

The Saudis Have A \223Modest Proposal\224 for Women  
Posted On:December 31, 1969

In 1951, Philip Wylie, an American social critic, wrote a novel called The Disappearance. In this fantasy, something happens in the cosmos, a spasm of some sort, that resulted in the disappearance of each gender from the other, both living in parallel worlds. It is always fascinating to contemplate how men and women would manage alone, a fantasy as old as ancient Greece, whose mythology included the Amazons, a tribe of women warriors who managed very well without men.

Men without women do not fare as well. All-male armies without women behave very badly indeed, and all-boy schools are notorious for rampant hormones and much acting out. But Saudi Arabia is trying to address a socio-economic problem created by their medieval religion: the strict separation of the sexes. In poorer Muslim countries, the suppression of women is only slightly worse than the suppression of men. Everybody is miserable. But Arabia is the beneficiary of an ocean of oil and a sea of money.

In less than a generation, they went from a fly-bitten backwash to a country with every modern advantage that money can buy. But herein lies their problem: anything can be bought, but nobody in that culture is producing anything of value. Their most popular Ph.D. programs are in theology, Muslim theology only, not in the sciences that produce a modern world, nor the humanities that produce a modern political system.

The Saudi authorities are stung by how badly their citizens perform, even when compared to their other Muslim neighbors in the Gulf. Despite strict gender separation, they have had enough money to educate their daughters who, by the way, are hungry enough for knowledge to exceed their brothers. What do you do in a country with a sizeable female population that is educated in useful, modern skills but prevented from participating?

For some years now, there have been female-only banks, certain businesses, and attempts to permit women to work in male enterprises as long as they are separate. Women in universities hear their professors (male) by closed circuit television. Because the number of educated women is growing, there is a serious brain drain from Saudi Arabia of women seeking work and opportunity elsewhere.

Some government official has come up with a perfect solution: female-only cities in which the women would run factories, banks, enterprises, and this would help raise the level of Saudi entrepreneurialism. But to do this, they would have to overcome several difficulties: first, women are not allowed to drive. Are they then to move away from their families altogether to live in these female-only ghettos? And second, what happens when these women discover that they do not need men at all, even for reproduction (which can be done today artificially)? In women-only cities, nobody will need the cloak of invisibility (hijab) and there will be no religious police permitted. This is sounding better by the moment!

Rather than correct the idiotic gender apartheid, they come up with a plan that will make their society even weirder. But they are not the only ones with a gender problem that makes them ridiculous in the world. Ultra-Orthodox men in Israel complain that the sight of women distracts them from prayer. But some wag\227I suspect a clever woman ---has come up with an invention for the men: glasses that distort their vision so that they cannot look at women clearly. I have long suggested that Afghan and Saudi men wear the burqas so that they cannot clearly see women, who would then not have to wear them.

And we have a Congressman (six terms) who believes that \223legitimately\224 raped women cannot get pregnant, and therefore are not entitled to abortions. He seems to have not only a problem with science, but one with women as well.

Jonathan Swift\222s Gulliver\222s Travels satirizes a make-believe island of state-financed mad scientists, wall-eyed and unable to see where they walk. Could Swift have imagined these Ultra-Orthodox men, or match the stupidity of Iran, which now bars women from almost all university courses?

Stupidity has many fathers.

678 words

Dr. Laina Farhat-Holzman is a historian, lecturer, and author of *Ten Inventions That Changed Everything*. You may contact her at [Lfarhat102@aol.com](mailto:Lfarhat102@aol.com) or [www.globalthink.net](http://www.globalthink.net).