

I am old enough to remember when women were not considered equal in rights to men. Women were "protected," according to the laws and courts. The benefits to being born female were thought to be respect, protection from heavy physical labor, and honor as wives and mothers. For some, these benefits were enough, but for many others, they were neither respected, protected, nor spared heavy labor.

They were paid much less than men, often those doing the same job. Even a university degree did not often reward a woman with work other than the typing pool (even in the CIA, FBI, and State Department). Professional choices were, for the most part, secretary, nurse, or teacher.

I remember laws that claimed that a husband could not be culpable of raping his wife because it was understood that he had "marital rights," but she had only what he wished to provide from his earnings. Her body was his to control.

Even so, we American and British women were light years ahead in rights and treatment than our sisters unfortunate enough to be born in unenlightened religious-dominated countries, or in dictatorships in which nobody had rights.

How different our world is today. Step by step, women have won the right to vote, the right to serve in any profession in which they are competent, to serve on juries, to become judges, and even to rise to the Supreme Court, phenomena new to our society. My daughters and granddaughters have never lived in a world in which they had no legal control over their own bodies. The Supreme Court made it so.

The revolutionary elevation of women to the equal rights status of men spilled out into the darker world, thanks to western media, movies, soap operas. The United Nations, an organization that tries to set global standards, is essentially toothless---by design.

The UN is fighting for gender equality, calling for a sharp increase of women in global decision-making, clearly Western values. Unfortunately, the UN is a creation of democracies, but the UN's democracy is full of undemocratic members: theocracies and monarchies such as Saudi Arabia, and every thugocracy in today's world: Russia, Turkey, Poland, Hungary, China, many African states, and even Latin American countries that vote, but are not yet enlightened. These UN member states are fighting tooth and nail to prevent gender equality. Their reasoning is fascinating.

Turkey, representing a once democracy that is now a virtual religious dictatorship, objects to women's equality because it violates "family stability." By that, dictator Erdogan means male supremacy, the basis for family structure in Turkey. Turkey's low birthrate alarms the dictator, and he wants no abortion, no birth control, and no choice for women over their own bodies. The state needs breeders. Even the laws protecting women from domestic violence are being pushed back. It is a man's right to beat his wife if family stability requires it (or if he is just angry).

Russia, which, when a Communist empire, supposedly aspired to gender equality. In practice, it was no such thing, cultural practices being much stronger than the liberal theories. Soviet women were free to work at heavy labor as much as men; could abort pregnancies rather than be provided with contraceptives; and were almost never in the higher levels of power. Today, Putin has rearmed religion to help suppress women. Male supremacy has returned to punish uppity women (journalists, judges, and young atheists). He claims to be protecting "Russia's Culture."

In Afghanistan, Muslim fanatics, the Taliban, may return to power. When they last ruled Afghanistan, it was unlawful for a woman to be seen (completely veiled), heard (no public talking, laughing, singing, or wearing shoes not rubber-soled), and faced public stoning (lynching) if accused of sex outside marriage.

We expect no better from Afghanistan and thuggish dictatorships. But to our shame, Congress is still home to one man, a fanatical supporter of former President Trump, Congressman Matt Gaetz, who was the single "no" vote against a bill protecting women and children from sex trafficking. No surprise, since he is under investigation for child trafficking himself.

685 words

Dr. Laina Farhat-Holzman is a historian, lecturer, and author of "How Do You Know

That? Contact her at Lfarhat102@aol.com or www.globalthink.net.