

How Global Elites Forsake Their Countrymen

Those in power see people at the bottom as aliens whose bizarre emotions they must try to manage.

This is about distance, and detachment, and a kind of historic decoupling between the top and the bottom in the West that did not, in more moderate recent times, exist.

Recently I spoke with an acquaintance of Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, and the conversation quickly turned, as conversations about Ms. Merkel now always do, to her decisions on immigration. Last summer when Europe was engulfed with increasing waves of migrants and refugees from Muslim countries, Ms. Merkel, moving unilaterally, announced that Germany would take in an astounding 800,000. Naturally this was taken as an invitation, and more than a million came. The result has been widespread public furor over crime, cultural dissimulation and fears of terrorism. From such a sturdy, grounded character as Ms. Merkel the decision was puzzling—uncharacteristically romantic about people, how they live their lives, and history itself, which is more charnel house than settlement house.

Ms. Merkel's acquaintance sighed and agreed. It's one thing to be overwhelmed by an unexpected force, quite another to invite your invaders in! But, the acquaintance said, he believed the chancellor was operating in pursuit of ideals. As the daughter of a Lutheran minister, someone who grew up in East Germany, Ms. Merkel would have natural sympathy for those who feel marginalized and displaced. Moreover she is attempting to provide a kind of counter-statement, in the 21st century, to Germany's great sin of the 20th. The historical stain of Nazism, the murder and abuse of the minority, will be followed by the moral triumph of open arms toward the dispossessed. That's what's driving it, said the acquaintance.

It was as good an explanation as I'd heard. But there was a fundamental problem with the decision that you can see rippling now throughout the West. Ms. Merkel had put the entire burden of a huge cultural change not on herself and those like her but on regular people who live closer to the edge, who do not have the resources to meet the burden, who have no particular protection or money or connections. Ms. Merkel, her cabinet and government, the media and cultural apparatus that lauded her decision were not in the least affected by it and likely never would be.

Nothing in their lives will get worse. The challenge of integrating different cultures, negotiating daily tensions, dealing with crime and extremism and fearfulness on the street - that was put on those with comparatively little, whom I've called the unprotected. They were left to struggle, not gradually and over the years but suddenly and in an air of ongoing crisis that shows no signs of ending - because nobody cares about them enough to stop it.

The powerful show no particular sign of worrying about any of this. When the working and middle class pushed back in shocked indignation, the people on top called them "xenophobic," "narrow-minded," "racist." The detached, who made the decisions and bore none of the costs, got to be called "humanist," "compassionate," and "hero of human rights."

And so the great separating incident at Cologne last New Year's, and the hundreds of sexual assaults by mostly young migrant men who were brought up in societies where women are veiled—who think they should be veiled—and who chose to see women in short skirts and high heels as asking for it.

Cologne of course was followed by other crimes.

The journalist Chris Caldwell reports in the Weekly Standard on Ms. Merkel's statement a few weeks ago, in which she told Germans that history was asking them to "master the flip side, the shadow side, of all the positive effects of globalization."

Caldwell: "This was the chancellor's . . . way of acknowledging that various newcomers to the national household had begun to attack and kill her voters at an alarming rate." Soon after her remarks, more horrific crimes followed, including in Munich (nine killed in a McDonald's) Reutlingen (a knife attack) and Ansbach (a suicide bomber).

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The larger point is that this is something we are seeing all over, the top detaching itself from the bottom, feeling little loyalty to it or affiliation with it. It is a theme I see working its way throughout the West's power centers. At its heart it is not only a detachment from, but a lack of interest in, the lives of your countrymen, of those who are not at the table, and who understand that they've been abandoned by their leaders' selfishness and mad virtue-signalling.

On Wall Street, where they used to make statesmen, they now barely make citizens. CEOs are consumed with short-term thinking, stock prices, quarterly profits. They don't really believe that they have to be involved with "America" now; they see their job as thinking globally and meeting shareholder expectations.

In Silicon Valley the idea of "the national interest" is not much discussed. They adhere to higher, more abstract, more global values. They're not about America, they're about . . . well, I suppose they'd say the future.

In Hollywood the wealthy protect their own children from cultural decay, from the sick images they create for all the screens, but they don't mind if poor, unparented children from broken-up families get those messages and, in the way of things, act on them down the road.

From what I've seen of those in power throughout business and politics now, the people of your country are not your countrymen, they're aliens whose bizarre emotions you must attempt occasionally to anticipate and manage.

In Manhattan, my little island off the continent, I see the children of the global business elite marry each other and settle in London or New York or Mumbai. They send their children to the same schools and are alert to all class markers. And those elites, of Mumbai and Manhattan, do not often identify with, or see a connection to or an obligation toward, the rough, struggling people who live at the bottom in their countries. In fact, they fear them, and often devise ways, when home, of not having their wealth and worldly success fully noticed.

Affluence detaches, power adds distance to experience. I don't have it fully right in my mind but something big is happening here with this division between the leaders and the led. It is very much a feature of our age. But it is odd that our elites have abandoned or are abandoning the idea that they belong to a country, that they have ties that bring responsibilities, that they should feel loyalty to their people or, at the very least, a grounded respect.

I close with a story that I haven't seen in the mainstream press. This week the Daily Caller's Peter Hesson reported that recent Syrian refugees being resettled in Virginia, were sent to the state's poorest communities. Data from the State Department showed that almost all Virginia's refugees since October "have been placed in towns with lower incomes and higher poverty rates, hours away from the wealthy suburbs outside of Washington, D.C." Of 121 refugees, 112 were placed in communities at least 100 miles from the nation's capital. The suburban counties of Fairfax, Loudoun and Arlington—among the wealthiest in the nation, and home to high concentrations of those who create, and populate, government and the media—have received only nine refugees.

Some of the detachment isn't unconscious. Some of it is sheer and clever self-protection. At least on some level they can take care of their own.

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