

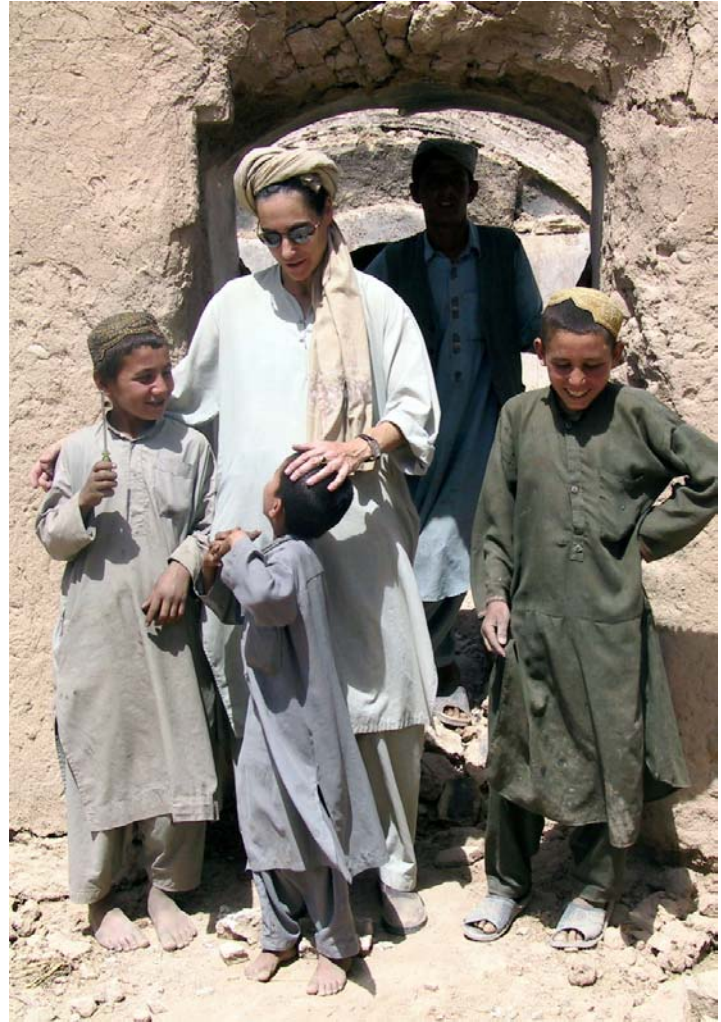
Edited by Sydney Lewis

Sarah Chayes

About Sarah Chayes

After reporting for years for National Public Radio in the Balkans, North Africa, and the Middle East, as well as her base in Paris, Sarah Chayes is taking a break from radio to make a direct contribution to reconstructing a post-conflict society. She is helping run an Afghan non-governmental, non-profit organization, Afghans for Civil Society. Based in the former Taliban stronghold of Kandahar, its primary mission is to bring to Afghanistan some of the intellectual resources necessary for formulating constructive public policy. It is also sponsoring community-to-community projects, such as a sister-school initiative and the rebuilding of houses destroyed during the recent conflict.

From 1996, Ms. Chayes was Paris reporter for National Public Radio. Her work during the Kosovo crisis earned her the 1999 Foreign Press Club and Sigma Delta Chi awards, together with other members of the NPR team. She has also reported from Algeria, Lebanon, Israel/Palestine, Serbia and Bosnia, as well as covering the International War Crimes Tribunal, and the European Union. Before that, Ms. Chayes free-lanced from Paris for a variety of radio and print outlets,



This is Sarah, dressed in Afghan men's clothes, with the 'bad boys' of the village, who followed her everywhere. Sarah first started wearing men's clothes when she was a reporter for NPR, they were her best shot at not drawing crowds of people every time she stepped out onto the street in Kandahar, but she grew to love them for their comfort and beauty!

including Monitor Radio, Radio Deutsche Welle, and *The Christian Science Monitor*. She began her radio career in 1991 at Monitor Radio's Boston, MA headquarters.

Ms. Chayes graduated in History from Harvard University in 1984, earning the Radcliffe College History Prize for best senior thesis written by a woman. She served in the Peace Corps in Morocco, then returned to Harvard to earn a master's degree in History and Middle Eastern Studies, specializing in the medieval Islamic period. She was born in Washington DC, in 1962. She has three sisters and one brother.

Intro by Jay Allison

Afghan Independent Radio is about to go on the air, with a projected launch date of September 11th. **Sarah Chayes**, shepherding the project, is a longtime international reporter for NPR, now taking a break "to make a direct contribution to reconstructing a post-conflict society." She has kindly agreed to file updates on Transom this month, telling us about working on the station and the programming, and about life on the ground in Afghanistan these days. Her opener is below. She has also sent many fine pictures, which we'll continue to post, and we will bring you audio from the field as time goes on.

Sarah has only intermittent Internet access in Kandahar and the team from Afghans for Civil Society are incredibly busy, but they will be checking in here as often as they can, so please feel free to engage them in conversation as they move toward broadcast.

Afghan Independent Radio

Notes From The Field by Sarah Chayes

Photos by Eve Lyman



A Street in Kandahar

A NAME, AN IDENTITY, AN IMAGE, AND MR. TIMOR, Summer 2003

The patient and loyal staff of Afghanistan's first indigenous free radio station have voted to name it Afghan Independent Radio/Afghan Azad Radio, or AIR. They have designed a logo using the ENGLISH AND Pashtu letters for "AIR," EMANATING FROM A TRANSMISSION TOWER.

The arrival of Mr. Ismael Timor and Seyid Mahmud Azil, on April 15, catapulted AIR to a new phase in its development. Timor, the team leader, has an IMPRESSIVE background in Afghan broadcasting. He was reporter/producer at Kabul Television, news department, from 1979-86; then he was in charge of the news department. Afterwards, he founded and ran Balkh Radio Television, in Mazar-i-Sherif, from 1987-98, when the Taliban conquered the city.

He has conducted focus group discussions, and been involved in human rights investigations. Mr. Timor is a gentle man, highly organized, and dedicated to his work. Under his tutelage, the core radio staff, which had been meeting about once a month to discuss basic concepts, and then almost daily with me, to work on radio techniques such as interviewing substance and style, technical recording, tape logging, editing, etc.,

launched into a two-week course on the principles of journalism. They were examined and graded on the material.

THE LAUNCH, THE PROGRAMMING

I still don't want to predict a launch date, but with equipment literally on the road between Kabul and Kandahar as I write, it's certainly firming up. We still need to do a lot of work on the radio building: putting in double glass and soundproofing the studio, building work tables for the mixers, and regular desks for computer work and news writing. That's liable to take a month at least, and will necessarily interfere with the reporting and producing.

Based largely on the preparatory discussions that began last year, Timor has developed a program list. AIR staff will produce the following original programs:

1. Kisht aw Karwanda: Cultivation and Field (agriculture)
2. Radioi Safar: Radio Journey (tourism, life in other provinces)
3. Salamatya: Health
4. Ghotai Ghwariji: Buds Opening (small children's show)
5. Badani Rozana: Body Exercising (sports)
6. Tserena: (research)
7. Zwanan aw Ratlunkai: Youth and Future
8. Sheze aw Owsanai Taulana: Women and Contemporary Society
9. De Ownai Mohimi Peshe: Important Things that Happened this Week. (Week in Review)
10. De Islam Wrange: Lights of Islam
11. Gulban: Flower Garden (poetry)
12. Bya Raghawana: Reconstruction
13. Zmuj Chapiryal: Our Environment
14. Tikki: Spots
15. Tassu wposhti Zawab e per muj: You Ask, the Answer is for Us (Questions for leaders.)
16. Radioi Kitab: Radio Book
17. Da Khalku Nazariat: People's Opinions (man in the street)

A normal sight
driving through
the streets of
Kandahar.



AN APPROXIMATE DAILY RUNDOWN

We are planning a broadcast day from 4:00 till 10:00 PM, with the only caveat in the schedule below being 20 minute slots for produced news. Knowing what it takes to put even a 4 or 5 minute produced news story on the air, I tend to think this is a bit ambitious, given the rest of the work our skeleton staff will have to do. So think of this as a draft.

3:59 Alert
4:00 Jingle, AIR id
4:01 Qur'an verse (XXX)
4:04 Jingle, AIR id, introduction of today's program.
4:05 News
4:10 In-depth news ??????
4:30 Short news
4:33 AIR program
5:00 News

5:05 AIR program
5:30 Short news
5:33 Afghan Music Program
6:00 News
6:05 BBC/VOA/Radio Free Europe/Tanin Program
7:00 News
7:05 Repeat in-depth news ??????
7:25 Music
7:30 BBC Pashtu News
8:30 News
8:33 AIR program (repeat from earlier in the week)
9:00 News
9:05 AIR program (repeat from earlier in the week)
9:30 Short news
9:33 Foreign music
10:00 SOC out (sign off)

A SPECIFIC PROGRAM . . . "40 STEPS"

MR. TIMOR has been getting a lot of this material in the can already. For example, he has already recorded a complete children's program. He said some of the technical quality wasn't all the way up to snuff, but the guys were absolutely thrilled at the result, realizing that they can really put a program together; that this is going to happen.

I've worked very closely with TIMOR on the research program, which we picked to discuss almost at random. The first show will be about the 40 Steps, a monument to the Emperor Babur (THE FOUNDER OF THE MOGHUL EMPIRE IN INDIA) on the edge of town.

We hammered out the structure of the 25 minute show thus: it will start with a famous song about the 40 Steps. Then some vox pop: end-to-end man-on-the-street interviews, relaying the legends people have heard about the 40 Steps, e.g. that Camran, Babur's son, had a beautiful daughter, and he said only a man who could build 40 steps into the side of this mountain could marry her.

Click image for full view & caption. Then the narrator will actually climb up the 40 steps (taking the sound of his footsteps), and describe the place: the view of Kandahar, the carved inscriptions, what the carving looks like, the beauty of the Persian used in the inscriptions,



A holy man by the side of the road, asking for money

and the pock-marks from bullets and shelling that mar the surface. Then he'll say something like: People believe so many things about the 40 Steps, we wanted to find out the truth about its origins. Perhaps the best way to begin our research is to find one of the oldest men in Kandahar, and ask him about his memories. Follows an interview with the old guy, who remembers picnicking even higher up in the hills above the 40 steps. Then the narrator will interview a historian, a mujahid (ANTI-SOVIET RESISTANCE FIGHTER), who remembers the battles around the site, and may, as appropriate, read parts of the Baburnamah, the autobiography of Emperor Babur.

Two days after we worked all this out, Timor came back to me with a Script for two 25 minute segments. That seemed like VERY quick work for such an ambitious project, leaving me to wonder if we might not have to focus more on depth and quality as time goes on. But very well, that will be an ongoing process.

ON THE GROUND. NO STABILITY, August 2003

In two years, I have not felt the sense of urgency about the political and security situation that I have begun feeling this week. If the ongoing degradation in the security situation is allowed to continue, the result will almost certainly be a durable disillusionment with the US presence here.

Armed attacks inside Kandahar Province have taken a deadlier turn over the past month or so -- fewer audible rocket-launches during the night, but more deaths: 2 moderate, pro-central government mullahs praying in their mosques, for example, two district police chiefs and several of their men, in the border area with Pakistan, at least two serious fire-fights leaving dozens dead and wounded, and most recently, the assassination of half a dozen members of government security forces at a Taliban road-block in the north of the province.

But even beyond the number of actual incidents is the rising level of frustration felt even by those Kandaharis most committed to the stability process, to the central government, and to the Western presence here. The terms in which this frustration is expressed are wholly new.

"Soon Afghans will turn against the Americans the way they turned against the Russians," several people have told me in the past week. "And once that happens, nothing will stop them." A businessman added: "Even doctors and engineers took up arms against the Russians." In the past week, a murky dust-cloud ("Khaura") engulfed Kandahar. Popular wisdom associates this phenomenon with an imminent change of regime. Kandaharis were harking back to the fall of Daud Khan and Amanullah - when, they said, a similar dust storm obscured view for days.

These comments are coming not from Taliban or religious extremists, but from those who looked to the US involvement here to bring about a new era for Afghanistan. The problem is that the United States is seen as having brought back, and as continuing to support, the warlords the Taliban chased out. The oppression and arbitrary rule Kandaharis are suffering has forced them just about to the breaking point. Recent examples include:

- The monopoly of public resources, such as stone and water, for members of the governor's family or tribe.
- The jailing or release of prisoners for reasons of personal interest. No significant Taliban or al-Qaeda official has been captured on the governor's initiative. But the "search for Taliban" has served as a pretext to ransack and loot houses throughout the province.
- The monopolizing of legitimate private business opportunity, like the right to sell gasoline within city limits, or the right to operate taxi services between Kandahar and neighboring cities.
- Threats and intimidation
- The torture of prisoners
- The theft of public resources such as customs duties
- Assassination attempts against officials opposed to the governor's practices, such as the prison director's recent (7/29) attempt to kill the chief of police.
- The refusal to pay salaries of security forces not under the governor's direct command, leaving the governor's private militia the only viable armed force in the province.
- Open trafficking in heroine and hashish

"In one year, the Americans will lose this country," said a highly educated Kandahari recently.

IN THE STATION, A MONTH BEFORE LAUNCH, August, 2003

Under the gentle and skilled guidance of "Timor Sa'ab," AIR program production has been going on apace. Mr. Timor's goal has been to put 3 months' worth of programming "in the can" before launch, September 11. His very fruitful trip to Kabul netted significant additional programming available for our use, from AINA, the French media project, Internews (one of our benefactors), and the BBC and VOA. The AIR team has been listening to and cataloguing that material, as well as continuing to produce our own. Mr.

Timor and I continue to meet regularly to discuss content, methodically working through each program, and talking about substance, technique, where to put "sound," etc.

But the most exciting progress at AIR since our last bulletin has been on the physical plant. Gul Agha the carpenter and his assistant have set up shop in the studio, and, using the most basic local materials (including beautifully seasoned cedar wood), have been building us a custom studio. Our radio building is partly underground for cool, as are many Kandahar buildings, and it is the underground level that we are fitting out as the recording studio. The arched double-windows for the director to see in by are framed in honey-colored wood; the soundproofing - a layer of sponge covered in carpet - is held in place with thin rods of wood decorated with burned arabesques. Gul Agha has made us assorted tables to order, including a corner director's table with a curved inside edge, and a wonderful pigeon-hole shelf for stocking program and music cds. Now he's working on the newsroom upstairs and the broadcast studio.

This morning we chose the paint color: a golden cream for the production area, and cool blue-gray for the hall and stairs.

All Afghans love
flowers.



A Conversation w/ Sarah Chayes

Post Six

bw - August 23, 2003 - #8

As I read your first five posts, I couldn't help but wonder WHAT Afghanistan you are talking about. then came post number 6. That's the Afghanistan I was wondering about... The urgency of your situation sure is palpable, I am very curious as to what your thoughts are concerning AIR in light of the remark you close post 6 with: "In one year, the Americans will lose this country..." Is AIR something that can put the breaks on this slide towards anarchy?

The Slim Chance

Sarah Chayes - August 27, 2003 - #13

Well seen. I'm not sure AIR in and of itself can have much of an impact. But if we don't try, while we have the slim chance, what are we?

Thanks for your concern.

Living Risk

Nannette - August 23, 2003 - #9

You may not be able to say, but I wonder about your personal circumstances. How you're living. What kind of security you and the station will have.

I wonder about your personal story leading to this extraordinary life containing risk and discomfort.

Three Cows And Acute Discomfort

Sarah Chayes - August 27, 2003 - #12

Personal situation involves a compound with a lovely garden and three cows...whence fresh milk for tea in the AM. Security is...a problem, in the abstract. There's a lot of licking your finger and sticking it into the wind... Security here is largely based on deterrence. You are safe if people believe that SOMEONE will track them down and kill them if they do anything to you. I have had to resort to having certain people told this, after I received threats. This sounds very dramatic, but it isn't really, it's just local theatrics. I think, for the moment, our force-field is safe. Of course if I begin to think differently, I will have to take appropriate measures, for me and the station.

I don't know about this life, how it came about...certainly unplanned, but always with an acute feeling of discomfort whenever I got too comfortable. Does that make any sense?

Specifics

CM Lane - *August 23, 2003 - #10*

Can you speak more toward the specifics regarding staff, equipment, and funding? How many reporters/producers, studios, players, and the like? What's your signal range? Where does your funding come from?

The Skinny On The Station

Sarah Chayes - *August 27, 2003 - #11*

Staff is skeleton, for the moment, due to the lack of qualified personnel in Kandahar. We want this to be local radio, not staffed by imports from Kabul or the diaspora, but as a result, we're pretty slim. Five men make up the core staff of reporter/producers -- Najib who's funny and very capable, and doesn't lie about himself or his courage, Sarwar who's a bit dreamy but very willing, Hikmat, a Farsi-speaker who's perhaps the most serious of the bunch, Ibrahim, who comes from the local newspaper, and is very involved with the local literary crowd, and Ma'mun, the youngest, very ambitious, good reporting instincts, very energetic. You have the profile of Isma'il Timor in the original documents.

We just got some funding from the German foreign ministry for women's programming, so a group of women we have been meeting with about the constitution is constituting our women's team. They began work last Monday. They are: Fahima, a high school headmistress, very active and sunny and thoughtful, Shakira, another high school headmistress, more passive, Shahida, now monitor for GTZ women's programs in Kandahar, sharp-tongued and alert, Bilqisa, an educated woman whose husband won't let her work, probably the best qualified in the group, and Ma Gul and Shala, two very common-sensical illiterate housewives, who have made some of the most pertinent contributions to the constitution discussion.

Funding comes primarily from the Carr Foundation, a private human rights organization based in Cambridge, MA. Additional funding is from USAID, the Soros Foundation, and the European Commission.

Two studios, still in the throes of loving creation by Gul Agha the carpenter and his assistant. Gul Agha was recently distracted by the kidnapping of his young brother by a local militia unit, which forced him to work for them (cooking, etc.) for free, and tried to rape him. We got him released yesterday.

Equipment is a standard package put together by Internews in Kabul. I confess to being less than pleased with the price/value ratio on the reporters' kit, which I know something

about. Commercial mini-disk recorders for \$300, Chinese microphones, no shot-guns, no lapel mikes, etc. I'll have to add some in.

Signal range will be Kandahar proper to begin with -- FM line of sight.

Electric Slide

Eve Lyman - *August 27, 2003 #14*

Hi - I am the US coordinator of ACS and will attempt to answer some of these questions, as the electricity in Kandahar is barely working any more, and Sarah is having trouble with accessing the Internet. Amazingly enough, after the fall of the Taliban, the situation with electricity in Kandahar was perfect. There was never any problem, for almost a year, and now it is getting worse and worse. These are the kinds of things the US needs to do in order to stop the slide into anarchy.

AIR will maybe, just maybe, at least begin to give the people a voice.

A child selling brooms.

Many of the children loved to have their pictures taken.



Gleams Of Mead

Thomas Marzahl - *August 29, 2003 - #17*

Kudos to you for fulfilling another part of your dream, and for gathering a small group of thoughtful and committed people, who can make a difference, and help change the world a little bit... as Margaret Mead said I don't know when...

I'm curious whether this radio station was always part of the Afghans for a Civil Society mission statement/goals when you hired on a year and a half or so ago, or whether it was a gleam in your eye that gradually grew into reality.

And how about the interaction between men and women, in production and possibly even on the air, in the future? Do you foresee problems?

Timor-Dried Blanket

Sarah Chayes - *September 4, 2003 - #30*

Thanks so much for your kind note. Re gleam in my eyes. Frankly, on the contrary! Knowing what it takes to get even 4 minutes of radio on the air, I was the constant wet blanket on this project. Thank God for Timor! Re men and women...I foresee no problems...for those women who even have the permission to come and work. But they will probably be working separately at first.

Radio Alert

Jay Allison - *August 29, 2003 - #18*

Sarah, Eve, et. al: do people in Kandahar know the broadcast signal is imminent? If not, how will you let them know? What is the history there of radio as a communication tool? Does everyone have radios?

Will you record your first moments on the air? I hope so. We'd love to post them here.

Hoary Headed Hitches

Sarah Chayes - *August 31, 2003 - #19*

I've grown very cautious, after a year and a half over here. I tend NOT to want to make splashy announcements, but just try to do the job as best we can. Then if we're late, or if the inevitable hitches rear their hoary heads, we won't be blamed or ridiculed. I'd rather word of mouth spread as people like our programming. Then we can start discreetly posting things around town. (Though posters etc. are not very popular here.)

Mic'ing Sarah

Julia Barton - *August 31, 2003 - #22*

I'm wondering if the Afghans you know are curious about your background and life outside the country. If so, what kind of questions do they ask you? And I have to ask, how do they feel about you wearing men's clothes?

Discreet In Pashtu

Sarah Chayes - *September 4, 2003 - #31*

Very few questions of a typical Western searching kind. Afghans are quite discreet, verbally. So it usually comes down to: am I married, how many siblings do I have, are both my parents alive? I assume most people assume I am a CIA agent, which frankly is good for my health, since folks are less likely to take pot-shots at me. This is typical of Americans working in conflict situations. Re: men's clothes. I certainly get some comments, and people ask me why I do. But I think there a kind of permissive zone for foreigners, a lot of things are accepted that wouldn't be from Afghans. The fact that I speak a bit of Pashtu helps a lot.

Intrigue And Awe

Viki Merrick - *September 3, 2003 - #24*

I am in awe of what you are doing...You mentioned being not so good at getting comfortable. And this intrigues me - you have a daunting resume, if not travelogue, for a reporter. You tended to be present in some of the world's more dangerous settings.

Is it possible you got comfortable doing that? Too comfortable? Can you talk a little about what inspired you to stop reporting and take on the mission? Why Afghanistan and not the Balkans?

That Old Chaos And Rebirth Jones

Sarah Chayes - *September 4, 2003 - #29*

Maybe I am too comfortable with being...out there. Though I must say I do not consider myself a "war reporter." I am not a conflict junkie, rather a "chaos and rebirth" junkie. Many people asked me if I regretted not being in Iraq during the war. Not at ALL was my emphatic response...until the day Baghdad fell, when to my great surprise I felt a little twinge.

The Balkans DID inspire me, but what was different in Afghanistan was the leadership. I never felt in the Balkans that there was a single political leader with the vision or desire to really make a difference for his people. Here, the Karzais inspired me. Though I was pretty

sure the odds are stacked very heavily against them. That's why it felt like an obligation to...pitch in.

I have steadily (in ebbs and flows) questioned the value of just reporting on these situations, rather than "doing something." I guess the moment of switching over was one of those transition moments when a number of factors come together at the same time -- the inspiration, an invitation, a crystallizing sense of disappointment with US journalism at a key juncture (the anti-Taliban conflict).

Buds Opening

Viki Merrick - *September 3, 2003 - #25*

How do you allow for letting genuine personality of the community infuse the programming? Is this a goal? I don't know if you ever had a chance to read the GOBI Wave discussion from Mongolia, but I was so struck by some of the brief moments in the day turned over to local pleasure if you will (singing, messaging). Maybe that flavor lies within "Flower Garden" and "Buds Opening" and "light of Islam:" what do you think?

And I also woke up thinking about the woman whose husband won't let her work...what does she stand for in "constituting the constitution"? You said she's the best qualified, can you elaborate?

Key Bricks

Sarah Chayes - *September 4, 2003 - #33*

A lot of the personality will emerge from the people we interview for ALL of our shows, from simply having Kandaharis on the air, their stories, their achievements. It's a first!

That woman was the one who launched a previous discussion by asking: how can we get out from under this need for permission? It's a real bind: if women act without their husbands' permission they are beaten or threatened with divorce. In case of divorce they lose their children. I said, this is like a huge wall. It won't be torn down all at once, but let's look for some key bricks. But even those are difficult to work on, let alone dislodge.

By qualified, I meant her reading and conceptual abilities.

Amidst the rubble
of Akokolacha, the
village we helped
rebuild.



Citizenship

chelsea merz - *September 3, 2003 - #27*

As you've lived all over the world has your identity as an American changed? Do you identify with being an American? Or do you consider yourself a citizen of the world?

Sans Cleave

Sarah Chayes - *September 4, 2003 - #32*

I do consider myself an American. ...I vaguely considered what it might be like adopting French citizenship, since I had lived there for years and actually knew my district's rep. in National Assembly personally, but it just seemed false. I'm not French, I'm American. ...and yet, I could never imagine coming back to the US for good. It is just too...far away from the world. I remember coming for some weeks immediately after Sept. 11th and feeling total disconnect with the reactions of almost everyone, including some really cosmopolitan friends...even though I was deeply moved of course. Am I a citizen of the world, or of nowhere? Everyone else seems to cleave to some place or geographic identity.

From Report to Reconstruction

Edie Rubinowitz - *September 7, 2003 - #34*

I was wondering if you talk a little bit more about the process of going from reporting on events to becoming part of the reconstruction efforts. Are there any reporting habits one has to break to "be part of the solution?"

Unmodified

Sarah Chayes - *September 15, 2003 - #42*

I think I always identified with my stories a bit more than most reporters, so what I really feel is a sense of relief for that characteristic to be fitting in better. Also, it is a pleasure NOT to have to put a microphone in people's faces...much more intimacy -- mikes turn out to be a big barrier, and you have to be constantly calculating the degree to which a person is just expressing him or her-self, and the degree to which they're modifying for the mike. Note also that this particular reconstruction job, due to the odd circumstance of being connected with the Afghan president's (very analytical) brother, involves more policy analysis and discussion than just about any other. So for me it's the perfect mixture.

Story Threads

Jackson - *September 7, 2003 - #35*

There is the story, and then there is your story. Do you wonder if, at some point, you will either try to sort them out or tell them together as part of an even greater narrative?

Moonscape Tangles

Sarah Chayes - *September 15, 2003 - #47*

The problem is I have always LOATHED the first person in journalism. Then some folks came to do a documentary on us, rebuilding a village (Life After War. Will air on the Sundance Channel in late December). I knew I was the vehicle for the story, for getting viewers to identify with this moonscape of a place, but I was pretty shocked when I saw the thing the first time. It was largely about me. What an eyes-open violation of my principles!! But it does get tangled up...the former governor of Kandahar blaming me for his getting fired -- and lord knows I worked at it -- or telling him to "slap him on the ass" if I ever have a bone to pick with him...and the entanglements go on from there. I'll probably never get it sorted out. But that's part of the fun of this incarnation.

News Quagmire

helen woodward - *September 8, 2003 - #36*

It is so difficult to get a real picture of what is going on over there from over here; media focus is generally trained on Iraq right now, with only brief mention of what is going on in

Afghanistan...How easy is it for you, personally, to stay in touch with world news, or do you bother, is it superfluous to your daily life?...Does Iraq look like a quagmire from over there?

More importantly, how about the average afghan person on the street? what level of non-local news do they get? In sistering with the Mongolian radio station Gobi Wave, I found out that there are a tiny number of radios per capita in Mongolia, like one for every 20 homes or something...it blows my mind that we get 24 hour news coverage in the West, from a multitude of media sources, and we feel in the dark, how does it feel from over there?

Professional Deformation

Sarah Chayes - *September 15, 2003 - #44*

Re outside news... It's a professional deformation, as the French say, but I tend to throw myself pretty thoroughly into wherever I am. It feels like the whole world. I do listen to a few minutes of BBC World Service every AM, and devour magazines that come our way once a month or so. Afghans listen avidly to the BBC, in company often. But as that's Pashtu/Farsi service, it tends to be rather -- if not exclusively -- regionally focused. From my perspective, especially given what I've been witnessing, Iraq looks not only like a predictable quagmire, but perhaps a pretty well planned one. Could the lightning defeat of Saddam's forces have been due to a strategic withdrawal?

Religion, Mistrust, Kinship

Rolf Siverson - *September 10, 2003 - #40*

First, seeing as religion seems like a very important matter to the Afghans...How much of the programming do you think will be devoted to religion i.e., speeches by local clerics, you mentioned something about readings from the Koran, etc? On the logistical side, will the station be taking breaks at the hours of prayer?

Second, I know in a lot of countries that have just come out of totalitarian rule where there is little or no free speech, there tends to be a general mistrust of the media, especially the news. Do you see that being a problem in the future, or is it a problem already, and what do you think is the best way to combat that?

Third, what kind of support is AIR getting from the local community? Are people willing to lend a hand, or do people have a sort of ambivalent "wait and see" attitude, or are some people out right hostile? Is the local government involved? Do you want them to be?

Re Readings, Residents, Regimes

Sarah Chayes - *September 15, 2003 - #46*

Religion IS a big deal in Kandahar, though people are much less ideologically motivated than one would think, given the previous regime. We will open each broadcast day with a short Qur'an reading, but only one of our weekly programs is devoted to religious subjects, and it will tend to offer non-wahhabi/fundamentalist readings of some of the most important teachings of Islam. Timor is an amazingly gentle, open-hearted/minded man. Re the public, we are trying not to trumpet ourselves much. Public support, hopefully, will come with good programming. Re government. New Kandahar governor and communications minister are informed. Don't want any more involvement than that. Stay tuned re their reaction!

EDITOR'S NOTE - October 28, 2003

At this writing, Sarah is still busy with the launch. She is also gathering support for the initiative through appearances in the media here, on PBS's "NOW" and "Frontline World" and in the documentary film "Life After War" for the Sundance Channel. She promises to keep us posted on her progress, so check her Transom Discussion Topic for news.

More Photos From Afghanistan

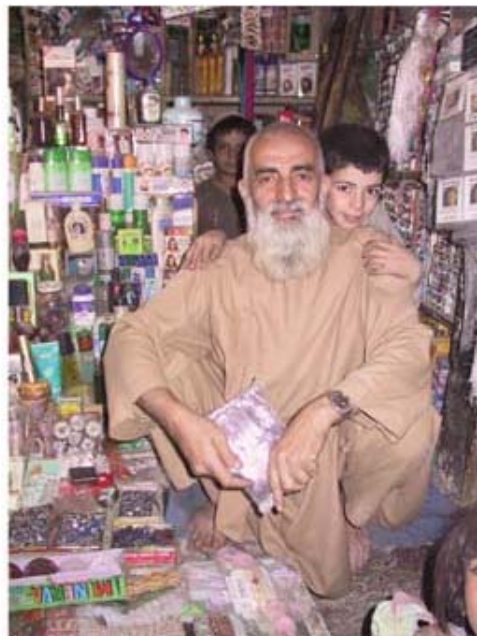
The flower of
Afghanistan.



Sarah and Haji
Baba, the oldest
man in the village.
His house was the
first we rebuilt.



At the Baazar.



Afghans are avid
radio listeners.



Fast Food –
Kandahar style.



Sarah unpacking the box of gifts sent by the town of Concord to the village elders of Akokolacha.



Afghans are hungry for education. They see it as a way out of war...

...but the Taliban are beginning to leave 'night letters' at the mosques, warning them to take their girls out of school.



There is a nomadic tribe of people called the Kuchis who are, as Sarah says scattered like confetti over the desert. Most have lost their animals due to drought and war. This is Sarah with some of their extraordinary beadwork, which some make for our women's income project.



There is nothing
more desolate than
an Afghan grave.



Old man selling
grapes.



The main street of the capital city of Urozgon. The bombing damage is from the time of the Soviets. There is no sign of reconstruction here.



Mules can be quite cute.



The soldiers in Urozgon were like children about having their pictures taken.



The governor of Urozgon province, Jan Mahmood, governor of Urozgon province, conducting business, his scribe beside him. As a tribal elder, in the traditional manner, he spends hours every day receiving petitioners, and deciding on their cases.



Sarah and the governor.

He says she's "the bravest man he ever met" After the US accidentally bombed a wedding party in his province, she drove a truckload of medical supplies up when no one else dared.



Children at a wedding.



Children at a wedding.



Tradition.



Sarah Chayes and Afghan Independent Radio Links

Afghans for Civil Society: <http://www.afghansforcivilsociety.org>

ACS seeks to bring about a democratic alternative for Afghanistan that opposes violence and extremism and promotes the rebirth of civil society.

About Transom

What We're Trying To Do

Here's the short form: Transom.org is an experiment in channeling new work and voices to public radio through the Internet, and for discussing that work, and encouraging more. We've designed Transom.org as a performance space, an open editorial session, an audition stage, a library, and a hangout. Our purpose is to create a worthy Internet site and make public radio better.



Submissions can be stories, essays, home recordings, sound portraits, interviews, found sound, non-fiction pieces, audio art, whatever, as long as it's good listening. Material may be submitted by anyone, anywhere - by citizens with stories to tell, by radio producers trying new styles, by writers and artists wanting to experiment with radio.

We contract with Special Guests to come write about work here. We like this idea, because it 1) keeps the perspective changing so we're not stuck in one way of hearing, 2) lets us in on the thoughts of creative minds, and 3) fosters a critical and editorial dialog about radio work, a rare thing.

Our Discussion Boards give us a place to talk it all over. Occasionally, we award a Transom.org t-shirt to especially helpful users, and/or invite them to become Special Guests.

Staff

Producer/Editor - *Jay Allison*

Web Director/Designer - *Joshua T. Barlow*

Editors – *Sydney Lewis, Viki Merrick, Chelsea Merz, Jeff Towne, Helen Woodward*

Web Developers - *Josef Verbanac, Barrett Golding*

Advisors

Scott Carrier, Nikki Silva, Davia Nelson, Ira Glass, Doug Mitchell, Larry Massett, Sara Vowell, Skip Pizzi, Susan Stamberg, Flawn Williams, Paul Tough, Bruce Drake, Bill McKibben, Bob Lyons, Tony Kahn, Ellin O'Leary, Marita Rivero, Alex Chadwick, Claire Holman, Larry Josephson, Dmae Roberts, Dave Isay, Stacy Abramson, Gregg McVicar, Ellen Weiss, Ellen McDonnell, Robin White, Joe Richman, Steve Rowland, Johanna Zorn, Elizabeth Meister



ATLANTIC PUBLIC MEDIA

Atlantic Public Media administers Transom.org. APM is a non-profit organization based in Woods Hole, Massachusetts which has as its mission "to serve public broadcasting through training and mentorship, and through support for creative and experimental approaches to program production and distribution." APM is also the founding group for *WCAI & WNAN*, a new public radio service for Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket under the management of *WGBH-Boston*.

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