
Afghanistan. In Herat, “a veil that weighs like a mountain” (Ghazni proverb)

(Herat) I was walking past a stream today, a stream whose waters no one seems to know the source of. Children had just returned from school and were busy playing; many of them were holding the string of self-made kites, which they were flying in the wind. There is always wind here in Herat, it blows in all seasons, at all times of the day. Other children had made other kinds of toys: with a simple rope they were trying to 'hang' the fish in the stream. In other words, they were trying to learn how to fish in a country with no fish, a country that has hardly any live fish.



Not too far away, a group of elderly persons were listening to the read-out of ancient poems sung by a contemporary poet who explained the meaning of each verse, as all elderly persons are either illiterate or only know a few words. Standing beside them were other young and old people playing skipping stones. It is a very ancient after-work recreational pastime as well as a sport to strengthen one's shoulders: whoever has the strongest shoulders is most likely to toss the stone further away and win. Several street vendors lined the inner alleys, one in particular shouted: "I purchase worn-out items and sell repaired items", another was eating poppy seeds and selling lapis lazuli stones with his grandchildren. Who knows whether he managed to bring some bread back home after a long day under the sun. I continued walking, passing from one door to the next, like a butterfly. As I proceeded along narrow, unpaved streets, I noticed an elderly lady returning from the mosque holding five rosaries in her hand as she continued to pray. She was not the only one, other elderly faithful were also going home, could it be out of fear of their growing age? Or were they praying for their loved ones on a journey or already miles away, whose return they aren't sure of? A prayer for each bead of the rosary: they only know a few things but they repeat them over and over. God is aware of their sin and their continual lament. A little further ahead there is a Bazaar with tents where women buy long gowns, with tailors' workshops packed with over one-month's orders. Tailors and wool dealers are working hard. Some women manage to sell them their needlework as if they were works of art, hoping to make some money to buy food for their numerous children.

