

How Goes It With Women Around the World?
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International Women's Day is coming up on March 8. Regarding women as human beings, equal in rights and dignity with men, is the boldest revolutionary change for mankind and is only a product of modern Western civilization. This view is not universal. Much of the world sees women as property to be disposed of as the men see fit. As my late mother-in-law once noted, it is better to be lucky than good.

Our society still has rapists; it still has wife-beaters; and it still has immigrant fathers who murder their daughters for being \223too American.\224 We punish them. Not s
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outside of our own culture.

o India. SuperFreakonomics (Levitt & Dubner, 2009), notes that when it comes to luck, being born female in India (unless wealthy) is not lucky. \223Girls are so undervalued in India that there are roughly 35 million fewer females than males in the population.\224 Girls are killed in utero by parents who do not want daughters: murdered by mothers-in-law and husbands when the dowry is not enough; and run an outside risk of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease (a gift of their husbands). Sick little boys get medical care; sick little girls do not.

o Egypt. While we were all waxing enthusiastic over the \223youth\224 taking down Mubarak in their \223peaceful demonstrations\224 in the Cairo, a CBS reporter, Lara Logan, was being gang raped and beaten. The story was initially suppressed; it does not make democracy activists look good. But finally, when the Lara story got out, Egyptian women in droves acknowledged that they can never go into the streets without being harassed, groped, or worse-with no punishment for the men.

An Egyptian woman and an American scholar were interviewed on PBS News Hour about this and they both tried to make excuses for the men. Many young men cannot afford to get married so they are sexually repressed; in a dictatorship that controls everything, the only freedom that men have is to own the public space (the streets); and women in the public space are resented because of religion and culture, both of which want women in the home, barefoot and pregnant. Even women in total hijab are not safe from harassment.

One might well wonder how so many Arab men, who are demanding \223dignity\224 throughout the Middle East, do not think women deserve dignity too. How sad to see all those hopeful (and brave) young women demonstrating beside the men and know that freedom and dignity is not for them.

o Palestinian Territory. Well-meaning European and American women who fall in love with the Palestinian cause have also experienced rape, harassment, and forced marriage. Apparently their notion of \223liberation\224 does not include women.

o Congo. Fifty women testified in a Congolese court that they had been savagely raped by their own army and the court sentenced an army colonel, Lt. Col. Mutuare Daniel Kibibi, to 20 years for crimes against humanity. This married man and father of eight children personally raped, along with all his men, for an entire night. The rapes are part of Congo's war culture, and until now, have gone unpunished. Hundreds of other such rapes go unmarked.

o Afghanistan. This is one of the unluckiest places for a woman to be born. The first battered women's shelters have been opened by western NGOs in Kabul and are entirely financed by them. Without such shelters, women who ran away from hideous domestic abuse not only had no place to run, but were apprehended and murdered. Remember the picture on Time Magazine's cover of the beautiful young Afghan women whose nose and ears had been cut off to punish her for running away? She had been left for dead, and would have bled out had not American soldiers rescued her.

Now the Afghan Minister for Women's Affairs wants to control the money that supports shelters. Religious authorities claim that runaway women are whores and the centers

should be shut down. Afghanistan makes India look like Nirvana.

Yes, better to be lucky than good.

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