

mentor's introduction

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How ought we to make a *podushka*? How do we think about the work we do? What is our character? These are intrinsic questions to the daily life of the Tabasaran people from the Caucasus region of Russia. Lorraine Ross, over the course of several months, in two trips, to the northeastern part of the Caucasus mountains, engaged people in conversations about their weavings and about what matters most to them in their work, and talked about families and communities.

When you talk to Lorraine you learn that while she was in Russia, and in particular in Dagestan, she found weaving to be inextricably crossed with important matters to the people whom she talked.--concerns about money, community responsibilities and what to teach children. Lorraine's hope in this writing and in her dissertation is to faithfully render an accurate portrait of the production of community and cultural meaning, often shared in Tabasaran weaving. In the pages of her dissertation, through narrative interpretation and analysis, Tabasaran women and men speak with Lorraine and tell stories, and , indirectly address each other with issues of Tabasaran life and art.

The fundamental question Lorraine posed, and that was repeatedly posed by Tabasaran women in their weaving was how to preserve and create, a coherent community meaning in their art. But the kind of weaving done depends on the people they are--a particular cultural meaning. And this is a story Lorraine locates beautifully in her inquiry.