**CHOCOLATE NATIONS: LIVING AND DYING FOR COCOA IN WEST AFRICA**

**Review by Neil Alldred**

It is encouraging to read Ryan’s primer on the political economy of cocoa in Ghana, particularly as it complements development educators’ ethical positions on the iniquities and inequities of international trade with an essential empirical element. A financial journalist for Reuters in Accra from 2006-2007, she filed dozens of stories on different aspects of the cocoa sector and has since been able to compile this interesting, informative and stimulating review of the sector. Her introduction and first chapter provide many of the facts of chocolate production that could effectively support development education work in the area of trade and globalisation. A later chapter takes the story of cocoa over to Europe and the United States (US), as we see how a commodity (cocoa beans) becomes a product (drinking chocolate) which then becomes a service (a cup of hot chocolate), with value added at each stage.

Ryan provides the reader with useful information on the finances of cocoa: Ghana earns over $1 billion a year from its 750,000 tonnes of cocoa, grown by 720,000 farmers, but the global market for cocoa-based products is worth more than $75 billion. Farmers’ earnings from cocoa are estimated to be about $0.42 per person per day. Production is low, at around 300-350 kilograms (kgs) per hectare, though fully one third of cocoa farms produce less than 150 kgs per hectare, and an estimated 40 per cent of all cocoa pods are lost to disease and pests. Implicit here are the issues of value-added, of supply chain management, of redistribution, of smallholder production, of poor technology and inadequate training, but none of these themes is investigated in any depth.

A chapter is devoted to the death of Guy Andre Kieffer who was an investigative reporter enquiring into the politics as well as the economics of cocoa production when he disappeared in Cote d’Ivoire in 2004. The details of this story are well documented elsewhere and do not integrate well into Ryan’s analysis of the political economy of cocoa in Ghana. Nevertheless, she brings a healthy critique to some of the myths we swallow unthinkingly about chocolate. For example, she discusses child labour and concludes tellingly with a statement development educators will recognise and relish: ‘Solve the problem of poverty and you solve the child labour problem’. She quotes the International Labour Organisation (ILO) but seems unaware of much of the excellent work done by the ILO’s International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC)
which is funded by Irish Aid and has partners in the trade union movement and in the Global March Against Child Labour. She similarly mentions in passing the big three cocoa traders – Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), Cargill and Barry Callebaut – but does not examine their role in determining how little of the overall value of cocoa production in Ghana is distributed to Ghanaian interests, including the farmers.

There is a thoughtful and thought-provoking chapter on Fair Trade: Ryan scathingly notes that ‘simply choosing one bar instead of another will not help resolve long-standing issues’. Even though Fair Trade certification offers a guaranteed minimum price whatever the fluctuations in the international market price, she claims the Ghanaian government regularly pay more than that guaranteed price anyway – though in 2011 alone, world cocoa prices tumbled from $3,700 a tonne to below the guaranteed price of $2,200 a tonne. She deprecates the $200 per tonne premium offered by the Fair Trade movement as it represents scarcely $36 to a farmer’s typical cocoa earning of $420 a year. And she almost exults in the fact that Kuapa Kokoo’s Divine Chocolate sales resulted in a dividend of barely £1 for each of its 40,000 farmers in 2007.

Her book is occasionally repetitive and fragmented, with the same themes being treated more than once – and sometimes with statistics from different dates, which is confusing. The editing is weak and inconsistent, and there is a price to pay in writing a book in 2011 based on anecdotes, vignettes, data, reportage and news items from 2006-7.

These criticisms should not detract from an overall positive assessment of the book: it is accessible, informative, counter-intuitive and helpful in sorting out myth from reality. Ryan’s book touches on economics, politics and consumer studies, and teachers in those fields will need to supplement her material with their own specific supplements and up-to-date data. Development educators need not share all of Ryan’s conclusions to recognise that here is a useful text to introduce students and learners to the unpleasant nuances of international trade where unorganised smallholder producers are pitted against multinational corporations within a rigged international trading framework – and are thereby bound to lose out.

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