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Baghdad Burning II: More Girl Blog from Irag

Riverbend

Feminist Press at CUNY (October 2006)
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While world leaders debate and the official media embed, the author, a blogger in Baghdad, continues her keen reporting on what passes for everyday life in Iraq. In the midst of a foreign occupation and a rising and divisive religious tide, she makes incisive observations: “I don’t think anyone imagined three years ago that things could be quite this bad today.” The book picks up her blog in October 2004, and is organized chronologically through March 2006.

“Riverbend” is a pen name referring to the banner of her blog: “I’ll meet you ‘round the bend my friend, where hearts can heal and souls can mend.” It is not safe for her identity to be widely known. A talented writer, she comfortably chronicles her personal experiences, contrasting the “official” information. She describes abducted American reporter Jill Carroll’s slain interpreter, a friend and neighborhood music store owner: “His passion was music … he was a Christian from Basrah with a wife and children … he loved Pink Floyd.” Commenting on the absurd local broadcasting of American television (*Jeopardy* and *Days of Our Lives*) during the few hours of electricity, or lamenting the world’s fascination with reality shows (“I have a suggestion of my own for a reality show. Take 15 Bush supporters and throw them in a house in the suburbs of, say, Fallujah for at least 14 days”), Riverbend ably brings the contemporary world into the context of her wartime world.

Riverbend is a Muslim whose middle-class Baghdad family and neighborhood combine both Sunni and Shia adherents. Educated partly outside of Iraq, she was a computer programmer prior to the war. The previous compilation of her blog writing, *Baghdad Burning: Girl Blog from Iraq*, received the Lettre Ulysses Award for the Art of Literary Reportage in 2005.

Her direct, concise writing and evokes the relentlessly diminishing quality of life and the general weariness of the Iraqi people; in March 2006 she observes: “Three years and the electricity is worse than ever. The security situation has gone from bad to worse. The country feels like it’s on the brink of chaos.” She misses no irony, subtle or unsubtle: “We actually pitied America and Americans when the Twin Towers went down and when the news began leaking out about it being Muslim fundamentalists—possibly Arabs—we were outraged.”

Astutely observing the language employed by those in power, she asks, “Why is it ‘terrorism’ when foreigners set off bombs in London or Washington or New York and it’s a ‘liberation’ or ‘operation’ when foreigners bomb whole cities in Iraq?” As the war continues to dominate the American press, readers of *Baghdad Burning II* will find a personal connection to the headlines, and will likely hope that Riverbend will be able to continue to report on living inside a war.

CHRIS ARVIDSON (January 5, 2007)

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