

Slavery in the Chocolate Industry

Politics of Food



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Slavery in the Chocolate Industry in West Africa

Commentary

Chocolate is consumed by almost everyone in the global world. It is a product of the cacao bean which is primarily found in Western African, Asian and Latin American countries. The most important ingredient of chocolate is extracted from the seeds of the trees which is used to create the unique flavour of chocolate (Qureshi, 2008: 11). Today, chocolate plays a significant role in celebrations and festivities around the world such as Easter, Christmas and Valentine's Day. However, there is another hidden ingredient in the chocolate consumed: child slavery.

‘A little child knows nothing... Older children know how to escape, but the little ones don't run away, they don't know how to escape, they don't know their way home. They just stay there working, working, working...’

- Philomene Tegble, quoted in Frenkiel 2001

Approximately 43 percent of the world's cocoa bean supply come from farms and plantations in the Ivory Coast and is the largest producer of cocoa in the world. Consequently, they are forced to sell their products at extremely low prices (Qureshi, 2008: 11; International Labour Organisation, 2007) in order to meet the demands of the global market. These small-scale farmers are forced to lower the costs of production, consequently resulting in extreme measures such as child labour. International Labour Organisation (2007: 6) defines child labour as work which harms, abuses and exploits children or deprives them of education. In 2000, a BBC documentary reported that children from Togo, Mali and Burkino Faso were being purchased and sold as slaves to cocoa plantations in the Ivory Coast (Schrage & Ewing, 2005: 100). According to the BBC Documentary (2012), approximately 800,000 children were working in

dangerous conditions in the cocoa industry, with slavery existing in 90 percent of the cocoa farms. Due to the high media coverage and numerous attempts to expose this issue, the government of the Ivory Coast were pressured into addressing its child labour issues (International Labour Organisation, 2007: 29).

Despite this, a number of children continue to work in cocoa production farms. (UNICEF, 2016). UNICEF (2016) stated that the demand for cocoa is set to increase by 30 percent over the next few years which would undoubtedly make things worse for these children. Child trafficking in African is based on distinctions of age, gender and place: trafficked girls are usually employed by women as ‘domestics, and boys tend to be employed by rural men on farms and plantations (Manzo, 2005: 394). Journalists discovered that children as young as six years old were being forced to work 80-100 hour per week without pay, and as a result suffered from severe malnutrition (Schrage & Ewing, 2005: 100).



<http://theindependent.sg/campaign-for-chocolate-free-of-child-slavery/>

North American and European companies such as Mars, Inc, Cadbury, Nestlé and Hersheys consume two-thirds of the global cocoa production. (Schrage & Ewing, 2005: 101). As a result of growing media concern, many protocols have taken place to ensure that these companies produced and traded ethically. The Harkin Engel Protocol of 2001 is an agreement between chocolate and cocoa industries to try and eliminate child labour and child

slavery (UNICEF, 2016). Moreover, UNICEF (2016) has started an initiative called ‘From cocoa fields to the classroom’ to provide education for the disadvantaged children who are involved in the cocoa production. Fair and ethical trading would benefit these children as it would educate them about their rights. Furthermore, in response to the Harkin Engel protocol, the International Cocoa Initiative (ICI) was founded to eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labour and Forced Adult Labour (The Independent, 2014). Additionally, Fairtrade Labelling Organisation was established in 2002 (Qureshi, 2008: 12) to ensure that cocoa beans were produced without any forms of exploitation.

Food choices have often been viewed as matters of personal preference rather than something with moral dimensions (Ankeny, 2012 :461). However, in such a globalised world, it is important to take the process of food production into consideration before consuming it. If we consume chocolate that is not fair-trade, we might be unknowingly supporting child slavery. As Qureshi (2008: 13) states “selecting items at the supermarket is increasingly becoming a test of consumers’ morality and humanity.” It is evident that lots of initiatives are being taken to eliminate child slavery in West Africa by NGOs such as UNICEF and also at government level. However, it is up to us to ensure that we are consuming fair-trade chocolate, ethically produced, to indulge in a guilt-free chocolate bar.

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