

Falling Whistles: A Mission on the Move

**An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)**

**by**

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thelma Lazo-Flores', with a large, stylized initial 'T' and 'L'.

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## Abstract

My Honors Thesis is a creative project related to the Falling Whistles installation movement. It is a concept museum utilizing a shipping container that narrates the issues in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). More than 6 million people have died in the last decade alone. At this stage, about 1,500 people continue to lose their lives daily. Since WWII, the war in DRC has been labeled as the world's deadliest war. The natural resources used for consumer electronics are vastly found in this country which is the root cause of all evident conflicts and destruction, political instability and massive numbers of death. As such, even young boys are forced to fight. They have been abducted from their families, tied up, beaten, and forced to kill the other rebels. There is also more sexual violence in DRC than any other country in the world. Children who are too young to hold a gun are forced to carry only a whistle and stand in the front lines of battle. The *only purpose* of which is to create enough noise to scare off the enemies. Their bodies are use as temporary barricades to accept bullets like in the frontlines of battles.

With all these wars, a man named Sean Carasso made a plan and a promise to end the war in DRC. He created an organization called Falling Whistles which uses DRC's weapon as a proactive voice. The organization educates the public on the happenings in DRC with the hope of one day ending this deadly war. They encourage everyone to be a whistleblower for peace. In order to spread the word of this organization, the goal of my final project is to design a Falling Whistles concept museum. By combining theories of my interior design major as well as from my peace studies minor, I have designed a concept museum using a shipping container that will bring awareness of this deadly war to different cities in the United States (Carasso).

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Thelma Lazo-Flores for all of her help throughout my college career and especially throughout the duration of my senior thesis project. She has been an amazing advisor and friend and I greatly appreciate all she has done for me while here at Ball State. She will continue to be an inspiration to me as I continue on with my career in interior design.

## History of Congo:

In the historical narrative of DRC, there are two important periods of discussion: one of European occupation and the second is about the multiple wars therein.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is known for its vast natural resources which apparently attracted explorers for permanent occupation. These resources are used for the manufacturing of consumer electronics and continue to deplete for they are non-renewable. In world history, the resources, differences in religion and political inclinations are the common causes of war. Given this premise, death and destruction has occurred and will continue to occur in DRC, and in parallel to our constant need of these resources. Such will continue to destroy the lives of the people of DRC until we put an end to this world's deadliest war.

Even before the 1800's, Portuguese explorers were the first Europeans to travel to the Congo. These European merchants began to trade African slaves through the Congo and then eventually brought them into the international slave market. By 1885, King Leopold II declared his ownership of Congo Free State. With the rise of the bicycle revolution in Europe and the automobile industry shortly after, the initial search for resources began. The Congo is significantly sought mainly for its rubber and ivory that will be used for our multiple consumer electronics.

In 1908, outcries from the public finally led to the end of King Leopold II's rule when news broke out that eight to ten million Congolese had either been killed or poorly slaved that led to their deaths. Around World War I (WWI) during Belgium's control of Congo, copper quickly becomes exploited and the need for such resources continues. Belgium lost control in 1969 due to many nationalist riots and the first Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, came into power. His ties to the Soviet Union during the Cold War brought suspicions and he was arrested and murdered, which left the DRC open for new occupation.

In 1965, a new leader named Mobutu Sese Seko took power where he decided to abolish political parties, which also led to the embezzlement of billions of dollars. This consequently caused the country to go into great debt, as well as resulting into massive inflation (Carasso). The United States government installed the dictatorship of Mobutu so the country would gain access to these resources in DRC for about 30 years. When Mobutu started to limit the access of the resources to the U.S. government, the latter began to use surrounding countries to intervene with



the DRC (Montague and Berrigan, 2001). After the event in Rwanda in 1994, Hutu militants and their key leaders arrive in the DRC who were responsible for the Rwandan genocide.

Unfortunately, they are still present in Congo today. (Carasso)

With the beginning of the First Congo War, Mobutu orders for the Tutsi ethnic group to leave the Congo in 1997. This causes a controversy and leads to Tutsi and other anti-Mobutu rebels to overthrow Mobutu Sese Seko which eventually led to the new leadership of Laurent-Desire Kabila. However, Kabila's allies quickly turn against him in 1998. Rebels from Rwanda and Uganda begin to control the east section of DRC. They now have easy access to timber, gold, and diamonds (Carasso). They installed illegal colonial-style governments, which still continue to receive millions of dollars in arms and military training from the U.S. up until today (Montague and Berrigan 2001). Kabila cannot control this new arrangement with the national army and begins arming local militias called Mai Mai. With this, the Second Congo War, or African World War begins.

As fighting continues in 2000, the United Nations Security Council provides 5,000 UN peacekeepers to monitor the DRC. Kabila is assassinated in 2001, but his son Joseph, becomes the new leader. By 2002, a triadic peace deal is signed with Rwanda and Uganda to withdraw troops from eastern Congo. Since 1998, the UN Refugee Agency declares that the war has directly and indirectly killed a total of 2.5 million people and states that the parties chose to prolong the war to gain access to gold, diamonds, timber and coltan that was found in the area.

In 2006, a general Laurent Nkunda begins clashing with the UN-backed government army in the east and is very opposed to the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) presence in eastern Congo. A peace pact to end years of conflict in the east is signed by Nkunda in 2008, which causes heavy clashes to begin between army troops and Nkunda's forces. The Congolese government says that Nkunda is backed by Rwanda. In January, Congolese and Rwandan troops began a joint operation against Hutu rebels in Congo. Nkunda's army is beginning to integrate with government forces as FDLR is still a constant threat. Mai Mai groups still continue to harass the local community and the Congo's natural resources are still continuing to be exported through illegal trading. Currently, the most popular resource used is coltan for cell phones and also found in aluminum cans (Carasso).

### History of Falling Whistles:

As Sean Carasso was visiting Africa for a shoe delivery for TOMS shoes, he wandered all around the continent and was amazed at the amount of progress that he was seeing in different countries. In most places, organizations and individuals were doing what they could to fix the problems, until he wound up in the DRC. There was war, terror, death, and destruction everywhere that he went. He immediately started writing and forwarded what he saw to everyone that he knew back home. With this, Falling Whistles (FW) was born.

Falling Whistles partners with local leaders to advocate and rehabilitate for those affected by the war in the DRC. Their campaign was launched with a simple idea in mind, to make their weapon the voice and to become a whistleblower for peace in DRC. One of the biggest problems is the way the war is currently affecting children, specifically child soldiers as they are regularly pulled back into the cycle of the war. In DRC, Falling Whistles is developing partnerships with community leaders who are rehabilitating the children involved in the war through education, art, sports, music, human rights education, vocational skills training, medical treatment, and nutritional services. These services are working to initially rehabilitate 267 war-affected children in northeast Congo.

By selling whistles and other merchandise, the organization gains funds that are then utilized to aid the services currently set up in DRC. They have used the funds to start services such as *Solidarite Pour la Promotion Sociale et la Paix* or simply known as *SOPROP* with Arnold Djuma that houses both a rehabilitation center as well as a women's training center within the DRC. Other organizations include Synergie, which gives support and justice for women and girl victims of sexual violence; Heal, which monitors over 600 HIV-positive children; and *Actions for le Bien etre de la Femme et de l'Enfant au Kivu* or ABFEK, which runs a training center in tailoring and soap making for women who are victims of sexual violence (Carasso).

By helping with all of the organizations, Falling Whistles uses its power to aid organizations that are already working with the victims of the war, and who will share the knowledge to improve the environment and the people that they are assisting to help. Falling Whistle's biggest goal is for people to use the whistle to tell the story of the DRC. Storytelling is a large part of the organization and is the reason that I chose to create a mobile concept museum.

This way, the story of the DRC can travel to different locations around the United States until the story is known everywhere and shared to everyone. I believe that one way of fixing the problem is educating through storytelling.

#### Democratic Republic of Congo and its Resources:

The DRC has been referred to as “the richest patch of earth on the planet” (Montague, and Berrigan 2001). Because of this, it has become a target for many attacks, especially from the surrounding countries Rwanda and Uganda. The country is abundant with diamonds, copper, cobalt, zinc, manganese, uranium, niobium, and more importantly coltan. Currently, coltan is highly in demand and is a main threat to the country’s security. This resource is used to make mobile phones, night vision goggles, fiber optics, and capacitors which maintain the electrical charge in computer chips.

The DRC houses 80% of the world’s coltan reserves, more than 60% of the world’s cobalt, and is also the world’s largest supplier of high-grade copper. Countries like the United States consistently encourage their corporations to invest and facilitate their production and sources from the Third World countries, thereby making DRC a continuous site for multiple attacks (Montague and Berrigan 2001).

Other coltan supply comes from Australia, Canada, and Brazil and adds up to about \$6 billion a year. However, as the market for electronics grew, more resources are now being taken from the DRC. Surrounding countries such as Rwanda and Uganda, are known for smuggling tons of coltan from the DRC into their countries to then export it to the global market. All profits are then used to fund their militias. It is reported that Uganda exports about 2.5 tons of coltan a year before 1997. In 1999, it grew up to 70 tons a year (Essick 2001).

Unfortunately, as our world continues to become technologically advanced, we will continue to use the resources necessary to complete these manufactured items and objects. Having noted this, these violence acts will continue to destroy countries unless we work towards using other sources for coltan.



### Author's Statement:

In this concept museum of Falling Whistles, it will primarily use visual aids to share the story of the children in the DRC. This is accomplished through the use of alternative space and installation purchased by retail companies; most of which are privately owned. They will then use part of their retail store for a Falling Whistles print media installation. This helps articulate and share the Falling Whistles' story by including it in our everyday life.

The story of the DRC is such a meaningful message, and the use of visual aids brings a new kind of interest to the retail and consumer movement. The purpose of the project is to replicate the story that is shown within these installations, but to create a new viewing method which will have the opportunity to travel in more locations. By following the design incentives and methods that are shown within these installations, the idea for A Mission on the Move became possible.

### The Design and Method:

The main goal of my design is to create a space, or museum that displays the story of Falling Whistles and of the boys in the DRC. The purpose of creating a space that is on wheels, is to allow for the museum to travel to different schools, communities, houses, and many other locations, and to share the story of Falling Whistles with as many people as possible.

The vessel for the physical museum will be a standard forty-footer shipping container. There will be a main entrance and a main exit with a single traffic flow pattern throughout the space. This will allow for easy visual narrative of the Falling Whistles story, and will also create a better atmosphere for such a small space.

The container is broken up into three different spaces, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) history, Falling Whistles history, and finally the Seek for Solutions section. When the viewer walks into the space, they will be surrounded by a timeline of the Congo and its leaders and how the war has affected the country. This section is to give the viewer a background of the DRC and show how the historical events were important to the Falling Whistles story.

Second, the viewer will walk into the Falling Whistles History exhibit. This will be a dark enclosed space with a dropped ceiling that will represent death, war, and destruction. There

will be images of war and of the way the people of the Congo are currently suffering. It will be a emotionally moving section of the museum that will also show how this war is affecting the lives of many. Within the walls, the Falling Whistles video will serve as an interactive movement within the space.

Finally, there will be a door that leads out of the smaller Falling Whistles enclosed space and immediately the viewer will be surrounded by natural light. This will represent the end to the problems in the DRC and will lead the viewer to the Seek for Solutions section of the concept museum. Here, they will learn how to help, and how to get involved with all of the organizations that are currently set up in the DRC which are working towards peace. It is designed to promote an inspired ambience and is the largest section of the container. Here, the visitors will be able to purchase whistles and other merchandise that will encourage them to share the story with others.

The whole purpose of this concept museum space is to educate others about our world's issues, to inquire, and to lend assistance. Museums share stories of lost histories and current events. In the same token, my concept museum is to showcase one aspect of history and event in the world. In design, every small step that we take in the right direction could affect the lives of others, particularly those in need. I strongly believe that design can be a tool for new advocacies.

In conclusion, this project meant so much to me because of my passionate desire to help the organization. I firmly believe that the art of telling stories can be integrated in media and visual arts to significantly increase awareness. Through the concept museum, the intention to reach out to the public and share their own understanding about the story of Falling Whistles, a difference can be made in the life of another. I learned throughout this design process that it takes determination and passion to follow a dream and to make a difference in the world, and eventually achieve peace in the DRC.



### References:

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# FALLING WHISTLES

## *be a* WHISTLEBLOWER *for* PEACE

The purpose of the Falling Whistles exhibit is to share the story of the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is a visual representation of the way the war, and our technologically advanced world is hurting the Congo and its people. The museum will create an intimate relationship between the viewer and the FW story to spread the word of our world's deadliest war. The shipping container is broken up into different spaces that will better explain the story.

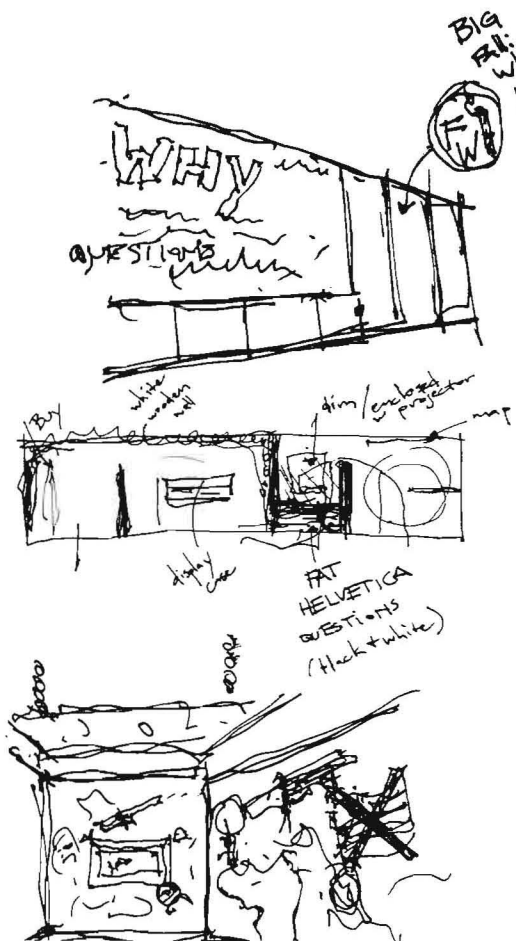
**discover:** Shares the history of the Congo and the wars that it has encountered. This section will give the viewers an idea of what is going on in the Congo so they have a better understanding of its history.

**express:** This is the more emotional section of the container where the use of images and videos to show the story of the child soldiers and others affected by the war.

**change:** Shows the visitors what they can do to fix the problem and how to share the story with others once they leave the museum. This will be an encouraging section that will share examples of how one person can make a huge different.

**share:** This is the section of the container where visitors can purchase merchandise that will allow them to better share the story of the Congo. They can look at whistles and sign a contract to donate and become a whistleblower for peace.

# Peace. In. Congo.



Exit



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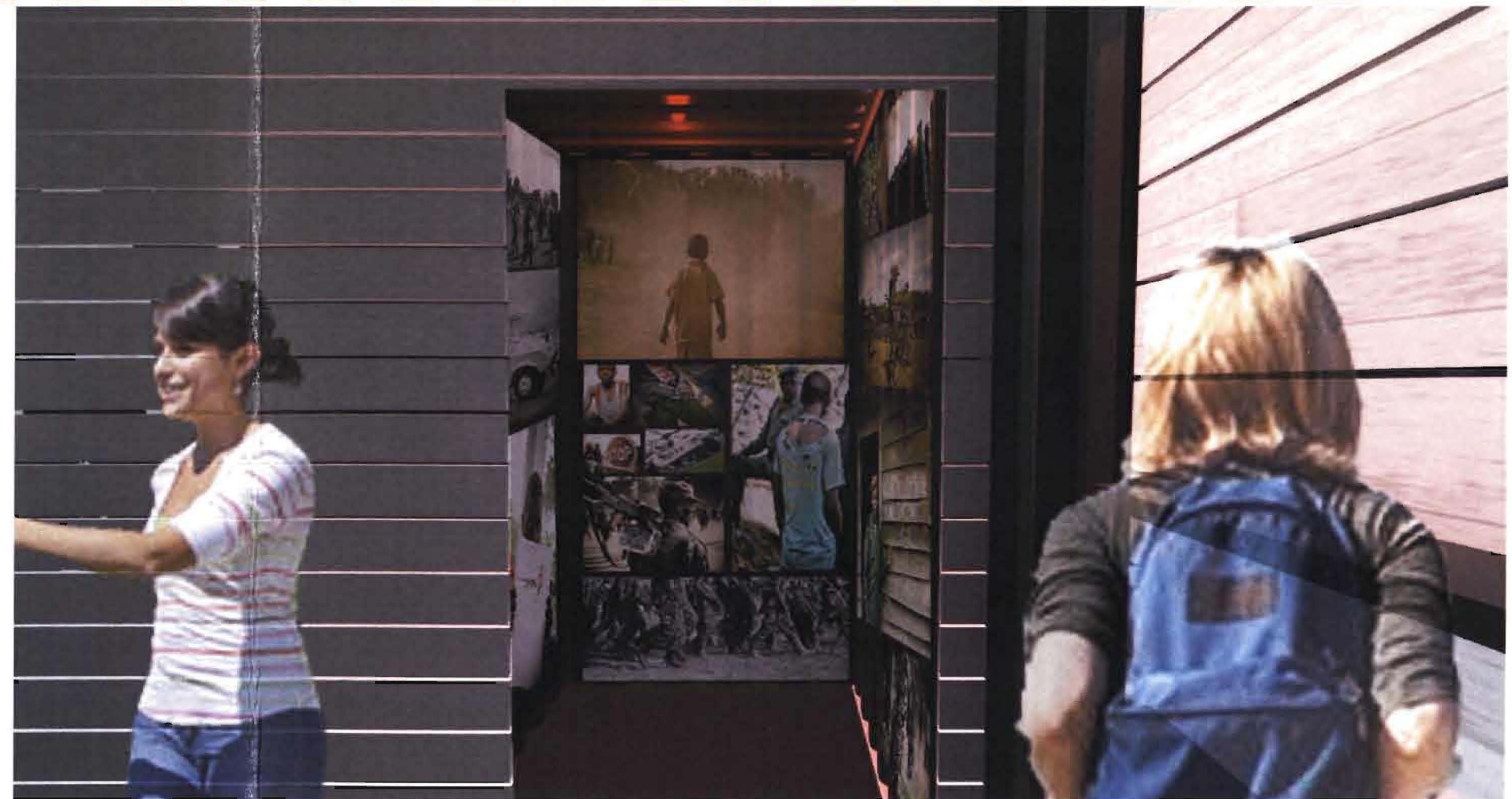
Responding to such a story is never easy. We have struggled ourselves. But take a tip from the T2 boys - *share*.

## ***Tell their story.***

Though we never heard of the whistle used in war again, the symbol lived on.



“Young boys are forced to fight. They have been abducted from their families, tied up, beaten, and forced to kill. There is more sexual violence in the Congo than any other country in the world. Children who are too young to hold a gun are forced to carry only a whistle and stand on the front lines in battle. Their **only** purpose is to make enough noise to scare off the enemy. When their bodies receive bullets, they are then used as temporary barricades.”





# Questions

Questions

Questions

“their weapon could be our voice.”

