



January 2007

Volume VII Number 1

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..."Not any more—my parents are gone now. Adoptive parents," I blurted out. *Why is it so much easier to bare your soul to a stranger?* Some of my closest friends don't know I was adopted, much less that I had a little sister. My mind reverted to that awful day, and the sad, frightened look on Joanie's five year old face when we were separated forever. At a loss for words, I remember crying out to her "I'll see you in the spring—when the whippoorwills sing." But I never saw Joanie again. I had to resist the temptation to tell this whole unhappy story to....

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## Hanging Saddam Hussein

by Anna Seymour

It's a bad idea. Don't do it.

There's no question that Hussein gave the commands that engendered the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. Nor is there question that he enabled a depraved and degenerate son who was a murderer and rapist. There is little doubt that he caused and condoned the uncivilized torture of countless numbers of Iraq's citizens. It's clear that he lived in an obscenely ostentatious style with palatial homes dotted throughout the country with statues to himself while many citizens barely scraped up a living for themselves and their children.

He certainly is a man who earned the hatred of millions.

Executing him is, none-the-less, quite a different matter. While there is no possible justification for what he did, what body is it that would be executing him? The Iraqi court? At present, there is no such thing. What currently passes for a government in Iraq is something tenuously held together by George Bush's USA. Looking at the number of bombings of civilians carried out by underground forces should be enough to convince anyone that a unified and united Iraq is not even close to existing. The executioner of Hussein will be the United States, a once exemplary nation which, in the last six years, has lost all the moral authority needed to convincingly pass the ultimate judgment against a leader they recently deposed.

Iraq is a complex country divided into unequal thirds, each one of which harbors distrust and hatred of the others for a history of atrocities that goes back more than a thousand years. Ruling and holding together a country like that is walking the most treacherous mine-field—and so Hussein endorsed the unthinkable: he relied on torture.

You can have torture or you can have civilization. You cannot have both. They are mutually exclusive.

In selling his country the war, George Bush relied on two things: the first was the weapons of mass destruction. The existence of those was the one stated reason for the war. Yet, we now know that not only do they not exist—nor did they exist in Iraq, but they do exist in other countries. The

second thing, which was not stated as a reason for the war but which was used to awaken America's abhorrence to the extent they would accept war, was the claim that Hussein's government tortured dissident citizens—and they would torture people's children in front of them.

After all that, George Bush tried very hard to get America to accept torture by Americans. There is a Cosmic distance between a society that rejects, abhors, and criminalizes torture and one that condones and uses it. There is a very small distance between a society that accepts torture of people and one that accepts torture of people's children in front of them.

The more Bush tries to control Iraq, the more like Hussein he becomes, and this is Saddam Hussein's ultimate revenge: let George Bush rule this dangerous country. From the start, Bush made egregious errors. The initial invasion was conducted without a plan for keeping the action under control. As a result, chaos ensued and museums which held ancient artifacts important for humankind's knowledge of its history were stolen and lost. Not only was there no plan for victory, there was not even a description of what would constitute victory.

According to a posting by CNN on October 11, 2006, "War has wiped out about 655,000 Iraqis or more than 500 people a day since the U.S.-led invasion, a new study reports.... The survey, being published online by British medical journal, *The Lancet*, gives a far higher number of deaths in Iraq than other organizations." \*

That would raise the question as to whether Saddam Hussein or George Bush killed more Iraqi civilians.

George Bush claimed that the study was wrong. CNN states, "Last December, Bush said that he estimated about 30,000 people had died since the war began."\* Sounds a bit like Hussein.

There seems to be little doubt that Hussein has been guilty of crimes against humanity, but the trial against him has been fraught with injustice from the beginning. Three of his defense lawyers and a witness were murdered.

Revenge disguised as justice is one of the greatest of injustices.

Hussein seems to have come-back powers way beyond the usual, and that is likely to be one of the things the new government in Iraq is afraid of. Hanging him is not likely to prevent that. While the term "martyr" is both overused and ridiculously used in that part of the world, in Hussein's case, he may become a *celebrated cause* and a martyr to many. This would keep the warring factions warring interminably.

It would be better to build a prison for him far away from Iraq and keep him there for life.

\* <http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/10/11/iraq.deaths/>

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## COLUMNS

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IDEAS AND THE ARTS

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## The Boxed Identity

by Rita Banerji

Delineating human identity—be it national, state or cultural—by drawing lines on the face of the earth is perhaps one of the most illogical and peculiar activities that the human species engages in. Perhaps no other animal species feels such a compulsion to self-assort. Among some of the most obvious illustrations of this, are the maps of the U.S.A., Canada and Australia, each a patchwork drawing of impeccable little squares and rectangles. It is as though a schoolchild conscientiously with the aid of a ruler and compass drew out neat, straight lines and labeled the resulting boxes. While all other nations, have non-geometric state boundaries, ones that generally follow the curves of mountains, rivers or deserts, just as do the countries themselves, the fact remains that all these lines are merely the whimsical art work of the human imagination. In reality, boundaries are non-existent— they are intangible. They cannot be touched nor seen. Their hypothetical existence is only on paper, and more so, precariously dependent on human desires and conflicts. History shows us that these lines shift often. Towns expand. Cities die—as did Machu Picchu and Babylon. New nations are born. And old ones—the U.S.S.R. and Yugoslavia for instance—unexpectedly disappear.

And almost instantly, like there was a magic pen involved, the lines on our paper maps are erased and redrawn.

The new lines enclose new identities – and this is what makes them particularly illogical and bizarre. While the shifting of the lines takes only a moment –the flash of an eraser and the flick of a pen—one does wonder about the repackaging of the corresponding human identities. Can they switch just as rapidly? And what happens to the old identity that people had grown into, assuming its uniqueness, contributing to its distinctiveness which may have brewed for many decades, even centuries, within the parameters of the old boundaries. Do people simply discard them like worn old shoes by the roadside and wear new ones?

When I first met Eva in Washington D.C. she had told me that she was from Czechoslovakia. “Oh, just like my dining chairs,” I had quipped, for the second-hand chairs that I had picked up from a garage sale, declared in bold, on their undersides –

‘Made in Czechoslovakia.’ A few years later in 1993, when under the capable leadership of Václav Havel, the country peacefully split along ethnic lines into two—The Czech Republic and The Republic of Slovakia—Eva would joke that I should consider repainting the labels under my chairs. “And put what?” I’d ask. “Why, The Czech Republic of course!” she’d retort mirthfully flaunting her new loyalties. Yet, as Eva often pointed out she is neither Czech nor Slovak, but Moravian. And more over she belonged to that extremely vibrant student body in Prague that not only actively resisted the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia, but was eager to take its place in a bigger and far more diverse world than the narrow walls of communism would allow. However, while Eva could treat her new nationalism with light humor, always keeping the history and evolution of her country in context of her relationship with the world at large, the process for most people is often agonizing and disorienting. As was recently seen in Yugoslavia, the restructuring of a nation’s borders is frequently accompanied by bloodshed and unmitigated violence of a manner that undermines humanity itself. Those who survive it are left to cope with the loss of property, family, and community. And oftentimes, even if these people have relatively safe and brand new nations to inhabit, they still can’t overcome an overwhelming sense of vacancy and anger.

An Eritrean friend, who I also knew in Washington, and who had begun sporting a ‘Viva! Eritrea’ T-shirt when Eritrea seceded from Ethiopia in 1993, would take offence at curious people who inquired to know just where exactly this Eritrea was. But what to her was a greater insult, was to be mistaken for an Ethiopian. This despite the undeniable similarities between the two peoples, and not just of some very distinctive facial features, but also of shared languages, food and customs that both inherited through a common history that dates back to the 8th century B.C. D’mt civilization. At a wedding that we attended together, she refused to sit at a table where two other Ethiopians were seated. Part of her antagonism was owed to the fact that all her three brothers had been killed in Eritrea’s war of independence.

However it would appear that the psychological tendency towards dissociation and denial is a coping mechanism frequently used by survivors of dismembered nations.

My father for instance was recently asked by a young family friend, how he had felt about going to war with a country that he had been born and raised in. In 1947 with the withdrawal of British Colonial rule, the Indian subcontinent was portioned into two nations along the lines of religion. The exodus that followed, with Hindu families like my father’s fleeing to the Indian side, and the Muslims to Pakistan, witnessed one of the bloodiest and most brutal civil wars on this subcontinent involving mass executions, looting, and rape. Media photographs show the roads between the two nations strewn with dead bodies as people stumbled over them to reach safety. My father, like many other survivors of this horrendous period, has always remained mute about his experiences, except for a brusque statement of fleeing “with the clothes on our backs.” Later in 1971, as an officer in the Indian army, he would be a part of the armored force that invaded and subdued Pakistan. To our young friend’s question, as to how it was possible for him to do so, he replied without any hesitation: “You see, the people I grew up around were good, decent people. But now it is different. Pakistan is a terrorist breeding ground.”

Oddly enough, General Musharraf, the current President of Pakistan, who as Pakistan's Army Chief in 1999 had organized one of the largest military infiltrations of India, one that brought the two countries perilously close to a nuclear face-off, was actually born in and spent his early childhood in India!

Perhaps one of the most unpleasant and destructive consequences of the boundary-borne human identity is how it splinters an individual's perception of himself or herself. It compels us to draw lines within which we are required to cram our selves, and discard the rest that does not fit or attribute it to another. By the same logic, it prevents us from personalizing that which exists outside the parameters of our stipulated identity, however deeply it resonates with us. All in all, boundaries don't just break up the human existence, but they obscure the reality of humans as a single species.

None-the-less, boundaries and lines exist, even if only in the warped and virtual world of the human brain. The perplexing question is why? What is it that compels us to incessantly engage in this self-destructive activity? Why do we feel a need to constantly build virtual prisons to incarcerate ourselves in, physically as well as psychologically, and subjugate our fellow humans to the same: You live in your box and I will live in mine, and periodically we might visit.

Perhaps the answer, to what really seems instinctive and irrational behavior lies with our Neolithic ancestors. Group formation was an essential tool of survival for the Neolithic man, for faced with resource constraints, one needed one's group members to hunt with, gather food, and fend off competition from others. Customs and habits—later to be recognized as 'culture'—are what identified a group's members and ensured cohesiveness among them. These thereupon demanded allegiance and had to be adhered to religiously. Thus ultimately, for all their glorification, their exultation, boundaries and their stipulated identities—national, communal, or cultural—are simply a throw-back on a very primitive and crude instinct, one fed by fear and based on the power-play of resource consumption and control.

Conversely some may argue that dissolution of boundaries would lead to global anarchy and possibly an across-the-board homogenization of cultures producing a monotonous, insipid, and mechanized life-style for all.

The thing is, that boundaries are in-and-of-themselves a manifestation of global resource inequities and their very continuation is evidence of the powers that thrive off these inequities by playing up one human block against another. Rigid Immigration control in developed economies, for instance, is based on the horror of being inundated by third world immigrants seeking the wealth of the west. Conversely, poorer nations in West Asia for instance, are suspicious of the intentions of Western nations who they suspect are only covetous of their oil reserves. The solution to boundaries is not to enforce the cessation of boundaries but to ease the inequities which enable the use of boundaries in a divisive manner by the reinforcement of our instinctive fears of survival and competition. And perhaps someday then, boundaries would lose their power of human confinement and

their illusive roles in defining human identity, their presence being simply routine and administrative.

As for culture, when it is not a duty bound imposition, couched in ideas like patriotism and tradition and infused with paranoia, it serves as the singular most versatile feature of human identity. For culture at its base is an expression of creative human adaptation to the collective environment and a community's desires, and as such has always been fluid and evolving, spilling over boundaries and transpiring through time and space. It is the innate nature of the human species to interact with its world in newer, more innovative and unique ways, and in a manner that would engage and entertain its own complex thought processes. Hence, boundaries, or no boundaries, the rejuvenation and diversification of culture are an eternal guarantee.

Despite skepticism, the thought of a borderless world, nonetheless, is not all that distant a possibility. The European Union for all its administrative hiccups could yet prove to be a precursor to it.

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## ARTS

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## Kipp's Restaurant

by Charles Miess

Worn out wipers skimmed over the slush on my windshield and created a translucent screen in front of my eyes. “Damn!” I thought, “I should have been ready for this!” It was the first snowfall of the season and I was unprepared. Large clustered snowflakes swirled in the cold air and were rapidly building up in the surrounding fields. Those balmy fall days of last month seemed like an eternity ago now. The only reminder was the residual heat seeping and steaming out of the glistening asphalt, keeping the road clear. My wimpy defroster, though, was just able to melt a little dome shaped opening at the bottom of my windshield. I hunched down and peered through as I drove.

It was getting worse now—much worse. The brilliance of my headlights was being hurled straight back into my face by the wind driven snow. I flicked between low and high beam as I stared at the dividing line where the pavement met the snowy edge of the road, just in front of my right front wheel. I was terrified to keep going, but even more afraid to stop. Luckily, this normally busy road seemed to be devoid of traffic this early in the morning—almost as if I were transported to another planet, alone.

Now the snow was starting to build up on the road and blend with that at the sides. Soon, the whiteness was uniform, as if some diabolical fiend had laid a sheet over my windshield. I was about to stop and take my chances of getting creamed by a cement truck, when I spotted the faint glow of tail lights ahead. The driver must have had younger eyes than I, and perhaps was more familiar with the road, as he seemed to drive along with considerable confidence, never even tapping his brakes. It was like a beacon in a sea of white. I crept up behind, put my trust in this stranger’s hands, and

followed.

After some time, brake lights flashed ahead. Then the right turn signal blinked. “Wherever this guy is going, he’s going to have company,” I said to myself. He made his turn confidently, and parked his car as if visibility was almost perfect. I was looking for my own spot, when suddenly the back end of a parked car loomed in front of me. I zigged and I zagged, just barely missing it, only to crumple a trash can as my car came to a stop. Between gusts of windblown snow, it looked like I might have squeezed that can into the red, concrete block wall of a little diner.



Kipp’s Restaurant left a lot to be desired for a place to be stranded. It certainly was no desert isle with Cindy Crawford, but it was warm and dry and I didn’t have to worry about that cement truck sending me to the Promised Land. The room was small, with a half dozen two-chair tables. An equal number of stools lined a counter separating the waitress station from the dining area. The aroma of fresh coffee, eggs, and sausage was mixed with the musty smell of wet wool and cotton from the handful of other people that were stranded there. Twangy country-western music confronted my ears as I surveyed the motorcycle posters and patriotic slogans on the wall; *God Bless and Protect America* said one. *Eggs, steak, homefries, toast, 4.05* was scrawled on a blackboard that hung near the opening to the kitchen. I felt as if I had stepped into the back hills of West Virginia.

As I brushed the snow from my jacket, a lady approached with a pot of coffee. “On the house, today,” she said cheerfully as she saluted me with the pot. “Please do,” I replied. She set a mug on the table across from a man who had seen far more winters than I had. I noticed something strangely familiar and reassuring in his craggy old face. “The name’s John,” he said as he held out his hand.

“Charlie,” I replied.

The music had changed to the plaintive strains of Billie Joel’s “Piano Man:”

*He says, “son can you play me a mem-o-ry,  
I’m not really sure how it goes,  
But it’s sad and it’s sweet,  
And I knew it complete,  
When I wore a younger man’s clothes.”*

“Well, Charlie,” the old man continued, “you sure didn’t show any pity on that trash

can out there.”

“Was that *you* ahead of me?” I replied.

“Might’ve been,” he said with a mischievous look in his eyes. “Nasty storm! You live around here, Charlie?”

“Just a few miles away,” I answered, “but I don’t get down this way much.”

“Got family here?” he asked.

“Not any more—my parents are gone now. Adoptive parents,” I blurted out. *Why is it so much easier to bare your soul to a stranger?* Some of my closest friends don’t know I was adopted, much less that I had a little sister. My mind reverted to that awful day, and the sad, frightened look on Joanie’s five year old face when we were separated forever. At a loss for words, I remember crying out to her “I’ll see you in the spring—when the whippoorwills sing.” But I never saw Joanie again. I had to resist the temptation to tell this whole unhappy story to the old man.

“Be thankful for those folks, Charlie,” he said. “It takes a lot of love and sacrifice to raise a kid—especially, one that’s not blood kin.” He wasn’t telling me anything I didn’t already know, but it felt good to get that reassurance. “Life isn’t fair,” he went on, “but things don’t always happen by chance; they sometimes happen for a reason.” I could see from the pain in his eyes that life hadn’t been fair to him either. I felt guilty for my own self-pity, and wanted to know more about him.

*Sing us a song, you’re the piano man,  
Sing us a song to-nite,  
Well, we’re all in the mood for a mel-o-dy,  
And you’ve got us feeling alright.*

“More coffee?” asked the waitress.

“Only if you sit down and have one with us,” John replied.

“Well, I don’t mind if I do,” she replied. “Doesn’t look like I’ll be getting any more customers ‘til the storm lets up.”

The old man looked on quietly as the waitress and I swapped a few lies and enjoyed each other’s company. Sometimes I felt he was picturing someone else in our place, someone dear to him perhaps, someone he missed at this particular moment.

*Yes, they’re sharing a drink they call lone-li-ness,  
But it’s better than drinking alone.*

For a long time we were in our own little world, isolated by the storm from life’s slings and arrows. Our reverie was finally interrupted by the clank and rumble of the county

plow going by. The old man got up from his chair and squinted out the window.

“Looks like the storm let up a bit,” he said. He pulled his faded denim jacket from the back of the chair. “Well, I’ve got to crank up old Betsy and get on with my journey. It was real nice meeting you folks.”

“You know,” I replied, “for some strange reason, I feel I was drawn by your tail lights to this place. It was almost like we were destined to meet.”

He shuffled to the door and turned around. I saw a curious mixture of joy and sorrow in his eyes. “As I said before son, things don’t always happen by chance.” The door closed slowly behind him.

“Well ma’am, it’s been a pleasure, but I have to go too,” I said. “I don’t get down this way often, but perhaps—perhaps I’ll see you in the spring.”

I was halfway to the door when I heard her say softly to herself, “. . . *when the whippoorwills sing.*”

I froze in my tracks. A thousand childhood memories raced around in my stunned mind. Through glazed eyes I watched her wiping down the table, lost in her own world, and oblivious to me standing there.

“Joanie?” I said.

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