

IVORY COAST

# The bitter fruit of cocoa

by Paul Lemaire



The Bloléquin forest, Ivory Coast. "It can be bought for 22 euros on the market," says a farmer about his UNHCR tarp as he spreads the cocoa on it to dry. This tarp is a remnant of a dark period for western Ivory Coast. The area was the scene of deadly post-election clashes during the 2010 crisis. The tarp that once helped house refugees is now used for drying the beans. As planters settle according to their ethnicity, skirmishes regularly break out between villages.





## THE CONSEQUENCES OF COCOA PRODUCTION IN IVORY COAST

It's 8.40 p.m. A strong wind blows across the dark night sky, whistling through the large trees that protrude from the canopy formed by cocoa trees. Everything above this vegetal roof is doomed to die; everything below it is a treasure trove for cocoa planters. "In the time of my ancestors, there were rice fields and forests here. Me, I planted cocoa," says Jean-Baptiste, an old farmer of the Guéré people, a group native to the great forests of western Ivory Coast. The forest will leave its place to the fields - In 2018 the NGO Mighty Earth reported that 90 per cent of the Ivorian primary forest had disappeared in less than 50 years. But although cocoa plantations in Ivory Coast are so extensive that they account for about 45 per cent of the world's production, this isn't necessarily good for local farmers who are left with only the crumbs, while most of the profits go to multinational chocolate companies. According to recent research published by

Fairtrade, in the 1970s, the share of earnings reserved for cocoa farmers could reach as much as 50 per cent, while in recent years, following the collapse in the price of the raw material, African farmers are entitled to about 6 per cent of the total earnings. This inevitably affects the labor force, with slavery-level working conditions, particularly for children. Almost a million children are employed on plantations, and this is the other scourge of the cocoa harvest. They live in villages where cocoa is the only resource. Children are also forcibly relocated from other regions and neighboring nations. Over the past decade, Ivory Coast has been in the news for child exploitation and, even though the government recently convicted some 20 people of child trafficking, the situation has not improved. And so, youngsters like Donatien and his nine-year-old brother Cedric are forced to work in their father's small field, with no chance of furthering their education or finding a viable alternative in order to escape poverty.



Man, Ivory Coast. "Work is more interesting here than in Mali," says Cissé, 27, when he compares his job as a porter with what he normally does in his field in Mali. His brother (pictured) and his team of 10 Malians load trailers onto trucks for 12 cents per bag (over 70kg). Many Malians come here for the harvesting season.



The protected forest of Goin Dèbé, Ivory Coast. Even though it is protected, this forest is cleared to host clandestine camps, while the authorities ignore the problem. Ancestral traditions forbid the cutting of trees, and so people burn them and they become white. The green at the bottom is the new canopy formed by the cocoa trees.

ihagshdhd

The cocoa port of San Pedro, Ivory Coast. Agalou, whose nickname is "the little one," is 50 years old. At the bottom of a ship's hold, he cleans the impurities left among the cocoa beans. "The work is not complicated when there is some," he says. Like most dock workers, he is hired on a daily basis and has no pay floor. When he works, he is paid 13 euros.





The protected forest of Goin Débé, Ivory Coast. Bakhary, a 52-year-old cocoa farmer from Burkina Faso.



Youngou, Ivory Coast. Boris studies late at night for his classes. He uses the porch of the family house.



Youngou, Ivory Coast. "I want to get out of here," says Donatien (left). He and his father Andrien (right) are in their 2-hectare cocoa field. 90 per cent of the farmland in Ivory Coast is owned by smallholders with properties of this size. Donatien failed his civil service exams last year and will not be able to retake them this year due to lack of family money.



Man, Ivory Coast. In a store run by a cocoa cooperative. On the left, Malians unload bags that are then weighed and loaded onto the truck.

La foto in alto a destra della Scala  
Western Ivory Coast. Burkanibé  
(inhabitants of Burkina Fasu) open  
cocoa pods in the protected forest of  
Goin Débé. Each day they move to the  
fields of one of their group members  
in order to harvest their pods.

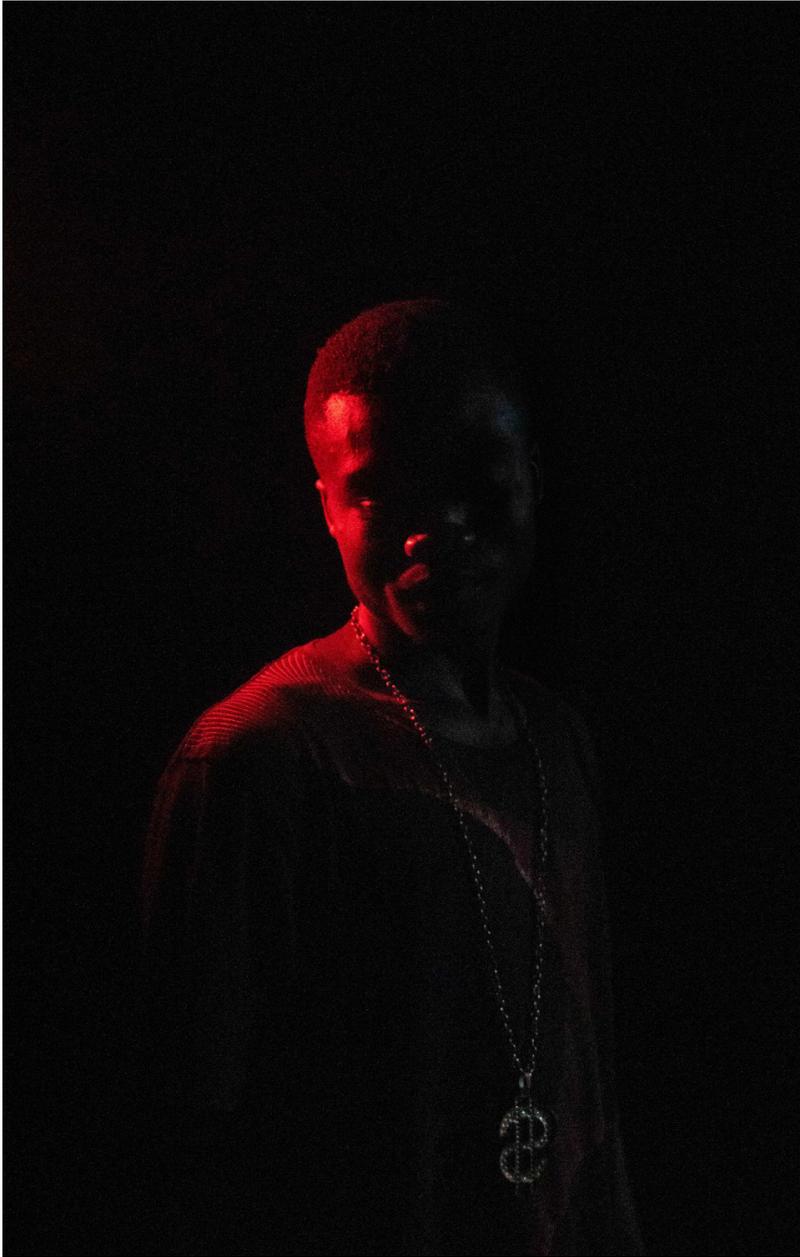




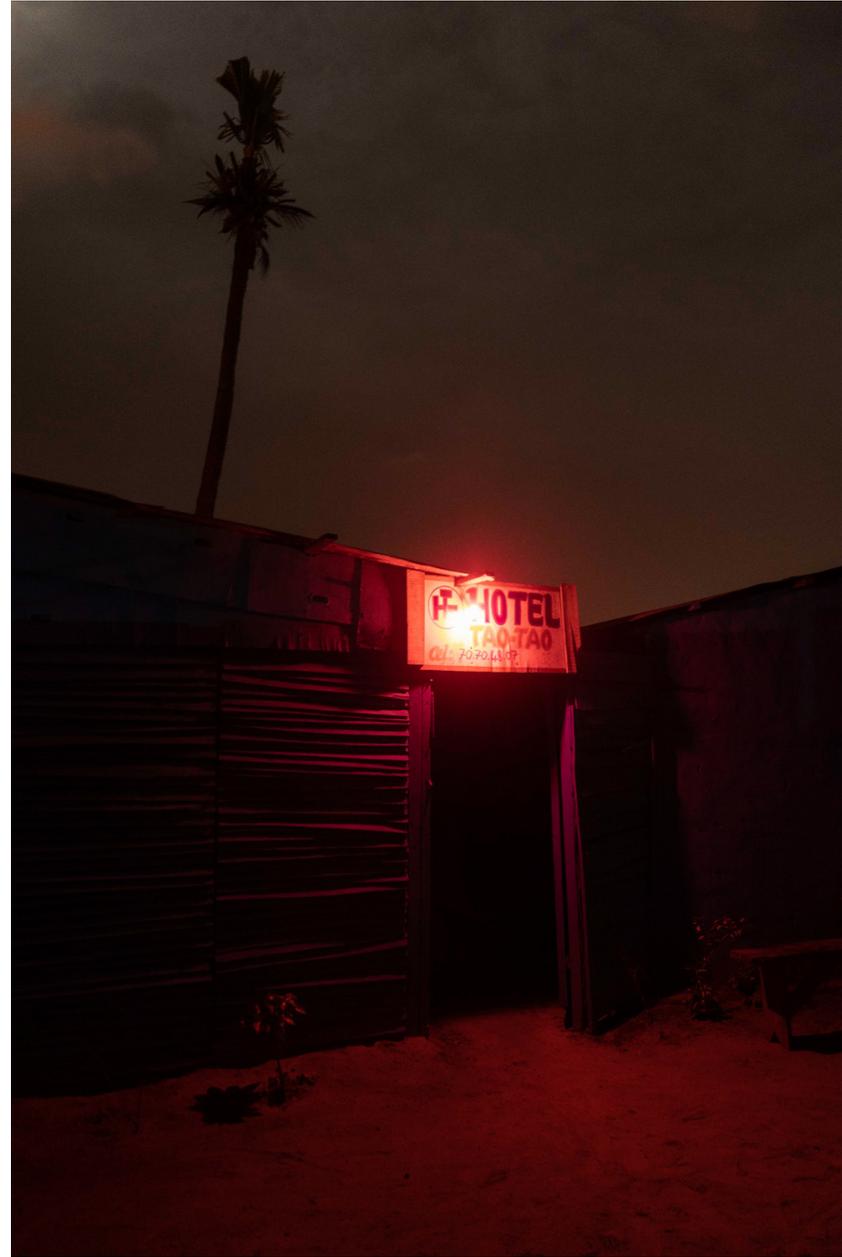
The cocoa port of San Pedro, Ivory Coast. The SEMPA card of one of the dock workers. SEMPA is the interface between the dock workers and logisticians. It ensures that the port's load capacity is respected. The dock workers are waiting for the phone call that will set things in motion.



The area around Man, Ivory Coast. "I have to keep breathing through the mask even after I've finished pumping" says 19-year-old Boris between coughs. He has been spraying phytosanitary products – and other toxic products (including glyphosate) - in the cocoa field since he was 15. "If the wind turns, it comes back to me and it stings me hard."



The area around Man, Ivory Coast. "It's going to sting me for the next 24 hours," says Boris, who is 19 years old. He has been spraying phytosanitary products in the cocoa field since he was 15.



The Bardot neighborhood in San Pedro (Ivory Coast), the world's largest cocoa port. This neighborhood used to be the biggest slum in all of western Africa, and it hosts most of the cocoa dock workers.



On the outskirts of a planter's camp in the Goin Dèbé forest, Ivory Coast. Large roads have been cut through the forest for truck traffic. In order to facilitate the growth of cocoa trees, large trees are burned to allow light to filter through. 90 per cent of Ivory Coast's primary forest has been destroyed.



Voungoue, Ivory Coast. Cedric is Andrien's youngest son. It's Sunday and he's not working, but tomorrow he will go out into the field. He should have gone back to school but schools are closed on account of post-election insecurity. In 2015 researchers at Tulane University estimated that two million children were working in the cocoa fields in Ivory Coast and Ghana.



Man, Ivory Coast. A Malian worker on the top of a cocoa pile in a warehouse.

At the port of San Pedro (Ivory Coast), the world's largest cocoa port, the dock workers are waiting for their shift to begin. They have to clock in every morning at 6 a.m. in order to hope for a job during the day. They will wait in the vicinity of the port until 6:30 p.m. Some 1200 dock workers load cocoa during the season, which is from October to March.





Abdoulaye, a Dozo hunter, keeps an eye on all the trucks that have been parked here for the night.



Ivory Coast. A truck brings back bags of beans to Bloléquin.



Paré, a Burkanibé (an inhabitant of Burkina Faso) dock worker, walks among the pile of containers in the port of San Pedro (Ivory Coast), the largest cocoa port in the world. He is a team leader and a union member, and fights for the rights of those colleagues who are employed on a daily basis.

