

How Does Testosterone Fuel Political Rampages?  
Posted On:December 31, 1969

Riots by the insulted and furious are not exclusive to the Muslim world, although it has become a standard cultural exercise there. I remember the student demonstrations of 1973, furious demonstrations that spread throughout Europe and America. We came to think that \223students\224 owned revolutions; but they are only cannon fodder. I was taking my doctoral oral exams at USC when the proceedings were interrupted by the sound of breaking glass across the campus. For months, I had moved the classes I taught out of doors after the ubiquitous false bomb threats. Why were students trashing their university?

Some of these students were genuinely outraged by their powerlessness in the face of adult authority. But others joined the riots---both young women and men---who often wound up in bed afterwards. Demonstrations unleash both adrenaline and sex hormones. Nobody is talking about this, but I think today\222s Muslim rioters are no different.

We have become accustomed to the sight of outraged screaming men who rally to the streets after every perceived \223insult\224 to their religion. These rampagers are uniformly male, ranging from bearded Islamist with an agenda to what was described by one journalist watching the Cairo demonstrations as \223football hooligans.\224 I saw the m myself on television, young men without beards dressed in western casual clothing. I wondered why these seemingly secular Muslims were out there. Were they really so insulted by this stupid film or was there another reason?

This is not to dismiss being insulted; Islam is insulted by the very primacy of the modern world, leaving them in the dust. But they are not insulted enough to avoid modern means of communication, weapons, and propaganda. Nor are they unwilling to produce their own insults: TV series such as the provocative and patently false Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a conspiracy story cooked up by the Russian secret police in 1899.

But looking at these young and seemingly modern men screaming in the street, my memory returned to the siege of the American Embassy in Tehran in 1979. Many of the shouting young men (and even women) were university students, but the real actors who went over the walls and took the embassy were bearded and much too long in tooth to be students. They were Islamist operatives.

Young men in the Muslim world have plenty to be unhappy about. They are unhappy that their economies are wretched, that there are few worthwhile jobs for them, that without jobs they cannot hope to marry, and they are bored. Family life in the Muslim world is very smothering and oppressive (by western standards). Getting out in the street and working up insulted outrage is an outlet for what might otherwise be directed against their authorities. And Muslim rage is a good cover for other agendas.

Note that the supposed \223Muslim Spring\224 in Cairo was peopled by a very different lot

. Our press interviewed charming, English-speaking techies who desperately wanted a modern society just like Europe. We did not consider how few there are like that in Egypt, in which the majority are ignorant, poor, and ready to believe any conspiracy rumor without question. The majority in the square were more or less secular and modern, and young women played a leading role. They paid for their boldness in being raped and beaten by both the police and the same Islamists who raped Lara Logan, a 60 Minutes journalist. Cairo is notorious for hordes of young, seemingly westernized men who prey upon any unaccompanied woman who dares appear in the public space. I see testosterone poisoning here.

The stupid anti-Islamic amateur movie was offensive, but the vast majority of rioters around the world had no way of seeing it. They were ready for a rumble, and the movie was a pretext, not a cause. The next time you see outraged mobs in the streets, consider the multiple psychological and sociological issues that have made them crazy. These demonstrations are never spontaneous. They are always organized and staged. Without the cameras there, they would melt.

675 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 or  
www.globalthink.net.