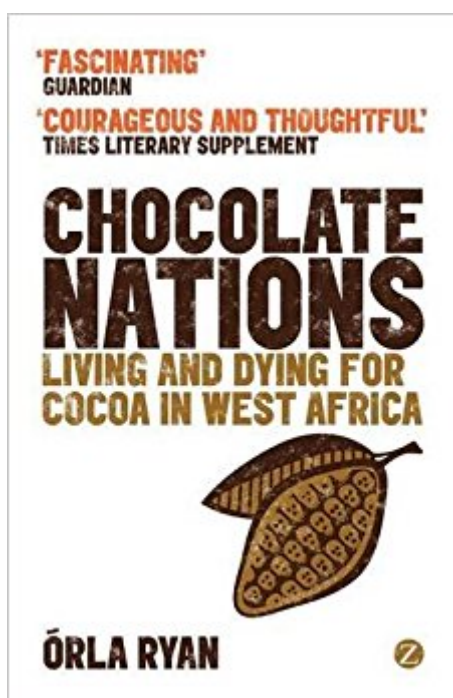


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Chocolate Nations: Living And Dying For Cocoa In West Africa (African Arguments)



Synopsis

Chocolate - the very word conjures up a hint of the forbidden and a taste of the decadent. Yet the story behind the chocolate bar is rarely one of luxury... From the thousands of children who work on plantations to the smallholders who harvest the beans, Chocolate Nations reveals the hard economic realities of our favourite sweet. This vivid and gripping exploration of the reasons behind farmer poverty includes the human stories of the producers and traders at the heart of the West African industry. Orla Ryan shows that only a tiny fraction of the cash we pay for a chocolate bar actually makes it back to the farmers, and sheds light on what Fairtrade really means on the ground. Provocative and eye-opening, Chocolate Nations exposes the true story of how the treat we love makes it on to our supermarket shelves.Â Â

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Orla's Chocolate Nations is a captivating read, painting a lively picture of the West African cocoa trade from a variety of perspectives. It casts a critical eye over the role played by governments and multinationals, while also putting fair trade and child slavery campaigns in perspective. It gives us all a good deal more to think about when we eat 'the food of the gods'." - Daniel Balint Kurti at Global Witness
"I gave up eating chocolate years ago after seeing at first hand the exploitation that surrounds its production in Africa. Since then, endless panaceas and fair trading schemes have failed to improve the lot of the farmers. It was about time a book like this was written." - Stephen

Chan OBE, author of *The End of Certainty* "A courageous and thoughtful account of a murky industry." - Times Literary Supplement "That Mmmmmoment when our lips meet the melticious chocolate bar we've been waiting for all day ... well, it could be the last bite we take of it that tastes right after reading this exposé of the cocoa industry. 'Fair trade' is a great feel-good advertising line, but it is often a contradiction in terms. Not much profit trickles down from the shelves of our shops to the farmers and child labor (in reality, trafficked or slave labor, Ryan says) of Ghana and Ivory Coast whose poverty is covered up by weasel words from trade associations and financial interests glibly defending exploitation and profiteering." - Iain Finlayson, Times "Chocolate Nations is a fascinating account of the struggles of cocoa producers in West Africa, almost all of them smallholders, and what it takes to turn a crop of cocoa into a warehouse full of Ferrero Rocher." - Jeremy Harding, The Guardian "Paints a disturbing and subtle picture of an industry few chocolate consumers think about." - Sydney Morning Herald

Orla Ryan works for the Financial Times in London. She lived in Africa for more than four years, first in Uganda, and then in Ghana, where she worked for Reuters.

I am so glad that I read this book. In preparing to write an article for the Huffington Post about chocolate and cocoa, I was introduced to issues about which I had previously had no knowledge. A couple other reviewers have given good summaries, so I won't attempt to add, but I want to say that if you are a chocolate consumer or anyone with an interest in how this crazy world works (or doesn't), I recommend you read this. Every couple pages I found myself thinking, "Oh! Really?" every time I came across a new piece of information. The book is short, so not having enough time to read it is no excuse. (I don't have any time either, but I read it.) Once you've done that, you'll never buy or think about chocolate in the same way as before. You'll understand the history behind that delicious nibble. I for one will now buy only Omani chocolate, one of the few brands actually made in Ghana, the second largest cocoa bean producer in the world. One of the most interesting aspects of the book is Ryan's examination of the fair trade issue. Think it's simple? Yes, I thought so too. I was wrong.

I walked away from this book with a deeper understanding of the complex issue of cocoa farming. Orla does a fantastic job of adding objectivity and nuance to a heated topic - and she does it in an engaging and easy-to-read way. Highly recommended read!

An interesting read on the west African chocolate industry and how it works. Very interesting I felt it dragged at points but all and all, very informative!

I have an unusual problem with reviewing this book: It is so intensely thought-provoking I'm having trouble just telling you what's actually in it. When I type, I start wildly drifting into my own tangents. Let me start with this, which I never knew before: Most of the world's cocoa comes from Ghana and the Ivory Coast, and nearly all of it is cultivated by hand on small, family-operated farms. It is the last of the global crops to be cultivated this way, and it represents the largest portion of each country's wealth. To buy chocolate - even those convenience-store staples from Hershey, Cadbury and Mars - is to directly connect with its harvesters in West Africa. After reading this book, I developed a respect and appreciation for the common Hershey's bar that I had until now reserved for the produce at my local farmer's market. Orla Ryan is a former Reuters reporter who covered the cocoa industry in Ghana and Ivory Coast before taking leave to publish this book. Because I feel a tangent coming on, I'll be quick: This is an exceptionally readable, comprehensive, smart and objective book that smashes any assumptions you may have been making since I told you it was about poor African farmers harvesting most of the world's chocolate with hand tools. I recommend it to anyone interested in journalism (for the way it presents information that I suspect will leave the farmers, consumers and chocolatiers feeling they have been portrayed fairly) business and commodities trading (for the way it analyzes a whole commodity market from the soil to the store) and social activism (for ideas in how to identify and implement policy changes that will actually reach the poor, as this author has tried to do). This book might even teach activists who have to communicate with business leaders (and vice versa) how to find common ground. And if you hate that guy from Coldplay, there's something in here for you, too. And now for the tangent that I cannot hold back any longer: Empowered consumers have been led to believe - especially by the coffee industry, which gets some treatment in this book - if they just buy a fairly traded product, they can be part of the solution to end poverty, child exploitation, and corrupt regimes hoarding resources from their hardworking and deeply impoverished citizens. Orla Ryan suggests the solution is not ours to purchase. Just like with sharecropping in the United States after slavery, money generated by the sale of those cocoa pods immediately gets distributed to the moneylenders, fertilizer suppliers and landowners to whom the farmer is indebted. "Cocoa money supports millions of people, not just those who work the farm but also many who have never harvested a pod." Worse, this is a "cash crop" which (tangent!) is practically a misnomer: West Africans don't eat chocolate, so they can't sustain themselves with their own labor. Their money has to pay for all of the food they eat, since

none of it comes from their own farm. No amount of money, even the \$3 you just spent on that Dagoba bar at Whole Foods, is going to stay with the farmers and their families for long. The solution, Ryan suggests, is to teach farmers how to get the most out of their land by cutting down older, less fertile trees, diversifying their crops and fighting disease and pests more efficiently. The Westerners in the best position to provide farmers the resources and motivation to implement these wildly counter-intuitive methods of wealth creation? Not the consumers - it's Mars, Cadbury and Hershey, the folks who get nearly 100% of the beans from Ghana and the Ivory coast into our mouths and whose business would collapse if something happened to the cocoa supply. The moral of the story: keep buying those Wonka bars, because Big Chocolate actually comes across in this book sounding fairly socially responsible, though not on a large-enough scale to have a positive impact on all of its farmers. But if anyone actually was able to wean the harvesters away from chocolate and into sustainable crops for their communities, there would probably be less chocolate grown overall. Prices would soar and chocolate bars would return to being a luxury rather than an essential element in my daily mental health regimen. By the end of the book, as Ryan alternated between staggering insights and brilliant suggestions for improving how chocolate is produced, I began to realize I need those chocolate farmers in Ghana more than they need me. The real price of humane chocolate may very well be one's willingness to get by with less of it.

Orla Ryan is a Financial Times journalist who previously worked for Reuters in Ghana, where she reported on cocoa for its general and financial news service. In this book she attempts to cast a factual, dispassionate and objective eye on the cocoa trade in Africa; adopting an analytical rather than an emotional approach. There are eight chapters in this short (160 page) but heavy-hitting work. The first two look at the contrasting histories of cocoa growing in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire. This is followed by a chapter that examines the extent to which child labour is used on cocoa farms, and the distinction between child and slave labour. The fourth chapter concentrates on corruption in Cote d'Ivoire and the fate of journalist Guy Andre, a man who asked too many questions about where cocoa money was disappearing to. The fifth chapter looks at the practical trials and tribulations of Steve Wallace, an American with a dream to produce chocolate in Ghana, including the very real physical location and structural difficulties of operating there. Chapter six seeks to separate the "myths and reality" of the various fair trade approaches to cocoa growing and buying, while the penultimate chapter examines how the cocoa trade really works - a complicated set of power dynamics involving global corporates, country cocoa boards and cocoa speculators, but rarely cocoa farmers themselves. The final chapter looks forward to how to create a sustainable

future for a cocoa industry which is struggling to meet world demand, where cocoa farmers often struggle to survive and where, in consequence, the younger generation do not want to enter the business. The answer to the plight of the cocoa farmer is not a simple one, and consumers, chocolate companies, national governments, scientists, and cocoa farmers themselves all have a part to play. But, as in Carol Off's excellent "Bitter Chocolate", Orla Ryan's starting point for a better future for cocoa farmers seems to be in improved education for cocoa farmers (both fundamental and agro-business), and in stable non-corrupt government and government bodies in the main cocoa-producing countries. I highly recommend both this book and "Bitter Chocolate" as an introduction to the issues surrounding the cocoa industry and the plight of the cocoa farmer. This book just shades it in terms of my recommendation because of its distilled focus.

Great overview of cocoa industry in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, addressing both similarities and differences, achievements and challenges, with nuanced explanation of benefits and limitations of FairTrade.

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