

## MUSLIM TURKISH WOMEN'S CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS CHALLENGES IN BOGOTÁ.

### Desafíos culturales y religiosos de las mujeres musulmanas turcas en Bogotá.

Robert Ojeda Pérez<sup>1</sup> y Meryem Poyraz<sup>2</sup>.

#### *Abstract*

In a time when there are many prejudices, getting to know people of different cultures, races, and religions — and listening to their experiences and challenges — helps break down these biases and fosters a more respectful and inclusive world. This research focuses on Muslim Turkish women who have migrated to Bogotá and lived there for years. We aim to identify the cultural and religious difficulties they face and explore the reactions of Bogotá's residents toward Muslims and Turkish people. The study gathers data through surveys and interviews with these women, providing insight into their experiences. This research is part of Semillero Se-Koiné in the University La Salle.

**Key words:** Muslim Turkish women, cultural challenges, religious difficulties, diversity, respect, dialogue

#### *Resumen*

En una época en la que existen muchos prejuicios, conocer a personas de diferentes culturas, razas y religiones -y escuchar sus experiencias y retos- ayuda a acabar con estos prejuicios y fomenta un mundo más respetuoso e inclusivo. Esta investigación se centra en las mujeres turcas musulmanas que han emigrado a Bogotá y viven allí desde hace años. Nuestro objetivo es identificar las dificultades culturales y religiosas a las que se enfrentan y explorar las reacciones de los habitantes de Bogotá hacia los musulmanes y los turcos. El estudio

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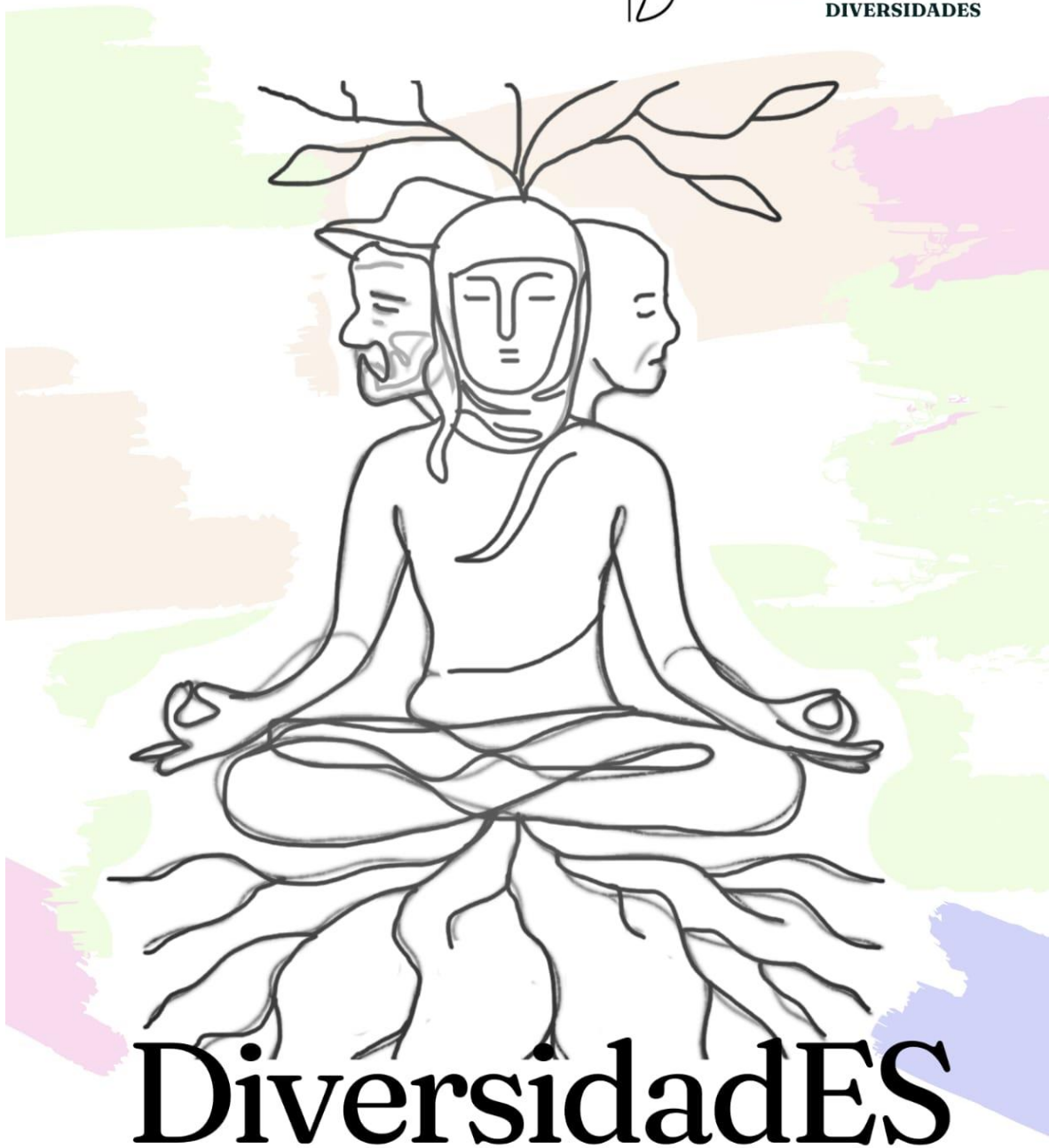
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In a time when there are many prejudices, getting to know people of different cultures, races, and religions — and listening to their experiences and challenges — helps break down these biases and fosters a more respectful and inclusive world. This research focuses on Muslim Turkish women who have migrated to Bogotá and lived there for years. We aim to identify the cultural and religious difficulties they face and explore the reactions of Bogotá's residents toward Muslims and Turkish people. The study gathers data through surveys and interviews with these women, providing insight into their experiences. This research is part of Semillero Se-Koiné in the University La Salle.

**Key words:** Muslim Turkish women, cultural challenges, religious difficulties, diversity, respect, dialogue

## ***Resumen***

En una época en la que existen muchos prejuicios, conocer a personas de diferentes culturas, razas y religiones -y escuchar sus experiencias y retos- ayuda a acabar con estos prejuicios y fomenta un mundo más respetuoso e inclusivo. Esta



investigación se centra en las mujeres turcas musulmanas que han emigrado a Bogotá y viven allí desde hace años. Nuestro objetivo es identificar las dificultades culturales y religiosas a las que se enfrentan y explorar las reacciones de los habitantes de Bogotá hacia los musulmanes y los turcos. El estudio recoge datos a través de encuestas y entrevistas con estas mujeres, lo que permite conocer mejor sus experiencias. Esta investigación forma parte del Semillero Se-Koiné de la Universidad La Salle.

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### ***Resumo***

Em uma época de preconceito generalizado, conhecer pessoas de diferentes culturas, raças e religiões — e ouvir sobre suas experiências e desafios — ajuda a quebrar esses preconceitos e promove um mundo mais respeitoso e inclusivo. Esta pesquisa se concentra em mulheres muçulmanas turcas que imigraram para Bogotá e viveram lá por anos. Nosso objetivo é identificar as dificuldades culturais e religiosas que eles enfrentam e explorar as reações dos moradores de Bogotá em relação aos muçulmanos e turcos. O estudo coleta dados por meio de pesquisas e entrevistas com essas mulheres, o que nos permite

entender melhor suas experiências. Esta pesquisa faz parte do Se-Koiné Seedbed da Universidade La Salle.

**Palavras-chave:** Mulheres muçulmanas turcas, desafios culturais, dificuldades religiosas, diversidade, respeito, diálogo.

### ***Introduction***

The city of Bogotá has increasingly become a site of religious and cultural pluralism due to waves of migration, including from Muslim-majority countries like Turkey. However, despite this diversity, Muslim women in the city often face invisibility, cultural misrecognition, and structural barriers. This study focuses on Turkish Muslim women living in Bogotá and explores how they navigate identity, faith, and gender while learning Spanish and adapting to a new cultural context. It also examines the epistemological, ethical, and political challenges of recognizing religious minorities in Latin American urban settings, through the lived experiences of women. Although the Muslim population in Bogotá has grown since the 1990s, religious and cultural diversity remains largely underacknowledged in public discourse and institutional

practice. This is especially true for women, whose identities are shaped by both gendered and religious marginalization. As Ojeda Pérez and colleagues note, “the presence of Muslim culture in Bogotá is still approached through frameworks of exoticism or suspicion, rarely through genuine intercultural respect or understanding” (Ojeda Pérez et al., 2023, p. 36). The visibility of Muslim women's dress and language renders them particularly vulnerable to symbolic violence. The intersection of migration, gender, and religion often leads to political and social marginalization. This marginalization is not only the result of legal exclusion but also stems from epistemic and institutional frameworks that fail to recognize plural subjectivities. As highlighted in *DiversidadES* (2022, p. 24), “patriarchal social systems and cultural bias have resulted in limited political visibility and institutional access for women from religious minority backgrounds.” These patterns are evident in the experiences of Turkish Muslim women in Bogotá. As a multicultural city, Bogotá still struggles to move from mere coexistence to true inclusion. Mahmoud Masaeli refers to this as “ethical dislocation”—a condition in which the moral claims of the 'Other' are acknowledged in discourse but denied in institutional practice (Masaeli, 2020, p. 112).

Without an epistemological shift that recognizes other worldviews as equally valid, Turkish Muslim women remain, in Nancy Fraser's terms, in a “bivalent condition” of both economic exclusion and cultural misrecognition (Fraser, 1995, p. 79). In the journal of *DiversidadES*, Beltran, M. & Cadena, A. & Triana, M. & Ojeda, R. (2023) state that global migration has expanded exposure to different traditions and religions, encouraging diversity in thought. However, prejudice and racism persist—often rooted in misinformation or a lack of familiarity. This raises key questions: How do Bogotá's residents react to foreigners? Is diversity truly encouraged in the city? How comfortable or marginalized do foreigners feel in Bogotá? Inspired by Goethe's words “Let everyone sweep in front of his own door, and the whole world will be clean” (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, s.f.), this research begins by examining Bogotanos' prejudices toward cultural and religious difference, with a specific focus on Turkish Muslim women. Because the hijab makes their religious identity visibly recognizable, these women offer a clearer lens into Bogotá's attitudes toward Islam. We conducted interviews with 12 Turkish Muslim women who migrated to Bogotá for reasons including study, business, or political circumstances and who currently volunteer at the Nenufer Foundation. The goal was to understand the religious

and cultural challenges they face and to analyze how locals perceive their religion (Islam) and ethnicity (Turkish). This research has four objectives: (1) to analyze Bogotá residents' perceptions of Turkish Muslim women; (2) to examine how cultural and religious differences affect these women's integration; (3) to assess their personal experiences of discrimination or acceptance; and (4) to identify the strategies they use to preserve their culture and religion in a different context.

### **Theoretical framework:**

A key concept in this study is diversity, which is essential for peaceful coexistence in multicultural societies. As Gulen (2020) illustrates, "The great symphony orchestras are formed by the combination of various sounds and different instruments. The important thing is to bring together the differences and diversities of society around this spirit of unity." This means true diversity is achieved not just by grouping similar individuals, but by valuing differences in culture, religion, race, thought, and talent. However, Gulen (2009) emphasizes that this requires mutual respect: "The peace of this (global) village lies in respecting all these differences, considering these differences to

be part of our nature and in ensuring that people appreciate these differences. Otherwise, it is unavoidable that the world will devour itself in a web of conflicts, disputes, fights, and the bloodiest of wars, thus preparing the way for its own end" (p. 250).

A closely related concept is interreligious and intercultural dialogue. Gulen (2009) defines dialogue as "Two or more people coming together to talk and meet on certain subjects and by means of this, to draw closer together to one another" (p. 50). Dialogue fosters understanding and prevents assumptions about others. Tolerance, a key part of dialogue, is described by Gulen (2009) as: "Tolerance does not mean being influenced by others or joining them; it means accepting others as they are and knowing how to get along with them" (p. 42). Without dialogue, we may cling to prejudices and discomfort in the face of difference. As McDaniel, Samovar, and Porter (2012) explain: "We are comfortable with the things we know and are drawn to them, but we are often uncomfortable with things we do not know and frequently avoid them" (p. 7). This discomfort is often rooted in stereotypes shaped by media portrayals. Mastro (2016) observes: "A traditional Muslim woman is perceived as oppressed, likely uneducated, and helpless. Because of these stereotypes, many westerners

approach a woman of an unfamiliar culture as a project, as someone who is incapable of understanding how poorly she is being treated.” Haq (2022) further adds: “Muslim women are told they are oppressed, forced to strip, and are deemed responsible for any disruption institutional Islamophobia creates.” Dialogue can help dismantle these misconceptions. As Hunt and Aslandogan (2007) assert: “One of the consequences of the creation of this global village is the need to recognize that interreligious dialogue is not a luxury; it has become not only desirable but also necessary” (p. 98). Mahmoud Masaeli’s work deepens this framework by integrating global ethics, spirituality, and intercultural justice. His concept of intercultural recognition as justice stresses that recognition is not charity but an ethical and political duty. In *Recognition as Justice* (2025, in progress), he argues that difference should be valued, not merely tolerated. This approach is vital when analyzing how Turkish Muslim women navigate cultural and religious identities in diaspora. Masaeli’s idea of dialogical spirituality offers an alternative to rigid secularism. In *Faith in Democracy* (2020), he and co-editors propose that spirituality rooted in compassion and justice can serve as a tool for dialogue. For Turkish Muslim women, faith is not a barrier, but a resource for resilience and intercultural

ethics. Furthermore, Masaeli supports a decolonial and plural approach to ethics. In *Beauty in African Thought* (2023), he critiques Western-centric development models and promotes diverse epistemologies. This aligns with our use of narrative methods, recognizing that the voices of Muslim women in Bogotá hold cultural and ethical value, not just experiential insight. Nancy Fraser’s concept of bivalent collectivities is also key. Turkish Muslim women in Bogotá face both economic exclusion and cultural misrecognition. As Fraser (1995) writes: “Bivalent collectivities need both redistribution and recognition” (p. 79). Justice cannot be achieved through economic or cultural strategies alone. Fraser also identifies the redistribution–recognition dilemma. Focusing on labor integration may suppress cultural expression, while prioritizing recognition can obscure material inequalities. As she states: “The redistribution–recognition dilemma is real. There is no elegant theoretical move that can dissolve or fully resolve it” (Fraser, 1995, p. 72). In multicultural contexts like Bogotá, this tension affects migrant women’s rights and identities. To address this, Fraser calls for transformative approaches: “The combination that best handles the redistribution–recognition dilemma is socialism in the economy plus deconstruction in culture” (Fraser, 1995, p. 88).

This means implementing inclusive policies while actively challenging Islamophobia and promoting intercultural understanding. Moreover, Fraser warns against superficial solutions: “reify group difference” or “leave intact the deep structures that generate injustice” (Fraser, 1995, p. 82). Instead, she advocates for a plural, intersectional view of justice that considers religion, gender, migration, and language as interwoven dimensions.

### **Methodological framework**

This research uses an interpretive ethnographic methodology inspired by Clifford Geertz’s concept of thick description, to understand how Turkish Muslim women in Bogotá experience language learning and intercultural encounters. The goal is to explore the meanings they construct in their daily lives, particularly around religious identity and cultural adaptation. Geertz (1973) writes: “I take culture to be those webs [of significance] and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (p. 5). This approach frames culture as symbolic, public, and structured by meaning.

The study combines qualitative and quantitative methods:

- An 18-question multiple-choice survey gathers data on participants' general experiences, cultural perceptions, and religious practices.
- In-depth interviews are conducted in Turkish, transcribed, and translated into English.

These allow for thick descriptions of their narratives and identities.

The interviews are interpreted as personal narratives and cultural expressions. As Geertz emphasizes, “Descriptions of... culture must be cast in terms of the constructions we imagine [people] to place upon what they live through” (p. 15).

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used for qualitative data, and descriptive statistics were applied to the survey. To ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the research includes direct quotations, reflexivity, and detailed context.

Geertz (1973) reminds us that ethnography is interpretive: “They are thus fictions; fictions, in the sense that they are ‘something made,’ ‘something fashioned’—not that they are

false” (p. 15). The researcher embraces this interpretive position to access the meanings women create in a diasporic context.

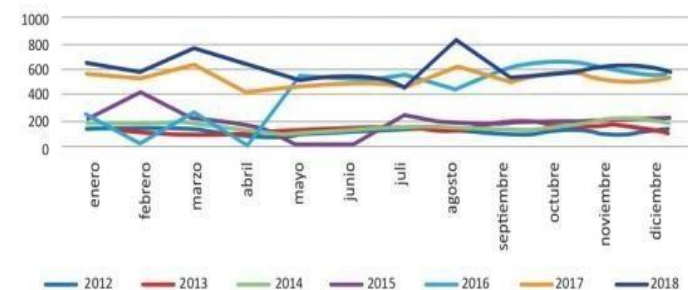
### **Stellar history methodology**

Building on this, the methodology integrates narrative analysis and hermeneutic interpretation, viewing stories not as isolated events but as webs of meaning shaped by values and perspectives. As Ojeda & Lizcano (2024) state, “data is imbued with meaning and organized based on values and assumptions that determine our positioning toward it” (p. 64). Stellar History uses metaphors such as star constellations and neural connections to illustrate how life events and memories are interlinked. This approach allows for the identification of narrative patterns and the construction of meaning across time. As the authors explain, it “allows us to identify narrative patterns and construct meaning from the relationship between different elements of the story” (p. 83). Finally, it brings together personal and collective experiences. The methodology is not only analytical but also therapeutic: “it allows us to understand ourselves on a deeper level, combining elements of personal history with collective experience and the stellar metaphor” (Ojeda & Lizcano, 2019, p. 61). It

enables participants to narrate their identities through a broader temporal and cultural lens.

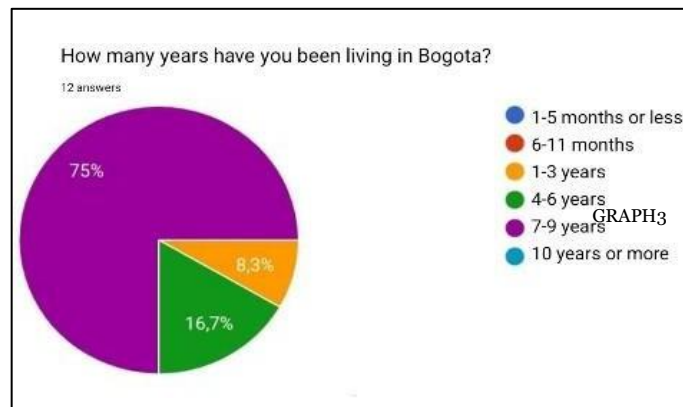
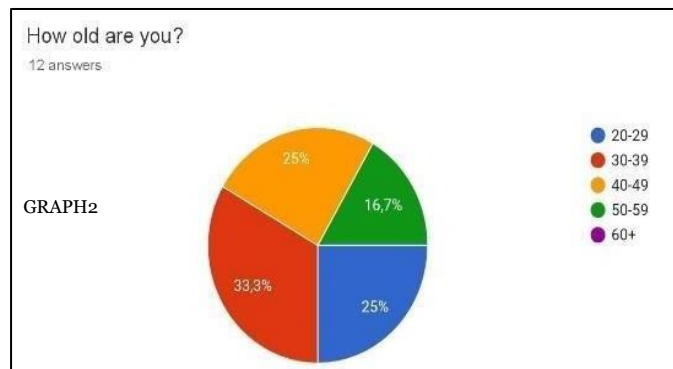
We first investigated the Turkish population in Colombia. In the following Graph 1, we can see the Turkish population in Colombia between 2012 and 2018. Considering the Colombian population which is 40-50 million, there are not many Turkish people in Colombia. Moreover, while some Turkish people come to study or work here, some only visit temporarily. However, in this study, we focused only on Turkish women who stayed here for a long time and not temporarily.

Graph 1: Flujo de entradas de los migrantes turcos a Colombia entre 2012 y 2018

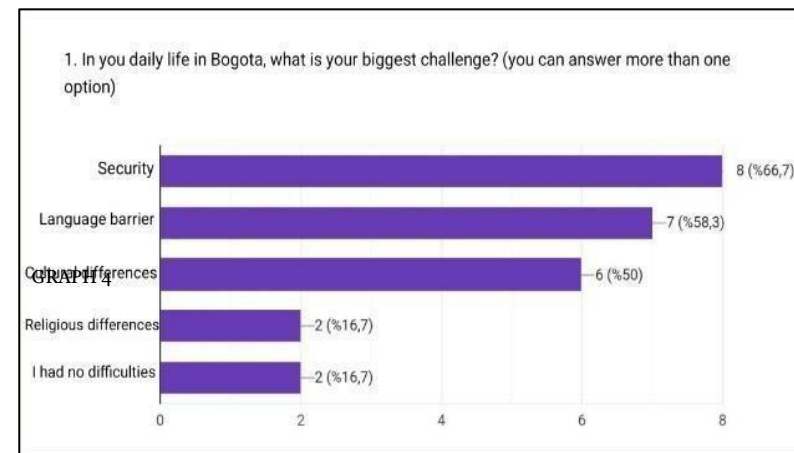


Now we move to the answers of the survey: First of all, let’s look at the ages of the participants. According to the survey, two

participants are between the ages of 50-59, three are between the ages of 40-49, four are between the ages of 30-39, and three are between the ages of 20-29. We also asked them how long they had lived in Bogotá and the results (Graph 3) indicate that nine participants have lived in Bogotá for 7-9 years, two for 4-6 years, and one for 1-3 years.



According to the survey, the majority of participants (%66,7) selected “Security” as their biggest challenge. When we asked the participants in the interview about why they selected that option and whether it was related to their cultural or religious identity, the participants clarified that it was not. Instead, they attributed their concern to the general security issues in Bogotá. They mentioned feeling unsafe taking their phones out of their bags on the street or while using TransMilenio and expressed that being outside at night could be particularly dangerous.



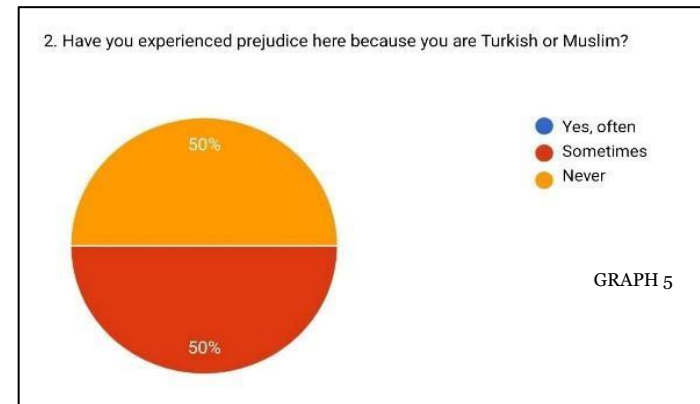
Another problem participants have selected is the Language barrier (%58,3). They shared with us some of their moments of misunderstanding due to language differences. However, most

of them said that even though they had more difficulties in their first years in Bogota, they knew the language without many communication difficulties.

Regarding cultural and religious differences, participants acknowledged that Bogota and Türkiye have different religions and cultures, for this reason, they had difficulties in adapting to these aspects.

## **2. Have you experienced prejudice here because you are Turkish or Muslim?**

None of the participants selected the option “Yes, often”, instead of that half of the respondents chose “Sometimes” and the other half chose “Never”. However, although six people chose the option “never” in the survey, according to the interviews, we observed that everyone experienced at least one instance of prejudice, mostly because of their religious identity. In conclusion, according to those answers, we can say that the participants are not exposed to prejudices every time or often but only sometimes.



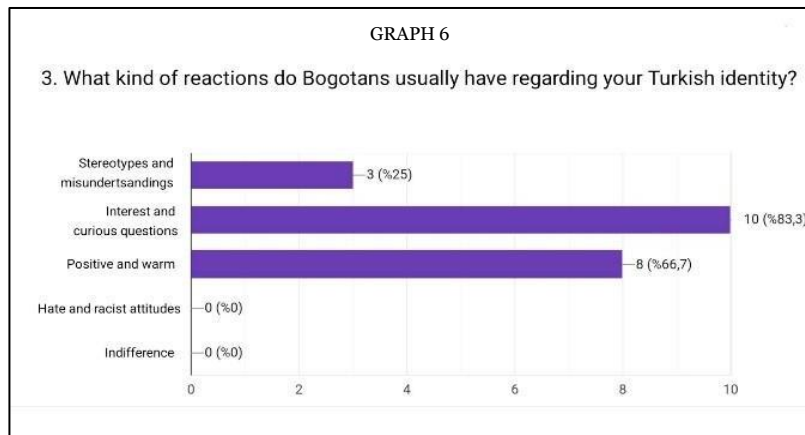
Now, we continue with Cultural questions:

## **3. What kind of reactions do Bogotians usually have regarding your Turkish identity?**

Three participants chose the The first option is “Stereotypes and Misunderstanding” (25%). In the interview, they said that some Bogotians have misunderstandings against Turkish culture because of Turkish dramas. These wrong perceptions from dramas are that Turkish men are macho and women are unfree in Türkiye. As we noted in the theoretical framework where we referred to Gülen and Masaeli's reflections, not engaging in dialogue can lead to prejudices and relying only on what you see on TV or the internet can create stereotypes about certain cultures, races or religions. The most chosen options are “Interest and curious questions” (83,3%) and “Positive and



warm” (66,7%). The respondents told us that Bogotanians often express a great interest in Turkish culture, mostly because of Turkish dramas and lots of people have visited Türkiye, so they know about it.



Moreover, we are told that when Bogotanians discover they are Turkish, they approach them very positively and say to love Turkish people, culture, and drama.

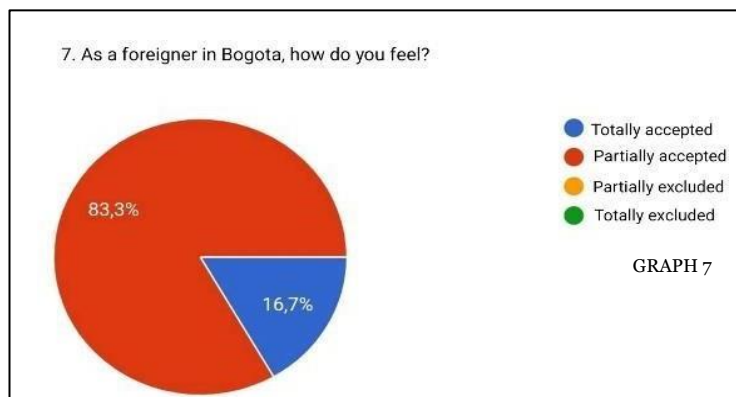
#### 4.5.6. How similar is the lifestyle in Bogota to your traditional Turkish way of life?

What are the difficulties and how did they affect you? None of the respondents considered Colombian and Turkish "very similar" cultures. Only 16.7% chose "partially similar," while

50% said "partially different," and 33.3% stated that the cultures are "very different". The most commonly cited difficulty was “Gastronomy” (83.3%) because the participants explained that Colombian cuisine often uses ingredients that do not suit their taste preferences and relies heavily on meat (including pork), which they cannot eat since it is not halal. On the other hand, 33,3% of participants answered the difficulty of “social involvement” and 16,7% “music and entertainment” which is also about participation in social events. Most of them told us that although Bogotanians are very respectful, their sense of entertainment does not match that of Turks, culturally and religiously. When we asked how these differences affected them, 16.7% reported that adapting was "difficult," while 66.7% found the experience "interesting and enriching," and another 16.7% stated that they "adapted easily.”

#### 7. As a foreigner in Bogota, how do you feel?

16,7% feel “totally accepted” while 83,3% feel partially accepted and nobody feels excluded. In the interviews, all the participants said that, even though Bogotanians have some misunderstandings about their Turkish and Muslim identity, they are very respectful people. Of course, some people’s attitudes are offensive, but there will always be those people, unfortunately.



#### **8. Have you had the opportunity to interact with the Turkish community in Bogota?**

Several participants (66.7%) reported meeting with the Turkish community regularly, while 16.7% said they communicate with them sometimes and another 16.7% never meet with them. However, during the interviews, both participants who selected "never" admitted they misunderstood the question and clarified that they meet with the Turkish community regularly.

Then, we move to religious questions:

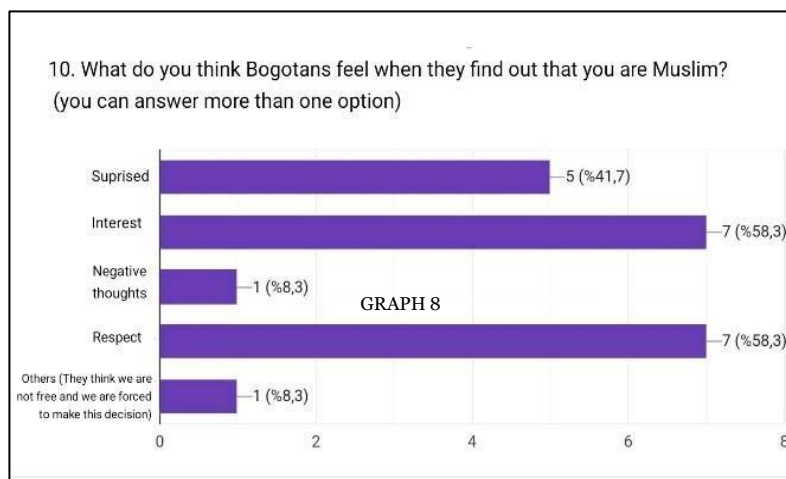
#### **9. When you wear a hijab or symbols related to Islam in the street, what kind of reactions have you received?**

According to the survey, 33.3% of participants reported experiencing "negative looks and comments." However, during

the interviews, most clarified that while they are not frequently exposed to negative comments, they sometimes receive strange or uncomfortable looks. Several participants (75%) mentioned that Bogotanians often approach them with questions, driven by curiosity about why they wear the hijab. Additionally, 50% of respondents noted experiencing "respectful and supportive attitudes." Among the other responses, 8.3% indicated that Bogotanians show no reaction, and another 8.3% stated that they do not wear the hijab.

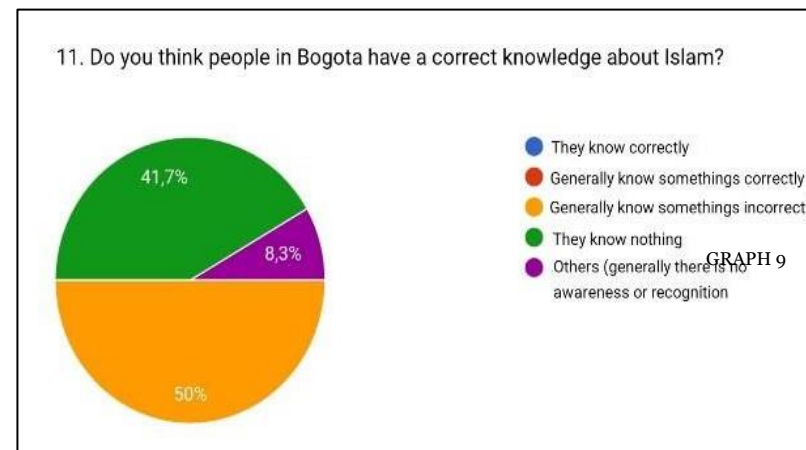
#### **10. What do you think Bogotanians feel when they find out that you are Muslim?**

Reflecting on the responses to the previous question, participants noted that when Bogotanians ask about their hijab and learn that they are Muslim, 41.7% of the participants think that Bogotanians are surprised, 58.3% think that they are interested in them and ask more questions. 8.3% believe that they have negative thoughts. 58.3% feel that Bogotanians approach with respect, and a person said that Bogotanians assume Muslim women are not free and they are forced to make this decision (wearing the Hijab). According to the interview, some participants agree on that as well.



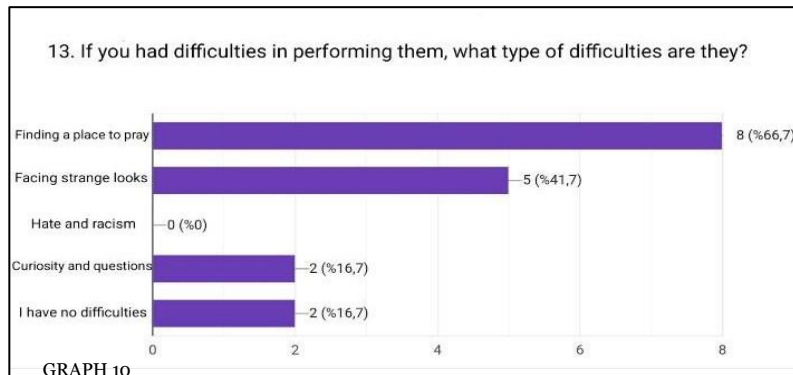
#### 11. Do you think people in Bogota have a correct knowledge about Islam?

We need to remark that in this question no one said Bogotans know correctly or know something correctly about Islam; Bogotans generally know incorrectly or nothing about Islam, and a person said that there is no awareness or recognition of that religion. Also in the interview, some of the participants stated that some Bogotans do not even know the word “Islam” and some of them relate Islam with terrorism because of what they have seen and heard in the media.



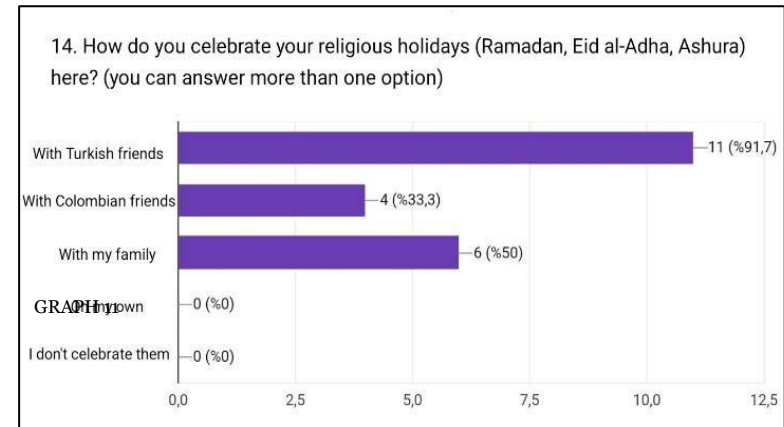
#### 12, 13. Have you had any difficulties in performing your religious practices?

And what types are those? 16,7% said that they have difficulties in performing their religious beliefs often, 58,3% said sometimes, 16,7% said no difficulty, and a person declared that she does not perform her religious practices (8,3%). In the Graph, we can see that other participants also have difficulties with that. They say that Bogotans do not approach them with hate or racism, but rather look at them strangely because they do not know and do not understand they are praying, and some of them approach Muslims with curiosity and ask them questions.



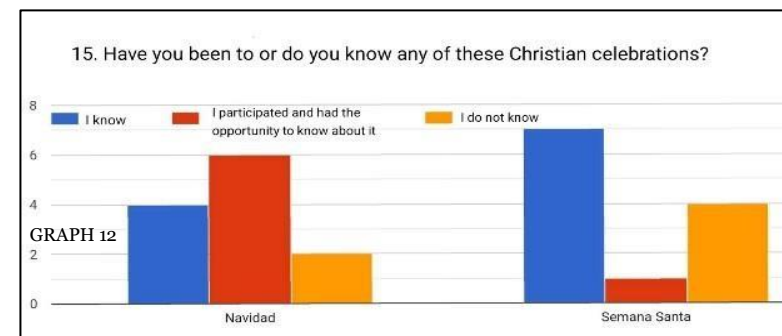
#### 14. How do you celebrate your religious holidays (Ramadan, Eid al-Adha, Ashura) here?

As we can see in the Graph, almost all the participants celebrate their holidays with their Turkish friends (91,7%) and with family members (50%) who live in Bogota but some of them did not choose the option “family” because they cannot celebrate with their mother, father or siblings, etc. who are in Türkiye or another country; thus, they can celebrate the holidays just talking with each other on the phone. On the other hand, 33,3% celebrate it with their Colombian friends. In the interview, participants explained that they often invite their Colombian friends to join the gatherings they have with their Turkish friends, creating a shared and inclusive festive atmosphere.



#### 15. Have you been to or do you know any of these Christian celebrations?

(Navidad and Semana Santa) According to the Graph, six people declared that they participated in Navidad, four did not participate but knew about it, and two did not know about this celebration. Regarding Semana Santa (Holy Week), only a person participated, seven knew about it, and another did not know anything about it.



**16. As a Muslim woman in Bogotá, how comfortable do you feel exercising your religious freedom?**

16,7% said they feel very comfortable, 58,3% were generally comfortable, and 25% said to have difficulties sometimes. In the interview, when we asked them about the difficulties, they stated that because there is no Mosque or a place to pray or make wudu (ablution) like in Türkiye, they have difficulties praying outside their homes. However, most of them acknowledged that this is expected, as Colombia is not a Muslim-majority country and has a relatively small Muslim population. Notably, none of the participants reported feeling completely uncomfortable practicing their religion in Bogotá.

**17. What is the biggest challenge affecting your eating and drinking habits when you live in Bogotá?**

For Muslims, halal food—prepared according to Islamic dietary laws—excludes pork, alcohol, and improperly slaughtered meat. Thus, many participants rely on Muslim butchers to ensure their meat is halal. When asked about their difficulties in maintaining their dietary practices, 91.7% of participants reported challenges in finding halal food, while 50% cited the high prices of halal products. Additionally,

83.3% expressed concern about not being certain of the ingredients used in food sold outside. One participant (8.3%) noted a lack of knowledge in Bogotá about religious diets, such as fasting during Ramadan, and 41.7% mentioned difficulties with the differences between Colombian and Turkish cuisines, as Colombian food often does not suit their taste preferences.

**18. What difficulties do you face most when interacting with the opposite sex in Bogotá because of your religious beliefs?**

Some Muslims refrain from physical contact—such as hugging, handshakes, or kisses on the cheek—when greeting the opposite sex, as a way of maintaining religious boundaries. However, this practice is sometimes misunderstood as disrespectful. When asked about this issue, 66.7% of participants reported that Bogotanians sometimes struggle to understand these religious norms and boundaries in social settings. 50% indicated that there is a general incomprehension of limits in communication with the opposite sex, while 8.3% mentioned being subject to prejudice due to the hijab. On the other hand, 25% reported having no difficulties in this area. Notably, none of the participants reported challenges finding partners who align with their religious beliefs, nor did they identify incompatibilities between social

norms and their faith.

## **Comments and opinions of the participants in the interview**

### **Cultural**

#### **• Reactions Of Bogotanians To Their Turkish Identity**

Almost all the participants agreed that most Bogotanians love Türkiye because of the Turkish series, and some of them have been to Türkiye many times, so they know about it. There are some comments from the interview with the participants but to protect participants' anonymity, we reference their comments by assigning participant numbers (Participant 1- P1, Participant 2: P.2,,,...).

*“When I say I'm Turkish they talk about how beautiful Türkiye is. Many people have more or less knowledge. For example, they know many tourist places, they know a few dishes. They know Istanbul, and since many Turkish TV series are broadcast in Colombia, they have information about Turks, of course, as much as they see from both wrong and true TV series. Also when I say, I'm Turkish, I generally do not get any*

*negative reactions, but I always receive positive reactions and questions about being Turkish” (P. 4.)*

However, although Bogotanians who have been to Türkiye have correct knowledge, some Bogotanians' knowledge who only know about Turkish culture from Turkish series are mostly wrong. A participant stated:

*“There are a lot of Macho Men in Turkish TV series, the jealous men do not send woman anywhere, she gets permission for everything and she is not free. I've gotten a lot of questions about this. They asked me if my husband would not allow me to come here or go out. I received similar reactions because they see this wrong in TV series that show a patriarchal nation and macho men who dominate women, but I want them to see that it is the exact opposite in our lives, I'm trying to explain this, especially by showing my own family life”. (P. 4.)*

Also, some participants claimed that Bogotanians confuse Türkiye with an Arab country, so they think that there are some restrictive rules like in some Arab countries:

*“They have a very different perception of Turks. They think Türkiye is completely an Arab country. They are*

*very surprised when they hear we have four seasons. Because of this, they have many prejudices and they ask questions like “Does your father have four wives? Are men very strict? Will you wear a headscarf when you return to Türkiye? Is it because you are here that you do not wear one? Is there a desert in Türkiye?” They think Türkiye is a country heavily influenced by religion and Arab cultures” (P. 10.)*

- **The differences and similarities of turkish culture with colombian culture**

As we saw in the survey, most of the participants claimed that Turkish culture is “very different” or “partially different” from Colombian culture. So we asked them what are the differences, and mostly they talked about the importance of breakfast and dinner in Türkiye while lunch is more important in Colombia, also about entering the house without shoes in Türkiye while Colombians enter with shoes:

*“Lunch is so important here but in Türkiye, it is breakfast and dinner. Apart from that, they wear shoes at home but we do not. They are always surprised when I ask Colombian people to take off their shoes when they come to my house, but they*

*welcome this situation with respect. They either take it off or use shoe covers” (P.2.)*

Furthermore, while Turkish people are more hasty and quick, Colombians are calmer and slower. So, this behavior affects people’s lifestyle and thoughts:

*“I think people here are much more relaxed. Colombians are calmer compared to Turks. Turks are more aggressive, practical, fast and result-oriented while Colombians are more artistic, process-focused and enjoy the day” (P. 10.)*

Then, we asked them if there were any difficulties for them to participate in social activities here because of those differences. Some participants talked about the food issue and entertainment activities:

*“Regarding food and entertainment, my religion has some sensitivities, like there are some prohibited foods. And I found it difficult to explain to my Colombian friends that I couldn't eat certain food, because I did not want to offend them. For example, I do not drink alcohol and when they bring alcohol as a gift, I worry about how to explain that, and sometimes I worry if there is anything haram (prohibited) in the food they*

*offer. Also, I do not like mixed-gender exercise groups. I joined one but left later.” (P. 9.)*

Another participant also stated that she had difficulties getting involved in their friend’s entertainment activities:

*“I can say that I had difficulty at first because if they invite you somewhere then invite you to a bar, to a disco, to drink. It took some time for our close Colombian friends to realize this. So there were times when you felt a little left out, but we worked it out. Once we got to know each other, they understood too.” (P. 5.)*

- **Keeping their Turkish culture alive here**

In the interview, we asked the participants whether they do anything to keep their culture alive and all the participants affirmed that they still make Turkish food, they celebrate cultural and religious holidays:

*“We have been living here for years, and we try to celebrate our cultural and religious holidays together, especially with our Turkish friends. I always cook Turkish food at home anyway.” (P. 4.) “I have two children and one of my children is 11 years old, they*

*were almost born and raised here. I care very much that they get to know our culture. Holidays, especially special religious and cultural holidays, are very important to me. My mother always cooked traditional meals during religious holidays. So, I try very hard to ensure that my children associate these things with holidays. April 23 is Children's Day in Türkiye, I attach great importance to children knowing this. I tried to make a different program almost every April 23, I told them about the capital of Türkiye and its flag, and we cooked food. So that they can learn about its gastronomy and other cultural aspects. I care about this very much and I think we should continue this.” (P. 8.) Participant 6 stated that they used to give Turkish cooking courses in Bogota and that when they celebrate a special day or cultural day, they invite their Colombian friends:*

*“We gave cooking courses for a while to keep the Turkish culture alive here. People here are already curious about such things. They also want to learn Turkish or come as a guest to get to know Turkish culture. We held henna nights and invited the Colombians here, they were also very nice.” (P. 6)*



### **Psychological or emotional effects of being away from their own culture and country**

Almost all the participants stated that, as an emotional effect of being away from their country, they miss their families in Türkiye and celebrate holidays with them. And participant 8 said that she tries so hard not to lose her own culture:

*“I have a hard time on special days from time to time, I feel like I'm missing some things because sharing with family on special days is very valuable in our culture, so I make a lot of effort at this point. I attach great importance to being with my Turkish friends on any holiday or special day. The first day of Eid is very important to me, I definitely try to invite my friends on that day. Maybe if I were in Türkiye, I would be much more relaxed and I might not care that much. Since I am far away here, I try harder not to lose this culture. I think I try very hard to see what I can do better.” (P. 8.)*

Participant 10 mentioned that being away from her country for too long made her feel like a foreigner in her own country as well:

*“I haven't been to Türkiye in 7-8 years, and I really*

*miss my country. But because I haven't been to Türkiye for a long time and I'm also a foreigner in Colombia, I sometimes feel a sense of divided identity. I can't say I'm Colombian – I'm too Turkish for that. But I also can't say I'm fully Turkish anymore because I've become somewhat of an expatriate. I feel like I've become a foreigner. So yes, I might be experiencing some identity confusion.” (P. 10.)*

We then asked if meeting with their Turkish friends and community here had any effects on them. All the participants stated that they do not feel alone when they are with people with the same language and culture as theirs. Although they have Colombian friends, sometimes the language barrier makes it difficult to express themselves to the other person. At those times, they feel more comfortable talking to their Turkish friends. On the other hand, they mentioned as a negative aspect that when they always hang out with Turkish people and not Colombians, they can't improve their Spanish:

*“It has a lot of good points. I do not feel alone thanks to them. I have very nice friends whom I love very much, whether they are from Bogota or other nationalities, but sometimes my language is not 100% enough to express myself. It is difficult for the other person to*

*understand me, and I can open myself better to a Turkish friend, I think that she understands me and my heart better. After all, we come from the same nation and we experienced the same difficulties here. There is only one disadvantage. When I meet with many Turkish friends and do not make friends from Bogota, my Spanish falls behind and cannot improve. This may be the biggest disadvantage: not being able to improve the language because of not practicing with anyone” (P. 4.)*

- **How accepted do they feel in Bogota’s society?**

In the survey responses, all participants said that they felt totally or partially accepted. On the other hand, when we asked the participants if they made any special efforts to feel more included in Colombian society, some participants noted that they invited their Colombian friends to their home and offered them food. Moreover, some of the participants tried to answer the questions of Colombian people when they ask about Turkish culture or their religion, and also the participants stated that they tried to learn about Colombian culture and their religion.

*“This was a special effort on my part. For example,*

*when "pesebre" [Christmas Crib] was installed at a friend's house I went to, I tried to learn its meaning. Or when we went to a friend's son's birthday party. It was at their house, the pine tree was decorated there, and there were different decorations. I specifically asked questions to be relevant like “what do they mean, why do you put this, why is this decorated?”. I have always tried to show interest in the things they care about, and understand what they mean. I want to learn about their lives and the things they care about too. So this was a special effort for me and it still is” (P. 4.)*

## **Religious**

- **The knowledge of Bogotanians about islam and their reaction**

In the 11th question, we saw a graph of the answers, and all the participants either claimed that Bogotanians generally know some things incorrectly or they know nothing. Also, a participant answered this question by saying that Bogotanians think that Muslim women did not choose to wear hijab but they were forced to wear it. Moreover, Muslim women affirmed that they receive a lot of strange looks from people around them when they are outside but when we asked them if they saw

those looks as Islamophobia or hate, they said it's generally not because of Islamophobia but because they do not know Islam. Of course, it's understandable because in Bogota there are not many Muslim people but some of the participants noted that sometimes those kinds of stares bother them and feel unsafe:

*"When I first arrived here, a few times I noticed that some older men looked at me clearly without hiding. Also, some of them thought I was a nun and treated me with respect. I never experienced any negative reactions, but sometimes they just stare at me curiously, in a strange way, and sometimes those stares are disturbing" (P.11)*

On the other hand, some of the participants told us their good moments about the reaction of Bogotanians, like giving beautiful compliments for their Hijab:

*"My friend was wearing a Hijab and we were walking down the street. An elderly man stopped us and said very nice things like, "You look beautiful, I hope you always stay like this." That was very touching, and I felt really good; it seemed very kind. Other than that, I think generally people in Colombia are not prejudiced, or even if they are, they do not show it*

*regarding the Hijab." (P. 10)*

On the contrary, there are some Islamophobic behaviors as well. Unfortunately, because Islam is associated with terrorism in many places, some Bogotanians think in that way too. So, when they know Islam in that way, their behavior becomes this way. A participant mentioned that some people make the sign of the cross when they see her like they are scared of her:

*" There are people who suddenly see me and make a cross symbol with their hands. Honestly, I thought they felt like they saw a devil when they saw me. I've encountered this a couple of times. I think they think that Islam is a religion of terrorism, and when they see it, they think like God protect us, that is, they engage in the act of crossing themselves, and I think this is Islamophobia."(P.6)*

Some participants affirmed that some Bogotanians think that Muslims wear Hijab forcefully, and ask them to take their Hijab off because they are free here:

*"One day, as I was leaving the market, the security personnel leaned into my ear and said, "You are free here, you can take off your Hijab if you want" but I said "I am happy that way". "There is a perception that*

*we are forced to cover ourselves, forced into religion, or that women are not free. Maybe this was done through movies or maybe a perception was created, but as a Turk, I consider myself free in this regard. Because we were given this space in Türkiye, we did not have any difficulties. In other words, we were in an education system aimed at being more comfortable, so this perception of the Middle East or Arab culture needs to be destroyed. Not all Muslim countries have sanctions like those in Iran” (P. 7)*

According to the interview, the questions that residents of Bogota ask so much to the participants are about Hijab and polygamy:

*“They misunderstand some things because they are influenced by the media. Most of their questions revolve around these misconceptions. For example, I often get asked if all Muslim men must have four wives or if women aren’t free. But over time, they understand. I love to travel and have done so alone, even driving by myself to Medellín or I traveled to Germany. A Colombian friend once said she couldn’t believe a Muslim woman could do that. After getting to know me, she told me that she felt she was less free*

*than I was. Many people assume Muslim women can’t study, work, or stand on their own feet, but after seeing my life and family, they appreciate how much respect my husband shows me. Many people believed Muslim women couldn’t study, or we had to be part of polygamous families, but their perspectives changed as they got to know us.” (P. 8)*

The reason of these questions and thinking that all Muslim women are forced to wear Hijab is due to misrecognition of the religion Islam in Bogota. As Masaeli noted in the theoretical framework about the importance of the interreligious recognition, through these narratives we understand more clearly its necessity in Bogota.

- **The difficulties about praying outside**

Muslims have to pray 5 times a day. Unlike Christian prayer, Muslims pray by making movements like prostrating. Also, there are specific times to pray, but sometimes they are outside and have to perform their prayer there, and because there are not much Mosque in Bogota, they try to find an available place to pray. The participants stated that Bogotanians stare so much to them while praying, so it sometimes makes the participants feel uncomfortable. The reason for staring at a Muslim who

prays is often this -they simply do not know- and for this reason, some Bogotanians try to talk to them and ask questions while they are praying.

*“It is very difficult to find a place to pray outside, such as a masjid or a mosque. That's why I carry my prayer rug with me and usually try to perform it outside in any available place I find. Of course, people stare, but I have never encountered a bad reaction, that is, nothing like "No, you can't do this here, go away". But of course, as I said, they look very intently and try to understand what I do. I tried to overcome this at first, it is a very difficult thing because we are generally used to performing prayers in a closed environment in Türkiye. It is not very easy for us to pray outside, on the road, in places where there are a lot of people who look at us.” (P. 3)*

*Participant 7 stated that she feels the absence of mosques in Bogota: “Here there are not many Mosques like in Türkiye. Of course, whether this is possible is a separate issue, but feeling its absence is a deficiency. (P. 7)*

On the other hand, none of them said that Bogotanians said anything racist or bad while they were praying; on the contrary,

they reported that some Bogotanians helped them find a place to pray:

*“I wouldn't call it a difficulty, but people do stare curiously. However, some are very helpful. Once, I prayed at the airport, and a worker came over and directed me to a more suitable and comfortable place.” (P. 11)*

Furthermore, Muslims fast during Ramadan. During this time, they neither eat nor drink anything, not even water. They start fasting in the morning, around 5-6 am, and break their fasting at night, around 6-7 pm, in Bogota (the times vary depending on the country). Then they can eat whatever they want, but the next day they repeat the fast, for 30 days. The participants stated that when their Bogotan friends hear about that, they are very surprised:

*“They react very well. I've never seen such a bad reaction. Of course, they are very surprised that we do not eat or drink water until the evening for 30 days. It seems interesting to them. You know, when you think about it physically, they see it as a ritual that can actually be healthy and beneficial to the body, and they respect it. They listen interestingly” (P. 3)*

Some participants said that some of their Bogotanian friends wanted to experience fasting with them and they broke their fast at the end of the day together:

*“Our group of friends welcomed us especially very well. They even wanted to fast with us. There were times when we broke the fast together in the night. Our teachers are the same way. They were always supportive and even let us out of class early so that we could go home early and have dinner”(P.5)*

There are also religious holidays, we asked the participants if they keep celebrating them. All the participants said that they celebrate the holidays with the Turkish community here, and also they invite their Colombian friends and celebrate it together:

*“I celebrate Eid and Ramadan with my Turkish friends. Of course, I wish I could celebrate with my family, but since that’s not possible, my friends feel like family. Even our Colombian neighbors sometimes join us. They enjoy the atmosphere and are quite positive. For Ashura Day, I make and share it with others, and they love the taste. Sometimes they ask what’s inside, and I explain it and say it’s a special day for us, so we*

*make this dish.” (P. 9)*

Furthermore, participant 5 said that her teachers helped them get permission from the university on those special days as well:

*“ When we get permission from the university on these special days to not attend our classes, they allow us and help us so that we do not fall behind in our classes on these days.” (P. 5)*

- **Experiencing Christian Celebrations**

In this question, we asked the participants if they had participated in Christian celebrations like Christmas and Semana Santa. Some participants said they had attended the celebrations, others knew about them but hadn’t participated, and some of them only recognized the name without knowing any details. Then let's look at the experiences of the participants who attended the celebrations:

*“I’ve attended almost all their religious holidays. It excites me. Every country has its special days, and being invited by friends makes me happy. I learn many new things. I have more memories related to Christmas. In my opinion, their Christmas desserts are*

*delicious. Apart from that, they exchange gifts with us. For example, yesterday, a friend left a package for Christmas which was very honoring. It's great to share his excitement, it's so nice". (P.8)*

Another participant said that she knew about Christmas superficially because of the movies. Also, she had the wrong knowledge about it as well in Türkiye, but she learned it here:

*"In Türkiye we only knew about Christmas, because of the movies. We thought it was a one-day thing, like in Türkiye. In fact, we did not know that the process was taking so long or what happened before it. We used to think of it as a new year event celebrated on the last day of the month, December 30th, just like New Year's Eve." (P. 7)*

Then we asked the participants who knew about the celebrations generally but had not attended, and the participants that do not know at all. They said that they couldn't participate in the celebration because they did not have the opportunity:

*"P.10: I haven't had the chance to attend the Christian celebrations because I do not have many close friends. However, I do not have any prejudice against them. I:*

*Would you consider participating if you had opportunity ? P.10: Yes, I would like to."*

In sum, most of the participants confirmed that they attended to Christian celebrations mainly Candle Day and Christmas. Some of them said that they had misinformation about Christmas like thinking that Christmas and New Year's Eve were the same and it was a one-day celebration but it is actually a long process. However, after celebrating these days with their Colombian friends or asking them about its process and its importance, in other words, after doing dialogue with them, they cleared these false thoughts. Therefore, we can see the importance of dialogue through their real life experiences.

#### • **The Misunderstandings Between Opposite Sex**

In Islam, there are certain boundaries between men and women. For example, they usually do not make physical contact such as shaking hands, hugging, or kissing while greeting the opposite sex. The participants said that they prefer to avoid physical contact, even shaking hands, but some people can misunderstand this behavior. Since the participants do not want to seem rude when the other person extends his hand, some of the participants shake hands while others avoid it by explaining their religious boundaries:

*“When an opposite-sex extends his hand to me, of course, I have to extend my hand out of politeness, but this bothers me. I prefer not to shake hands but I can't refuse because I think it would be rude” (P. 2)*

This was the final part of the interview. Now, we will summarize all the information that we have learned from the survey and interview.

## **Conclusion**

Firstly, we asked the participants what they think about Bogotanians' knowledge of Türkiye. They stated that Bogotanians know Türkiye because the Turkish series are published in Bogota, and especially people who have been to Türkiye before, know many things such as tourist places, Turkish culture, and traditional food. If we look at the 3rd question in the survey, most of the participants answered that Bogotanians approach their Turkish identity with curiosity, and interest and in a positive way. But at the same time, some participants answered that question as “with stereotypes and misunderstandings”. In the interview, they also explained some misunderstandings because of TV series such as the perception that Turkish men are macho and women are not free. Likewise, it is claimed that some Bogotanians confuse

Türkiye with Arab countries such as Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan, for this reason, they think that the same strict rules apply in Türkiye too. Secondly, we learned about the differences and similarities between Turkish culture and Colombian culture with the comments from the interview. In the 4th question in the survey, the participants answered either “partially similar”, “partially different”, or “very different”. When we look at the comments in the interview we can realize that the differences are more than the similarities. So, they seem to have experienced a cultural shock when they came to Colombia. Also, when we asked in the survey about the process in the 6th question, some answered it was difficult, and some claimed it was an easy process but mostly they said it was an interesting and enriching experience. Thirdly, they mentioned how they keep their Turkish culture alive here. They said that they still cook Turkish food, celebrate their holidays with their Turkish and Colombian friends, and also they used to give Turkish cooking courses to Colombians who are curious about Turkish cuisine. In the fourth part, they talked about the emotional effects of being away from their culture and country. From their comments, we see how difficult it was for them to be away from their families and culture. But also they stated that having a Turkish community and being able to meet



Turkish people here helped them to keep their culture and traditions here, celebrate their holidays easily, and communicate with people who share the same culture and language as you. Hence, some of them stated that they became a family here. Then, we wanted to learn if they made any effort to be accepted by society. In the 7th question in the survey, an overwhelming majority answered “partially accepted” and some of them as “totally accepted” but no one described themselves as excluded. About the efforts they made, while someone stated that she tried to invite their neighbors and friends to her home and offer them Turkish food, another participant said that she celebrated her Colombian friend's holidays and tried to learn about their culture and religion, asking their meaning. After that, we moved to the Religious questions. We’ve learned about the reaction of Bogotanians to their Turkish identity in the previous parts but what about their reactions to Islam and the Hijab? In the 11th question in the survey, the participants either responded as “they know some things incorrectly” or “they know nothing”. So, we asked them why they think like that, and what they've experienced. They emphasized that mostly the Bogotanians respect their religion and no one tries to prevent them from praying or taking off the Hijab. On the other hand, some Bogotanians have some

Islamophobic behaviors because of associating Islam with terrorism or misunderstanding Islam due to misleading media coverage. But those Islamophobic behaviors are not acts of violence but a reaction of fear or thinking that Islam is realted with terrorism. Some participants stated that some Bogotanians approached them and told them “You are free here, you do not have to wear that headscarf (Hijab)”, but the participants did not define those actions as Islamophobia but because of having wrong knowledge like all women are forced to wear Hijab in Islam, which is not true. So, the problem here is not hate for Muslims but a lack of knowledge and misunderstandings about Islam. Moreover, they stated that Bogotanians stare at them a lot because of wearing a Hijab, but again, although some Muslims are uncomfortable with it, they think this action is because of not knowing about Islam. On the other hand, as we have mentioned, some Bogotan people respect their religion and people who approach them to ask questions with curiosity. About performing their prayers or fasting here, although they have difficulties in finding a place to pray like a Mosque, Muslims noted that they pray in any available place and Bogotanians never said any bad things about it. The only thing that makes Muslims feel uncomfortable is, again, the strange looks from people around

them, but of course, they declare that there are also people who help them or show them a supportive attitude. About their fasting, Muslims stated that when their Colombian friends learn about it, they feel very surprised and interested. Furthermore, Muslim Turkish women said that when they celebrate their religious or cultural celebrations, they invite both their Turkish and Colombian friends. In the other part, most of them stated that they participated in the Christian religious holidays. In the 15th question results we see that while most of the participants participated in Christmas, they did not participate in Semana Santa. Likewise, when we revised the comments of the participants in the interview, most of them also attended Candle Day. And if we observe how they attended those celebrations, it's generally because of being invited by their Colombian friends. So, the participants who could not attend did not have the opportunity to do so. In the final part, the participants mentioned the difficulties of not being in physical contact with the opposite sex when they are greeting, because Colombians love to hug or shake hands to greet the other person. So, while some of the participants stated that they explained to them to avoid shaking hands or hugging, other participants said that they shake hands instead of hugging so as not to look rude to the other person. But they also

stated that they feel uncomfortable and prefer not to do it. In the 18th question in the survey, we can see from the results that the participants claimed that there are sometimes difficulties in understanding the limits and boundaries of their religion for Colombians. Finally, let's look at the answers to the questions that we have asked in the introduction: how do Bogotan people react to foreigners, or is diversity encouraged in Bogota? How comfortable or how marginalized do foreigners feel in Bogotá? According to the answers in the survey and the interview, we can say that Bogotan people stare a lot at foreigners who are dressed differently and unfamiliar. It's not only about Muslim people or the Hijab but it can be also about the foreigners whose appearance or way of dressing is different from Colombians. So, if we respond to the question if diversity is encouraged in Bogota, although there are schools, universities, and some places where they teach about some religions and cultures, in general, Bogotans do not know about Islam and probably about other religions. Again, if Bogotans stare at Muslims excessively when they are praying outside or wearing a Hijab, it's because they do not know what Muslims are doing or wearing. And, if we talk about the culture, the people who know the Turkish culture very well are usually people who traveled to Türkiye and saw their culture and the country with

their own eyes, but the others usually know from the Tv series wrongly. About the other question which is how comfortable or marginalized foreigners feel in Bogota, as we saw in the 7th question of the survey, the participants feel generally or partially accepted by society and no one feels excluded. In the interview, they said that Bogotans are very respectful people as well. So, even though there is a lack of knowledge, they generally do not act with Islamophobic or racist attitudes. If a Muslim wants help to pray in an available place from a Colombian, he/she helps her. Although there are some prejudices and misunderstandings, they do not show them or express those thoughts. Besides, they try to learn and understand by asking them questions. The participants stated that as their Colombian friends got to know them, their prejudices were broken about Muslims and Islam. It's not only about Colombian people, but the participants also said that their perspective has broadened and they clarified some misunderstandings which they had in Türkiye. In the Cascadia journal, Falcón, N. (2024) declares “Respect for diverse cultures and religions, together with the primordial value of education, are essential elements of social transformation”. Thus, if Colombians and Turks and all the people make an effort to learn better about different cultures and religions, and

instead of relying on media and prejudices, getting to know the people personally will create a more respectful environment. As Mother Teresa states, “If you judge people, you have no time to love them”(Mother Teresa, s.f.).

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