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Afghans in Colombia: risks of Islamophobia and xenophobia

... as long as the problem of Islamophobia, xenophobia, the lack of a foreign and migration policy is not resolved, the rest are songs to the flag.



Many years ago I was invited to give a lecture in Sweden on refugee rights. The most practical way I found to explain this was by placing them in an imaginary war between Denmark and Sweden that led them to flee their country and end up living in another where they eat a root called cassava and speak a strange language called Spanish. That made them think differently about the migration coming to that Scandinavian country.

It seems that we could use the same mechanism to explain to the Colombian population the temporary arrival of 4,000 people from Afghanistan to our territory, but I think that metaphor, however accurate, would have to break at least four obstacles first.

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Islamophobia

The first of these obstacles to break to understand migration is Islamophobia, because, although you have never taken a Quran in your hands, people say that the Qur'an says that you are promised 70 virgins, people say that the Qur'an says that there is an obligation to commit suicide to kill enemies and that the faith of Islam must be imposed by force. None of the above claims are true, but a creation of the popular imagination, just as the myth that Eve gave Adam an apple was invented when nowhere in the Bible does that fruit mention.

I repeat the phrase I usually use from Professor Olivier Roy, the important thing is not what the Qur'an says, but what people think it says; this means that an Islam of the size of people's fears has been built, far from Muslim life, contrary to the principles of Islam and based on prevention. It would suffice to explain to Colombians that Christians and Muslims are much closer in faith than they might think.

In Colombia, the tradition of condemning without judging or judging without understanding is imposed. Thus we have built a person of Muslim faith much more dangerous, even if he is not, than a Catholic who prays, for example, to the virgin of the hitmen.

Xenophobia

The second obstacle is xenophobia, and this has nothing to do with Colombia not having migration. That is not only a false argument, but also contrary to reality, because the Arab migrations that arrived in northern Colombia were not entirely well received. In addition, it should be remembered that internal migration to the center of the capital is also a victim of prejudice and discrimination.

In the case of Venezuelan migration, it was absolutely clear that it was useless that millions of Colombians had left the country in the previous decades looking for solutions or that people had traveled the world; xenophobia is embedded. We could also say that more than xenophobia, as Adela Cortina explains, it is aporophobia, that is, contempt for the poor.

It would be enough if the 4,000 Afghans arriving from that impoverished and destroyed country were Swedes, blond and blue-eyed for the attitude of Colombians to be different. Therefore, the problem is not that they are foreigners, but rather the type of foreigners. The situation of Venezuelans clearly demonstrates the racist tinge that for decades we had repressed and that, at last, we had someone to turn against.

That same bias of wanting to receive refugees who meet certain requirements and not others is what is imposed now. So, there are already voices saying that Afghans do not deserve to be received in Colombia because they are sexist, because they worked for the United States, because they are from another culture or eat different things. We intend to select the refugee at our convenience as if it were a menu; that negates any universal humanitarian gesture, of receiving them for the simple risk of being killed if they remain in [Afghanistan](#).

What prevails is this eagerness to believe that there are victims of the first and victims of the second. Some groups, from a supposed moral superiority, want to demand certain requirements demanded to reach Colombia, and say who can stay and who cannot.

Lack of foreign policy

The third obstacle to understanding the rights of refugees comes from the decision of the Government of Iván Duque, which does not start from a gesture of international or humanitarian solidarity, but is an imposition of the United States. This decision to receive

the 4,000 Afghans is not born of an attitude prone to respect for International Law, so often violated in Colombia, but because we are bosses.

Now, it is necessary to distinguish between a submissive attitude towards the United States from what would be an attitude of solidarity, even if it were not the one sought. While it is true, the decision is imposed by Washington, that is not why the potential [victims of Afghanistan](#) should be punished and denied entry into a purism that pretends to claim that "we are not agents of Yankee imperialism".



La consecuencia final es la protección de 4.000 personas, así no sean los millones que lo necesitan, así hayan trabajado para el Gobierno de los Estados Unidos, porque podrían ser asesinados en el territorio afgano. A ellos se les puede salvar la vida. Si la vida es realmente un valor como creemos, entonces, deberíamos alegrarnos de que se salven esas personas sin entrar a hacer juicios morales como los que ya están revoloteando sobre el aire. Entonces, hay una contradicción entre el origen de la decisión y las consecuencias de la misma, pero meter todo eso en mismo saco no contribuye a la supervivencia de los afganos.

Colombia en la práctica no tiene política exterior. No la tiene frente a Asia, que desconoce, y mucho menos frente a Oriente Medio, donde desde Tel Aviv se dice lo que se tiene que hacer. No la tiene frente a África, que tampoco conoce, ni en otros temas porque los únicos gestos de política exterior recientes se basan en exigir el respeto a los

pronunciamentos de la Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos con relación a Venezuela, pero no con relación con la propia Colombia.

También se puede ver esa ausencia de política exterior cuando habla de que Cuba exporta terrorismo por habernos ayudado en el proceso de paz, pero vuelca todo su aparato político para tratar de apoyar jurídica y emocionalmente a los colombianos asesinos del presidente de Haití.

Esa es la política exterior que tenemos, de pandereta, basada en lo que digan los Estados Unidos dependiendo de sus intereses en las diferentes partes del mundo. Por tanto, mientras no consolidemos una política exterior adecuada no podremos avanzar.

Falta de política migratoria

El cuarto problema para entender los derechos de los refugiados depende de la política migratoria, esa tampoco existe en Colombia, porque, aunque hay migrantes, no hay afán de crearla.

La política migratoria colombiana, por ejemplo, no hace una lectura humana de las necesidades de los que llegan al país sino una basada en sus intereses políticos. Una muestra de esto es solo atender los partos de las venezolanas en territorio colombiano, pero sin garantías de control prenatal.

Ni siquiera para gestionar los recursos que hay para los propios venezolanos ha habido transparencia, inteligencia ni capacidad de gestión. Por tanto, el manejo de los pocos recursos que lleguen para atender a los 4.000 afganos el tiempo que se queden aquí puede llegar a ser bastante discutible.

The crisis in Necoclí of Asian migrants who use Colombia to try to reach Central America and then the United States, the lack of humanity on the part of the public force, the scarce resources granted to Migración Colombia, are another sign that this country is not prepared or is preparing for the global challenge that is migration.

We can say, in conclusion, that as long as the problem of Islamophobia, xenophobia, the lack of a foreign and migration policy is not solved, the rest are songs to the flag. The most painful thing is the amount of far-fetched readings on these topics, so overwhelming, that personally it is impossible to fight against a current of thought so marked, prejudiced, moralistic and ridiculous.

PS: As a Spaniard said, migration is not a problem or a solution, it is a reality. To that I would add: refugees are not saints, angels or demons, they are human beings.

Víctor de Currea-Lugo August 22, 2021

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