

Caravaneers, Shopkeepers and Consumers – the Appropriation of Goods among the Kel Ewey Tuareg in Niger*Gerd Spittler*

This article deals with “trading expeditions” as a special type of economic relations with foreign societies. Expeditions cover long distances. Nevertheless they are not organized by professional traders but by people who are interested in the immediate use value of goods. There are some similarities with migrant labourers, but in contrast to them caravaneers are independent entrepreneurs. Following an overview of anthropological theories on trading expeditions, a case study is presented: the caravan system of the Kel Ewey Tuareg of Timia, which has lasted for several centuries and still exists today. Whereas the caravans are organized exclusively by men, local appropriation of the caravan goods is dominated by the women who do not leave the local region. Thirty years ago the first shops were opened in Timia, which have continued to increase in number ever since. A new relationship has developed between shopkeepers and clients. We can now speak of consumption and consumers, terms which were hardly appropriate under the monopoly of the caravan system.