

## Working in the Desert

### The Significance of Labour Performances among Tuareg Nomads in the Algerian Sahara

Anja Fischer

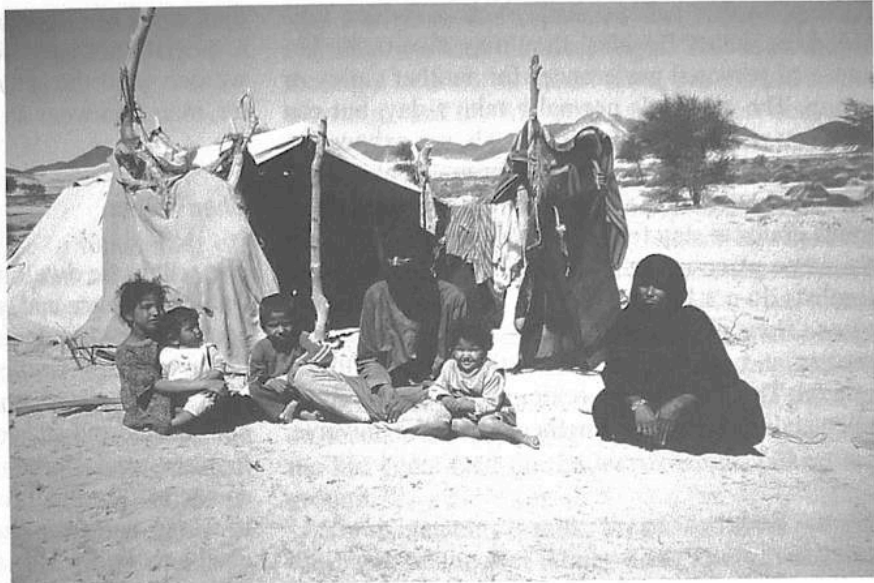
#### Introduction

The Tuareg nomads work as pastoralists in some of the most extreme climatic environments in the world. They have always been dromedary and goat

breeders in the Sahel and the Sahara, and, nowadays, they are also sheep breeders. The Central Sahara of North Africa is an area which can experience temperatures as high as 57 °C in summer, accompanied by extremely low humidity and permanently hot trade winds. What does work mean for nomadic pastoralists in such a barren and swelteringly hot environment? This article examines the seasonal labour processes of Tuareg nomads in the Ahnet/Mouydir Mountains in the South of Algeria, the hottest and driest mountainous region in the Central Sahara. Only highly qualified and specialised pastoralists can work in such extreme climatic conditions. Their subsistence-orientated milk economy and market-orientated meat production require permanent supervision and care of the herds even in the unrelenting heat of the summer. So pastoralists always have to work (Dahl 1987: 249; Klute 1996: 212). The Tuareg nomads' subsistence needs are satisfied by goats in Algeria (Keenan 2006: 686), while the work in dromedary breeding creates investment (Fischer 2008: 81). As with most pastoral societies, the division of labour is determined by the types of animal that are herded (Chatty 2006: 11). Labour is divided between women and men, with the women managing the small livestock and the men being responsible for the dromedary breeding.

"Ethnological research on pastoralism has strikingly neglected the issues of work and labour" (Beck und Klute 1991: 91). So far the labour of Tuareg pastoralists has been documented in detail in less extreme environments such as the Air Mountains in Niger (Spittler 1998), the Iforas Mountains in Mali (Klute 1992), and the Ahaggar Mountains in Algeria (Nicolaisen 1963). This current study is based on anthropological fieldwork carried out among a group of around 200 nomads in the Algerian Ahnet Mountains over a period of 22 months between 2002 and 2011. The method used in the fieldwork was participant observation. This meant, that I not only watched the nomads at work, but that I actually worked with them, thus enabling me to gain an understanding of what working in the desert means. It is difficult to define clearly what work for Tuareg nomads means, because their language has no word for work (Spittler 1990). This article examines the working procedures and habits of the Tuareg nomads, not only when working with the livestock but also when carrying out essential labours such as in the household. The research also includes the cultural embedment, the emic concept of work, and the emic work ethic, without which the research would not have been feasible (Beck und Klute 1991: 106).

However, the article does not examine what work means for the production, but what work means for



**Fig. 1:** Tuareg family sits in front of their tent.

the Tuareg. Acting economically is seen as a social process. At first, the emic concept of the working world is discussed. This concept includes six dimensions. The introduction to the sociocultural context of work embeds a description of work performance, demonstrating the necessary seasonal adjustments to work in the livestock breeding under such extreme and arid climatic conditions. Furthermore, the division of labour in the Tuareg society lends itself to a study of gender- and age-specific work performance. An analysis of the motivation of work leads to the emic work ethic of the Tuareg that helps to understand the relevance of work for Tuareg nomads in the Algerian Sahara.

#### **The Kel Ahnet Nomads and Their Working World of Six Dimensions**

The Tuareg live in an area which encompasses the Sahara, the largest desert on earth, and the Sahelian fringes. The area spreads across Libya, Algeria, Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso. The term Tuareg is a foreign designation and they call themselves Imuhar in Algeria. The Ahnet Mountain area, around 250 miles northwest of Tamanrasset, is the only mountain area in the Sahara without settlements and is home only to Kel Ahnet nomads. Widely ramified valleys cut through the Ahnet Mountains which are up to 1,300 meters high. High fluctuations in temperature shape the arid climate. During winter nights, the temperature can drop to below zero, while during winter days, the temperature can climb to as high as 35 °C. On summer days, the tempera-

ture can reach higher than 50 °C and drop to around 30 °C at night. The amount of precipitation averages only between 5–50 mm per year. Major rainfalls can only be expected in September or October. If there is heavy rainfall, floods can happen in the valleys, which sweep everything away. Some of these valleys are sparsely vegetated and only few waterholes or wells are found. After the rainfalls in autumn the vegetation sprouts, while in summer all the plants dry out. The flora is very sparse and only extremely resistant plants survive. The fauna, which is not very varied, include many dangerous species, such as scorpions and poisonous vipers. But the pastoralists' major enemy in the Ahnet is the jackal. The Kel Ahnet nomads have developed strategies to use even this vast and barren landscape. They work successfully as nomadic pastoralists in the Ahnet region and remain until today a vital collective (Fischer 2010: 13).

The basic unit of production of the Kel Ahnet is the household, which consists usually of a married couple and their dependent children. They live together in a tent. Ideally, the household is self-sufficient: it owns herds of mostly goats, a few sheep, and some dromedaries. Each tent unit is composed of enough people of different ages and sexes to function autonomously, but three or four tent units usually cooperate with each other and move together through the Ahnet. In times of drought, smaller groups are formed which change location up to every two weeks. In the winter season when fodder plants are plentiful, it often happens that around eight tent units gather in a valley for two months. The Kel Ahnet nomads move because of better con-

ditions in other valleys, such as more fodder, firewood, or water. Besides, they may also move because of personal preferences for another valley or group. The removals normally take a day, but can also last about ten days. Removals are exhausting and dangerous for humans and animals alike in the heat of the summer. Therefore, the Kel Ahnet nomads prefer to stay for about two or three months at the same place in the summer. The Kel Ahnet pastoralists do not have special summer or winter pastures. They prefer to marry within the Kel Ahnet society and, as a consequence, they are all closely related. Their nomadic working world can be divided in six dimensions, from the body to the universe.

### *Elem – Body*

For work performance physical and psychic power is needed. The body is the closest dimension of work. Physical exertion makes the work rigorous and demanding, the labourer actually feeling the physical efforts made. Carrying firewood or catching dromedary calves are but only two of the exhausting labours performed by the nomads which cause stress to the body. The scheduling of power reserves is a vital strategy to work efficiently. Livestock breeding requires permanent work performance in contrast to a peasant economy where the work performance reaches a maximum during the harvest time. Working as pastoralists in the desert is characterised by a high risk of injury. Thorns, poisonous animals, or being bitten or kicked by livestock are only a few of the risks which pastoralists are exposed to. Attentiveness and concentration while working are extremely important. Knowing how to precisely use one's body and good coordination and dexterity are preconditions to this highly specialised work in nomadic pastoralism. The body serves as a sturdy tool.

### *Aselsu – Clothing*

The covering of the body is subject to social and cultural norms. The Imuhar have to veil the whole body. The women wear a large wrap robe that also covers the head over a long coloured dress. The men wear long shirts, loose fitting trousers, and turban-like headdresses. Every item of clothing is made out of cotton and the everyday clothes are also the work clothes. Especially the women's dresses are very flexible and can be worn in different ways. For example, while performing work, the women can wrap the large wrap robe around their tummies or

they can form a sack from their wrap robes using a special knot technique to transport things. While women wear the same clothes in summer and winter, men also wear an anorak in winter.

### *Ehan – Tent*

The tent is the dwelling of the nomads. It is the central living space and, especially for women, it is the central working place. "Making a tent" also means in the language of the Imuhar "getting married." In winter, Kel Ahnet nomads live in tents which are constructed out of wood with the roof made from linen or used clothes and their entrances face the southeast. The tents act as a protection from the cold in winter and from the heat in summer. The tent is used as a living room, a sleeping room, a kitchen, and a space to store personal goods. Every family uses its tent in the same way. They do not use fittings such as beds, tables, or chairs and so they can pack and load all of their personal belongings onto the dromedaries within two or three hours.

### *Erahar – Valley*

The lifelines of the desert are the overgrown valleys. These valleys are the nomads' workplaces in the daytime where they graze and water their animals. Without these valleys, living in the desert would not be possible. They first appear very barren, but the nomads know how to use them very well. It is only when one leaves the valley and reaches the arid surroundings that one feels the isolation of the valleys in the desert. These valleys create and exude an internal emotion and the surrounding areas seem not to be part of this emotion (Claudot-Hawad 2006: 63).

### *Tenere – Waste Land*

If one crosses the border of a green valley, one arrives in a waste landscape full of stones and sand. Large sand planes and mazelike rock formations are only two of the geomorphological designs of the *tenere*. No life seems to be possible there. The *tenere* appear to encapsulate the valleys, a space which has to be crossed to get to another valley. It is not an area for dwelling but rather it is an area to cross, which is dangerous because of the absence of water and vegetation. This bootless hostile area for stockbreeding is the home of the jackal. Nomads avoid the *tenere* and women never walk across this



area alone. Only demons live there who lead people astray, and this absolute wilderness causes most Imuhar to panic (Spittler 1994: 120).

### *Esuf* – Universe

*Kel esuf* (people of the universe or loneliness) exist in the cosmology of Imuhar nomads (Claudot-Hawad 1996: 296). These demons, who in a parallel world also live as pastoral nomads, can watch the Kel Ahnet, but the nomads cannot see them. They are dangerous because they can provoke illnesses and even death. The Imuhar avoid talking about the *kel esuf*, because they are afraid of making contact with them. These demons live in the *esuf*, in the atmospheres or rather universe that envelops everybody. The Kel Ahnet nomads are afraid of supernatural sanctions by the *kel esuf*. Because of a poor work ethic, the *kel esuf* can cause work accidents. Thus, even the universe can influence how the nomads act economically in the desert.

### Work Performances in the Winter Season

Work performance is divided among the Kel Ahnet, with the women managing the herds of goats and sheep and the men attending the dromedary herds. The women organise the small livestock, manage the milk economy, do handicrafts, organise the household, gather firewood, attend to child-rearing, and arrange the removals.

A family unit has around forty goats and a few sheep. The milk economy requires intensive care.

The kid goats are separated from their mothers and tied in a little cot over night. The dams spend the night near the nomads' tents, are milked in the morning, and the kid goats are suckled coevally. After the women have checked the small livestock, the herd goes grazing. The herd normally pastures without a herder and comes back alone in the evening. The processing of the milk starts while the herd is still in the camp. The women shake the milk in a leather sack using a special technique to turn it into butter and buttermilk, which they drink for breakfast. The children unbind the kid goats after the herd has left. The women then go with the kid goats to an acacia tree, which they hit with long sticks, and the kid goats feed on the leaves which fall on the ground.

Three elements – milk, bread, and meat – form the basis of the Kel Ahnet diet. The wives bake bread in the sand at noon. They tear the bread in pieces and spill milk over it for lunch. In the forenoon or in the afternoon, the women make cheese out of the surplus of the buttermilk. Often the women meet each other in the afternoon to do some handicrafts and drink tea. If the women have only infants, they gather firewood late in the afternoon. Nomads need fire to cook, to heat, and give light. But the women often have to go far to get firewood and they have to carry the heavy loads of wood on their heads back to the tents. In the evening, the herd returns and the women have to milk the goats and let the kid goats suckle. These activities last long after sunset and then the women begin to bake bread, which takes around one hour. Late in the evening, when all the children are asleep, they put out the fire and lie down.

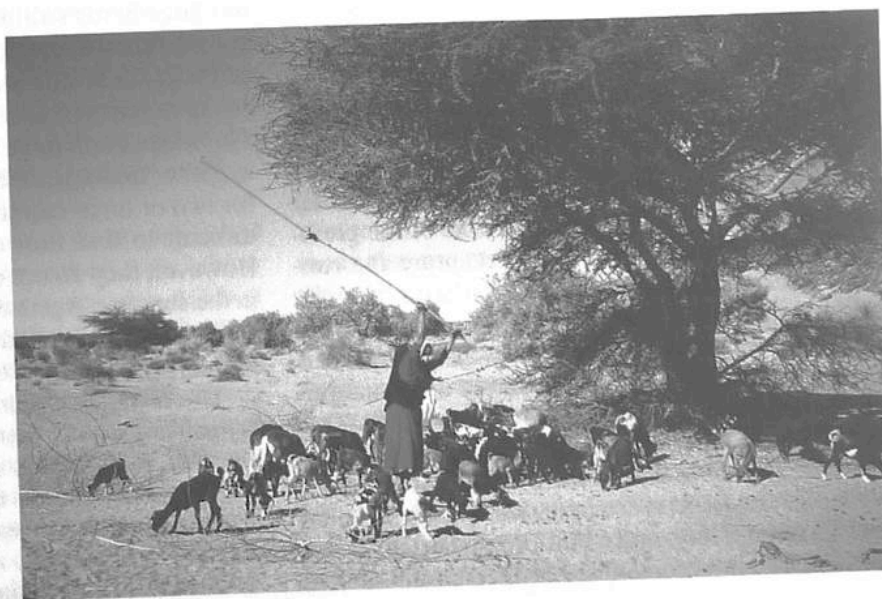


Fig. 2: Tuareg woman hits an acacia tree with a long stick.

Generally, the women have to organise the whole household including the laundry and cleaning. In addition, they organise removals in addition to their regular work. A removal involves taking down the tent, doing the packing, and loading the goods onto the dromedaries. If their children are only infants, the women have to do everything by themselves, but when the children are older they do a lot of the labour for the women.

At about the age of five, children start to catch kid goats. Boys have to help their mothers with the goats until puberty and girls help their mothers until they are married. They milk the goats or let the kid goats suckle in the early morning. Sometimes they have to herd the goats, but they come back to the camp around noon. The duties of the young girls include gathering firewood, doing the laundry, baking bread, and making cheese or butter. They also have to take care of their younger siblings. Infants are specially trained to do courier service. Adolescents have to work especially in the mornings and in the evenings. Children have to learn the main work performances in the pastoral economy early. The male adolescents start to work with dromedaries and then follow the orders of their fathers rather than their mothers.

The main labour of men is the dromedary breeding. The nomads own herds of female dromedaries with their calves. She-dromedaries are ideally reserved for breeding which is a slow process. They give birth to only one calf every two years. Mother-dromedaries are milked twice a day. Dromedary milk is drunk and not used for making butter or cheese as in the case of goat milk. The Kel Ahnet nomads tie a cord around the forelegs of the calves, which is then fixed in the soil near the tents, while the mother dromedaries roam freely in search of pasture. Similar to the goat breeding, she-dromedaries are also bound in this way to the camp unlike pack dromedaries. If nomads do not need their pack dromedaries, they are hobbled with a short rope between their forelegs while they are grazing. Even with a hobble rope the pack dromedaries roam far away in good grazing conditions. One of the greatest chores of the nomads is to recapture the runaway pack dromedaries and dromedaries used for riding. In former times, the pack dromedaries were important for caravan expeditions. Nowadays, caravan trading with pack dromedaries is of marginal importance among the Kel Ahnet nomads. One of the labours performed by the men is watering the animals, but in winter the livestock do not need so much water. She-dromedaries, which have no calves, roam freely with a bull-dromedary in nearby valleys. The men sometimes do handicrafts such as

making shackles or reins. The men's work includes trade with the surrounding villages. Nowadays, nomads rarely ride with livestock to the settlement to sell them. Settled relatives come with their off-road vehicle to the camps to pick up the goats to sell them. They bring flour for bread, clothes, and other items which are required. The nomad men sometimes drive with the relatives to the villages to buy all the necessary goods on their own. Dromedaries have a much higher prestige than small livestock (Fischer 2011). Therefore, working with dromedaries adds more prestige and nomad men normally avoid working with goats. Only in the night, when the herds become restless and leave their night places in the camp, do the men have to get up and bring them back. But not every husband is willing to get up at night and then it is his wife's duty to bring back the goats in the dark.

### Work Performances in the Summer Season

For the majority of Europeans, working in the middle of a desert in temperatures of 55 °C, even for just one day, is barely imaginable. The Kel Ahnet nomads work for months under these conditions. Every removal is physically demanding for humans and animals in a hot climate and, therefore, nomads prefer to stay in one valley for the summer. The main duty of women in the winter season is managing the milk economy, which is not necessary in the summer season because the goats do not have any kid goats and, therefore, no milk. Thus, the women make no butter or cheese and do not have to care about the kid goats. Only a few she-dromedaries have milk, which is reserved for the infants. But the livestock herds still need to be tended. The women herd the small livestock in summer if they are afraid of the jackals. It is too hot for children to be alone in the desert with the herds in the summer months. The women still have to organise the household and to gather firewood. When a family stays in one place for two or three months, it becomes more and more difficult to find firewood in the surrounding area. However, they do not need wood as a source of heat in the summer. Again the women bake bread at noon and in the evening and if they find no firewood, they use dry dromedary droppings to make fire.

The work for children is very hard in the hot climate. They do not work with the kid goats in summertime, but the girls still have to take care of their younger siblings, do the laundry, and help in the household. Older boys have to help their fathers by watering the animals.

The main duty of the men in summer is watering

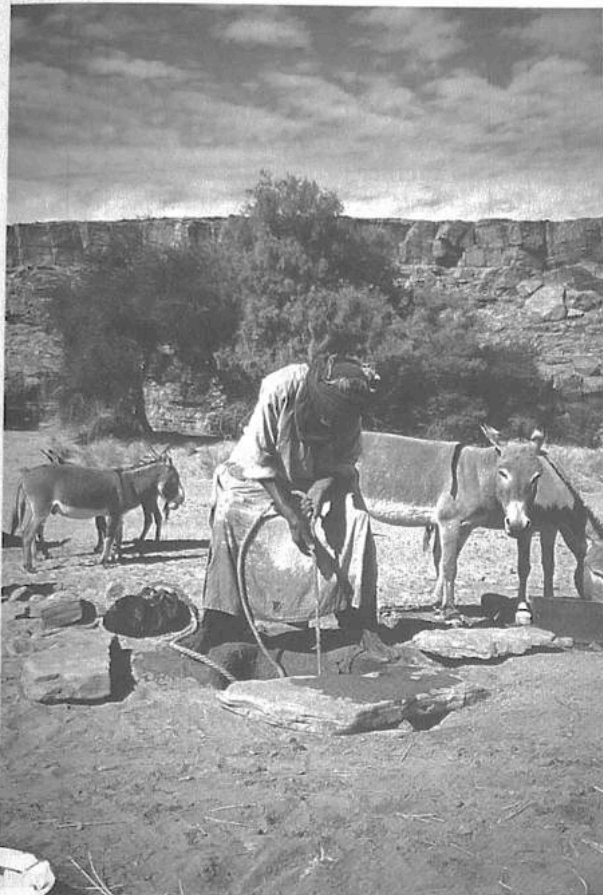


Fig. 3: Tuareg man waters animals.

the herds. Under these extreme climatic conditions every plant is seared and even the leaves of the trees fall off. The livestock eats only dry fodder. Therefore, the animals have to be watered in the morning and in the evening. The men pitch their camp near the water hole and they spend hours every day carrying the water from the well for animals, for themselves, and for their families. The time-consuming labour of searching for the runaway dromedaries becomes less as the thirsty dromedaries come to the wells to drink. The men do not trade with the villagers in the summertime.

Every exhausting labour has to be organised well in the summer in order to conserve the labour performance. The work performance, for children and elders in particular, is difficult in the heat of the summer. Parents reduce the work for children in the summer months. The nomads generally slowly retreat from work when they get older. Elderly men avoid direct contact with the livestock. The sons take over their work and seniors assume a standby function. Now they have management responsibilities like organising the herds or collecting and evaluating information, using their profound knowledge

about veterinary medicine, climate, flora, and fauna. Elderly women still work in the goat breeding, but especially when they are widows they acquire a certain social function. Their tents become centres of entertainment and gossip in the camps in the evenings. These gatherings are important places to relax after work.

### Work Organisation

Work performances always appear rational from the point of view of the respective society (Beck und Spittler 1996: 3). The women bake a loaf of bread at noon and one again in the evening. In the evening, women also have to tend the herd until long after sunset. Afterwards they sit down and bake bread. This takes at least one hour. Often the little children are already sleeping when the bread is baked, so they get no dinner. They could bake a bigger loaf of bread at noon, which is less expensive than baking twice. Thus they could eat much earlier in the evening and so the infants would have dinner. I asked a nomad wife why she baked twice a day and she said that they preferred fresh bread. Every afternoon the women go to gather firewood for just one day.

The women plan ahead for the summer months. They make butter for the direct consumption, but especially for the summer season. They have less milk in the summer to use as sauce for the bread. Butter is a good alternative to milk as sauce. The women make cheese with the surplus milk in the winter-time for the dry season. The cheese gets mashed and mixed with mashed dates and water. This substantial mixed drink can replace a whole meal. In this way, they can stabilise the milk for the summer periods. The women store these supplies in storage places in trees or upon empty metal barrels. The Kel Ahnet pastoralists not only keep food products in storages, they also store clothes, kitchen equipment, tents, or other personal goods. The stored supplies are not hidden, there being no fear of thieves in the desert. They plan their routes and organise their winter and summer equipment in storages. The nomads also use rocky outcrops as storage places, but these places are not safe from animals such as mice. This stockpiling facilitates the removals. They keep the essential goods and store the goods they do not need in the particular season. In this way, they can keep their baggage to a minimum, which makes it easier for them to move around.

Every nomad woman does her work in the same way and at the same time as the other women. Nevertheless, there are individual differences. For instance, some women tie the kid goats always in the



same order at night, but for other women the order of the kid goats in the cot is not so important. But the collective of nomads always tries to synchronise their labour performance. Before a woman starts to bake bread, she looks to see if her neighbours are also about to start baking. The women try to feed the kid goats or to gather firewood together. The other women are not only their immediate neighbours but their relatives as well. A specific work rhythm ensues through this scheduling of work and the whole group monitors that schedules are adhered to. If a woman deviates from the schedule, she has to justify why. The nomad women have a continuous organisation of work, while in the winter season men have a more ambulant work organisation, searching from time to time for the runaway dromedaries. This allows men more flexibility within a socially controlled schedule. Even the living space serves as the working place as well. The different tents stand close to each other and, so they can watch each other in both their living and working places at any time. The work of a herder alone in the desert is described as very severe for Imuhar nomads and even as the hardest work on earth (Klute 1992). But the herds of Imuhar in the Ahnet Mountains mostly pasture unsupervised. The wives of the camp coordinate the direction in which the herds are driven in the morning. The female leader of the camp normally sets the direction. The female leader as well suggests that the camp move. A male leader consults a group of men. The leaders are not chosen by rules of seniority but for personal skills, professional competence, managerial qualities, and assertiveness (Fischer 2008: 155). It is possible that the youngest husband in the camp is the leader of the men. They have an advisory function within the group of nomads.

### The Sociocultural Concept of Hot and Cold

The Kel Ahnet pastoralists have a dualistic worldview of hot and cold, whose natural roots are found in the ever dominating and powerfully influencing difference in temperature between day and night (Hureiki 2004: 53). Every bodily condition is always divided into cold or hot. Especially women always touch their body, mostly their forearm, to check if it feels hot or cold. This means not only the temperature of the body but also the elastic force or tautness of the skin. They classify each other according to whether one is cold or hot as well and this can be seen in how one walks, talks, or even appears. Illnesses are divided into cold or hot sicknesses. A cold flu is not so serious, whereas a hot flu means a severe illness. Food products divide into

two groups. Sheep meat is graded as cold while goat meat is graded as warm. Hot coffee makes the body hot and hot tea makes the body cold. But sugar is classified as hot and can neutralise the tea. A person who drinks coffee with sugar, talks loud, or even quarrels with another person is classified as hot and is avoided. The state of the body and, therefore, the first dimension of labour can often alternate between hot and cold. This depends on what one consumes, says, and even feels. Especially the women try to balance their physical and physic condition between hot and cold very carefully.

Exhausting work in the summer heats the body and, therefore, the state of a person can be hot. But this state should be avoided in public. Large clothes can disguise this state. The dark veil of men is considered as cold even in summer. It casts a shadow over the eyes and the dark colour does not dazzle the eye. The entire body is covered with clothes to protect the body in summer from the sun and in winter from the cold. Only the eyes, hands, and feet are generally seen. While the second dimension, the clothing, is the same in summer as in winter, the nomads change their dwellings. Linen tents are classified as being hot and, therefore, are good for the winter, while tents made of used clothes are seen as cold. Not only is the sun classified as hot in summer but so also is the moon. Thus, the Kel Ahnet nomads prefer to sleep under tents that are built like a roof. The valley is the living and working space for nomads in the winter season. But the valley becomes dangerous in summer because of the poisonous animals which often lie in soft sand near plants. The nomads and even the livestock leave the valley at night. They stay along the border of the valley in the *tenere* upon the stones and sand plains. These waste areas, which are avoided in winter, seem to be safer than the valleys in the summertime. But the nomads depend on the valley because it is the place of production, the place where the herds pasture, the place of water, and the place for baking bread. Even the *tenere* is dangerous because of the cloth demons. These *kel esuf* can make a person become hot. The nomads have to balance a situation along the border between the valley and *tenere* in the summer season as they have to balance a situation between hot and cold.

### Work Motivation and Work Ethic

"The most severe matter in summer is to get up in the morning. Your body feels heavy and listless, and you need your time to wake up," said a nomad wife. The heat in the summer paralyses the body, the main

tool of work of a stockbreeder. Even in wintertime, when the temperatures fall under 0°C in the night, the motivation is low to get up before sunrise from under the warm blanket. To work in a desert environment in all weathers requires special motivation.

Slaves play an important role in the history of Imuhar pastoralists (Rossi 2010). Slaves used to do most of the work performances for the Imuhar. Nowadays, the Kel Ahnet pastoralists do not have slaves any longer. Some families of the Kel Ahnet employ hired herders from Niger or Mali. These young men work in the dromedary breeding with the nomads for a winter season, only supporting the work of the men. In earlier times, Imuhar also had female domestic slaves. It seems that their daughters now do that work (Spittler 1990: 190). The hired herders, who are also Imuhar, have to bear the brunt of the work with the dromedaries. But it is difficult to monitor their work. Hired herders often mistreat animals, and in emergency situations they react with less motivation (Beck und Klute 1991: 114). These herders lack absolute loyalty to the owner of the animals in contrast to a member of the owner's family. A newborn baby immediately receives animals as a gift and the children are co-proprietors of the herds. Women, men, and children own livestock and personal relationships between humans and animals emerge. Every animal is named. This distinguishes livestock breeding among Imuhar from breeding on a mass scale. A mother can motivate her children much more to work by appealing to them that this is their own animal. The work motivation of children is also much higher when they know that the livestock belongs to their parents. The ownership of livestock encourages children and adults to take care of stock, even in the heat of the desert.

"Kela is thin and beautiful. She will easily get a husband. Men always look for thin girls because they work well," said an old woman of the Kel Ahnet nomads. A corpulent woman represents fertility, but not a great worker. Imuhar consider that a fat or meagre woman or man is not able to work hard in the heat of the summer and, therefore, he or she is a less eligible suitor. It is one of the main goals of both women and men to find a marriage partner, as otherwise they have to stay with their parents and can never have an independent life. Hence, the motivation of an unmarried woman or man to show how well they can work is high.

Mismanagement can be the result of misfortune (*tehot*) (Spittler 1990: 197). The *tehot* can hit humans as well as animals. It can bring bad luck to the herd to ask an owner about the numbers of animals he has. A person who works unsatisfactorily can be hit by *tehot*. If a woman cooks meat in a pot upon

the fire and the pot tips over; it happens because of the *kel esuf* and not because of the pot being badly positioned.

The Irish proverb "work praises the man," or the German proverb "work ennobles" shows how work performance is highly valued in the European context. But physical work is seen as a source of shame in the Imuhar society (Boesen 2004: 214). Strenuous physical exertion heats the body and results in a person becoming hot. In the nomadic Imuhar society, work performance is indeed estimated and expected, but assiduity is not a virtue. A person who works too much soon has the reputation that he or she is obsessed by *kel esuf*. The Kel Ahnet nomads avoid showing heavy work performance in public, especially among mixed gender groups. Physical labour is more accepted in a same-gender group. The working fields of men, women, and children are clearly divided, but these divisions do not represent a taboo if crossed by the other gender. It can happen that a woman milks dromedaries or men feed kid goats, for example, when the wife becomes ill or a husband has to search for runaway dromedaries. This swapping of working fields is socially tolerated, but only for a limited period. Especially men feel uncomfortable working with goats, because this is women's or children's responsibility and carries less prestige. The Kel Ahnet pastoralists always prefer that a person does the gender-specific work, as otherwise verbal sanctions can follow. Sometimes men (have to) do the work of a child, but then they risk remarks such as that they have become children. A verbal motivation encourages the society to remain with their gender-specific work. A nomad who physically overworks or shows slothfulness can be sanctioned by group members. When a wife prefers to delegate her work to her children, she acquires the reputation of slothfulness. Even if this particular woman is not directly criticised, the neighbours' children now have the chance to tell their mothers that she is becoming like this particular woman to avoid their mothers' orders.

Normally, idleness is socially sanctioned in the Imuhar society, but there is a form of rest that is socially accepted especially for women. When a woman is over-worked and is suffering from burn-out, then she possibly suffers from an illness called *tenede*. The symptoms of *tenede* are often multifarious. She complains that she has a headache, stomachache, or growing pains. She lies down for a few days and another group member takes over her work. Everybody in the camp knows that she is not really ill in the physical sense, but it is accepted for two or three days. Afterwards she has to work again, or, otherwise, she has to fear verbal



sanctions. Social control in such close collectives, in this case the Kel Ahnet nomads, regulates the attitude to work performance and, hence, the perception of the work ethic.

Beck (1996) developed the approach that pastoral nomads work as a service for the animals (*Dienstethik*). Not only do the requirements of the animals generate work for the Kel Ahnet pastoralists but undoubtedly so does the social pressure of the kin group. A wife would not rest under a tree while all the other wives go to feed their kid goats because of the social pressure. When people are alone in the desert with their animals, the motivation to work may come from a sense of responsibility for the herds. But the herds normally pasture freely and only a few nomads work alone in the desert among the Kel Ahnet. The work performance happens mostly under the supervision of other nomads. The kin not only watches, but also criticises, evaluates, and comments on every work performance in the society of the Imuhar. However, compliments are rather infrequent. The reputation of a nomad is an important social resource. Losing honour and reputation are two of the hardest social sanctions in the Imuhar society. The ownership of livestock and the demonstration of qualitative work performance provide prestige. The work ethic of a nomad is closely connected to the honour of a person. Kel Ahnet nomads have to balance their work between too much and too little and have to adjust their work performances to the work rhythm and requirements of the entire kin group.

### Conclusion

Men and women approach work differently in the winter season, while their approaches become more similar in the summer months. The Kel Ahnet women have a regular work organisation all year round. The small livestock herds generate a permanent work performance, especially in the milk economy in the winter months. The anticipatory work performance of women in the milk economy reduces their labour in the dry season. The regular labour performance of women, children, and the elderly is reduced in the summer season, but the conditions of work are much harder in the dry season due to the high summer temperatures. Women neither procreate nor work in the rich poetic verses of the Imuhar (Bourgeot 1987: 115). In reality, women always have to work whatever the weather is. Even at night they are on standby.

In contrast, nomad men work in the breeding of dromedaries in a more ambulant manner in winter.

The main work performance of men is to search for runaway dromedaries or trade with the villagers. Their regular work with the dromedaries is not as much as the women's work with the small livestock in the winter season. Men in turn have to work much more regularly in the summer time watering the animals.

The regular work by women in goat and sheep breeding ensures subsistence, while the work by men in dromedary breeding creates investment and is market-orientated among the Kel Ahnet nomads (Fischer 2008: 81). Nevertheless, the boundaries between the gender-specific areas of responsibility mentioned above are flexible and work may be swapped when it is necessary. But the high prestige of the dromedary, in contrast to the small livestock, endows working with dromedaries not only with social prestige but also with honour.

The barren environment, the extreme climatic conditions, and the poisonous animals render the qualified work performance of these nomadic pastoralists very difficult. The climatic conditions of the desert, which oscillate between very high and very low temperatures, allow for a permanent balance of work performance. A person who works too much in public appears not so assiduous but rather obsessed by demons, while a nomad who shows slothfulness has to fear social sanctions as well. The living space of a nuclear family is also their working place, which is intimately connected with the living and working space of the attendant relatives. Therefore, the kin collective of nomadic pastoralists always controls the adequacy of the work performed. Every work performance has to be adjusted within the collective and deviations from normal conditions bring about social sanctions. On the contrary, every member of the collective can count on the absolute loyalty and solidarity of the kin group, thus securing the pastoral work. The collective defines the work ethic and specifies the work rhythm of everyone in the Ahnet Mountains area.

The Ahnet Mountains are one of the most challenging environments in the world to work in. The Kel Ahnet nomads work successfully in extreme conditions where life would seem to be impossible in the inconceivable heat of the summer. These nomads are highly specialised experts in pastoralism and in utilising such barren landscapes. The Ahnet Mountains do not offer any infrastructural security and safety as does a workplace in town, but it is, nevertheless, interesting to note that among the Kel Ahnet nomads there is an employment rate of 100%; whereby they have no choice of profession and every Kel Ahnet is a nomadic pastoralist. The surrounding settlements, e.g., Tamanrasset, are

expanding dramatically and demanding more and more meat, which the Kel Ahnet pastoralists supply. Hence, the Kel Ahnet nomads still have a secure market for their products, which are made independently of any fossil energy in the middle of the largest desert in the world.

## References Cited

- Beck, Kurt**  
1996 Ethnologische Arbeitsforschung in Bayreuth. In: K. Beck und G. Spittler (Hrsg.); pp. 357–374.
- Beck, Kurt, und Georg Klute**  
1991 Hirtenarbeit in der Ethnologie. *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 116: 91–124.
- Beck, Kurt, und Gerd Spittler**  
1996 Einleitung. Plädoyer für eine ethnologische Arbeitsforschung. In: K. Beck und G. Spittler (Hrsg.); pp. 1–24.
- Beck, Kurt, und Gerd Spittler (Hrsg.)**  
1996 Arbeit in Afrika. Hamburg: LIT. (Beiträge zur Afrikaforschung, 12)
- Boesen, Elisabeth**  
2004 Hirtenkultur und Weltkultur. Die moderne Mobilität der Wodaabe Zentral-Nigers. In: K. Beck, T. Förster und H. P. Hahn (Hrsg.), Blick nach vorn. Festgabe für Gerd Spittler zum 65. Geburtstag; pp. 210–223. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.
- Bourgeot, André**  
1987 The Tuareg Women of Ahaggar and the Creation of Value. *Ethnos* 1–2: 103–118.
- Chatty, Dawn**  
2006 Introduction. In: D. Chatty (ed.), Nomadic Societies in the Middle East and North Africa. Entering the 21st Century; pp. 1–32. Leiden: Brill. (Handbook of Oriental Studies; Sect. 1: The Near and Middle East, 81)
- Claudot-Hawad, Hélène**  
1996 Identité et altérité d'un point de vue touareg. In: H. Claudot-Hawad (dir.), Touaregs et autres Sahariens entre plusieurs mondes. Définitions et redéfinitions de soi et des autres; pp. 169–274. Aix-en-Provence: Institut de Recherches et d'Études sur le Monde Arabe et Musulman. (Les Cahiers de l'IREMAM, 7–8)  
2006 Touaregs. Apprivoiser le désert. Paris: Gallimard.
- Dahl, Gudrun**  
1987 Women in Pastoral Production. Some Theoretical Notes on Roles and Resources. *Ethnos* 1–2: 247–279.
- Fischer, Anja**  
2008 Nomaden der Sahara. Handeln in Extremen. Berlin: D. Reimer Verlag.  
2010 Research and Nomads in the Age of Globalization. In: A. Fischer and I. Kohl (eds.), Tuareg Society within a Globalized World. Saharan Life in Transition; pp. 11–22. London: I. B. Tauris.  
2011 The Saharan Dromedary as a Sign. The Prominence of Dromedaries among the Nomadic Imuhar Society in the Algerian Desert. In: E.-M. Knoll and P. Burger (eds.), Camels in Asia and North Africa. Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Their Past and Present Significance; pp. 193–198. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. (Veröffentlichungen zur Sozialanthropologie, 18)
- Hureiki, Jacques**  
2004 Tuareg – Heilkunst und spirituelles Gleichgewicht. Schwülper: Cargo Verlag.
- Keenan, Jeremy H.**  
2006 Sustainable Nomadism. The Case of the Algerian Tuareg. In: D. Chatty (ed.), Nomadic Societies in the Middle East and North Africa. Entering the 21st Century; pp. 682–709. Leiden: Brill. (Handbook of Oriental Studies; Sect. 1: The Near and Middle East, 81)
- Klute, Georg**  
1992 Die schwerste Arbeit der Welt. Alltag von Tuareg-Nomaden. München: Trickster. (Rites de passage, 6)  
1996 Kinderarbeit bei Nomaden. In: K. Beck und G. Spittler (Hrsg.); pp. 209–223.
- Nicolaisen, Johannes**  
1963 Ecology and Culture of the Pastoral Tuareg with Particular Reference to the Tuareg of Ahaggar and Ayr. Copenhagen: The National Museum of Copenhagen. (Nationalmuseets Skrifter; Etnografisk Række, 9)
- Rossi, Benedetta**  
2010 Tuareg Trajectories of Slavery. Preliminary Reflections on a Changing Field. In: A. Fischer and I. Kohl (eds.), Tuareg Society within a Globalized World. Saharan Life in Transition; pp. 89–106. London: I. B. Tauris.
- Spittler, Gerd**  
1990 La notion de travail chez les Kel Ewey. *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée* 57/1: 189–198. [Numéro thématique: Touaregs. Exil et résistance. Sous la responsabilité de H. Claudot-Hawad]  
1994 The Desert, the Wild, and Civilization – As Seen by the Kel Ewey. In: T. Bargatzky and R. Kuschel (eds.), The Invention of Nature; pp. 103–124. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.  
1998 Hirtenarbeit. Die Welt der Kamelhirtinnen und Ziegenhirtinnen von Timia. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag. (Studien zur Kulturkunde, 111)