

Abstract

For more than a Century cocoa has constituted the primary export crop of both Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, yet the consumption of chocolate products has remained very low across both nations. Focusing on Ghana in particular this thesis attempts to answer the question of how then cocoa attains value and significance to people if not as a consumable good?

The theoretical frame for this work is primarily a critical discussion of a number of academic approaches to 'value', on the basis of which the thesis' author proposes to engage the analytical term 'spatialized value'. This term implies the identification of numerous boundary enactments that serve in different ways to delimit or enable the spaces of significance and value affordable to the natural good which both the anthropologist and his informants recognize as 'cocoa'. The thesis thus discusses a number of situations in which cocoa is valued in terms of shifting spatial capacities.

In terms of ethnographic material, this thesis is based on engagements with farmers on cocoa plantations and communities in the direct vicinity of the southern Ghana-Côte d'Ivoire border, talks with rural cocoa depot workers and border officials, journeys with cross-country cocoa truckers, and interviews with portside government officials. The thesis seeks to investigate the contemporary Ghanaian cocoa production practices through notions of spatiality and time borne out of both colonial legacies and pre-colonial traditions, an inquiry that entails land disputes, religious devotion, practices of corruption, and more.

What emerges through the analysis is a nuanced insight into cocoa as a complex locus for generating meaning and value among people of southwestern Ghana of the early Twenty-first Century – a picture that takes the reader much beyond any simple ideas of a neat global commodity chain.