

AFGHANISTAN

# Pastures of sand

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A nomad camp on the shores of Lake Band-e Amir, in the province of Bamyan. Due to the drought in this region, tensions have been mounting between the populations of Kuchi and Hazara herders.



## FORTY YEARS OF WAR AND FOUR OF DROUGHT ON THE PATH OF THE NOMADS

**Central Asia was once traversed by numerous peoples, traders and armies. Afghanistan was at the heart of this world as it welcomed the routes and footsteps of those who travelled across Asia: arguably none of those invaders ever completely left.**

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Following on from other photojournalism reports on the topic of nomadism in the 21st century, we set off for the quintessential nomadic land.

Passing through dozens of checkpoints controlled by the new Taleban, those modern-day Sandokans with their long raven hair and kohl-painted eyes, we travelled across many regions in search of the Kuchi nomads that belong to the Pashtun ethnic group. In recent years drought has made the pace and strategies necessary to exploit the available pasture

even more unpredictable for the Kuchi herders, while also inflaming historic tensions with other nomads, the Hazara of mixed Persian, Mongolian and Turkic ethnicity. In some areas, in fact, the Kuchi are allowed only to bring their herds but not their tents.

We found them after trekking for hours in the heart of the Hindu Kush in the highlands above the Amur Darya River valley, among the chimneys of the brick factories and the tarmacked roads with numerous flocks and camels. We sipped copious steaming glasses of green tea, chatting with them to understand how much the long war, drought and the new regime affected their ability to access the few available resources in a land whose beauty, contradictions and complexities are all closely intertwined. Many families have been forced to sell their camels and their flocks have reduced significantly in number. The groups that used to spend

the entire summer in the mountains, this year left earlier than usual in mid August due to the exhaustion of the pastures. Many herders have had to buy forage to feed their flocks. This is also the case with the water they need for their families: those who can afford it buy it from water tankers, creating small man-made ponds in which to store it.

In spite of these problems, the majority of the families we met did not intend, nor had the possibility, to change their lifestyle and so they continue to resist change, exercising their innate ability to adapt. Their sacred sense of hospitality, the collusion of some with the Taleban forces and the almost total impossibility to access the world of the women, meant that every moment spent in their tents was a rare privilege filled with questions and perplexities as we got to know one another.



A Kuchi-Asakzai woman makes bread in her tent in the Shiwa pastures in the northern province of Badakshan. Families used to stay in the highlands until the end of September but now they begin to depart at the end of July and the beginning of August due to the exhaustion of the pastures.



Shirin Aigha and Bismillah, two Kuchi-Farjayan boys, fetch water for their family's flocks in the northern province of Kunduz. Due to droughts they have had to buy water from tankers and store it in this small homemade pond they have built.

A family of Kuchi-Asakzai herders return from the Shiwa pastures in the northern province of Badakshan. The herders used to stay in the highlands until the end of September but now they begin to depart at the end of July and the beginning of August due to the exhaustion of the pastures.





Shir Ali, an elderly Kuchi-Farjayan man, watches over his sheep near his tent in a semi-desert area in the northern province of Kunduz. Due to the drought, this family has to travel many kilometres each day with their donkeys to fetch water for themselves and their animals, which feed on the few remaining dry stalks of grass.



Sayed Khan, a young Kuchi-Baluch herder, takes his family's flock of sheep to Feyzabad, capital of the Badakshan province, where some will be loaded onto a truck while others will continue the migration through the mountains to reach the province of Kunduz. In recent years, because of war and drought, his family has been forced to sell almost all of their camels.



A flock of sheep belonging to a family of Kuchi herders is travelling to the Shiwa pastures in the northern province of Badakshan. Families used to stay in the highlands until the end of September but now they begin to depart at the end of July and the beginning of August due to the exhaustion of the pastures.





Kuchi-Karouti shepherds take forage to their flocks. Because of the drought, the pastures are often not sufficient and many shepherds need to buy forage, especially for the winter season.



Discs made from the dried dung of sheep and goats, which will be used as fuel by the Hazara nomads during the cold winters in Bamyan province, situated at an altitude of over 2,000m.



Kuchi-Karouti herders fill their jerry cans with water at a well created to irrigate the fields, in the province of Kabul. Due to war and drought, many herders have lost part of their flocks and therefore have to work in the fields during the summer months.

A Kuchi-Karouti girl carries a kettle of green tea to a shepherd with his flock, in the province of Kabul.





Lawang, a Kuchi-Miakhil herder, at his summer camp in the mountains of the Hindu Kush. Many herders spend the summer months in increasingly distant areas accessible only by foot at altitudes of up to 3,000m, in search of pastures that are becoming harder and harder to find.



Lawang, a Kuchi-Miakhil herder, is returning to his summer camp in the mountains of the Hindu Kush after having visited the town to buy supplies. Many herders spend the summer months in increasingly distant areas accessible only by foot at altitudes of up to 3,000m, in search of pastures that are becoming harder and harder to find.

A Kuchi-Farjayan girl near her tent in a semi-desert area in the northern province of Kunduz. Due to the drought this family has to travel many kilometres each day with their donkeys to fetch water for themselves and their animals, which feed on the few remaining dry stalks of grass.







A young camel with its parents in the province of Kunduz. In recent years, due to war and drought, many families have had to sell most of their camels.



A Kuchi cemetery in the mountains of the Shiwa pastures, in the province of Badakshan.

A Kuchi shepherd moves his flock from the Shiwa pastures in the northern province of Badakshan towards the province of Kunduz.





A team of young Hazara volunteers at a Kuchi camp in the province of Wardac vaccinate children against polio.



A Kuchi-Baharankhel boy leads the flock in the province of Wardac where there are tensions with the Hazara herders who, as a result of the drought, compete for the same pastures.



Kuchi-Daulatzai nomads inside their tents in the province of Kabul.

A Kuchi herder leads his flock along the road from the province of Badakshan to Kunduz.





A camp of Hazara nomads in the province of Bamyan. In spite of its position at an altitude of 2,500m, the area has seen little rain in recent years. Drought has reignited ancient conflicts between the Kuchi and Hazara populations who now compete for the same pastures, leading in some cases to armed confrontations.





A sleeping sheep rests its head on another sheep as if it were a pillow.



A Kuchi-Farjayan girl heads to her tent in a semi-desert area in the northern province of Kunduz. Due to the drought this family has to travel many kilometres each day with their donkeys to fetch water for themselves and their animals, which feed on the few remaining dry stalks of grass.



Sayed Khan, a young Kuchi-Baluch herder, separates the sheep to be transported by truck from those that will continue the migration through the mountains to the province of Kunduz. In recent years, due to war and drought, his family has been forced to sell almost all of their camels.

Inhabitants of the Shiwa pastures in the northern province of Badakshan bring sacks of flour distributed by the World Food Programme to their villages. Because of the drought, many families cannot survive without international aid, which has significantly reduced since the return to power of the Taleban.





A Kuchi-Farjayan family pictured in their tent in the northern region of Kunduz. The youngest children that are not yet able to walk are bound in cloth in the belief that it will help them to grow.



Sayed Khan, a young Kuchi-Baluch herder, takes his family's flock of sheep to Feyzabad, capital of the Badakshan province, where some will be loaded onto a truck while the others will continue the migration through the mountains to reach the province of Kunduz. In recent years, due to war and drought, his family has had to sell almost all of their camels.



Bismillah, a young Kuchi-Farjayan herder, poses on his father's motorbike. His family spends many months of the year in a semi-desert area in the province of Kunduz. The lack of available water means they sometimes have to purchase it from water trucks and build small artificial ponds in which to store it.

A young Kuchi herder, in the northern province of Kunduz, leads his flock of sheep towards his family's tent, after having travelled many kilometres to find a well where they could drink.





