

Collaborating to preserve and disseminate testimonies of child survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda

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Abstract:

Many outstanding collections in many institutions in Africa have for a long time remained hidden and inaccessible. One such collection comprised 1000 handwritten testimonies by children from Gitarama prefecture who survived the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and lived to narrate first-hand about of what they each experienced from the time the genocide started until the time each one of them got rescued. Some of them go on to narrate about their life after the genocide. Unfortunately, documenting testimonies of children who survived the 1994 genocide in Rwanda has tended not to be extensive nor systematic. However, IBUKA, the umbrella organization of associations of survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda was one of the few institutions to collect close to 1000 handwritten testimonies of children from Gitarama Prefecture, which had been one of the major killing fields. This is one of the largest collection of testimonies of children who survived this genocide. Since these testimonies were collected in late 1999 through early 2000, they have remained inaccessible. This paper explores how IBUKA and University of South Florida libraries collaborated and used relatively inexpensive technology to digitize and disseminate these handwritten testimonies.

Keywords: Digitization, Rwanda genocide, Preserving documents Africa, Digitization collaboration, Preserving children's testimonies

Introduction

Digitization can be an expensive exercise that many institutions in Africa have tended to shy away from. However, there are relatively less expensive ways to digitize collections. Collections in most institutions in Rwanda have remain hidden and inaccessible because of the perception that digitization as an exercise that requires very expensive flat scanners, most of which tend to cost at least one thousand United States dollars. Many of these institutions assume that digitization can only be done using scanners, and they do not seem to explore the possibility of using digital cameras that have now become pervasive in society. The cost of digital cameras has been steadily declining over time and this is an opportunity that institutions with limited budgets can use to digitize their collections.

Many of the institutions in Africa have the desire to digitize collections in their custody. However, making those initial steps of planning a digitization project never seem not to get off the ground because most of the institutions lack the appropriate human resources and funds to digitize (Asogwa, 2011). There are other institutions that desire to digitize their collections although they lack sufficient storage space for the digital surrogates (Mutula, 2014). Yet other institutions fear that they will lose control of their collection materials when they get digitized because digital materials can easily be shared and distributed yet the parent institution may want to continue having a tight control over who accesses both the physical and digital materials thereby the politics of digitization is becoming an important factor that needs to be overcome (Breckenridge, 2014).

A brief overview of Genocide in Rwanda

Genocide is not spontaneous (Mugesera, 2014). It is a process, and, in the case of Rwanda, it started in late 1950s and culminated in 1994. The 1994 Rwandan genocide claimed close to one million people in a span of 3 months and was well planned by extremist Hutus who used the Hutu masses and militia groups such as *Interahamwe*, *Impuzamugambi* and *Simusiga* to kill Tutsis with the sole aim of exterminating them.

Before colonization, Rwanda had a well-established system of administration and Hutu, Tutsi or Twa existed together in relative harmony. This harmony became undone when German and later Belgian colonizers started to use divide-and-rule tactics over Rwandans so that they could rule over that society (Repubulika Y'U Rwanda Perezidansi ya Repubulika, 1999). Hatred between Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa continued to escalate, albeit in very subtle ways, especially from the time Belgium colonized Rwanda in 1918. From late the 1950's until the time Rwanda got its independence in 1962, and even after independence, the Hutu-Tutsi conflict became evident.

For colonial government and Christianity to take root in Rwanda, colonists and Christian missionaries embraced the Tutsi, who tended to be rulers at the time. Tutsis became favored in all spheres of society. Children of kings, chiefs and the noblemen in the Rwandan kingdom were thus given the opportunity to attend formal education from the time it was being established by Christian missionaries. Most of the first African priests in Rwanda were Tutsi and all the coveted government jobs were also held by Tutsi. Hutus were side-lined and tended to be oppressed by the Tutsi chiefs, something that greatly angered the Hutu masses. In the late 1950's, conflict between Tutsi and Hutu continued to escalate to unprecedented levels when Hutu masses started to clamour for political power and control (Mugesera, 2014).

The Hutu clamour for control led to the major killing of Tutsis that took place in 1959, 1961-1962, 1972-1973, 1980's and finally culminating in the slaughter of close to one-million people in 1994 (Mugesera, 2014). Unfortunately, neighboring countries did not intervene to stop the genocide. Other members of the international community also paid little attention to the killings that were happening in Rwanda from April 1994 and took too long to call what was a happening a genocide because they had viewed the conflict that had been taking place was a tribal conflict that was characteristic of African countries (Shyaka, [2006]).

Multiple reasons have been advanced as being the cause of the 1994 genocide and they include: Post independence leadership that only wanted to consolidate and centralize political power while at the same time striving to exclude others from leadership positions based on ethnicity and regionalism (Mugesera, 2014); Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), then a militia group mainly composed of Tutsi in exile attacked Rwanda in 1990 so as to force President Habyarimana's government to allow thousands of Tutsi refugees in exile to return to Rwanda (Verwimp, 2003b); Poor governance (Kalinganire, 1992); Prolonged hatred between Hutus and Tutsi (Nahimana, 1993); Introduction of multiparty democracy politics in 1990s leading to the creation of extremist groups eager to exterminate Tutsis (Mugesera, 2014); Declining economy caused by a drop in the price of tea and coffee at the international market between 1987 to 1989 (Verwimp, 2003a); Implementing of the World Bank's structural adjustment programs (SAP) which lead to devaluation of Rwanda's currency, government employee layoffs, and reduction in government spending (White, 2009); Famine that had ravaged the country for a couple of years before the 1994 genocidal killings (Newbury, 1998); and mushrooming of hate media in Rwanda in the early 1990s (Thompson, 2007). Some of this hate media included Kangura newspaper, Radio Muhabura, and Radio RTLM, which kept on broadcasting how Tutsis should be exterminated and equated them to snakes and cockroaches living amidst the Hutus. These extremist media outlets also urged that children belonging to Tutsis should not be spared.

The precise number of people killed during the Rwandan genocide will never be known. However, IBUKA estimates that close to 1.4 million people were killed (IBUKA a.s.b.l., n.d.). However, one million victims is what is widely used although there are scholars who quote an even lower number (Verpoorten, 2005). In Table 1, IBUKA provides the number of mass graves and genocide victims and in each prefecture.

Table 1: 1994 Rwanda genocide victims as per IBUKA.

Prefecture	Mass Killing sites	Genocide victims killed
Kigali Ville	12	80,000
Kigali Ngali	12	196,400
Gitarama	9	109,000
Butare	18	216,000
Gikongoro	9	155,000
Cyangugu	10	40,250
Kibuye	18	239,000
Gisenyi	5	77,000
Ruhengeri	3	60,000
Byumba-Umutara	3	7,500
Kibungo	19	209,000
Total	118	1,389,150

Source: (IBUKA a.s.b.l., n.d.)

Irrespective of the number of people killed, those lives ought not to have been lost, especially children who ended up being innocent victims. Children were exposed to traumatic experience on a daily basis by witnessing people being killed or living in fear of being killed at any moment. Many children were killed and maimed. A 2003 Human Rights Watch report shows that close to 400,000 children -- equivalent to 10% of the population in Rwanda -- had been orphaned during the genocide or slightly afterwards (Kaplan, 2013). 600,000 children were severely traumatized, while 300,000 ended up living in child-headed households (United Nations Rwanda, [2001]).

Those who survived lived to narrate their first-hand experiences of their life during the genocide. These child survivors has been exposed to life threatening experiences multiple times and many of them also endured some of the atrocities over and over again for several months. 95.9% witnessed, 79.6% lost a family member, 69.5% witnessed killing or wounding, while 90.6% felt that they were going to die (United Nations Rwanda, [2001]). Even after the end of the genocide, life was never the same again because some of the children still had to endure many hardships especially when they recalled what they went through during the genocide.

Preserving Memory

One of the best way to preserve memory of the 1994 Rwanda genocide was to collect testimonies from survivors including testimonies from child survivors. Unfortunately, in most armed conflicts, children's testimonies seem never to be collected, yet children are innocent victims who bear the brunt of a conflict.

Collecting children's handwritten testimonies

Prior to 1998, very little effort was being put in place to systematically collect, let alone preserve, testimonies of survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. This situation started to change on the realization that survivors of the genocide were dying at a higher number due to disease or other natural causes. By 2007, there were 309,368 Rwanda genocide survivors with 93,855 being children between the age of 13 to 20 years (Institut National de la Statistique du Rwanda, 2008). In late 1999 and early 2000, IBUKA organized *ingando* (solidarity camps) that brought together close to one thousand children whose homes were in Gitarama Prefecture and who survived the genocide. The purpose was for these child survivors to discuss issues affecting them and look for ways to alleviate the challenges the children had been experiencing in their lives and to help these young genocide survivors to bond. By late 1999, these children had grown and were students in secondary schools and were between 12 to 20 years old.

During the *ingando*, IBUKA requested each child in attendance to write their testimonies in an exercise book and say what they experienced from the time the genocide started until the time the child was liberated. This exercise was IBUKA's pilot project to collect testimonies from these children and, if successful, IBUKA hoped to scale up the project so that all the children who survived the genocide from all the prefectures in Rwanda could document their testimonies. Unfortunately, the nationwide project to collect testimonies from children who survived this genocide was never put in place partly due to lack of sufficient funds to support collecting the testimonies on a large scale.

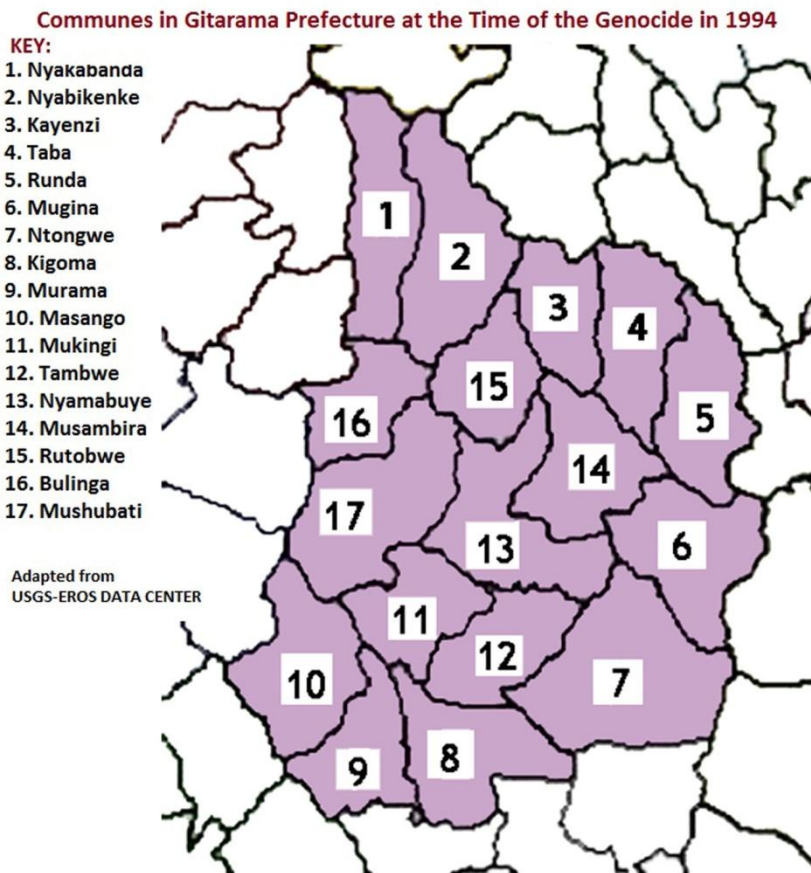
GITARAMA PREFECTURE

Gitarama Prefecture was established in 1959 and was one of the 10 prefecture of Rwanda at the time of the genocide in 1994. Other prefectures included: Butare, Byumba, Cyangungu, Gikongoro, Gisenyi, Kibungo, Kibuye, Kigali, and Ruhengeri. The prefecture was composed of 17 communes namely: Masango, Mugina, Mukingi, Bulinga, Kayenzi, Kigoma, Nyakabanda, Nyamabuye, Taba, Runda, Murama, Musambira, Tambwe, Rutobwe, Mushubati, Nyabikenke, and Ntongwe. Each Commune was further subdivided into Sectors and each sector was then divided into *Cellule*. The location of each commune can best be viewed in illustration 1.

This prefecture became one of the major killing fields because of its location. It was in the middle of the country and bordered Kigali City which was the epicenter of the genocide. Many Tutsis from other prefectures fled to Gitarama with a hope of seeking refuge in churches. Unfortunately when RPF attacked Kigali, members of killer groups fled westwards to Gitarama and killed any Tutsi they came across. Gitarama Prefecture also had a very well established church system and can be regarded as the cradle of early European missionary work in Rwanda. It had a well-established network of Catholic churches and major Catholic missions like the one at Kabgayi, which became instrumental

during the first republic under President Kayibanda's rule (Carney, 2011). It hosted internally displaced persons during the genocide and also became a killing field.

Illustration 1: Gitarama Prefecture



IBUKA

IBUKA is a Kinyarwanda word that means memory/remember and is the name of a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that was established in 1995 to look into the welfare of the 1994 Rwanda genocide survivors. Its other goals include keeping the memory of survivors of the genocide; representing survivors and defending them in cases; Collecting and providing evidence against perpetrators; and supporting the survivors. It is currently the umbrella association of 15 other associations of genocide survivors. Associations affiliated with *IBUKA* include: Avega-Agahozo which looks at the welfare of women and children who survived the genocide; AERG which brings together students who survived the genocide; Duharanire Kubaho, AOCM among others. *IBUKA*'s mandate is very broad and it thus deals with diverse issues including education, poverty reduction, justice, preserving memory, assisting survivors of the genocide who are vulnerable, and supporting the physical and mental health of survivors.

Some issues that are brought out in these children's testimonies

These handwritten testimonies reveal that children witnessed firsthand the following atrocities being committed to fellow children or to other people: Torture and being beaten was common; People being killed using machetes, guns, knives, bows, spears and arrows; Women and girls being raped; People being undressed and left to walk naked along the road; while some of the victims were drowned in river Nyabarongo. It was also common for perpetrators to disembowel pregnant Tutsi women or Hutu women married to Tutsi men that they came across. Some toddlers were killed by being smashed onto

walls while others were killed by strangulation with their necks twisted between metal bars. Destruction of property belonging to Tutsi and moderate Hutus was prevalent and some of it was either burnt down or got looted. Perpetrators and members of the killer gangs extorted money from Tutsis and moderate Hutus either through brut force or by promising to spare their lives. It was not uncommon for those who were targeted to pay bribes only to be killed later or even be killed instantly. Those who did not have anything to bribe the perpetrators tended to be killed instantly. Perpetrators also coerced some of the people they arrested to participate in killing fellow Tutsis or moderate Hutus. Others victims were first forced to witness people being killed before they themselves got killed. Among those who were being killed happened to be relatives or family members of the survivors.

It was just by sheer chance that any children survived this genocide. Some hid among dead bodies while others hid in swamps, in pit latrines, in deep pits, or were on the move trying to escape. Some were given refuge by relatives or strangers while others sought refuge in churches or hid in forests.

A survey of collections at IBUKA

IBUKA has more than 100,000 unique documents and A/V materials relating to the genocide, including survivors' testimonies, oral histories, and crucial documents that show how the genocide was planned and executed. Unfortunately these some records are kept on the floor in boxes and in a poorly ventilated, tin-roofed room where temperatures fluctuate dramatically. The possibility of these invaluable documents being damaged or destroyed is very great. Digitization of these documents would greatly help to preserve the information in the documents for future generations. If destroyed, a large body of information about genocide perpetrators, justice and reconciliation efforts and the struggles that genocide survivors have gone through will be lost.

There were about 8900 pages of handwritten testimonies by secondary school students from Gitarama prefecture who survived the genocide; 18,000 pages of reports about genocide survivors; 20,000 pages about the top genocide perpetrators; 80 hours of survivors testimonies on VHS video; 40,000 pages on justice from all the *Tribunale de Premiere Instance* dating back from 1998; 10,000 pages on Gacaca courts and security of the genocide survivors; about 2000 photographs; and some survivors' testimonies on audio cassette tapes and reels. Unfortunately, systematic preservation and dissemination of information about the survivors testimonies, oral histories, and primary documents that show how the Rwandan genocide was planned, executed, justice and reconciliation efforts has not been done systematically.

Availing the digitized children's testimonies was likely to stimulate national and international discussion of genocide and crimes against humanity in Rwanda. It was also likely to encourage other agencies in Rwanda to digitize and preserve their archival holdings. The effects of this genocide still linger in Rwanda; and attempts to preserve these irreplaceable materials will not only deepen scholarly inquiry, but may help prevent future atrocities by creating an open dialogue about the nation's shared history based on examination of these primary sources.

Collaborative Digitization project

IBUKA in conjunction with University of South Florida Holocaust and Genocide Studies Center (HGSC) digitized the testimonies. HGSC was established in 2008 as a platform that would bring together faculty members at USF to share their research and to provide them with rare primary documents that could support these faculty to undertake research that would have high impact to society. At inception, the HGSC concentrated on growing collections on the Holocaust and later established two more collection areas: The Armenian genocide; and Genocide and Crimes against humanity in the African Great Lakes region.

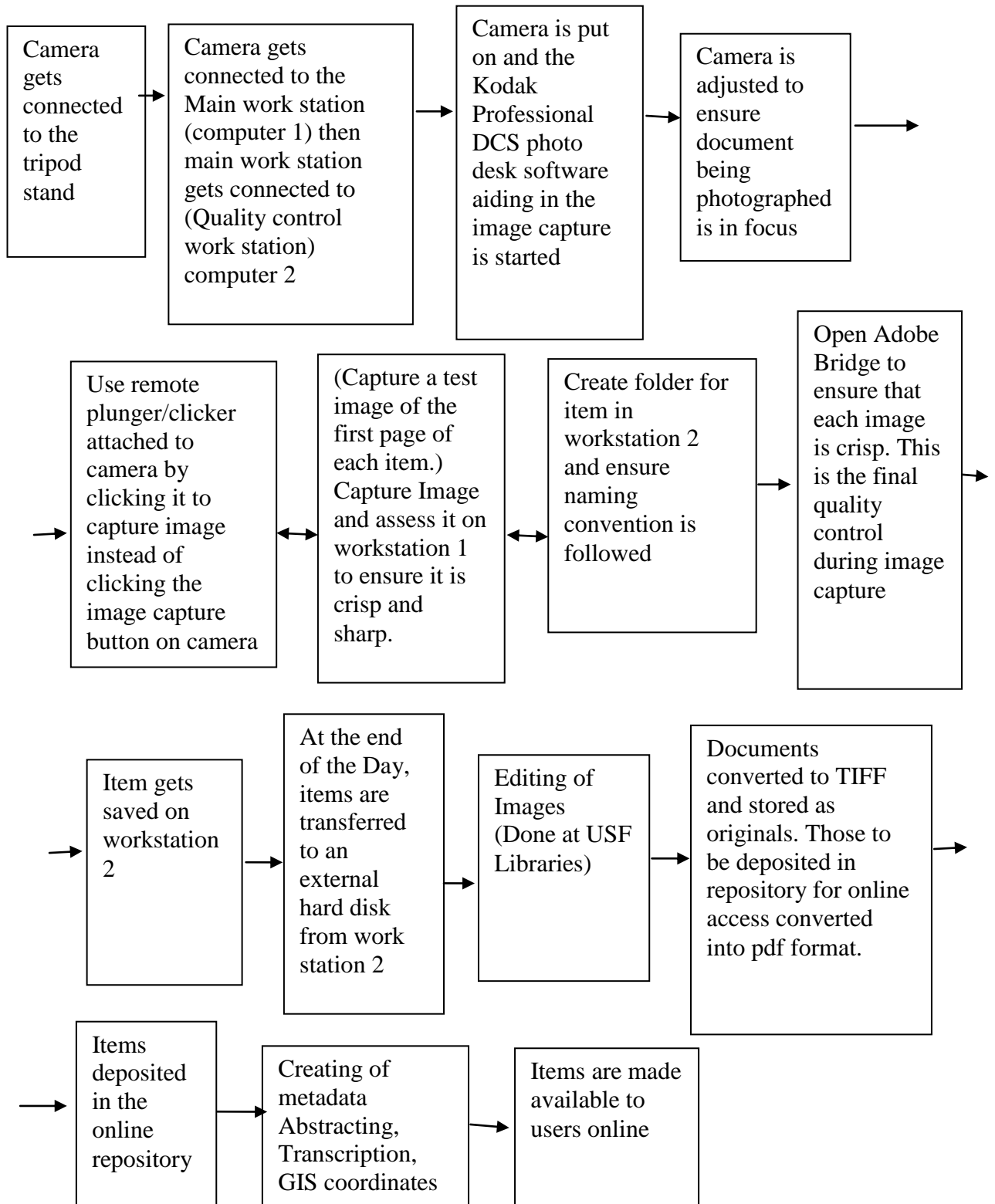
In the month of October 2011, the author of this article and one other librarian visited Rwanda and made a brief survey of IBUKA's collection, and August-September 2012, an agreement between University of South Florida Libraries and IBUKA was signed so that the two institutions could collaborate in digitizing documents on the Rwandan genocide held at IBUKA.

Digitization process and work plan

Between 25 October and 2 December 2012, Dr Musa Wakhungu Olaka, a librarian USF Libraries traveled to Rwanda in order to work with IBUKA to digitize rare and unique documents on the Rwandan genocide held by IBUKA. The 5-week long digitization process translated to 22 days, because we only worked on weekdays and there were a couple days we could not work due to power outage to run the computers. We captured 12,021 images that took up 152.47 Gigabytes. The 12,021 images translate to approximately 16,000 pages because some double pages were captured in single images. An additional 366 files that were on floppy disks were retrieved and translate to about 3,500 pages. Digitizing the paper documents was done using Kodak DCS Pro 14n Digital SLR camera that was mounted on a tripod stand. Connected to the camera was a Dell Latitude E4300 laptop running on Windows XP operating system. This primary production workstation computer was used to display the images that had been captured by the camera and thus helped in positioning the physical objects, creating item folders and was also used in the first steps of quality control. Another Dell Latitude E4300 was networked with the primary workstation computer and was primarily used for quality control and saving the digital copies. The camera captured images in RAW format, with each image being 4500 pixels by 3000 pixels. RAW format was chosen to capture images because it captures colors far much better, thus making the color of image/digital surrogate to be very close to the natural color of the original physical object. The quality of the output was thus comparable to a document scanned at 400dpi. The camera was set at ISO speed of 160 with F22 to capture the images and relied on natural lighting. A Nikon Coolpix P6000 camera was available as a backup just in case the Kodak camera malfunctioned.

Dr Olaka and an assistant from IBUKA scanned the collection. Dusting of the documents was also done the previous day by these two people. During scanning, one person ensured that the document being photographed was properly laid down and was in focus. The same person created a unique folder on the computer for each item and ensured that naming of the folders was consistent. This person also made the final quality control checking of each page photographed to ensure the image was sharp and clear.

Illustration 3: Chart showing the workflow process



In order to digitize the collection and also build staff capacity at IBUKA in Rwanda, the scanning of the documents was wholly done at IBUKA Headquarters located at the Nyanza Kicukiro Memorial Site in Kigali, Rwanda. A copy of the scanned documents was taken to USF libraries while another set remained at IBUKA. Metadata creation was done at University of South Florida Libraries and so was the creation and hosting of the repository to house the electronic documents. Metadata for the items was created when the final edited documents were uploaded online. Editing of the scanned documents was also to be done at USF libraries. It was agreed that USF Libraries will make the documents available online through the internet. However, before any of the testimonies could be posted online, we sent them to IBUKA to ensure that none of them contained information that could jeopardize an ongoing case in court or a case that was still being investigated. Creating visualization such as mapping locations (home location, and escape location) on a map using GIS was to be done by USF libraries.

Illustration 2: Digitization equipment setup



Importance of the children's handwritten testimonies

Despite being a killing field, some of the children from Gitarama Prefecture who survived the genocide were able to survive and later write their personally experiences from the time the genocide started till the time they were rescued. These testimonies give the world an opportunity to read what children experienced during the 1994 genocide and may be a good learning opportunity for organizations that try to come up with interventions during an armed conflict situation.

Budget

The entire budget for the project including airfare, accommodation and paying the digitization assistant \$1000 all came to \$5476 and was paid by USF. Cost of metadata creation, deposit, and editing the testimonies was absorbed by USF. Editing was mainly done by student labor at USF.

Organization and preservation of the Physical Materials

The materials at IBUKA did not have an inventory and nor had they been catalogued. The handwritten testimonies had been scattered with other materials in different boxes. After digitization, we organized the materials in archival boxes and each box was labeled to show the content in it including the date it was digitized. Storing the boxes in archival boxes was likely to lengthen the

lifespan of the handwritten testimonies because the paper of the exercise books they had been written in easily gets decolorized and turns brittle when exposed to sunlight over time.

Master copies of digital surrogates

Images of the documents were captured in RAW, and when they were brought to USF libraries, they were converted to TIFF to be our master copies. The TIFFs were edited and the final master documents were stored in the USF Libraries repository of master copies that was running on D-space. Copies of the testimonies in pdf format were then derived from the master copy TIFF files and these pdf derivatives were then uploaded in the public open access repository that we developed using Drupal to enable the public to access them.

Ownership

IBUKA owns the physical and digitized testimonies while University of South Florida hosts electronic copies to facilitate wider access. However, the agreement was drafted in such a way that IBUKA could not take back the digitized testimonies. Even if IBUKA later got a new organization to host the testimonies, USF would also continue hosting the ones it digitized.

IBUKA had to approve any testimony before it could be made freely available online. The reason for this being that there were instances where there was an ongoing court case and some of the testimonies had a bearing on the case. Thus, IBUKA wanted to protect students and the evidence. In case someone wanted copyright clearance to use the testimonies, then it was IBUKA's duty to grant the permission and not USF.

Access and Dissemination

All of the collection, when digitized, will be freely available on the internet by accessing the repository held at University of South Florida and IBUKA will be given all the attribution as being the source of the collection. Due to the sensitive nature of the materials at IBUKA, they are normally under lock and key including the physical copies of the children's handwritten testimonies. The digitized surrogates of the handwritten testimonies can now be accessed using the following url. <http://genocide.lib.usf.edu/rwandanchildrenstestimonies>

(i) Abstracts

The testimonies were written in Kinyarwanda and there was only one librarian at USF who was conversant with Kinyarwanda language. He therefore wrote abstracts of the testimonies in English and by the time he left USF in February 2014, he had written 500 abstracts representing at least half of the testimonies.

(ii) Transcription

USF libraries did not have sufficient funds to transcribe the testimonies because they had been handwritten in Kinyarwanda. It is difficult to perform OCR on handwritten text and much harder to perform full-text searching. Our goal was to eventually create documents with the capability for a user to undertake full-text searching. Due to the small number of people working on the project, it is only the author of this article who did transcription of the testimonies and, by the time he left in 2014, he had transcribed at least 25 testimonies. The transcription was to be used as proof of concept so that more funds could be sought to transcribe all the testimonies.

(iii) Translation

The author of this article also translated at least 20 testimonies from Kinyarwanda into English, and ideas to crowdsource the translation were floated but nothing has been implemented.

(iv) Digital Library/web presence

University of South Florida used Drupal for presenting the testimonies. So far only 157 testimonies have been uploaded in Drupal. When the author left USF, the library shifted its focus to other projects because of limited staff.

One is thus able to browse all the testimonies uploaded in Drupal with each testimony having a brief abstract that can help the user have an idea as to whether he/she may want to download the entire testimony.

The system also has the capability to help users do advanced searching. Also provided is the ability of users to see a brief list of issues that appear in each of the testimonies to ease searching.

When dealing with testimonies, location is very critical. We were able to extract the home location of each of the child who wrote the testimonies and the various places (names of towns, prefectures, communes, sectors, cellules/villages or even countries) that the child escaped to. In essence this can help trace the escape trail of the child.

Quality Control

Quality control is critical at all stages. During the digitization phase, we used Adobe Bridge to check sharpness of the image captured and also to ensure that that the object was in focus.

When the digital objects were brought to USF, they were cropped to eliminate part of the surrounding area around the digital object.

There was always a person to ensure that all the metadata about each of the digital objects was accurate. The same applied to transcription, translation of the testimonies, and the abstracts.

Conclusion

Instead of continuing to keep hidden collections especially in developing nations, librarians and archivists can use digital cameras to digitize rare and unique collections so as to save them from destruction and enhance their access. Cameras are very portable and are becoming very prevalent thus becoming cheaper although being able to produce high quality output.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The following staff and librarians of University of South Florida libraries worked hard to ensure the project was a success: Dr Mark Greenberg, Mr Richard Benardy, Miss Barbara Lewis, Mr Richard Schmidt, Ms Kimberly Nordon and Miss Melanie Griffin. Not forgetting Mr Patrick Ntamakemwa who was my digitization assistant and Mr Boniface Nkusi from IBUKA, all whom we shared many good times and at times very painful stories about the Rwanda genocide.

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