



Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

Official Transcript: Colette Ngoya (Part 5 of 8)



Role:	Translator
Country of Origin:	Cameroon
Interview Date:	13 October 2008
Location:	Arusha, Tanzania
Interviewers:	Lisa P. Nathan Donald J. Horowitz
Videographer:	Max Andrews Nell Carden Grey
Interpreter:	None

Interview Summary

Colette Ngoya reflects on her role as translator during the early days of investigations in Kigali, Rwanda, and later during trial proceedings in Arusha, Tanzania. She addresses challenges of translating difficult material, such as evidence and witness statements regarding rape and killings. Ngoya also discusses difficulties in translating legal terminology, learning differences between civil and common law systems, and with the Tribunal's system for three-way translation using English, French, and Kinyarwanda. She emphasizes the importance of public education in law.

The transcript of Part 5 begins on the following page.

Part 5

- 00:00 **Donald J Horowitz: Well, now you, now you're getting me. I'm Judge Horowitz and I'm going to ask you a few more questions, also to explain a few things that you answered before when Lisa was questioning you. You said something when, that you were pleased about, that – and I was trying to understand it that for the first time a woman was charged with rape. Can you tell me – I didn't quite understand that, what that was – what you meant by that. What was happening?**
- 00:33 Okay there was a woman minister in Rwanda, in Kigali and she incited young men to commit rapes on women. And because she did it; she monitored it, she ordained it, she was the master of that occurrence, she was charged with rape for the first time.
- 01:02 **DJH: So, and not only she was charged with rape for the first time, that was the first time a woman was charged with rape (____). . .**
- 01:07 With rape over other women, yeah, yeah, yeah.
- 01:09 **DJH: Of other women, okay.**
- 01:11 As mastermind of rape. She didn't commit it herself but she strongly incited people to do it.
- 01:18 **DJH: Okay, I, that, that makes it clear to me thank you. Is, and is she – has she been brought to trial yet?**
- 01:26 Yes, she, the trial is on now. It's going on and –
- 01:27 **DJH: Okay. So there's been no result?**
- 01:30 It has not been concluded yet. They are still . . .
- 01:31 **DJH: Okay . . . okay. Now, you also mentioned Judge Kama . . .**
- 01:36 Mm-hmm.
- 01:37 **DJH: . . . and you didn't work directly with him?**
- 01:39 No I didn't.
- 01:40 **DJH: But did you hear about him? And what he, the kind of person he was and what he did here, from, from other people?**
- 01:46 Yes, he was as, from what I gathered a very good leader. People who worked with him liked him a lot and said he was dedicated . . .
- 02:01 **DJH: Mm-hmm.**
- 02:03 . . . a good leader mostly, yeah. I didn't get to – I met him, I met him of course but I didn't work directly with him.

- 02:17** DJH: You talked about some times when you were translating and people, and maybe others were translating as well and some, and some people would cry. Do you remember that?
- 02:30 Yes, yes.
- 02:31** DJH: Did you ever cry when you were translating?
- 02:35 Yes, I suppose so.
- 02:38** DJH: And I don't need to know the specifics, I mean, tell, tell me about this. What was it that happened; what made you cry?
- 02:47 It's just, it's just you know you, you put yourself in other people's shoes. You are reading the history of a young girl of about like 16 who – I, I mean I can't go into the horrific details . . .
- 03:03** DJH: Yes, I'm not asking you to do that.
- 03:04 But she would explain that, how she got raped, how she got kept into a ceiling for months, how people would come ten, five, 15 people would come and rape her one after the other, and sometimes these were people she used to know. One guy would ask her, "Okay let's go out together" she would say no and when this happens he comes and he said, "I wanted to get married to you, you said no, now I will get you for free."
- 03:38 And that would go on and on, I mean horrific details. You, you, you put yourself in those people's place and you feel bad for them.
- 03:48** DJH: Mm-hmm.
- 03:49 And sometimes when you go to court because it happens to us; you go to court and these people they testify about what happened to them and I would get emotional.
- 03:59** DJH: Whe-, when you . . . of course. And you were not speci-, I mean you were not unique; other, other translators apparently had the same experience.
- 04:10 Of course but we were working with some people who had all their families killed . . .
- 04:13** DJH: Yes . . . yes.
- 04:14 . . . we had colleagues who had undergone the, the – who went through the genocide with others. They were working with us, yeah. So once in a while there would be an anniversary of the death of this person and then you will go to support them and (____), it was a daily life thing. You know, you knew people who went through it, especially in Kigali. We have colleagues who lost all their families.
- 04:42** DJH: So there were R-, Rwandan colleagues, yes.
- 04:44 Yes the interpreters, the translators, yes.

- 04:51 DJH: And were you prepared in any way or warned befo-, when you came on this job about the possibility of such problems?**
- 05:04 No, not really, no. I knew it was a tribunal and I knew we were going to work on that type of material but you, you can never imagine how far they are going to, yeah – what you are going to face ultimately, yeah.
- 05:19 DJH: Yes. Was there – were there any resources at the tribunal to help you, you know, psychological or other resources to help you to adjust to this or to cure, to feel a little bit better or to deal with these problems?**
- 05:41 At the moment we have a staff counselor. At the beginning it wasn't so. We asked and I think they have a staff counselor now and the lady who took care of gender issues . . .
- 05:55 DJH: Yes.**
- 05:56 . . . when you asked to talk to her she would listen to you.
- 05:59 DJH: Let's get a little timing on this. You've been involved here a long time, when did the counselor approximately come?**
- 06:09 I don't – I can't, I can't say.
- 06:10 DJH: I'm told it was maybe about a year ago. Am I correct about that or, or was it before that?**
- 06:18 I, I don't know because I, I met him in, in rotary. He happened to be in my rotary group and that is how I know him. But I don't know, I really don't know when he came in.
- 06:28 DJH: Okay, and the person with gender issues.**
- 06:32 She has been here all the time.
- 06:34 DJH: All the time.**
- 06:35 Yes, from the beginning...
- 06:35 DJH: And . . .**
- 06:36 And she – I think, it, it happens, she happens to be one of my countrylady but there was somebody before and from the beginning that person was taking care of the witnesses I think so and, yeah. She was taking care of the witnesses mostly and if you needed her I think, but, yeah.
- 06:57 DJH: Okay. So . . .**
- 06:59 You also have – there w-, there is a doctor . . .
- 07:03 DJH: Yes . . .okay.**

- 07:03 . . . a psych-, psychiatrist or psychologist, who used to work with the, the tribunal's prison, he (___) . . .
- 07:13 DJH: At the prison?**
- 07:14 Yes . . .
- 07:14 DJH: Okay . . . okay.**
- 07:15 . . . but he's available if – but Africans don't function, I, I, I think we, maybe it's, it's, it's – we are not prone to going to a psychologist or psychiatrist, you know.
- 07:30 DJH: Mm-hmm.**
- 07:31 Yeah. So maybe they would have – I can't, I can't say. Maybe they would have provided somebody if people, but we don't function like that, I think.
- 07:42 DJH: Mm-hmm.**
- 07:42 When you have a problem you tend to speak to your, to members of your family, we ask people to sit down and talk about things. You will, you will not see a lot of Africans that will go to a psychiatrist or psychologist. It's not in the – yeah, you don't, we don't have the drive, it's not there yet.
- 08:06 DJH: Yeah. It's not in the culture or the tradition. Okay.**
- 08:09 Yes, yes, yeah. If, if I had a problem, I don't think the first move would be to go to a psychiatrist and talk about it with him, yeah.
- 08:16 DJH: Sure . . .**
- 08:17 I will talk to my mom who would call an uncle; it's not in this culture I think. It's coming but, yeah.
- 08:25 DJH: Did there come a time when these problems whether it was you or somebody else and people had to take off a day or two just to deal with the problems, or they didn't have the energy to go to work in the morning because of these kinds of problems?**
- 08:39 Yeah, when it happened, if it happened, we have in the setting of our leave. You have seven days that you can take off without ha-, having to explain. So whenever, when it happened, you just tell the boss, "I'm not feeling well" and that would be it.
- 09:03 DJH: Did, did you . . .**
- 09:04 My personal I mean the, the, the boss of the language section understood that . . .
- 09:09 DJH: Okay.**

09:09 . . . because we were really working with that kind of thing and when somebody felt bad she would tell you, "Okay go home." And most of us, two or three of us would come talk with you and then, yeah. It happened.

09:21 DJH: Did you do that? Did you that, and take a day off or time some time off?

09:27 It happened but you know like an afternoon or if you feel bad but, yeah. Not more than that.