

**Scene on Radio: Capitalism**  
**Episode 10: The Extracted**  
**Transcript**

**John Biewen:** Ellen, silly question for you. Do you like chocolate?

**Ellen McGirt:** (Laughs.) Oh, yes. I like chocolate in all its forms. How about you, John?

**John Biewen:** Yes. Love me especially some good dark chocolate. And I've bought my share over the years, often from a certain Swiss company that I won't name. Although, yes, you know, in my household, we've sometimes gone for the chocolate bars from less famous brands that feature the Fair Trade label – meaning they claim to pay the cocoa growers a decent price.

**Ellen McGirt:** Well, good on you and your household, John. I appreciate you for shopping you that way. I guess I don't know as much as I'd like to know about the global chocolate marketplace — but my guess is we're about to learn all about it.

**John Biewen:** Yeah. And after hearing this reporting that we're about to share, um, my chocolate shopping will never be the same.

## Music

**Ellen McGirt:** Early in this series, we had a lot to say about the relationship between capitalism and colonialism. The European countries that revved capitalism into motion a few hundred years ago did so using riches that they'd extracted, often using force, from countries in Africa, Asia, and the New World.

**John Biewen:** Yeah. "Colonial loot," as economist Jayati Ghosh called it. Adam Smith, the great economic thinker of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, wasn't quite that blunt, but he wrote that the colonizing powers used their superior weaponry to "commit with impunity every sort of injustice..."

**Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (voiceover):** ...they were enabled to commit with impunity every sort of injustice in these remote countries.

**Ellen McGirt:** Now, the era of gunboat colonialism and conquest did come to an end. And most of the former colonies of the Western European powers gained independence through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. But that leaves a big question.

**John Biewen:** Yes. Did the fundamental economic reality – rich, capitalist countries extracting wealth from what folks now call the Global South – did that ever change? Or does it continue today?

Theme music

**John Biewen:** From the Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University, this is Scene on Radio Season 7: Capitalism. Episode 10. I'm John Biewen.

**Ellen McGirt:** And I'm Ellen McGirt. This season we've been telling the story of capitalism from its beginnings to the present. In episodes to come, we'll turn to the question of what to do about our economic system now that many people, the world over, believe capitalism in its current form is doing more harm than good.

**John Biewen:** In this episode: A visit to West Africa and Western Europe to look at some hard realities about the chocolate trade, among other things. Our guest producer will be familiar to folks who listened to our 5<sup>th</sup> Season, on the climate crisis, in which she took us to Nigeria. Welcome back, Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Thanks, John. I'm glad to be back on the podcast.

**Ellen McGirt:** Ugochi, you're Nigerian, born and raised, now living in Europe, right?

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** That's right.

**Ellen McGirt:** And I have to ask: do you like chocolate?

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Of course! Of course I love chocolates. But growing up in Nigeria, I only saw chocolates when someone came back from abroad, like my father who traveled a lot to Europe for business. For most Nigerians, chocolates, like so many” good” things, came from outside Africa. We had no idea that the key ingredient needed to make it came from my country or continent. Until this day, over 39 years after I discovered chocolates, millions in Nigeria and the African continent still believe this.

**John Biewen:** Hmm. I suppose I grew up thinking chocolate originated in Hershey, Pennsylvania. There are so many things that most of us in the rich north take for granted, from that daily cup of coffee to the rubber in our car tires, to the gold and diamonds in our jewelry, if we have that stuff. You know – what else?

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** The minerals in your mobile phone and in your electric car battery – so many commodities that make modern life possible come from places like Africa and South America.

**Ellen McGirt:** Ugochi, Nigeria gained independence before you were born, in 1960. That was after about 75 years of British colonial rule. Now, how has this been for you?

How have you experienced the allegedly “post-colonial” relationship between the European powers and African countries like yours?

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** I mean, in many ways, it seems like there are mighty fingers from outside whose support is needed before important decisions that affect my country can be taken.

**John Biewen:** So, fingers belonging to people in Europe or the United States?

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** That’s right. Sometimes those ties are obvious, like in the extraction of minerals to serve the needs of rich foreign countries, and the wars, destruction and death that the scramble for these resources have caused. But some others are quite subtle. A couple of real sore points for Africans? One is the amount of money we have to pay just to cross the borders of the EU, the UK, and the USA. In 2023 alone, the EU took in 130 million euros from *rejected* applications – not all applications just rejected applications, with people from Africa and Asia paying 90 percent of that amount.

**John Biewen:** Ouch. You’ve also talked about this thing where, if you as an African – from a former British colony – if you want to attend a university in the UK or some other English-speaking country, including the U.S., you have to take a test to prove you speak English?

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** And the cost of taking that test is more than double the Nigerian minimum wage. The UK government took in almost 800 million U.S. dollars from the language exam between 2016 and 2021. And even if you pass it, like myself, I have to take it again every two years to prove that I can still speak English! So, it expires after two years. The home office has exempted some English-speaking countries but not one out of 28 Britain-colonized English-speaking African countries is exempt.

**Ellen McGirt:** Speaking of crossing borders, migration from the global south is a huge issue in the United States as well as in Europe. We have endless debates about the so-called “border crisis” and what immigration policy should be in rich countries. But we tend to ignore the question of why so many people want to cross those borders.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** The “problem” of migration is directly related to the exploitative, neo-colonial relationship between the rich global north and countries in the south. Millions of people who can’t scratch out a decent life for themselves in African countries, and other nations in the Global South, hit the road in desperation, or get on any boat they can find, in search of a better life.

**Ellen McGirt:** Ugochi, you have a story about a couple of those desperate migrants, and what became of them. Could you share it please?

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Yes, yes. One morning in the summer of 2023, my phone beeped. It was a WhatsApp message from my friend Erna. When I opened the link, the image I saw there really shocked me: a photo of a woman and her child laying side by side on the hot desert sand, dead. You know, that image will stay etched in my memory forever. At that moment, I looked at my own young daughter. The woman and her child turned out to be thirty-four-year-old Fati Dosso and her six-year-old daughter, Marie. Fati and her partner Pato grew up in two West Africa countries – Cote d’Ivoire and Cameroon. Both are rich in resources. They export billions of dollars in natural resources each year, but many residents of those countries live at the very bottom of the economic ladder despite their countries’ wealth. As young adults, Fati and Pato independently decided to try the very dangerous journey to Europe, and like many who try to make that passage, they headed to Libya in the hopes of eventually crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Italy. Fati and Pato met in a Libyan refugee camp, and Marie was born there. You know, they actually failed five times to get to Europe, but as Marie got older, they wanted her to have a chance at an education and to learn the French language, which is spoken in Cote d’Ivoire and Cameroon. So in 2023, they once again decided to try to cross the Tunisian desert to catch a boat to Italy.

**John Biewen:** And obviously, something went badly wrong.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Yes. The same week that they set out, the Tunisian government signed an agreement with the European Union to stem what they called “irregular” migration, and began violently expelling immigrants from African countries. When the family finally made it to the Tunisian city of Ben-Gardane, police arrested them, then handed them over to border guards, who took the family back into the desert with no water or food in 100-degree heat. The father, Pato, who was exhausted and thought he couldn’t go any further, so he asked Fati to push on with Marie to at least save their child. Sadly, Pato would never meet his wife and daughter again, alive or dead. Both Fati and Marie died of thirst in the desert, Marie lying close to her dead mother. You know, as a mother, I could not imagine the deep cry of a thirsty child and the pain of a mother who could do absolutely nothing for her dying child.

**Ellen McGirt:** What a terrible story, of these pointless deaths. But Pato survived?

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Uh-he was eventually rescued by two Sudanese men who gave him water. Three weeks after the death of his wife and daughter, he got the chance to see their final resting place, a cemetery in the west of Libya. But really, the question is, why do Fati and Pato, and so many others like them, feel they have to flee their homes in search of a better life in countries that are not as rich in resources as their own?

**Music**

**John Biewen:** You went to Cote d'Ivoire—Ivory Coast to a lot of us Yanks—to find answers. Take it away, Ugochi.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Fati's country, Côte d'Ivoire, is the largest exporter of cocoa beans in the world. Globally, chocolate is a 140-billion-dollar industry. Most Ivorians work in some sort of agricultural industry, growing bananas, rubber, and coffee, but a big majority—about 85%—of farmers make their money from cocoa. Cote d'Ivoire is such an important hub for cocoa that many multinational companies like Nestle have offices in the country.

**Sound: Abidjan street – cars, horn**

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** In parts of the capital, Abidjan, ongoing massive development is evident. With hundreds of foreign companies and stores, it is hard to tell that the country went through a post-election crisis in 2011 that required a UN military intervention. Cote D'Ivoire even hosted the African Cup of Nations, a huge football event, in January 2024. However, a big driver of this economy is not here in the

city, but on farms outside of Abidjan. I headed to Afféry, a rural cocoa farming community north of the city.

**Sound:** Voices

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** The farmers have created a cooperative called Gedeon of Affery. Today, they are meeting on the co-op's front porch. The bungalow has a little office space and a cocoa storage room. There are about 10 men and two women seated on long wooden benches. Kouame Marius, the group's agricultural practices officer, is speaking.

**Kouame Marius, in French**

**Voiceover:** Thank you for coming. This morning, I would like to discuss the Café-Cocoa Council project regarding identifying producers with you. This concerns all cacao producers in Côte d'Ivoire. It involves producer cards, identifying every cocoa producer in Côte d'Ivoire.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** The conversation is about a new pilot program. Each cocoa farmer will get one of these cards, but the talk is not going smoothly. The farmers have

many questions. Kouame explains that the government wants to make the system work better for farmers.

**Kouame Marius, French**

**Voiceover:** We want to exist as all workers, all entrepreneurs. From now on, we will manage our production, and our cocoa farms as a company. So to do this, you need the tools that accompany it. This card is a Visa card. Wherever you are, you can withdraw money. If you have money on your card, you can withdraw it. We want to migrate from physical to digital. It avoids so much fraud. This is so beneficial for the cocoa farmer.

**Sound:** Voices at cooperative

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Yapo Seka Claude heads the cooperative. He was born and raised in this cacao farming community. He later moved to the city for education and returned to fight for the survival of his community's way of life, hence the name, Gideon.

**Yapo Seka Claude, French**

**Voiceover:** Gideon is a name that we have given our cooperative it is part of the Bible. Alluding to the fight of Gideon, God said to him, you are the youngest of the family, but it is with you that I will fight. And we were inspired by that and said, we have nothing, but with this idea, we can become something. So we got together.

Music

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Claude now questions his decision to come back to the countryside. The cacao business is not as profitable as he had envisioned. By the way, you will hear cocoa and cacao used interchangeably. Cacao refers to the raw seeds harvested from the trees while cocoa is created after the beans have been ground. Beda Valentin, a member of the cooperative explains why times are hard now.

**Beda Valentine, French**

**Voiceover:** This year, the biggest difficulty is climate change. Climate change has a lot of effects on the plantations. For the past four months, almost five, there has been no rain. It is very hot. The plants die. There is no water in the campsites.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** The dry conditions weaken the trees and allow diseases like Swollen Shoot to flourish. There's no cure.

**Beda Valentine, French**

**Voiceover:** We are looking for a solution. The only solution we have today is to cut the infected areas. When we cut the infected areas, it is the loss of cocoa beans. It reduces our living conditions. When the beans are cut, we have less production of it. So it creates a lot of problems.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Fewer trees means less money and creates a cycle of poverty that affects everyone in the family. After the meeting ends, they take me to the storage room where they have a few bags of cocoa arranged, and a weighing scale. We soon head to a farm about twenty miles from the cooperative's office. Our car can't manage the rugged terrain so we hop on the farmer's truck.

**Sound:** on truck with wind, music playing

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Forty-five-year-old Dao Salimata is on hand to welcome me. Walking on a mountain of dry cocoa leaves, she leads us into the farm where her husband and children are at work.

**Sound:** Footsteps on cacao leaves

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Young cocoa trees live under the shade of other trees like banana and cassava. Cocoa pods grow directly off the trunk. They are the shape of an American football with many beans inside. But I can see that many of these trees are not thriving.

**Sound:** tree being chopped, sharpening of knife

**Dao Salimata, French**

**Voiceover:** We have a lot of problems. It's hot right now, there is no rain. It's hard for us. Cocoa is sold at pathetic prices, and we are suffering. We can get by if cocoa is sold at a price that suits producers. At the moment there is no cocoa and the money is gone.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** In Côte d'Ivoire, the government sets the price paid to the farmers and that, says Dao Salimata, is where the problem starts.

**Dao Salimata, French**

**Voiceover:** Without consulting us, they tell us that the price of cocoa is 1000 FCFA per kilogram. 1 kilogram of rice costs 600 FCFA, soap costs 500 FCFA. 1000 FCFA can't do anything. They should ask our opinion before giving the price of cocoa. It's not good for us. We want to be asked before deciding the cocoa's price.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Salimata and her husband have worked as farmers for decades. They say they wish to remain in their village but say they do not wish for their children to inherit the family business. However, their daughter has other plans. She can see herself working in the cocoa fields after she finishes her education.

**Girl, French**

**Voiceover:** Yes, Yes, if I see I can come because my parents taught me a lot of things. So I can come and work in the cocoa fields. Yes, if I don't find a job, I can come back here to work the land.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Quickly, her parents shut her down. “She is just ignorant and young”, they say. She has no idea how commodity prices work in the global market. Her mother says she can’t stay here.

**Girl, French:**

**Voiceover:** Yes, I can be a civil servant and work the land.

**Father:** No.

**Girl, French**

**Voiceover:** Just because I work in an office doesn't mean I don't want to work on the land. Things can change if the government decides to help and do research to combat climate change.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Walking further into the farm, we see another mother with her 3-year-old daughter tied to her back and bearing some farm produce on her head.

She tells me her name is Yao Adeline; she's 37 years old. She and her daughter remind me of Fati and Marie. She works on this cacao farm but says that life is hard here. Just like Fati, she wants a better life for her daughter. She sees no future here.

### **Yao Adeline, French**

**Voiceover:** If the children stay here, I don't know what they will do. I'd rather help them go to school quickly so that they can get a diploma and do something.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Standing here, I can clearly see why they wish for a better life for their children. The roads are bad, there is no potable water, the education here is poor and the farmers cannot meet their own needs. A similar situation exists for farmers in other cocoa producing countries in West Africa such as Ghana, Nigeria and Cameroon. If the cocoa business is a multi-billion-dollar industry, where is all the money? According to the World Economic Forum In 2022, the retail and manufacturing sectors garnered almost 80% of the revenue, which is telling: retail and manufacturing of chocolate products happen largely outside of Africa in countries such as the Netherlands, Germany, and Belgium. Cocoa farmers meanwhile make about 7% of global chocolate industry sales, and often are paid less than \$1 a day. Given that the

World Bank sets the extreme poverty threshold at \$1.90, cocoa farmers are some of the poorest of the poor.

**Bart Van Besien:** Cocoa is a risky business like most agro commodities.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Bart Van Besien is a policy advisor for Oxfam, Belgium. In spring 2024, Oxfam published a report on the inequality in the cocoa supply chain.

**Bart Van Besien:** Prices can vary. There can be diseases of the crop, it's hard to predict how much there will be produced. And that's why companies have all kinds of tools to protect against those risks.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Financial tools, such as futures contracts, allow big trading companies like Cargill to hedge against the swings in the cocoa harvest and sell at a profit. From there, companies like Hershey's turn cocoa into chocolate. The Oxfam report says that in 2023 alone, Lindt, Mondelēz, and Nestlé together made nearly \$4 billion in profits from chocolate sales. Hershey's candy profits added up to \$2 billion last year. And the collective fortunes of the Ferrero and Mars families, who own the two

biggest private chocolate corporations, grew to \$160 billion during the same period. Most cocoa farmers, however, do not have any way to protect themselves against a bad harvest, and they have little negotiating power.

**Bart Van Besien:** I think what happens often in supply chains that depend on extremely vulnerable people is that they are being squeezed by everyone on top, both by companies and by governments.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Over the years, the governments of Ghana and Cote D'ivoire have negotiated so-called “differentials” with cocoa trading companies to try to stabilize the price that farmers get for their harvest. A differential adds an additional cost to the base price. One differential is tied to the country of origin, another is for premium beans, and there’s a fair-trade differential. And although the complex supply chain depends on getting good cocoa beans from farmers, Van Besien says chocolate companies typically put their focus not on the farms but on the market.

**Bart Van Besien:** The main worry of companies is not to have paid a cent more than their competitor has. So that's their worry. So, what we really want, to introduce the concept of human rights in the way businesses are being run. So

you don't only look at your competitor, you also look at what your obligation as a company is to respect human rights and that obligation is to pay at least a fair price.

Music

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** In 2019, the governments of Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire negotiated a Living Income Differential – or LID – on behalf of farmers, adding \$400 to each metric ton of cocoa sold. And yet Oxfam and other organizations that track the cocoa supply chain say that the LID has not helped farmers. They say companies have been able to effectively bypass the Living Income Differential by lowering the differentials in other areas. The poverty that farmers face has consequences, says Van Besien.

**Bart Van Besien:** When you don't get a decent living out of cocoa production you will be highly tempted to sell your lands to people who are willing to devastate the whole area and just create a big mud pool out of the whole area just to get some gold out of it. So, in the end, it's about human exploitation, and it's about natural exploitation.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** It is no wonder that young people flee not just their rural villages but their countries. Van Besien says he doesn't know how much migration is connected to cocoa farmers, but....

**Bart Van Besien:** I'm from Belgium. So chocolate is a big business in my country. And then to see that there are Ivorians where our cocoa comes from, right, to see Ivorians risking their lives to come to Europe – how is it possible that we get our valuable cocoa from their country and they're leaving their country? To come to my country?

Music ... fades out

[BREAK]

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Some locals, in Côte d'Ivoire, are working hard to claim a bigger slice of the chocolate industry. Here in the center of Abidjan is a company called Chocoladrom. The founder, Fulbert Koffi Evans, grew up on one of the farms, but

became a journalist. That career choice opened his eyes to how the chocolate market, as it currently operates, fails his people. Determined to do things differently, he started his own company to take local beans and turn them into chocolate.

**Fulbert Koffi Evans:** We are the top world's cocoa producer country, but more than 70% go abroad without being transformed. So these small units, like the Chokoladrome, are initiatives that are private initiatives to transform on the spot to create local consumption. And if we become numerous, it will be a dynamic sector and others will be interested. Then the chocolate will be produced here and then exported instead of the contrary.

**Sound:** Rain

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** During our interview, it began to rain very heavily. It had not rained in a while and I could only imagine the happiness of the farmers in Affery and the rest of the country.

For now, much of the raw cocoa that leaves Cote d'Ivoire arrives at European ports such as the Port of Amsterdam in the Netherlands, the world's largest *importer* of cocoa beans. In 2020, the Dutch imported one quarter of the cocoa produced in the world – almost 900 thousand tons.

**Sound:** Amsterdam Centraal Station

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** I am in Amsterdam's busy central station. As usual, millions of tourists are here this summer. Symbols of the country's history of international trade are visible at every turn. On the wall outside the station is a painting of ships and sailors at sea. Since the 1500s, Dutch sailors have traversed the world to trade commodities and resources. In the 1700s, the Dutch empire stretched from Europe to parts of Asia, Africa and the Americas. Between 1596 and 1829, Dutch slave traders transported about half a million kidnapped Africans across the Atlantic. The Dutch also ventured into the cocoa trade, becoming the first country to mass-produce cocoa powder and also the first to import raw chocolate.

**Sound: on ferry**

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** The ferry ride across the river from Amsterdam centraal to the Nord is filled with people. As I walk along the shores of one of Amsterdam's ports, I reflect on the contrast between life in the Netherlands and in Cote d'Ivoire. It's a huge world of difference.

**Sound: Port**

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** The cocoa-grinding industry in the Netherlands is the world's second largest after Ivory Coast. When the beans arrive at the ports, companies process them into chocolates which are shipped across the world. There are several brands of the product in stores across the country including here in Bijlmer. The construction of this area for the Dutch middle class was completed in the 1960s. However, the big high-rise flats were rejected by those it was built for –so it soon became home for immigrants and for social housing. Bijlmer is seen by the Dutch as the first and only Dutch ghetto and a poor black neighborhood. It used to be synonymous with crime, drugs, unemployment and illegal immigrants; the chief of police of the Bijlmer district once described it as a “national disaster area.” Today, despite its vibrant multicultural community of 130 nationalities, it is still seen by many in the country as a place to avoid. There are several shops selling products and services that are in demand among immigrants. One of them is this restaurant called Ogiri that employs immigrant workers. The owner, Alfred Ade Olokun, tells me about growing up in his uncle's cocoa farm in the west of Nigeria.

**Alfred Ade Olokun:** He managed to raise his kids, built his own house through his cocoa income, he is an old man now. Unfortunately, his children did not take it on. That is what you get in those parts of Nigeria, in the villages. When I went there five years ago, the village was empty. The young ones have gone to the city. They do not want to continue with the farming that they grew up with. The

amount of effort put into cocoa and the amount generated, is not – it's not well balanced.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Behind his shop, I found some Ghanaian hair stylists. One of them, Barkisu, told me about her journey to Europe, which started 17 years ago when she arrived in Italy.

**Barkisu:** It makes me sad. I feel sad, sometimes I feel angry. Because it's all due to our leaders. Because of management and because of that we are here, still slaving ourselves in this age and time. I think we are supposed to be back home enjoying our resources that we have back home, but it is unfortunate that we are here so thinking about it makes me sad.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Patrick traveled from Ghana through Senegal as a stowaway. He risked being thrown overboard if discovered.

**Patrick:** When they see you, they can kill you, throw you in the water or maybe you survive. Nobody knows. It took us 11 days from Senegal to Spain. So from there, based in Spain, start to go to school, learned the language, til I finish, get the documents, maybe a passport. Now I'm here.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** They all have things in common - the wish that more of their countrymen are able to thrive in their home country and not make the treacherous journey, and the longing to return and live a comfortable life at home.

**Barkisu:** I feel happy. I feel at peace when I am there.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Their wishes are valid but may not be realizable soon as many developing nations contend with poor leadership. Often, foreigners ask them to go back home and fight to improve their nation, but it is not that simple, even for countries in a democracy. Presidents like Paul Biya who governs Cameroon from Switzerland, and other politicians like him have often taken power illegitimately and stayed in power with backing by the West. They stay in power no matter how much the citizens object or protest.

**Achike Chude:** You cannot have a country that is abundantly blessed with all manners of resources, and yet the citizens continent wide are wallowing in absolute poverty. It simply tells you that there has been a failure of political leadership in the African continent.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Achike Chude, a Nigerian political analyst, says that the West has always determined the kind of political leadership that will favor them. In the past, he says, some western countries forcefully cajoled African countries into doing their bidding, but now it's done more subtly through elections.

**Achike Chude:** And even when elections are contentious because it is clear to everybody that such elections did not meet the minimum test for credible elections. You see some of these countries looking the other way, you know, pretending that they are not aware that there was a clear violation of the electoral process during such elections.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Achike Chude says people, especially the younger generation, are tired of the economic oppression, which is why we have seen news of military takeovers and protests in a number of West African countries.

**Achike Chude:** So if you're talking about Niger, Mali, Chad, Guinea then you're talking about France because France was a colonial overlord. And they showed their distaste and their disdain for the way the French treated them. And that's why you see this kind of revolt. So not just a revolt against France, but it's a revolt against the economic system that France imposed upon them, which is capitalism. Now, that is not to tell you that even the new people that are there are not going to practice capitalism. But even if it's going to be capitalism, it is going to be capitalism on their own terms, and under their own definition of what they think that capitalism should be.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Global organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, or IMF, say they exist to “promote the health of the world economy,” yet many believe they are harming the development of the countries where they operate.

Chernoh Bah is an investigative journalist at *Africanist Express* and a historian based at Brown University in the U.S. He's traced the economic corruption and mismanagement of wealth in the West African countries of Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia, and Cote d'Ivoire. His work shows how African countries, through the IMF and World Bank, are saddled with debt. Then the solutions to their economic problems are taken out of their hands and given away to foreign companies.

**Chernoh Bah:** The key here is privatization, where we are told that the state has to be displaced from its responsibility of providing social service delivery, and that responsibility is transferred to private corporations who have increasingly looted resources and deprived the state of its ability to generate money to provide education and much needed social services.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** This happens across many sectors, says Bah, such as health services, water supply, and power plants.

**Chernoh Bah:** In the case of Sierra Leone, we have looked at the privatization of electricity supply, where in the last 20 years, a World Bank and IMF and ADB program has led to the privatization of electricity where the national power authority was dismantled and new institutions were created, and also the service delivery position of electricity was handed to private corporations.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Bah says when these kinds of services get privatized, the quality of the service doesn't get better and often gets worse.

Many people in Europe don't connect the dots between the migrants arriving on their shores and anti-immigrant protests on one hand and the coffee they drink or the

chocolate they eat on the other. But there are also those who have come to understand how these things fit together. They are concerned about how their good life affects others around the world.

**Rachel Walker Konno:** I was going to primary school in the 90s. And high school in the, in the 2000s. And at that point, there was almost no education about colonial history taught in schools.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Rachel Walker Konno is part of WeMove Europe, an organization that uses petitions and legal channels to pressure big multinational companies to change.

**Rachel Walker Konno:** I think I remember only at the very end of my high school time, so that was year five or six, that we got some history on sort of the violence by Dutch colonialists in Java. But yeah, not much on slave trades. And basically, yeah, how the Netherlands was at the forefront of colonization, and how that continues in our current trade system. And to be honest, like with regards to like, yeah, the Dutch history, colonization and chocolate supply chain has only been through my own activism. So one of the campaigns we worked on was around the corporate due diligence law. And this was a legal mechanism within the European Union that would hold these companies to account so that even if they operated across multiple national lines, that there are mechanisms

to hold them to account for human rights abuses, and also environmental degradation. We don't need to just have quick fixes within capitalism, we need to completely rethink what it's centered on.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** WeMove Europe has also targeted a chocolate maker with a campaign they hope will get the company to change its practices or at least let consumers know of the company's poor track record.

**Rachel:** So, Storck is one of the largest chocolate producers in Europe. I believe, you know, the German owner is a multimillionaire. The chocolates, like mercy chocolates that they produce, are actually what people give to schoolteachers at the end of the school year. So, it's a chocolate with a very big feel-good vibe around it. And this is a company that refuses to comply to any standards against deforestation, any standards that try and prevent forced child labor, or comply with ensuring a living wage for farmers. So, they've also been a target by us in our activism.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** In 2020, President Nana Akufo-Addo of Ghana caused a stir in Switzerland, which relies on Ghana for cocoa beans. He said that pipeline may soon come to an end. The president said Ghanaians will be expanding their own chocolate making industry. This is Ghana's President speaking in Switzerland.

**Akufo-Addo:** Ghana no longer wants to be dependent on the production and export of raw materials, including cocoa beans. We intend to process more and more of our cocoa in our country, with the aim of producing more chocolate ourselves, because we believe that there can be no future prosperity for the Ghanaian people in the short, medium or long term, if we continue to maintain economic structures that are dependent on the production and export of raw materials.

**Michael Marmon-Halm:** Yes, indeed, the President did not mince words, when he mentioned that as a country, our intent is to stop sending raw cocoa beans to Europe and America for value creation. It is his dream. It is also the dream of the many, many cocoa farmers who live in Ghana, to have these beans transformed into at least if nothing at all semi-finished products, before export.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Ghanaian chocolate maker Michael Marmon-Halm has teamed up with a German chocolate maker in an effort to break the monopoly and to make the system more equitable. Their company is called FairAfric. They say their goal is to “decolonize chocolate.”

**Michael Marmon-Halm/** It won't be done overnight. It will take some time before there can be full implementation of this. But at least the President has been clear that as a country, this is our intention, and this is the direction we'll go.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** For now, the world is aware that the two *families* who own the biggest chocolate companies are richer than the two biggest cocoa-producing *nations*, Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire. The often-extreme exploitation of poor people in West Africa is driving some of them, like Pato, away from their resource rich countries. Remember, Pato is the Cameroonian man who tried to walk across the desert with his partner Fati and their daughter Marie.

**Pato (in French):** *To migrants like me who have lost their loved ones at the Tunisian-Libyan border, I want to show my solidarity with them. Because I know it is not easy...*

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** This is Pato speaking in an interview recorded in 2023. He expresses solidarity with Africans who, like him, have lost loved ones while trying to cross the desert to get to Europe. He did make it to Italy, but the traumatic experience,

including the loss of his partner and daughter, took a toll on him mentally and physically. Pato refuses to grant any more interviews as he struggles to get legal status in Italy, learn the language, and get a job. He will also have to wear a thick skin to endure comments from people who would ask him to “go back home” while he mourns the loss of his family.

In a different world, with different kinds of economic relations, Pato and his family probably wouldn't have tried such a desperate and fatal journey.

**John Biewen:** Ugochi, thank you for this reporting.

**Ellen McGirt:** Just extraordinary. The story of Pato, and his partner Fati and their daughter Marie who died in the north African desert – it's just unbearable.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** An experience like theirs is almost impossible to imagine if you haven't lived it yourself.

**John Biewen:** You know, those of us living safe and comfortable lives in rich countries like the U.S., even when we do manage to pay attention to tragic situations like these, and to feel something for the people so desperate that they make these dangerous journeys to try to get to a better life – if we get that far, we still often fail to make the connections. I plead so guilty to this.

**Ellen McGirt:** I plead guilty as well. And so, the connections between these desperate migrants and the global economic system that creates the conditions they're trying to escape from...

**John Biewen:** Yeah, and specifically, the connection to some of the very products we happily consume in our daily lives.

**Ellen McGirt:** So, Ugochi, how should we think about this? Do we stop eating chocolate and drinking coffee?

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Renouncing chocolate is probably not what these cocoa growers would want us to do. Sure, it's good to support companies that are paying a better price for these commodities, but the real solution is systemic. We need to change the power dynamic so corporations in rich countries don't have all the leverage that allows them to make big money processing and marketing things like chocolate while paying so little to the people who grow the key ingredient.

**John Biewen:** It's not just the market that creates this power imbalance, right? Ugochi, there are experts who've explained that the currency that countries use in some former French colonies has lingering colonial effects.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Yes. Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, and a dozen other countries in West and Central Africa are in what's called the Franc Zone. Their currency, called the CFA Franc, is controlled by France and tied to the Euro. Some economists say this is why countries in that zone can't advance economically. In a fiery interview on Jeune Afrique, French economist and author Thomas Piketty reminded the audience that the currency was created after slavery was abolished to compensate French slave traders for their losses. He described the continued use of the name and currency in 2021 as an anomaly. For a few years now, some leaders in these countries have been debating whether and how they can decouple from the CFA, as, you're right, it's seen as a symbol of colonialism. The history and the arguments are quite complex, but the main criticism is that these African countries don't have the monetary and fiscal independence to run their own economies – and the fact that most of them are so poor and still falling further behind is evidence that the CFA Franc is not serving them well.

**Ellen McGirt:** A couple of episodes ago we heard Esteban Kelly, here in the U.S., talking about the IMF and the World Bank, and the role they've played in the global south since they were founded at the end of World War Two. Ostensibly, from the perspective of the rich global north – led by the United States – those organizations were created to help with the “development” of poorer countries. But as many critics have argued, and shown, the policies these lenders insisted on have brought poorer

countries into the global economy in ways that really help to facilitate more extraction from those countries by the very nations that once colonized them.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Yes. Those institutions have generally insisted on open markets for western corporations, and austerity and privatization at home – which means that some wealth does get generated by these foreign investments in places like Africa, but very few people benefit from that wealth.

**John Biewen:** Last time you made a piece for us, Ugochi, in Season 5, we talked about the oil industry in your home country, Nigeria.

**Ugochi Anyaka-Oluigbo:** Yes, we're the top oil-producing country in Africa. But has that made Nigerians rich? Not at all. Most of the people who live in the oil-rich region, the Niger Delta, live in extreme poverty. And meanwhile the main oil companies operating there, Royal Dutch Shell, Exxon Mobile, Eni, Chevron, Oando and others have left the delta one of the most polluted places on the planet. This is a place where people had an economy and a way of life based on fishing from that river, for centuries. That's been destroyed.

Music

**John Biewen:** Thanks again, Ugochi. Ellen, remember back in Episode 3, we heard about the study estimating that Britain had extracted 45 trillion dollars from India alone, over two and a half centuries of colonial rule?

**Ellen McGirt:** I do.

**John Biewen:** So, here in our time, experts debate how to measure the amount of wealth extraction still going on between the rich global north and the south. One estimate comes from the scholar Jason Hickel, who we've heard in this series. Along with several colleagues, he did a study on the question. They did an analysis of global trade, and they estimate that every year, the global north drains 10.8 trillion dollars from the global south. How?

**Ellen McGirt:** My goodness, John. Yes, how. And I get it – this doesn't go down the way it did a couple hundred years ago, through military conquest, right? But through the kind of exchange we just heard about from Ugochi, in the form of the chocolate trade.

**John Biewen:** Yes. They found, for example, that about two billion acres of land in the global south is used in service of corporations in the global north – to grow stuff for us.

**Jason Hickel:** Now, to put that in perspective, that is twice the size of India. So that amount of land could be used to provide nutritious food for up to 6 billion people if it was mobilized domestically around provisioning food for local populations, but instead is mobilized to produce things like sugar for Coca Cola and beef for McDonald's in global supply chains with consumption occurring in the global north. So, it's like a huge – it's a huge appropriation of southern land for consumption in the global north.

**John Biewen:** The same thing goes for natural resources – oil and minerals and on and on – and labor. Vast quantities of all of those things, in the global south, being devoted to producing stuff for those of us here in the rich north. To take just one more example – look up the mining of cobalt, for mobile phone and electric car batteries, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the death and destruction that labor leads to.

**Ellen McGirt:** And we don't see it as colonialism or imperialism because this is just business, right? People buying and selling stuff and shipping it across the sea – or investing in production overseas, employing people in other countries to make stuff for you. But that leaves out the power differential, the fact that rich countries get to set the terms in all kinds of ways. They control the international trade and lending institutions, like the IMF and the World Bank, they set the prices, and they control the currencies, whether it's the dollar or the euro or the CFA Franc.

**John Biewen:** Yes. So, to boil it down, when these business transactions take place between the rich north and the lower-income south, folks from the north get to pay discount prices for everything – land, materials, labor ... and charge high prices for everything they're selling.

#### Music

**John Biewen:** Next time, in two weeks: We turn at last to the response. Solutions. In several episodes. Starting with, how much better could capitalism be?

#### Credits

This episode was reported by Ugochi Anyaka Oluigbo and written by Ugochi and Loretta Williams. Recording assistance from Aïssatou Fofana and Bakary Traoré. Our story editor this season is Loretta Williams. Voiceovers by Axel Kacoutié and Aïssatou Fofana. Music by Michelle Osis, Lili Haydn, Chris Westlake, Alex Symcox, and Goodnight Lucas. Music consulting by Joe Augustine of Narrative Music. Our website is [sceneonradio.org](http://sceneonradio.org), where we post transcripts. This season is produced in partnership with Imperative 21. The show is distributed by PRX. Scene on Radio comes to you from the Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University.