

University of South Florida

From the Selected Works of Barbara Lewis

Spring March 26, 2011

What the Heart Remembers: the Women and Children of Darfur

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Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/blewis/9/>

What the Heart Remembers: the Women and Children of Darfur

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Introduction (Audrey)

Several years ago, the Director of Waging Peace, Rebecca Tinsley, was the commencement speaker at my son's graduation. She told an incredible story with horrific details about the plight of the women and children in the refugee camps in Darfur.

At the time I knew that our Library was embarking on creating a Holocaust and Genocide Studies Center so I contacted her with the hopes that we could develop a collaborative arrangement. As a result, the library was able to obtain over 500 drawings created by Darfuri children while interviews were conducted with the women in the refugee camps. Since then these drawings have been used as evidence of genocide in Darfur by the International Criminal Court.

Digitization (Barbara)

In 2007, Waging Peace, an international NGO that campaigns against genocide and crimes against humanity, travelled to the refugee camps of eastern Chad to interview displaced Chadian and Darfuri refugees who had escaped the war in Sudan's Darfur region.

While there, the Waging Peace representatives gave paper, crayons, and pens to the children in the camps aged 6 to 18 years old. As you'll see in the images of the drawings, any available material was used. The children were then asked to draw their hopes for the future and their memories of the war.

Nearly all of the children drew pictures of attacks on their villages.

The people at Waging Peace understood the power of the images to convey the devastation and trauma suffered by the children of Chad and Darfur. As Audrey mentioned, the drawings have been used as evidence of genocide in Darfur in the International Criminal Court. In addition, exhibits of the drawings along with photos and testimonies have traveled the world educating people about the events in that region.

Thanks to Audrey's initial contact with Rebecca Tinsley, a partnership was formed between Waging Peace and the University of South Florida. The USF Tampa Library has digitized all of the drawings and when the traveling exhibits end, we will become the permanent home of the actual drawings. Our digitization process was accomplished using a Microtek ScanMaker 9800XL and ScanWizard software. Both sides of each sheet were digitized since many sheets had drawings and / or writing on both sides. The drawings were scanned as artifacts, with margins on all sides so that the entire image was captured. The scanning was done in 8-bit RGB color, 600 dpi resolution and the masters are saved as uncompressed tiff files. Web presentation copies are 300 dpi JPEG2000 files.

Using Adobe Photoshop, we performed minimal editing on the images, which consisted of straightening, level balancing, and color correction, all done with the originals in hand to ensure accuracy. As we began the editing process, we had an initial concern about the writing on the drawings. Since it was in Arabic, we weren't sure whether there might be any information about the artist and, unfortunately, retribution is still an issue for the people in the camps. The people at Waging Peace assured us that the children had been instructed not to put that kind of information on their drawings, so none of the writing was removed from the presentation copies. This semester we hired a student who reads and

writes Arabic to translate the text on the drawings so that we can present the children's words along with their images.

Recently, the Tampa Library hired Dr. Musa Olaka as our Holocaust and Genocide Studies Librarian. Musa is originally from the great lakes region of Africa and brings to USF a wealth of personal knowledge about the events in Darfur, Rwanda, Chad, etc. as well as a network of friends and colleagues to assist in our development of an African genocide collection. He and I are currently working on the web presentation of the Darfuri Children's Drawing collection. The images are currently available online but our goal is to provide context to the drawings with information about the history of the region, timelines, summaries about the camps, and other resources that will add value to the researcher using this collection.

As we work on the website, two of our questions are who is our audience and how will the materials be used. Fortunately, we already have one example of the collections use, which Audrey will now address.

Faculty Outreach (Audrey)

During one of Rebecca Tinsley's visits to the University of South Florida campus Rebecca posed a curious question, "how can the atrocities that affect a culture of marginal interest be communicated to the industrialized world". My first response was through the arts.

As the research librarian for the College of The Arts, I felt an imperative to communicate the Darfur project at the Library to two of our faculty members, one in Theatre and one in Dance. I knew both of them were interested in working on a collaborative project together. So I invited them to look at the drawings and to hear the story behind the drawings and their acquisition. The power of the images became the catalyst for a two year

process resulting in the original production of *What the Heart Remembers: The Women and Children of Darfur*.

When I first approached the faculty members to develop a collaborative performance piece, they were, needless to say, hesitant. The Theatre professor recently said that “when initially approached about creating a project focusing on Darfur, we were uncertain and overwhelmed by the magnitude of the topic of genocide”. She continued, “The journey began with a strong desire to work with one another. Each of us admired the other’s commitment to explore social issues, to engage with interdisciplinary and multicultural work. The project seemed a perfect match for us.

When we saw the children’s drawings and read Rebecca Tinsely’s manuscript *When the Stars Fall to the Earth: A Novel of Africa*; it was as if we had been summoned. Finally, it was the faces and the eyes of the women and children, seemingly looking into our faces and our eyes. Though silent, they sent us on our journey”.

Multidisciplinary Collaboration (Audrey)

Once the faculty members from Theatre & Dance committed to the project, the work began. I assured them I was always available as a resource person and sent them a plethora of links to materials available at the library which included print books, e-books, articles, DVDs, and music and video databases; and, of course, the images of the children’s drawings.

The performance piece started with several poems and gestural studies developed as a response to the drawings of the Darfuri refugee children and evolved into a collage divided into twelve sections. Students were involved in every aspect of the development of the performance piece and the library continued to provide needed research assistance along the way.

Students used the library materials to support their research and the work being produced. However, throughout the process, the students were drawn to, and explored, what was depicted in the children's drawings. With the images of all the children's drawings, the directors, student actors, dancers, designers and technical crew continually referred to the drawings for inspiration.

Also, the library also developed a seminar series. After each performance a knowledgeable person on our campus delivered a short talk and directed a discussion with audience members and the cast.

The Director of the Libraries Holocaust and Genocide Studies Center volunteered to take responsibility for developing the accompanying symposium, thus freeing the directors to focus on the creative aspects and instilling confidence that this element of the project would be realized.

After each performance a symposia speaker who had a research connection to genocide or Africa spoke to the audience. The speakers included one of the Lost Boys of Sudan who recently graduated from USF; a Social Science student and member of the African Students' Association; a Math Professor who was co-author and associate professor of the documentary *The Genocide Factor: the Human Tragedy*; Rebecca Tinsely, Director of *Waging Peace*; a professor in Africana Studies who researches genocide and its implications for global human security; the newly appointed librarian in the Holocaust & Genocide Studies Center who is a native of Kenya; and the two faculty members who created and directed the performance piece.

In addition, after each performance and talk, the student cast came on stage to answer questions for audience members about their experience in

preparing for the performance, from the rehearsal process to the development and performance of this original work.

Ultimately, a significant contribution towards making this performance piece successful was that the creative team of faculty and students felt that they had library support from the beginning. This gave the faculty confidence to move forward with the project and helped solidify the partnership.