

Report

Blood in the Mobile: Coltan und die Kriegswirtschaft Wieviel Blut steckt in meinem Handy?



*Filmpresentation and discussion with the
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(VIDC) - Votivkino Wien, 8 November 2011

Report: Bella Bitugu und Franz Schmidjell

Schmidjell: Frank, I would like to ask why is it so hard for Nokia to talk about it and tackle this issue.

Frank Piasecki Poulson: You are right and in many ways you can say that this film is a good example of how such a big company should not react when somebody like me come knocking on their door. I think what is nice about the CSR manager of Nokia is that he really trying to answer my questions even though it will turn out to be foolish of him and will not come out good for him because they have this problem. I just want to say that from the beginning when I was in Congo to make this film, I was in Congo five times when I was making this film. I realised *for the first time that* I just did not want to make a film about the situation about Congo but I wanted to show how the other half is. I chose Nokia because I have always been a NOKIA user and so have this personal approach. I had my prejudice towards Nokia because I thought they were a socially responsible company and thought they would be willing to work with me, to make this film how to solve this problem but I was frustrated after one year without any dialogue and in the end I just walked into the reception and insisted they gave me some answers. I think this is part of the reason why this problem has not been changing for the past ten years because Nokia agrees they know about this problem since 2001 and is also on their home page. The reason why nothing is changing because nobody wants to get involved if they do not have to and if they are not forced to, then it is easier not to . It is such a complicated issue and difficult to solve and in this way the film is answering some of the questions why this is not changing and a company like Nokia will not be in that, of course they won't. I talked to a woman who was the predecessor of the woman , this supply chain woman, she was Finish who worked with Nokia and directly in the supply chain. She said she was nokia CSR person in 2001 and was trying to get the Board of Nokia to solve this problem but the only thing that she could argue with was the risk assessment, the risk of how this will expose Nokia and blow up in their face. Talking about child labour and people dying in the Congo had no effect on the Board, the only thing that had effect was tom be exposed as people who did wrong. She also wrote to me later and she said after years of trying to get Nokia to solve this problem, she got fed up with it and stopped working with Nokia. In fact I can make films on the shoes that I am wearing, the jeans that I am wearing, on the things around us. It is part of the globalised problems that we have of extracting resources from everywhere and leaving nothing behind. So this is part of the reason why I wanted to make this film, to connect the dots to show how we are consuming in this part of the world and other people elsewhere have to suffer in order for us to have this kind of life.

Schmidjell: So that is the point which shows the interconnectedness of the world and how our life affects people in other parts of the world and not in a positive way in this case. During the film especially in the first part, one realises it is quite difficult to make a film in Congo. How did you

manage to go down to the mines and get access, was it a bureaucratic thing. How dangerous was it to go there?

Frank Piasecki Poulson: Actually, the point is it was difficult but I have been working in Africa for many times but have never worked in the Congo where the situation was more difficult. We were arrested more than 50 times and every authority who had the opportunity would arrest us and take us to the room taking our passports detaining us for about 20 minutes and expecting us to pay some 20 000 CFA but I don't do so. That is why it took even longer. I also wanted to make the film as safe as possible. The problem in Congo was also more complicated and very bureaucratic and they have a lot of respect for stamps. Of course we had permission from Kinshasa and we made sure we had the right permission for the authorities that we are going to meet. So when we were in Wali Kali for instance even though they did not want to let us through, they had to because we had the right kind of stamps. Of course, it was dangerous there and also the number of the soldiers that we encountered. We did not see many soldiers in the film as we met during the shooting because it was dangerous to film and of course many of them were involved in many terrible things like rapes and killings. I have been travelling all over Africa but did not hear of the war in Congo until my producer asked me if I wanted to make this film. I realised that the reason why I did not hear about it was because it was very difficult to go there. It was dangerous and inconvenient, but the more difficult it became, the more important it dawned on me to finish this project.

Schmidjell: It seems it was not easy and very dangerous for you to make the film but for the local people there, it was even more dangerous and difficult for the couriers, the miners and it seemed the people working in this mine were young and some were children. Can you tell us about them, their lives, their working condition, were they from the villages or coming from far away.

Frank Piasecki Poulson: I must say I had been to many places and saw a lot of poor people and their working conditions but I have never seen any such thing before in my life. It is not much about how it looked like but the atmosphere there, an atmosphere of despair and desperation and in the actual mining areas, to get just a glass of water which was not completely contaminated was very difficult and made the people very desperate. The thing is that you see a lot of people, a lot of children there, the boys working down in the holes and mines, kids are 12, 13 years or so but you had a lot of children working on the top of the mines selling things like biscuit and in many ways. This is a very desperate place to be and also because you can't get out because just as you had to pay to get in so also do you have to pay to get out. You know they are earning money but they have to use this money to survive, to get a place to sleep, to eat, maybe they can get out but they cannot afford to because then they are

home and have no earning. So they cannot thread inside of this line, so it is like living closest to hell.

Schmidjell: Yes the argument is that we are using mobile phones and we are also financing the war and this taxation at local level; how are the different groups there getting their money?

Frank Piasecki Poulson: What they are doing is taxing everything that comes in, so it is business. They are not taxing only the minerals that come out but everything, a place to sleep, to eat, it is like a beer costs 8 Dollars and a kilo of meat costs 12 dollars and these are extreme prices compared to the rest of Congo. So, it is like people working and the tax takes away everything that they got. So all the profits that are made there end up in the pockets of the war lords.

Audience: First of all I want to congratulate you for this film emotional documentation and I really enjoyed watching it. My question is the young man Charles in the film, his mother agreed to let him take you to the mines where he barely escaped the massacre, how did that happen, did you just reimburse her.

Frank Piasecki Poulson: We could make a whole work shop on the ethic of this because it is an issue of ethics and it is a very important question that you raised. The reason why it is in the film like this is to make you ask this question as it is very important. If you want to make a film about child labour it is very hard not to ask the child to work. So I have also become accomplice in this and sort of responsible for doing this. It is a long story and was summarised in the film as such. Actually, what happened was that I was in the mines twice. In the film it appeared that I was going to the Congo but I was in Congo 5 times. We met Charles who was working in the mines. And when we returned the second time, I heard the rumour of the boy who escaped the massacre and it turned out to be Charles. He said if you are going to the mines then I want to go back with you and I thought he wanted to go there to work and I thought that was his reason for wanting to go there. He did not have any money and did not have any funding and the mother didn't either and could not take care of him. When you are sixteen in the Congo then you have to take care of yourself, he was not even living at home as you saw in the film the house they were living in was almost falling apart. But I said no I can't take responsibility of bringing you to this place. But then upon second thought I realised I wanted us to go in quickly and come out quickly so I thought It would be easy to have a character with me than to go looking for one. So, I went back to the mum in order to save my face by wanting to know from her if he wanted to or was going there any way. In that case I could say okay then since he was planning to go there any way, he could join us as it was then just a matter of hooking up with someone. But she completely misunderstood the question and said okay you can go with him but you have to bring him back. But I have teenage boys at home and I

knew how difficult it was to tell them to do anything and so I said no I can't take responsibility for that adult. But in the mean time the whole chiefs and the elders of the village got involved and I had to explain to them what this project was all about again and again and then they went to discuss and I went back to my assistants and told them we have to get going and start the walking through the jungle as we can only walk during day time, but they said no you can't go until the elders come to a conclusion because it will be total disrespect for them if we go before they finish the discussion. When they returned they told us how great the project was and wanted to participate and they agreed that Charles goes with us but we will in addition be accompanied by a member of a civil society and said they could be part of the mission and then we could work together. But then I became nervous because this is my film, my project and did not want them to take over and determine what happened but they did not, they really collaborated with me and we made this film together. In terms of paying, I always wanted to work in places like this and to work with people who can see that it will benefit me not only me but the others too in the long run. So I want to be a part of it because when you pay people to make a documentary then it is no more documentary but a fiction. He did it all for free. Of course, when we came back we gave him all the money that we had and not only that but the boots and medicine that we had. We had become so close friends after travelling and putting up together and doing the things together. Not only him but also some from the villages. We left our things, our clothes, our back packs – anything that we could leave we left before flying out. So that is very briefly to address something that is important that we could discuss the whole night and there is a lot in there and one can argue for and against. I put it in this film so that it can be seen as a problem, as an ethical dilemma, such an important issue, asking a boy.

Audience: As you pointed out it is for me not actually a surprising reaction from Nokia because such companies are only interested in maximising their profits. You cannot expect them to change their production or supply. My question is, we learnt of the Coltan in mobile phones. Are there any alternatives and what can we do as consumers to change and put the big corporations like Nokia under pressure.

Frank Piasecki Poulson: We will get back to the technical parts later but of course there are things that we can do as consumers and when we started this project we also thought of boycott of phones and we were just looking at ourselves in this small group of people but we were just laughing at ourselves not using our phones. Of course this is not the solution for the Congolese because if we just stop using the phones that will not help them in any way. I think the solution is to try and trade in a fair way with people from Congo for instance about their natural resources. But having said that, I think we can also use consumerism as a campaign tool when it comes to for instance the catastrophe going on in the Congo and I think it can be an effective tool. You could also do

something by asking questions when you go to buy electronics, you can ask if there is any element of the materials used coming from violent and war ravaged areas because if you do so and tell the stories and the shops get to know about it. You can also get into contact with your politicians and write to them telling them that these are things that concern you and you are worried about. You can also join the campaigns in Europe and there are some organisations involved in this kind of campaigns. But I have to add that I do not think that consumerism is the solution for the problems of the world. First of all, we don't know what all the products we surround ourselves with are made of and so we all have to be experts to be able to know this. It is also not possible when standing in the super market to decide what world you want to live in. This is something we need to decide together when we are going to the election box not when you are standing in the super market; do I like ecological risk or I don't like ecological risks. In this case it becomes only something for the rich because they can decide whether to buy ecologically sound or not products since their prices are almost double the normal ones. This is not a fair way I think to develop the world. I think we should stand together to decide what kind of world we want instead of leaving it to the market and we know that the markets can't solve the problems of the world and we have seen that for the last 100s of years and if we leave it out to the markets, the world will be ruled by the most cruel and the most greedy.

Schmidjell: At this point I would like to introduce to you two special guests. Both of them came for the workshop which will take place tomorrow. Tim Steinweg is a researcher at the Centre for Research on Multinational Companies (SOMO). SOMO is coordinator of the makeITfair campaign. He recently organized a roundtable at the European Parliament on EU legislation on conflict minerals. Prof Mike Morris is Director of the Centre for Social Science Research and Head of PRISM (Policy Research in International Services and Manufacturing). He is also Professor in the School of Economics at the University of Cape Town. His current research project is called "Making Most of Commodities". So can the consumer change anything.

Tim Steinweg: Yes, they can of course change something because the consumer is not just a consumer. The consumer is a person who encompasses various roles in order to achieve something and being a consumer is just one of those roles and so I really like the question raised of what can we do. The problem is you can't choose a fair trade mobile phone that does not have the materials coming from the Congo. But what you can do is to consume less. Why do we need to buy a new mobile phone every year. I am happy you have shown your mobile phones but I don't have one. I used to have an old one which was ten years old but it broke down. Consuming less mobile phones means there is less pressure on the mines. It is exactly these pressures that create conflicts and human right abuses. We can recycle and we can just say that these

concern us. Let our voices be heard, talk to the companies when you buy products but also join the online campaigns through the social media. It is really easy to address these companies. I always say let us try and find out if we can get the Tweeter accounts of these companies so we can get in touch with the board members of these companies and raise these questions directly with them. We can use our voices as consumers to tell them that what we have seen in this film is unacceptable. The other thing is that I do not think that companies respond only to consumer pressure. The other big important thing is that they also respond to laws and legislations. It is quite absurd that no company is breaking the law in what we just saw and what we saw at the end of the movie was the beginning of the process of a law in the United States. That law has been passed about a year and a half ago. All of a sudden you realise these companies are getting concerned and starting to do a lot more than they have done in the past. So what we are saying is why can such a law be passed in the United States and not here in Europe. So as consumers and also as a citizen, we can also call for legislations in Europe to try to tackle these issues.

Schmidjell: You mentioned this law and it was also shown in the film which might lead to or has already led to a de facto boycott of the so called conflict minerals. But this is criticised by African partners, not only by the mining companies but by civil society, by the local authorities. The argument is in the final analyses we are losing jobs, we have no more tax incomes and our economies are collapsing. So what did you recommend to the round table of the European Parliament?

Steinweg: Well there are two things that I wanted to point out. First of all I completely agree with the criticisms, boycott is not the solution, walking away from the problem is not same as solving it. In fact what we heard from the Congolese authorities is that the boycott has led to the total collapse of the local economy but not reducing any of the conflict and the violence. What needs to be done is to source from the region but sourcing it without linking it to violence. There have been mechanisms that have been developed internationally that can be used to ensure that it actually happens that way. The second point is that I would argue that it is not directly a consequence of the law that there is a boycott. As in America the laws have passed but are not in effect, meaning that the companies do not have to go by it as at now but yet there is already a boycott. Something else must have been in play and I would argue that this is really a very conscious choice by the companies that say okay this is too complicated, we are not going to source from the region anymore and which does have really negative consequences on the local economies and people.

Schmidjell: It seems it is a complex issue, and anytime it is getting this way we ask the scientists, in this case Mike Morris. His current research project is very closely related to our current issue. It is called *making*

most of commodities. Well when I saw this film and realising the wealth on and under the African continent, the question for me is, is this wealth more of a curse than a blessing for the people of Africa.

Mike Morris: I want to focus on two issues concerning the points that you made and speak on these from the perspectives of an African, as a South African, and for that matter an African concerned about the whole issue of industrialisation and development of Africa. Without industrialisation, you can't solve poverty problems and without industrialisation you can't solve employment problems and without employment you can't fundamentally solve the issue of poverty. Employment is critical to these issues and industrialisation is key to these areas. I will address these questions by taking up two points that you made. You said something like - 'we take away resources from Africa and when and what are we going to give back to Africa in terms of industries that are not developed'. I see that as a very important issue raised. What do you do with the resources, do you just take them and export them without bringing in forward and backward linkages? By forward and backward linkages we mean industrial activities of some kind which might in some way process these resources or backward linkages, which are supply chains which provide services and inputs to mining activities or to oil extracting activities which is the basis of industrialisation in the final analysis. So that leads me to the other point which you mentioned - that even though conditions are terrible, they want employment. So from the perspectives of African countries or economies we have to separate these points - bad working conditions from what are the resources used in civil war type situations to finance armed militias and armed gangs. So we have to distinguish among these questions and it may be that we could solve the problem of conflict but not the problem of working conditions in Africa and employment. So in an attempt to answer your question, I have taken a long route. As an academic I am allowed to do that. I am trying to simplify an extremely complex issue. For the period before 2000 Africa went backward - the actual combined GDP of Africa halved from 1990 to 2000. In 2000 onward GDP on aggregate level had increased quite tremendously and in a number of countries we had growth rates of 7 or 8 per cent which is good when we had growth rates of 2 per cent in Europe and this is on the back one thing - resources that have been extracted from Africa - it is not all countries, some countries have real problems, they have no resources and this is a bad situation. On the back of these resources that have been extracted you have growth in GDP and employment. So when people say resources is a bad thing and it leads to conflict I say yes it is true but then what do you want people in Africa to do, do you want them to give the resources away, don't mine any more? That is not the solution to the problems that people have in Africa. So for us the question is too complex and the first answer to the question is to say you have to extract resources because that is the basis for development. On the back of that we have to do something about the elites and the corrupt governments that steal the fruits of that resources. Secondly we have to try and

develop backward and forward linkages. We have to get industrialisation to take [place which is not just about extracting resources and exporting them. Would this movie have been different if the coltan processing were to take place in Kinshasa even though the conditions are really bad in these mines. So how do we get forward processing taking place, how do we get supply chain links getting backward which will result in industries been developed. So the second question is how to get these linkages to be developed because that is the heart and basis of industrialisation. The third issue that we face in this respect is how do you use these resources to get infrastructure that is not enclave infrastructure. What do I mean by that? That is a classical case of colonialism. You have Belgium coming and saying it wants the rubber and all we do is we construct the road from wherever we get the rubber straight to the ports, nothing takes place on either side of that. There are no linkages from the infrastructure, which have a knock on effect on industrialisation processes on either side of that road or railway. So in social science we use the term corridor development as opposed to enclave infrastructure development because that spreads the process of industrialisation. The fourth big issue is how can we get on skilled development taking place on this basis because if you upgrade the skills then you raise the development process of African people. They will use resources in positive and productive ways even though you will always have unemployment in Africa.

Schmidjell: Are there positive examples of countries following these principles which you just mentioned now.

Morris: Well, the irony of South Africa is on the basis of harsh, repressive and racially configured regime. From the 1920s you had industrialisation process that occurred. So let us put that aside but yes you have examples of this occurring, Ghana is an interesting example with industrialisation occurring in terms of linkages without very much policy intervention but policy is very critical. Nigeria is a good example of trying to use policies, government regulations, to try and build backward linkages from the oil sector in Nigeria. Angola is a very poor example but also a very good example in some respect. It is a very peculiar country and has messed up in many ways. But they have major local content type initiatives that have worked in some respects in terms of upskilling people in the oil industry and oil supply industry. You also have some ways in which it is working in Zambia with respect to the copper mines. Tanzania is an example where nothing is working in this respect. It is a very good example of what could be done. It is incredibly rich in minerals but they are not getting anything from it because the government is unable to do anything to reap the benefits. So the question in this respect is the role of corporations, lead commodity extractors ie the mines or the oil companies. Do they have a vision for developing supply chains, do they have supply chain management programmes of some kind, does the government have a policy which says our focus is not only on extracting oil and stealing the money that comes from it but focussing on building backward and forward

linkages and having industrialisation process and realigning our policies and implementations with the policies and implementations of the corporations themselves. If you get that alignment going on then you will have a real positive process. Is this happening to a limited extent. The real problem is the lack of alignment that takes place in Africa within corporations and between governments and aligning corporations.

Audience: I just want to say that nobody mentioned China. What is and has been its role. I also want to know if this discussion will not die after the rhetoric as with many others or the problem just transferred elsewhere. I also have not seen any one from the Congo participating in this discussion.

Steinweg: Now we start with China and then how the companies are functioning. I think the question of China is really an interesting. There are two different issues. One is how companies in China resort to this. If that company in China is part of the supply chain of an American company and in most case they are, then they have to respond because the American companies have a requirement by law to be able to show where materials are coming from. The other point you are raising is a very important one because it is very easy for these companies to say okay we are going to stop sourcing from Congo and we source from somewhere else. This is exactly not the solution that we should be looking for because it makes the situation even worse in the Congo rather than improving it. That is the big discussion going on at the moment. That is, how can we avoid complete boycott of minerals from that region but at the same time avoid that armed groups are getting their monies from these. I am not going to go into too much details on this but there are mechanisms that you can use to achieve this. And to respond to the second question I think that, it is a very important one, why are there no Congolese on the podium but also in all these discussions on international level, in European parliament, in the US because there was no Congolese involved in drafting the law and this is really a big problem because there are very knowledgeable people on the ground who know what is happening, what the current situation is, what would work in the context and what would not work and they should therefore be an integral part on any effort be it laws or anything which attempts to solve the problems and change the situation.

Schmidjell: We are coming more or less to the end our debate and I want to come to China because it was mentioned in the debate. Is China fulfilling this criteria doing the backward forward linkages not having these enclave industries, is it the way forward.

Morris: I have actually been working on the issue of China in Africa, I just had a talk for about 45 minutes on this issue and so would like also to touch on it here. I don't know anything about China and Coltan or China in DRC but I can say however a few things about the role of China in

Africa and I will start by saying what I said before is that when we come to China the issue becomes even more complicated because first you have to take your ideological glasses off and you have to decide that you are not getting into the issue of praise or blame because whenever anyone looks at the issue of the role of China in Africa, they put on their ideological lens saying is China going to save us or we are again been colonised by China, that is the first point. The second thing is China operates completely differently from the Western world in Africa. They don't separate trade, aid and foreign direct investment, they are all bundled up together and that is the direct opposite of what goes on with western aid and western involvement. I can simply say that this has problems and has advantages as well. One advantage is that it provides leverage with China the so called the Angolan model that is applied. This is a relationship where an African government has a relationship with China as follows: we are going to give you oil and you put in infrastructure involved in the process and we going to pay you back in oil so we have aid, trade and FDI all bundled together. In return also we want for example to have three hospitals over there, we want China to give scholarship to 100 people to study in China to learn to become engineers, we want China to come and help us develop some backward linkages etc Whether this happens in practice is the problematic part of the story. To summarise we say China has a strategy for Africa but Africa does not have a strategy for China, there are more than 51 countries dealing with China at the same time, that is the nub of the problem.

Schmidjell: Frank it is up to you to say the final words. Your film has been shown not only in TV but also at several festivals, cinemas and the film will be shown in the Congo. What is your final message?

Poulsen: Next week the film will be having its premier in African, in Goma in Congo at a film festival there. I would say that when I decided to make this film I wanted to show what is going on in African and how we are connected to it in a way and how that is relevant for people here in the west because in many ways it seems as if what is happening over there is far away and has very little to do with us but it has. I think we have a great responsibility not only historically but what is going on today and what will be going on in the future on creating a much fairer world in terms of distributing of the wealth. The human kind has become so much richer during the last hundred years but this wealth is not being spread in a fair way. I think because we are here with surpluses we have the responsibilities to take part in changes. This is really my agenda. Of course when you work with a subject like what is going on in the Congo, you get affected and you also get involved and you want to move on this particular issue and I think this is just one example of how messed up our world is and so we all have responsibilities especially those of us living in the rich parts of the world, we have all the means of communication, we have the education, we have all the surplus that will make it possible so

please join and help make the world a nicer place for everybody. Thank you everyone.