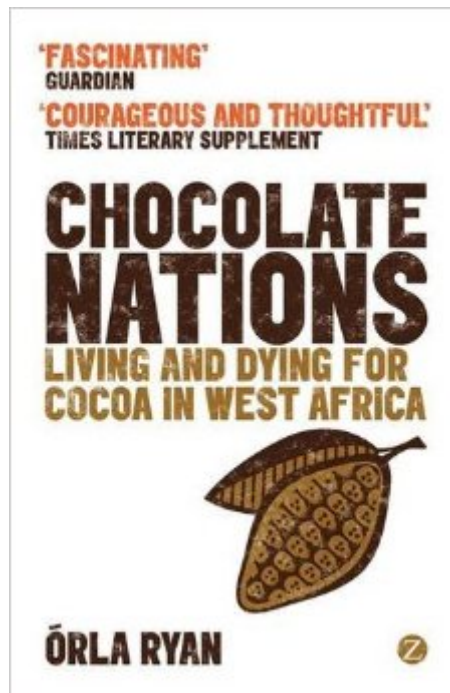


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Chocolate Nations: Living And Dying For Cocoa In West Africa (African Arguments)



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

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

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).

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.

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