



Written by [Ralph R. Reiland](#) on January 26, 2015

Fatwas and Gender Wrecks

You hear some funny and unsolicited commentary when you're writing a weekly column.

The best this past week was from Dominic, a retiree I cross paths with from time to time at a breakfast place.

"Did you see Putin wants to ban Russian transsexuals from driving?," he called over to me.



"It's not as crazy as it sounds," he said. "I know a guy, Larry, who became Liz and now he can't keep his car on the road.

Dominic asked on another occasion if I'd heard about the whacky mufti who issued a fatwa against snowmen.

"They're nuts," he stated. "You can't build a snowman in the desert."

Dominic had it wrong. Here's the headline on a news story by Rajia Aboulkheir in Al Arabiya News on December 29, 2013: "Snow blankets the desert in the Middle East's white winter."

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It was the "worst storm witnessed in decades" in the region, wrote Aboulkheir.

Many refugees, reported Al Arabiya, "including children in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon," displaced by conflicts in their countries, "have frozen to death."

Others were more fortunate, "responding cheerfully to the sub-zero temperatures," reacting with "a childlike spontaneity and enthusiasm to the unexpected snowfall," reported Aboulkheir. "Many took to the streets to build snowmen, while others pelted fluffy balls of white snow at companions."

What Dominic got right was the fatwa against building snowmen. Those in charge of keeping a religious lid on everything appeared to see the snowmen, the snowball fights and overall spontaneity as looking too much like a fun day in Central Park.

"A prominent Saudi Arabian cleric has whipped up controversy by issuing a religious ruling forbidding the building of snowmen, described as anti-Islamic," reported Reuters from Dubai in January.

Asked on a religious website if it was permissible "for fathers to build snowmen for their children," Sheikh Mohammed Saleh al-Munajjid replied: "It is not permitted to make a statue out of snow, even by way of play and fun."

Munajjid explained that making a snowman is creating an image of a human being, a sin under the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's strict interpretation of Sunni Islam.

"God has given people space to make whatever they want which does not have a soul, including trees, ships, fruits, buildings and so on," wrote Sheikh Munajjid in his ruling.

In other words: "Hey kids, it's snowing for the first time in your lives. Hurry up, get your gloves and let's go outside and make a snow walnut."



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Responses on Twitter to Munajjid’s fatwa were swift, on both sides.

“Building a snowman is imitating the infidels — it promotes lustiness and eroticism,” said one supportive and strange response. An erotic Frosty?

And regarding Dominic’s buddy Larry losing his knack for keeping his car out of the ditch when he became Liz, Dominic was spouting a flawed stereotype. Data from the National Association of Insurance Commissioners show that women, per mile of driving, are less likely than men to get into accidents.

DUI and accident statistics, similarly, show that male drivers take more driving risks than their female counterparts. In fatal accidents, for instance, speeding was more likely to be a factor for men than for women, reports the Institute for Highway Safety Administration.

For drivers aged 16 to 19, the Institute for Highway Safety reports that twice as many boys as girls die in traffic accidents over the same distances of driving. For ages 20 through 70, likewise, males are twice as likely as females to crash.

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