

Refugees vs. Immigrants: Let's Not Conflate the Two

A couple of months ago, when I first began writing for Intellectual Takeout, I wrote [a piece about the difference between arguing and quarreling](#). I referred to G. K. Chesterton's quip, concerning his relationship with his brother, that they were always arguing but they never quarreled. Chesterton's point is that arguing is good, whereas quarreling is bad. The purpose of the first is to engage with the ideas of someone who disagrees with you with the intention of arriving at the truth. The second is a dispute between two or more individuals in which clarity and charity are lacking and in which the truth is compromised by a lack of sympathy and empathy between the quarreling parties.

Having reiterated this crucial difference between an argument and a quarrel, I'd like to argue with a fellow writer at Intellectual Takeout with respect to [his recent post about European refugees in the Middle East during World War II](#).

The writer seems to imply* a parallel exists between refugees from Poland and other eastern European countries seeking refuge in Iran, or Persia as it was then, and the plight of Syrians seeking refuge in Europe today.

With all due respect, there is a world of difference between the two scenarios.

First, it's unclear how many (if any) European refugees fleeing Nazi or communist tyranny during the war had any desire or intention of staying in the Middle East. After the war was over, one can presume they wished to return home. For many Poles this was not possible because of the Soviet occupation of their homeland after the war. Yet they did not stay in the Middle East but moved on to other countries in

Europe or America. There was little question of their remaining in Persia and little doubt that they would not have been welcome had they desired to stay. There are no large Polish Catholic communities in Tehran demanding the right to flout Islamic law and live instead according to Christian law, independent of the law of the land, as Muslims in Europe are currently demanding Sharia law for their own communities.

Second, the European refugees were kept in refugee camps and were not permitted to settle among the indigenous population and claim benefits from the Middle-Eastern governments' social security systems (if they had them).

Third, Persia was not an Islamic state at the time and was on friendly terms with European nations. There was little reason for the Persians to fear that they were allowing Christian terrorists into their midst when they permitted refugee camps to be established.

In contrast, nobody expects the millions of displaced persons, many of whom are not from war zones but from other Muslim countries, such as Pakistan, to be kept in refugee camps when they arrive in Europe until such time as they can return home. Everyone knows that when they arrive they will stay. They will join the millions of Muslims already living in Europe, many of whom are hostile to the very concept of European culture and Western values.

Nobody who tries to follow the commandment to love one's neighbor wishes to see people suffering the misery of war. No one of noble heart relishes the sight of refugees displaced from their homes. There is a universal desire to do something to help. But it simply isn't helpful to suggest parallels that don't apply.

Europe is not being asked to accommodate refugees in specially designated camps until they can return home to their native lands. Europe is being asked to accept these people as

immigrants. Perhaps she should do so. This is, however, a question to be settled in another argument. In the interim we should learn to discriminate in the good and original sense of the word, which is to say that we should learn to distinguish the difference between a refugee who is waiting to be repatriated to his own country and an immigrant who is seeking to settle in a country other than his own.

*[Editor's Note: [Read the writer's response to Mr. Pearce.](#)]