



On immigration, intolerance, and the West's fundamental dilemma

Matt A. Mayer

January 13, 2016 10:28 am | *AEIdeas*

With [news out of Cologne, Hamburg, and Berlin](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/06/world/europe/coordinated-attacks-on-women-in-cologne-were-unprecedented-germany-says.html?_r=0) (http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/06/world/europe/coordinated-attacks-on-women-in-cologne-were-unprecedented-germany-says.html?_r=0) about marauding groups of Middle Eastern men — including newly-arrived refugees — assaulting women on New Year's Eve, the West yet again is confronted with a fundamental dilemma: how do Western societies based upon tolerance deal with immigrants who are intolerant? After all, the assaults in Germany merely reflect the adoption of practices previously used in Sweden and Egypt, as noted by [Bret Stephens in the Wall Street Journal](http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-cologne-portent-1452555941) (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-cologne-portent-1452555941>).

Specifically, Stephens states “Mob assaults in Egypt became notorious after the 2011 attack on reporter Lara Logan, but they have become a staple of Egyptian life.” Stephens cites reports from the World Economic Forum and Pew about the views of Muslim men, concluding “there is a pronounced tendency among Middle Eastern men to view women as chattel or as whores.” This view obviously conflicts with the West's belief in equality.



(http://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/RTX21MZW_Cologne_2016_refugees-e1452698697435.jpg)

Supporters of anti-immigration movement PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West) take part in a demonstration rally, in reaction to mass sexual assaults on women on New Year's Eve, in Cologne, Germany, January 9, 2016. REUTERS/Wolfgang Rattay.

It is a simplistic anecdote, but that is why many Americans scratch their heads when they see a Middle Eastern family out in public where the husband walks around in shorts and a t-shirt in ninety-five degree heat while the wife wears a suffocating black burka covered from head-to-toe. Whether it is prohibiting girls from going to school or disallowing women to be in public without the escort of a man or banning mixed workplaces, some Middle Eastern practices are difficult to align with Western values. We can pretend these practices don't happen in Europe or America, but they do.

A few years ago at a discussion I organized with a group of Somali refugees, a Somali woman told the story about bringing a work colleague to lunch at a Somali restaurant. The woman recalled how she had to stop the non-Muslim colleague from entering through the front door. She told the coworker that they needed to enter the back door, as women ate in a separate area of the restaurant. The colleague, an African-American, expressed shock at the idea noting that her people had fought for the right to enter the front door at restaurants and eat in the same room as whites. In response, the Somali woman cautioned her colleague that she had to respect her culture and comply with its customs. To her credit, the coworker refused and they left. This incident happened near my high school, which frankly shocked me.

With the flood of Middle Eastern refugees into Europe and, to a lesser degree, America, these types of conflicts will become more prevalent. Just because we will protect the rights of Muslims to practice Islam doesn't mean we should permit them to violate other foundational rights like equality, freedom of speech, and freedom of association.

In The Open Society and Its Enemies, Karl Popper wrote in 1945:

Unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance. If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them.

Intolerance is simply not compatible with tolerance. We in the West pride ourselves on welcoming immigrants from all over the world who seek better lives for themselves and their families. Part of the deal in coming here, however, is to accept our rights-based system. As the father of three, I'm just as disgusted as the Muslim dad when I see some of the decadent aspects of Western society, but I accept that burden because liberty and the opportunities that come with it are so great.

As Europe and America wrestle with how to assimilate this latest wave of immigrants, we must make it clear to all who come that adherence to our laws and respect of our rights are non-negotiable points. Immigrating to another country isn't a fundamental right; it is a luxury we only should afford to those men and women willing to abide by our laws, work hard, and practice tolerance.

This article was found online at:

<http://www.aei.org/publication/on-immigration-intolerance-and-the-wests-fundamental-dilemma/>