



Source: Sheryl Gay Stolberg, '[Bush offers Europe a defense of Iraq policy](#)', *New York Times in International Herald Tribune online*, 22/06/06.

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It has been now about a year since the two of them began their expedition into the Orient, exploring local traditions of crafts. The longer they are in the region, the more they find it impossible to avoid news regarding events throughout the Middle East.

Although they don't feel any hostility in their personal meetings with craftsmen (that is, mainly, craft-women), sometimes they do get the impression they are regarded as representatives of the West and in a way responsible for whatever it does. Maybe some thought of this kind guided them in the beginning to take this mission, to learn the Orient in ways it would lead them to.

A few months ago they were staying in a village in the mountains, studying the local traditions of textile design and manufacture. It came out that the son of one of the women artisans was imprisoned. She didn't ask this woman when, how or why; she didn't want to get into all that. Yet, she made an effort to separate in her mind the choice, deeds and fate of the son from those of his mother's. Local conflicts and international interventions, she thought, were not a new thing in that region nor for that matter almost everywhere. Rather, she observed the mixed feelings of that woman sharing her knowledge and skills with Westerners, while probably thinking on her son's circumstances. The whole situation was quite fragile, she thought, and she could only keep doing what she does, since the people did agree to cooperate with them.

Nevertheless, as time passes she notices she pays more attention to the complex political climate. Alongside the sketches of designs and drawings of people they meet, she keeps newspapers and pamphlets documenting the

events of that time and place. She thinks it might be useful when presenting those wonderful fabrics to remind herself and others of the context in which they were created.

She recalls the film *Gabbeh* by the Iranian filmmaker, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, its visual impression upon her and the way it reveals the life of the people through the rugs the women create. Indeed, sometimes she feels herself superimposed onto anyone of a number of characters in films about travellers or other kinds of adventurers such as *Lawrence of Arabia*. But she tries very hard not to become captive of her imagination. She is aware how easy it is to create for herself an image which she would later have to admit differs greatly from what she actually feels or thinks.

The best way to keep her feet on the ground, she learns, is to meet people and listen to their stories, learn their crafts and habits and tell them about hers. She had already learnt some of the language of the places she visits, but since she is looking for 'visual stories', she finds the need for verbal language less and less important. The designs, the choice of fabrics, the colours of the threads, the gestures of creating the embroidery—all these are understood simply by watching and paying attention. Then she can feel her way into the moment when she also can take something out of her bag and show the women designs of cloths and fabrics she has brought with her. Their hands examine it together, their heads angle towards each other, smiling.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Rivka D. Mayer.*