

D. Reflection and analysis

Persian culture and a woman's role in it

Jimena Fuenmayor

ANTH 1102

Professor Amanda L. Ellwanger

April 29, 2019

On March 31, I attended a Persian festival at Piedmont Park. With the intention of not only learning about a different culture but to also answer one big question: "What is a woman's role in Persian culture?". The festival itself was smaller than I thought, but there were a lot of people. Including many families with members of all ages, but mostly kids, who were free to walk around and play with each other. The first thing I noticed was that kinship was a very strong part of their culture.

The festival was divided into three parts, food, Persian business and a sitting area with tables and space to sit down on the floor. For renting a table people had to donate fifty dollars to the festival and if they couldn't afford it, they will have to lay down on the grass. This is a perfect example of social stratification given that people were grouped by their economic status.

Overall the atmosphere was nice, traditional music was playing and everyone seemed to have a good time, however, no one was dancing. People were either eating, walking or just hanging around. The food looked great with many meat-options and few others. The ones cooking were all men while women stood on the other side were the Persian business was. Besides selling things like art, jewelry, and clothes, some women were with their families taking care of the kids by watching them from the distance. Most women wore hijab with a few exceptions, like young girls.

One of the women working at the festival was this woman in her 30's that was doing henna tattoos. The tattoos were very popular and everyone was getting one including me, there was already a line, so I waited for about 15 minutes. When it was finally my turn I asked the lady

to do whatever she wanted, she ends up making this beautiful flower with details all around it. While she was doing my tattoo we talked and had like a small interview. I asked her how long she has been doing this, she told me for a while now and that back in Iran it was her hobby but here is her job. She also told me that she has been in the United States for more than 5 years and has lived in New York, Houston, and Atlanta. My impression of her is that she was very shy but still nice, she was wearing a hijab and a huge coat because of the cold weather.

I spend approximately three hours at the festival from 12 to 3. Before leaving I talked with two girls that were around my age and asked them if I could interview them. I explained the project and quickly built trust with them. They agreed to be interviewed and recorded. One thing I noticed after the interviews were that both had similar answers to my questions, although I conducted the interviews separately. They were also very open and none of them wore a hijab.

At the end of this cultural encounter, I learned about an important tradition that was present at the festival called “The lentil sprout”, that celebrates the main transition in climate from winter to spring. Also, how social stratification plays a big role in many cultures Persian. The most important thing I learned is that Persian women have more than just one role in Persian culture.

I left my comfort zone and ethnocentrism behind so I could get the most of the experience. I felt good doing this and now I feel more open to try new things. Having a henna tattoo was weird since it wasn't a thing I wasn't used to, however, I took the chance and I liked the results. I got to know a little bit about the henna tattooer and her life journey.

Leaving behind your comfort zone is the most challenging thing of being an anthropologist and expecting the unexpected. At a new field site, you don't have the control,

everything can happen and as an anthropologist, you should know how to deal with every kind of situation.

From what I could observe and understand thanks to the women I talked to is that a woman's role in Persian culture now days is being a multitask/family-oriented individual. They have many choices of life but is important that they are responsible for the kids and husband. They can have jobs, and get an education, however, the jobs available back in their home countries don't have equal pay and often are simple ones that don't require higher education. Inequality is still a huge thing in Persian culture men and women differ in many ways, not only rights but in religion and social expectations too. For most Persian women, America is a place where they can have equality and more job/education opportunities.

Although Persian culture is patriarchy one and there is a great difference between gender, the feminist movement is growing stronger. Thanks to this social movement, things are changing for the better and the proof of that is the young generation of Persian women, like the ones I got the chance to interview that have goals and aspirations far beyond being just a stay at home mother.