

Contradictions in the House of Saud: Separate City to be Built for Saudi Women

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On August 6, 2012, the Saudi Industrial Property Authority (MODON) issued a press release which highlighted, once again, the utter absurdity of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This writer has written previously on the rampant corruption, perversity, cruelty, and utter criminality of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and this latest insight into the workings of the House of Saud—i.e. the family that runs this gulag—defies rationality and further exposes the insanity of the rulers of this captive nation. Once again, we see how monarchy distorts the mind, corrupts the body politique, and deforms society into bizarre contortions as it attempts to reconcile its contradictions.

MODON's press release stated that it had initiated work on planning and development of "the first industrial city being readied for women workers in the Kingdom. It will be launched in Al-Ahsa 2nd Industrial city which is located in Hofuf near Al-Ahsa airport," reads the release. And while the press notice indicated that job opportunities would be created for "both men and women," it was the focus on the separation of the sexes in the workplace that caught the attention, and outrage, of news agencies and observers from around the world. With an estimated costs of 500 million riyals or about \$133 million, the new city is expected to create only about 5000 new jobs.

"The city," the development authority announced "is distinguished from other industrial cities for its proximity to residential neighborhoods to facilitate the movement of women to and from the workplace. It is also characterized by allocating sections equipped for women workers in environment and working conditions consistent with the privacy of women according to Islamic guidelines and regulations."

Nearly half of Saudi Arabia's 28 million population and over 60 percent of the country's university students are female and yet only about 15 percent of the entire Saudi workforce is comprised of women. *Al Arabiya* reports that 78 percent of the Kingdom's university graduates are unemployed.

Reporter Homa Khaleeli of the UK-based *Guardian* newspaper writes that the "country already has separate schools, segregated universities (and the biggest all-female university in the world) not to mention offices, restaurants and even separate entrances for public buildings. Now industrial hubs are to be built so that women can be hidden away even further than their current dresscode of abaya, headscarf and niqab allows." The proposed KSA development is "so extreme," remarks Khaleeli, that "the plans bring to mind the US's racial divide under the Jim Crow laws, ensuring 'separate but equal' institutions for black and white people." Furthermore, she correctly points out, "like the legalised discrimination in the US, 'equal' in this context means no such thing. The female half of the adult

population of Saudi Arabia is considered unfit to control their own lives. Women cannot decide whether to leave the house, whether or who to marry, whether to work or study, whether to travel, what to wear, or even whether to have major surgery—without the consent of a male guardian.”

Brett Wilkins, writing in *Digital Journal*, notes that the city “is being billed as a way for women to achieve a greater degree of financial independence while obeying the strict gender segregation dictated by the kingdom’s Wahhabi Muslim rulers and enforced by the dreaded *mutaween* morality police.” Describing KSA as being “run by the world’s most repressive religious fundamentalist monarchs,” Wilkins lays bear the facts that in Saudi Arabia, “women are subject to a strictly enforced gender apartheid. They aren’t allowed to vote or drive. They cannot be treated in hospitals or travel without written permission from their husbands or male relatives.

One woman who was kidnapped and raped by seven men was sentenced to 90 lashes of the whip for being in a vehicle with an unrelated male. When she went to the media with her story, her sentence was increased to 200 lashes. In 2002, 15 girls needlessly died when the *mutaween* locked them inside their burning school and stopped firefighters from saving them because they weren’t ‘properly’ dressed in black robes and headscarves.”

As *The Week* put it, “Saudi Arabia has a problem: The Persian Gulf kingdom has an increasingly educated, increasingly unemployed female population and ultraconservative laws and customs that forbid women from mingling, much less working, with men.” In other words, this is a recipe for civil war. Being prodded by its western ally, the USA, to reconcile its deformed society to contemporary production methods and enter into modernity—at least into the nineteenth century by western standards—King Abdullah, in September of 2011, announced that by 2015 women will be able to vote and run in local elections. But don’t hold your breath, as such statements are issued from time to time by the Saudi royals only to please their American protectors and never meant to actually be implemented.

Contradiction upon contradiction is plaguing the House of Saud, and nearly every solution they propose to address their multiplicity of problems is prone to failure by the contortions of their belief system. On the one hand, the house of Saud bills itself as “the custodian of the two holy mosques” in Mecca and Medina and, hence, as the “true” guardians and interpreters of Islam. On the other hand, they defy Islam and common sense by denigrating the female half of the population as either subordinate or inferior to men, if they consider women to be human at all.

In coddling these neanderthals, the US sets itself up for payback, as can be witnessed by the current Republican Party courting Saudi Arabian financial contributions as well as campaign donations from the other oil-rich five monarchs of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council in their attempt to unseat Barack Obama from the US presidency. The latest example of this disparagement of women was spewed forth from the mouth of Missouri Congressman Todd Akin who claimed just last week that women cannot become pregnant from something he calls “legitimate rape”. This comment and others prompted the following response from Republican Senator Olympia Snowe of Maine: “the comments from Akin reinforce the perception that we in the Republican Party are unsympathetic to issues of paramount concern to women.” And, yet, the Republican Party continues to compete to see how extreme they can be in relegating American women back to the status of their Saudi counterparts: subordinated, strictly regulated, covered up, denied equal personhood, and

stripped of their legal status as citizens.

Akin was only following the party line, as Republicans in the last year since becoming the majority in Congress in the 2010 midterm elections, have proposed redefining rape and thus limiting the charge to only cases described as ‘forcible rape’ in order to deny women access to health services, voted to defund Planned Parenthood (the nation’s leading sexual and reproductive health care provider and advocate), repeatedly tried to restrict women’s access to health care services, and held a Congressional House Oversight and Government Reform Committee hearing on the Obama Administration’s contraception rule in February of this year with five men and no women. Indeed, as in much of the Republican Party’s assault on women, female input into formulating their proposals is entirely absent. It is no wonder that Olympia Snowe, quoted above, is stepping down from her position as a Republican senator.

In one noted example of the Republican Party’s war on women, Virginia’s House of Delegates in February 2012 pushed through legislation that requires women seeking abortions to first undergo an invasive abdominal or transvaginal ultrasound procedure, a procedure which amounts to state-sanctioned rape. A similar law, known as the sonogram law, was passed in Texas with the backing of Republican Governor Rick Perry. These laws require doctors to pick up the fetal heartbeat to play back to the mother—presumably to dissuade her from pursuing an abortion—and requires a probe to be inserted into the woman’s vagina. This procedure is not only medically unnecessary but, as well, is to be forced on women, i.e. state-sanctioned rape!

This action alone was responsible for sending Obama’s support from women through the roof in subsequent polling, as many women—even Republican women—have begun to question the intentions of the Republican Party. As one longtime Republican state legislator, Katherine Waddell, stated after joining forces with other Virginia women to form an organization called Women’s Strike Force to oppose the re-election of legislators who voted for the transvaginal ultrasound bill: “They have released this avalanche of women who are opposed to what they are doing.” Waddell continued, “They should be focused on jobs and transportation and the economy. Why are they focused on us and our bodies and what we do with them?”

The truth is that the Republican Party has an agenda, and there is method to their madness. The Republican Party’s war on women is intended to appease, not only fundamentalist Christians here in the States, but as well Saudi royals and their Persian Gulf counterparts in the hope of jangling loose some of the ill-gotten oil gains from these women-hating misogynists. But such attacks on women only serve to heighten the contradictions. There is an active volcano in Saudi Arabia, similar to that in the States, just below the surface, and as educated free women continue to stand up and demand their rights, there will eventually be a cataclysmic eruption.

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