

Oral History Interview Transcript

Course Title: Energy in World Civilizations

Institution: University of Chicago

Student Name: Yasmine Baldo

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ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

Speakers: Suliman Baldo (interviewee), Yasmine Baldo (interviewer)

Interview

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Transcription Service: [Otter.AI](#), edited by Yasmine Baldo

Yasmine 0:01

So I guess to start, I'll just explain, like the purpose of the interview. So there's an archive through the University Library where, um, this is a novel class also, it's called Energy in World Civilizations. So we've studied I guess, energy systems through time beginning with a history and Aboriginal Australians and how, indigenous populations kind of conceived of their relationship with the world and then kind of extrapolating that to, globalized trade networks and, the history of like the Industrial Revolution and fiscal military, state complexes and how, the need for different food systems or energy supplies has kind of propelled, different wars. Just learning the relationship between social and economic conditions and the need for food as energy and what I said here was that, I think it's still recording but yeah, it is.

So what I said here was that I guess the prefacing was to create a nuanced and spatial temporal understanding of of your individual experience or conception of energy sources throughout your life. So in that I would hope to understand who you are through a different lens, but also to get a different I guess reflection on your career also and how that has kind of shaped your understanding of energy history and or energy systems over time. And of course, I would, do I have your informed consent to—

Suliman 1:53

Oh yes, you definitely have my informed consent. Okay. Please to also respond to your questions and give you my understanding of the issues you will be raising okay.

Yasmine 2:06

So yeah, I was just wanting to say, you don't need to disclose anything you don't wish, you so that I do have your informed consent, because some of the questions might be personal. So you

can just share what you think is relevant to the discussion. And then just to clarify by energy, I'm referring to a broad entity of things from the organic energy derived from the sun, photosynthesis like plants, to the food we eat, like our biological energy systems and caloric needs. And to all the way to the agricultural industry to nuclear, nuclear power. Surface mining of minerals, like fossil fuel energy that's derived from below us. So yeah, there's a lot that's implied by energy, but I think hopefully the questions will kind of steer us in the right direction. But just for the introduction, because this will be shared a link with my class and my professor, I just want you to clarify, your name, where you were born, what year if you choose to share, what you studied in school, and anything you think is relevant for context of who you are.

Suliman 3:16

Gonna pick my voice from here? Yes?

Yasmine

Yeah!

Suliman 3:20

My name is Suliman Baldo. I am originally from Sudan. My career is one which is not a formal, professional career as I studied French, taught French at the University of Khartoum back in the mid 1980s. However, because of the tragedies of successive wars, disasters, man made and nation made disasters. I found myself very rapidly drifting from the ivory tower of academia, into grappling with problems related to issues of communities that are affected by disasters, whether manmade or natural disasters.

And therefore, while I was still at university and teaching French, I also was volunteering at the civil society activist and organizer in organizations, local community development organizations that sought to support communities facing the consequences of natural disasters such as drought, such as, the destruction of their environment by ill advised development projects, such as conflicts that affect them and disrupt their livelihoods and so on. So that's, that's where I come from. I said, in the late 1980s, as Director for Oxfam America, in Sudan, on the Horn of Africa, and in that capacity, I was a funding agency for other civil society organizations than the ones I

directed, and therefore came to know about their priorities, their programs and interventions to support communities in fragile environments who are exposed to instability as a result of these disasters. And later on, I work directly in supporting humanitarian aid humanitarian relief organizations, in providing the most vulnerable communities, ones that have run out for example of the food needs with life saving assistance to maintain them until they are back again able to depend on themselves. So from this experience, I would say that I had a practical involvement when I say practical, it's not through studying it in school, for instance, in college, but by directly dealing with the problems of communities that are fragile, environments that are fragile, and how certain interventions could help support these communities and reverse the damage done to their environments. I think this is the part of my experience, which is relevant to your line of questioning.

Yasmine 6:48

So I'll ask a couple questions later about how your career relates to it but I kind of also want to see you as an individual, how you kind of conceived of energy growing up in Sudan and moving around throughout your life and taking, obviously a lot of trips throughout your vast career experiences. So I just want to ask, what your your life was like growing up and how you spent your childhood in Sudan and permeating childhood memories that kind of strike out to you as relevant to that?

Suliman 7:22

So, my own experience with energy and the damage wrongful approaches, approaches to the supply of energy could bring that when I was growing up before going to school, like age five or six, I remember very well going with my, one of my relatives who was involved in buying charcoal from the areas around my hometown in western Sudan on the way and charcoal, of course, you cut trees and then you turn them into fuel for mostly most of the time cooking needs of communities and families. And this could be sustainable as long as it is *limited* to local communities, right. But if you're doing it at a commercial level, then there will be abusive cutting of trees at a rate in which nature cannot renew the forest. So I grew up, when I remember very distinctly that there were very dense forests around my, not far from my hometown, by the time I was in middle school, those forests were not there. Because there were too many people

involved in commercial logging to turn trees into charcoal, or, for commercial purposes. And with trees, go all the life, wildlife and all the biodiversity that exists. You know, if you cut trees and they're not renewed, then everything goes away with it.

Yasmine

So by reading the school are you reading memoirs, for example of a few officials from the colonial period?

Suliman

That was around 1940s, so this was the history I was interested in what they were telling about what they saw during that time. One of them was telling about a trip from my hometown to another city, which is less than 50 miles away. And he was describing very dense forest and seeing lions, and giraffes, and elephants in this forest that were dark from the density of the trees. This was 20 years later, when I was growing up, none of this was visible. There were no wildlife, of the type he was describing as someone who was a witness, and wrote this down in their memoir, and none of the trees could be, so what happened is that people basically destroyed the environment, the wildlife and the biodiversity that came with that environment. From the very simple, by the very simple act of cutting tree for commercial power, fuel provision for for local communities, what should be the most simple basic form as charcoal for cooking so that's that's now as someone who is concerned many as many decades actually later, I can see that there is even more aggressive deforestation, deforestation rather, occurring, because this is becoming an industrial activity.

11:05

There are people who are operating a form of organized crime, type of crime that crosses borders, transnational crimes of commercial logging. And then exporting charcoal for consumption in countries that don't have forests, like in the Arab Gulf countries and so on. So that's, that's something that is happening in Africa. Not only in my country, Sudan, but also in the entire region, which is just below the Sahara. You know, it's called the Sahel. The, the shore, it's the shore of the Desert, desert, northern lands, and then just in the Sahel region, you have sort of lighter rains and forests and then you go to another area of Savanna, more trees, and then you go to the tropical forests, which is really. So excessive deforestation in the Sahel will lead to a

phenomena of *desertification*, the desert, creeping into areas that were sustainable, ecologically before, and, as a result of the drought, that occurred, you don't have rains to renew plant cover trees in this area and so on. So it becomes a sort of a problem affecting *millions*, millions of people, you see illegal logging and excessive tree cutting for charcoal used by this very simple. This is my experience with energy and the wrong, how wrong approaches to procurement of energy could lead to natural disasters. That's, that's how my experiences intersect with your line of inquiry. Yes.

Yasmine 13:15

Yeah. Yeah. Were there any other natural resources you think, especially within the Sahel region that kind of contributed to this phenomenon? Or was it strictly was charcoal the dominant because the coal industry, is very dominant. I think during that time.

Suliman 13:32

You, even in the Sahel region, you'll find some countries that fared *better* than others. Interestingly, this happened because of people who are enlightened or because of traditions that are inherited from one generation to the other, and that taught people to respect trees, as if they are, symbols of life and of creation and so on. Therefore, some cultures where these traditions exist, of respecting trees and never cutting a tree without planting another in its place. You will find out that they were less affected by the phenomena of the creep of the desert in the Sahel or the in the regions south of it that is vulnerable because of scarcity of rain in this region. And then you have other communities and groups that when they began feeling the effects of desertification, they began planting, drought resistant plants to bring back their tree cover and the green cover and therefore, stop the creep of the desert in the areas– this is the exception rather than the rule. So, when you hear that there is famine somewhere, it is always because, there was some form of abuse of nature. Around the groups that are affected because, they just disrupt the natural cycle of nature to a point where, it becomes unsustainable to support life. In the human communities around it, you see.

Yasmine 15:40

I guess so, yeah, this covered a lot of the questions I was gonna ask just in terms of how you kind of conceived, conceived of that that energy relationship, both on a local scale, but also on a broader, geopolitical or social political scale, how you kind of were there, events in in local news or in broader, you know, country, country to country basis? Just kind of events that really permeated your memory that kind of changed your nuanced your understanding of that, maybe desertification or just the—

Suliman 16:22

At level of geopolitics to again, take the the example of a country like Sudan, which is, it has huge resources in terms of land, water, forests, arable land, it has rivers, it has water for irrigation and so on. But then the model of economic development that was adopted by central governments relied not on supporting the traditional agricultural systems that people have developed by experience over generations from the beginning of creation. You know, which really lived in harmony with the nature around them, but to get quicker results, they went into modern forms of large scale mechanized farming, a large scale mechanized farming means that you go in is to these communities, and you push the traditional farmers to subsistence for whom who will depend on farming for their livelihood, and a little of cash when there is surplus, you push them aside, and then you cut the trees. So that you can do large farming on a commercial scale.

Yasmine 17:49

Sorry, is this contracted work or the laborers is, are you saying when you mean like pushing out the the local laborers are they also?

Suliman 17:56

They end up being cheap labor, right? You see, instead of being producers for themselves, providing for themselves food and for their families, their production systems are destroyed. And they can only work as you know very few labor while the big entrepreneurs who invest in large scale mechanized farming. So this kind of farming is is not sustainable. Because you have vast lands and recently producers are not interested in the impact of their work. The moment the land becomes less fertile. They just move to somewhere else. And start all over doing the same thing,

which is cutting trees, massively displacing traditional farming communities, forcing them into poverty. And therefore, and contributing to this natural phenomenon of the depletion of tree cover and the advance of drought and desertification in areas that didn't exist before.

And the result of this? These marginalized communities whose livelihoods have been destroyed by modern development projects or wrong approaches to development projects. They end up being so upset that they start protesting against the symbol of power which is the central government that has adopted these very wrong approaches to economic development. And this explains why in many of these countries you have ruler insurgencies, armed struggle against the central government. This is the beginning of civil wars. You know, this is a typical module of how civil wars begin in this context: it's *always* over resources. The resources of local communities are used by autocratic governments and the local communities have no other resort than to go into confrontation with the government.

There is a name, there is now even something more, more damaging to, to local communities with something that is called 'land grabs'. So you have countries that are very rich but don't have enough food resources, such as the Arab Gulf countries, the Emirates, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, they are rich in oil, they are rich in natural gas. They don't have very good arable lands and therefore they cannot grow their own food. What they do is they go *grab* land in poorer countries. They pay for local governments in Africa, wherever they go, and these lands at very cheap prices to produce food for their own people at the cost of the local communities here. And again, this is a kind of abuse. That is, that is the kind of abuse, that is causing a lot of tensions globally. It's happening, Saudi Arabia, even this land here in one of the states of the in the US and the government. This happened this year. I don't remember which state. But the governor said "Come on, guys". We are growing alfalfa. This is the kind of plant or animal feed. So they used a huge stretch of land. They go alfalfa using underground water. The plant takes a huge amount of water and probably nutrient proper nutrients for animals. And they ship this back to Saudi Arabia and the government said, "No, I'm breaking this lease, because they are depleting the underground water for my state". You see, so the *food needs* of some of the rich countries are causing disruptions, not only in the poorer African countries, or, South American countries where they go and grab land, but even sometimes, they do this by purchasing or leasing

land in case of the US that should know better. Yeah, I'll find the name of this title. Yeah. So that's, that's another form of tensions that is caused by in this case, the need to feed mass populations who don't have the means of feeding yourself except by going somewhere else, using their natural wealth and causing conflict.

Yasmine 23:03

So, you talked a little bit about just yeah, that that kind of land grab and I think we have in our class discussion gone over this idea of offshoring. Offshoring not only labor, but in terms of like the British Industrial Revolution, a lot of it was driven by the mass expansion in London's population and the fact that they had to they had no other choice but to outsource that, that labor so what do you think is, I guess, an alternative for countries the, in the Arab Gulf that are kind of trying to develop themselves to kind of build more, you know, mutualistic relationships with with countries facing such massive depletion of resources and conflict?

Suliman 23:48

This is a very interesting question, but there's obviously speculation but yeah, I frankly, don't know what could be the alternative for these countries right. Now, except that, they should think of doing these investments in ways that benefit the local communities, instead of totally ignoring the needs of local traditional farmers. As is happening now, for instance, and therefore, to be made more fair, the second thing they need to do is to pay attention to renewable approaches to farming, right? You don't have to destroy the environment and then walk away from it to go and destroy the next block of land. You should pay more attention to, for example, if you cut trees to replant new seedlings and things like that, so that there is a level of sustainability of this. So that could be another approach.

Yasmine 24:56

And would you say that kind of ties in deep, into the the notion of, of where the intersection between human rights and environmental degradation come into play that that kind of exploitation not only of the land but of the people as well? Do you think it's always inherently intertwined?

Suliman 25:13

It's inherently intertwined. Yeah, so by taking away the livelihoods of people, you are basically marginalizing them, you are basically oppressing them. And you know, this is a major trigger, a major root cause of conflict. I would say. You see, that's, that's one one thing. Now, what are the alternatives to using a tree cutting for instance? For energy–

Yasmine 25:44

Decentralization?

Suliman 25:47

In places like Sudan, where poverty is no main feature in order, you will, as I told you about this local groups to try to work and help their communities. One approach was to introduce very simple family level use of solar energy. So they develop kind of stores that concentrate sunlight, when there is an abundance of heat in these Sahelian countries. You know, that concentrate the sun rays to, for cooking, cooking purpose at the household level. But then it's not enough to develop simple technologies at no cost that even people can manufacture locally at very little cost. You *have* to promote this because this is something new. And these communities, because they're not used to it will not adopt it by themselves unless you invest in *expansion*. You know, in promoting it in the community. Illustrating why it is useful, how helpful it is, and so on.

Suliman 27:09

Yes, that's, that's very, and another approach that we found out that the use of natural gas, which is bottled. So, because there is no distribution system, this is centralized distribution system in these poor countries. So what they do, they store natural gas in cylinders and it is distributed by household, you take a cylinder, it works in meeting your cooking needs, and this goes on for like three weeks a month and then you will return the thing to the supplier and pick up a new one that gets a lot on the use of charcoal. And therefore is, is a factor that helps in preserving woodlands and preserving environment instead of relying on cutting trees for energy.

Yasmine 28:16

So the Sudanese economy is still dependent primarily on coal right now or is it still trying to make that transition?

Suliman 28:23

I mean, if it is the use of, as I said, you know, of rural populations, this is not overtly over threatening to wood cover, but commercialization of this and wrong development policies that are based on clearing land for mechanized farming are the ones that are causing the most damage, you see? And therefore, we have now people cutting trees and exporting charcoal or they said smuggling it actually is a criminal activity because it's not done legally. Smuggling it to Arab Gulf countries. Other places where it is needed basically. This is happening in Sudan and Somalia and DRC. Across many countries in Africa. It's causing a lot of damage, without people paying attention. Yeah.

Yasmine 29:21

I was gonna ask you a little bit about just, yeah, how your career experiences working with the UN, in Mali, Darfur, Côte d'Ivoire, in the International Center for the International Crisis, all of these, these massive organizations on the kind of globalized scale, how you you kind of conceived of the relationships between between social experiences and energy?

Suliman 29:49

I worked as a volunteer advisor to the United Nations in the Republic of Mali, in Cote d'Ivoire, as you know, Director for Africa, the organization, the International Crisis Group, and International Center for Transitional Justice. These are all organizations about conflict resolution, and how to therefore, you study why conflicts occur and what should happen to preempt them from happening, therefore, conflict prevention and then proposing policies to policymakers such as the United Nations, and the big nations, the rich countries have a lot of international influence: European Union, the United States of America and all these international groups, what they should be doing, to prevent to preempt conflict, and to resolve conflict, you see, and once that happens, what are the interventions that are needed to stabilize peace, to make it more stable, more sustainable, more permanent in a way? So that's the kind of work I do.

31:14

If you ask me what is common in the conflicts. I know, that I covered for all these organizations I work for is really about the hijacking of natural resources from local communities, by their own governments, and by the clients of their governments in the region or internationally. These resources are of two natures, you know. It could be agricultural and I have just spoken so far over the agricultural or so, but it could also be *mineral* sources. Let me give you an example. There is now a trend for electric vehicles. Several countries have set a target of having to phase out carbon fuels and fossil fuels altogether. And to introduce vehicles. Electric vehicles depend on batteries. You see and batteries are fueled by metals that are found, for example, Cobalt, one of them in sources of this metal is in the Democratic Republic of Congo. And what is happening is that the expansion, the industrial expansion in electrification of vehicles is extracting resources from these countries in a way which is not fair trade.

Yes, they get this fuel *very* cheaply. And it's through the use of technology and science, the margin of profit is huge but it's not the people who are on the ground who live miserable lives around this, areas where the Cobalt is found. They are not benefiting from any percentage of that. So, in these countries, the bitterness people feel about the shift of the resources or this in this case, mineral resources is again a trigger of conflict.

You see, so this is very common in all the conflicts in Africa. It's always resentment about the collective, resources that have been hijacked by your own government or powerful people in your own region, or the international actors who are using corrupt governments in Africa to get access to this to get access to these resources. France, you know, relies to a large extent on a thermal atomic energy for the generation of power. So the power grid in France is to a large extent, a high percentage of it is from atomic reactors. And they get Uranium from a country like Niger, Niger is dirt poor, one of the poorest countries in the world. They get it at a fixed price, which for for a very long time was, really ridiculously so low. That nothing of this resource trickled back into the country. Because, France, *knew* how to exploit its historic relation with Niger, and to fix the price even when the country became independent to exploit the resource without having to pay for it in real *value* of what it represents. So you end up with a country that

is very miserable, very poor, is sitting literally living on a wealth or a treasure of mineral resources that are needed by industrial countries and they are not getting any fair price for that.

Yasmine 35:20

It's like a very, parasitic relationship, I think.

Suliman 35:26

Yeah, it's unfair trade, basically, exploitation, *neocolonialism*, this is where you go into the relationship between how the unfair abuse of natural resources in poorer countries to feed into modern industrial, advanced societies is causing misery and suffering to large numbers of people across the globe, you know? And the examples are many, when you go to Brazil and you see what is happening with the incursion of wild capitalism in the Amazon forest, its logging, you know? They're going for the wood, and they don't care about the destruction of the environment in the Amazon forest. So this is one example. Ranching in Brazil, the ranchers who have large-scale projects for developing industry, for, Brazil is one of the largest exporters of beef, globally. But they are doing this at the cost of the rights of the indigenous populations, and at the cost of the destruction of the environment.

And you have several presidents in Brazil tolerating this because they were paid by the ranchers and people who are in the timber industry, and so on. Now they have a president, who is very much aware of all this, and is very aggressively pushing back and putting an end to this. Lula da Silva, yeah look at his story.

Yasmine 37:12

So with um, leaders like da Silva, who want to set a precedent, for for change, the decentralization of an exploited resource, do you think with one leader trying to set a new precedent, that's enough, to kind of change this practice? Or do you think it takes more of a community, to, to a bottom-up approach, as opposed to top-down?

Suliman 37:39

It takes enlightenment, it takes, more of awareness in a community, to reverse these trends. The example, the impulse could come from the top when you have an enlightened leader, in the case of for instance, Brazil, in this case, Lula da Silva, but it takes much more than just one president, because he will be there for one or two cycles, maximum, and done, you know? And there may come someone else who, reverse all this, enlightened and progressive uh ideas, and return people to the destruction of people, and therefore, you *really* need to educate people basically. That they can do better. That they can do all of this without having to destroy their environment, or marginalize local communities and indigenous populations, and, the poorer countries, people grab their resources without something going back to them.

Yasmine 38:47

That's very true, community yeah. Um, well yeah I just wanted to yeah since we're running pretty high on time I just wanted to know if there's anything else you'd like to share, that's relevant to the discussion or if I could ask you one or two more questions?

Suliman 39:00

Yes, yes, yes, please go ahead, yeah.

Yasmine 39:03

Well, I guess, I wanted to know why you chose, with your career path, why you chose to study comparative literature outside of Sudan, and whether or not that kind of shaped or nuanced your understanding of your individual kind of perceptions of energy systems?

Suliman 39:24

That's an interesting question because, growing up, I was very much interested in literature, I was telling you about my poetry reading, and my novel reading, in middle and high school, and when I went to University, I just went into the faculty of arts, and French is a new language at the time in Sudan, and I went for French, and therefore, from a purely academic point of view, there's just a succession of doing your BA, and your Masters, PhD, and so on. So, it was just following my hobby, or my, so, yeah. And then, it was, by the *force* of events, when you, it was really a sort of, that's why I use the term the 'ivory tower,' the University of Khartoum at the

time was a cultural beacon, we had the theater, and we had film shows, and exhibits of all kind of plastic arts, and so on, but then, you hear vaguely that there are millions of people who came running from their leader, from South Sudan, from West Sudan, and were living in big displaced camps around the capital (Khartoum).

So we'll go, "Let's go see what's happening." and we go there, and it hits you that this, what you are doing is totally isolated from the reality around you. There are people dying out of hunger. Because of drought. Drought is a natural phenomena, but, if it is the policies of the government that caused the drought, as in this case, we call it *man-made*. And you have to expose this, you have to explain to the public opinion, that this is a disaster that was made by our *own hands*, by our own policies and this needs to change. You see? So people were displaced as a result of drought, and people were displaced by war. War is definitely man-made. You see? So again, you go to explain, why is the war occurring? And when you look into it, and as a volunteer I started looking into that, we found out, this happened because the government wanted to put its hand on the oil that was discovered in South Sudan at the time, and ask some militias to clear the populations out of these areas. So the population ran from their homes, and they lived as displaced, forcibly displaced people, around the capital, you see? With no resources to feed themselves, and so on. So I immediately dropped my comparative literature, started volunteering and because of my volunteering and the writings I was doing about that I ended up being very quickly in less than a year or two, the head of a relief organization, Oxfam America, I said, that was the beginning, full-time professional involvement, in something that has nothing to do with poetry and comparative literature.

Yasmine 42:55

But I'm sure the background of literature also helped, summarizing, what you were actually witnessing.

Suliman 43:02

Yeah yeah, that helps a lot, exactly, it gives you *perspective*, it gives you an understanding of the world, French is very helpful, because half of Africa is Francophone, so, I was able to translate,

work in other African countries very easily, in and out, because I spoke the language, and so on. Like, Congo, for instance, I worked in Congo a lot. Mali, these are all Francophone countries, Niger, yeah.

Yasmine 43:32

Yeah no, I think it all fell into place well.

Suliman 43:33

So that's, it's a change of career that was forced by *events*. Reacting to developments around you because you can't be indifferent. And I reacted in a positive way because some of my colleagues decided to be rebels. They were so much shocked by all of this they said "Okay, we'll go join this army of rebels," you know?

Yasmine 43:56

How are they now?

Suliman 43:57

Ah, well they are back to their academic careers. So that, that armed rebellion doesn't work hahahah.

Yasmine 44:00

Okay, that's good, yeah no, I'm sure they realized, but, it's interesting to see even with current events and what's happening on my own college campus, you know, how the parallels, but also the differences between them, um.

Suliman 44:17

Yeah, yeah. I mean, there are things that are shock, they shock you, they force you into taking action, becoming an activist, you know just like what's happening around campuses, there is something that shook the students, and they joined this campus movement because it was just too enormous? That's the kind of thing that's happening.

Yasmine 44:37

But I think the main difference is that in one instance being outspoken is a *right*, and in another one you could be persecuted for it.

Suliman 44:44

It could be persecuted. You know, we had to run for our lives, we left, Sudan, because of repeated incidents of harassments, and I hid subversive literature in Omer's (son) crib. Hahahah, yeah yeah, and, when these security agents come, Mom would go and tuck Omer, so that they don't come search these things. And we said this is just too much let's leave this place.

Yasmine 45:24

Yeah, it all boils down I guess to to, someone wants their hands on a resource, it's all sad.

Suliman 45:32

Yes, yes, yes, it's really about, stealing the, from the trodden below, those who are helpless, poor rural communities the resources they have, whether cultural, or mineral, natural resources of all kinds, you know?

Yasmine 45:52

I guess um, I guess I'll close off, yeah by asking any, if you had any final comments or statements, that you think are relevant?

Suliman 46:00

Yeah I mean, if people know, what the origins of problems are, they are always motivated to take action, to stop injustice, you know? So let me give you another example. I talked about, batteries for electric vehicles, and how this is based on, miserable conditions of people who are working in these mines in the Congo— Congo is one of the richest world, countries in the world in terms of natural resources and mineral resources, and it has rare minerals. Cobalt is one of them, another one is, um, a metal which is only found in Congo in large quantity, Australia, and perhaps to some extent in Canada also. It's called Coltan. Coltan is a necessary ingredient for cell phones, for computers, for space technology, for precision instruments, of all kinds, for space

exploration, or surgery, because it is a *very* tough metal, and has many qualities, you see? But Coltan, in, in Congo, is again exploited by companies that don't pay anything to the workers. And in many instances they use militias, armed people, to force them to work in extracting this metal by digging big trenches in the ground, and people get buried under them, and so on, and they get nothing out of it.

While the moment it goes out of the country, and is processed, in one or two facilities globally, because it's really a very rare thing, it becomes of *huge* value. So when people made this link, between the exploitation of workers in Eastern Congo who extract Coltan and what the world was learning, the profits of companies like Apple, and Microsoft, and all this, are making out of this metal, they started a campaign. Which is, "We don't want Coltan, from Congo on our phones," and it started in Europe, and it was a popular movement, so companies who made cell phones, and Europe at the time was more advanced in making, you know, Nokia? They made, this is before, basically the tinies, and Apple, and all these things just took the market away from it, so the campaign started saying, people were saying "We are not going to buy cell phones that have Coltan from Congo, specifically, because of all this ill treatment of local workers and the way it is stolen basically for nothing". And this had an effect. So companies that are big buyers started telling those who process the raw material into the industrial form they can use, they tell, "We don't want Coltan from Congo to be in our". And this led to a drop of the value of Coltan from Congo and therefore ended the middle people who were exploiting rural populations in Eastern Congo in extracting. So, the campaign, from activists to boycott the use of Coltan from Congo led to the stoppage of the abuse of local populations in a direct way. And you had companies like Apple, Microsoft, telling their suppliers we don't want Coltan from Congo. This happened around the early 2000s, this campaign.

Yasmine 50:02

So you think a campaign, a direct campaign, has prospect to, yes.

Suliman 50:08

A direct campaign can lead to an immediate effect like this. If people are aware, then you can make a difference. And this campaign, really, I followed it closely. I was at the time very much involved in Congo, yeah.

Yasmine 50:26

I think it's good to end it on a more optimistic note.

Suliman 50:28

No no no, if people, you can do something about it, if you *know* the problem. And relate, and find the pressure point, the pressure point is *shaming*, in this case. How dare you, this shameful, Apple, making all these profits and people are paying their lives, and getting nothing for it. So, you end up changing things for the better basically for the rural populations.

Yasmine 50:53

But it does require an awareness, of course. I'll close it off, yeah.