Bingham, after her release from Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Left: Former political prisoner Sua'd cries during midday prayers in Baghdad. She promised that if she was ever released from prison she would pray 1,000 times to Allah. Bottom right: Mogadishu, Somalia, photographed by Bradley Clift, who was captured in Sudan and held for 16 days.

"AT ONE POINT," BINGHAM SAYS, "I LOST IT. I WAS CRYING AND FREAKING OUT. I STUFFED A TOWEL IN MY MOUTH SO THAT THE GUARDS WOULDN'T HEAR ME."

available" to kidnapping victims. She was detained by Iraqi police in 2003 at the start of the U.S. invasion. She speculates that her arrest was opportunistic: "The United States was claiming to have CIA agents all over Baghdad, and Iraqi intelligence agents were being offered $2,500 for anyone they turned in who was a spy."

During her time in Abu Ghraib, Bingham was blindfolded and interrogated, and heard fellow prisoners being beaten up, even as American planes strafed buildings less than a mile away. At one point, she says, "I lost it. I was crying and freaking out. I stuffed a towel in my mouth so that the guards wouldn't hear me."

In retrospect, she says, the prison authorities treated her decently, giving her cigarettes, decent food and towels. After eight days, the evidence against her collapsed and she was released. But at the time, she says, "I was terrified I'd be raped, or worse."

"By definition, if you face a major trauma, something profound has happened to you that will change you in an essential way," says psychiatrist Frank Ochberg. A member of the committee that first defined Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in 1980, Ochberg says that "flashbacks, nightmares and reexperiencing of a traumatic event" are the major markers of PTSD. While other events—the death of a loved one, or an unexpected job loss—can be stressful, the stress has a different quality when you're being held captive. Victims of capture might end up being "hypervigilant; you're wired and you're on the lookout for danger," he says. "There's a risk of alcoholism and health problems. Marriages and close friendships may not survive."

According to Ochberg, the amount of emotional fallout from a kidnapping or detention depends on the harshness of the experience, but also on personality. A 2002 study by psychiatrist Anthony Feinstein found that over 70 percent of journalists who work in war zones and witness carnage don't get PTSD. "Who gets it, who doesn't?" Ochberg asks. "In many cases, it's genetic—just as some people, by a throw of the genetic dice, are tall or short, some people have a larger channel from the emotional part of the brain to the memory part."

For Clift, it has taken a year—and intensive psychotherapy—to be able to speak about his experience in Sudan. He has resigned from the *Hartford Courant* and plans to work on photojournalism projects within the U.S. Simply put, he says, "I lost myself in Sudan, and I've been trying to come back ever since."

Bingham, on the other hand, was able to return to Baghdad two weeks after being freed from Abu Ghraib. She shot a story about Iraqi women who had been held as political prisoners under Saddam Hussein. "It was important to me to go back," she says. "If I hadn't, I'd have felt beaten." However, she adds, "If I'd lost a finger or been raped or tortured there, I don't know how I'd have reacted—it's very different when your body is violated."

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

The good news is that news organizations are now much more sensitive to the risks faced by journalists. Many now send their staff writers and photographers on courses that teach them how to cope in conflict zones.

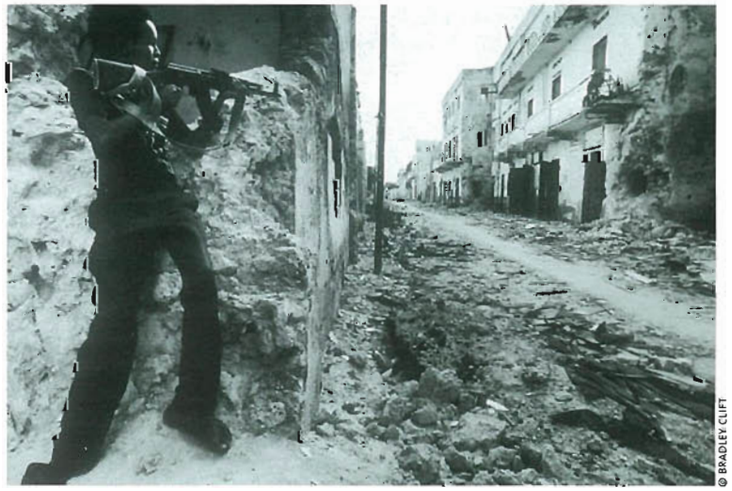
"The aim is to raise the person's awareness to a point where they can anticipate problems," says Tim Crockett, executive director of the AKE Group, which teaches a five-day course called "Surviving Hostile Regions." AKE's course, and a similar one taught by Centurion [see "Tips" section for contact info] include simulated kidnappings that help train journalists for the real thing. In addition, says Crockett, "We talk in general terms about what someone goes through in an abduction...you, as an abductee, have an opportunity to influence the outcome."

Most of all, it seems, to survive a horrifying ordeal, you need strength—both emotional and physical—and an unshakable commitment to your work. "This is what I've dedicated my life to," says Kashi, who was back photographing on the Niger Delta a day after his release. "The stories and issues that are meaningful to me are usually not in easy or tranquil places, but that's part of the deal."

Clift worries that the intimidation and growing risks could discourage young journalists. "Governments are becoming really good at stopping the press," he says. "If they get even better at it, how are we ever going to know what's going on?"

Pletts, for one, isn't cowed. If anything, his experience sharpened his appetite for reporting from danger zones. "The kidnapping gave me an opportunity to say, 'This is something I really want to do,'" he says. Now 28 and enrolled in a master's program in photojournalism and documentary photography at the London College of Communication, Pletts says he plans to return to Gaza and, given the opportunity, would like to be able to interview his kidnappers at some point.

"These people are living in perilous circumstances in a place where they're pushed to do things they wouldn't normally do, and it's not getting them very far," he says. "As a journalist, I'd like to give them an opportunity to say what they're trying to achieve." □



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