
What it means to be a consumer in the West African Savannah. Consumptionscapes and access to Chinese goods from the margins

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Abstract (in French and English)

West Africa is no less exposed to the economic impact of China (and other globalizing trends) than any other part of the world. The term "Consumptionscapes", coined by Ger and Belk in 1996, helps to conceptualize the context of globalization for people who do not normally have the means for acquisition. Because of the condition of "absolute poverty" that is a reality for many households in rural areas of West Africa, affordable Chinese goods have a special appeal. One might even argue that the advent of affordable consumer goods has made it possible for many households to participate in global consumption in ways previously unimaginable. Based on the author's ethnographic field data, collected during the last ten years in southern Burkina Faso, and a small scale level survey on household budgets and expenditure for consumer goods per month, I take a consumers' perspective. This paper addresses issues of fragmented knowledge about origins of products, specific routines of testing product quality, and the decision-making when household budgets are limited. I argue that marginalization does not mean exclusion from consumption; however, limited means obliges consumers to limit their engagement and to find ways to engage in the marketplace in creative ways.

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