



# Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

## Official Transcript: Colette Ngoya (Part 6 of 8)



<b>Role:</b>	Translator
<b>Country of Origin:</b>	Cameroon
<b>Interview Date:</b>	13 October 2008
<b>Location:</b>	Arusha, Tanzania
<b>Interviewers:</b>	Lisa P. Nathan Donald J. Horowitz
<b>Videographer:</b>	Max Andrews Nell Carden Grey
<b>Interpreter:</b>	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 6 begins on the following page.*

## Part 6

- 00:00** Donald J Horowitz: For you personally when you took this job and when you were here for a while, did you have your own – what was your goal? You know what I’m saying, as to what you wanted to do, to accomplish in your job? Did you have such a goal?
- 00:17 It’s always considered good to work for the UN, so I came to – you know the first idea is, “I’m going to work for the UN.” And it is after that that you discover. I m-, I mean it’s more the UN than the tribunal.
- 00:32** DJH: Mm-hmm.
- 00:32 Then you get to the tribunal and you see the nature of work and you want to feel you are useful, you want to feel that you’ve contributed to whatever is happening, you want to think this thing is going to help maybe prevent this kind of thing from happening, so at some point you feel happy to have been part of it. You try to do whatever you can to do it as best as possible. That’s it.
- 01:03** DJH: Do you think you d-, you did a good job? The, the job you would like yourself to do, do you think you did that here?
- 01:13 In my capacity as a translator, yes, because we make it possible for trials to hold, we make it possible for people to understand one another. And you want to think that this helps in making people better, in making bad people fearful. Yeah, you want to think you . . .
- 01:34** DJH: Okay. And that you were part of that.
- 01:36 Yeah, you’re happy to have been – to h-, to have contributed, however small.
- 01:42** DJH: Was there a time you did something that you’re, that’s especially good, you know, that you feel really good about, during the course of your – that you’d like to tell us about?
- 01:53 Yeah, but that was not in the tribunal. We had a group . . .
- 02:00** DJH: Yes.
- 02:00 . . . and we used to work with orphans. We used to, one of our colleagues set up a small unit that she gathered widows and orphans and we would contribute to send them to school. And we sent quite a number of children to school.
- 02:21** DJH: Rwandese children?
- 02:23 Yes, yes, we used to give (\_\_\_).
- 02:25** DJH: When you were in Rwanda or when you were here or both?

- 02:27 Both, both, both. When we were in Rwanda we would, we would go to the school, get the school fees, whatever and then, and, yeah.
- 02:36 DJH: Have you followed up and learned some things about (\_\_\_\_) . . .**
- 02:37 We're still doing it, yes.
- 02:39 DJH: You're still doing it? Yes.**
- 02:40 Yes, we are still doing it.
- 02:42 DJH: And some of the children, have they done pretty well?**
- 02:44 Because we, we were sent the results, yes . . .
- 02:47 DJH: Oh good, you're sent the results.**
- 02:49 They send us the results of the children.
- 02:50 DJH: Okay. What is this called, do you have a name?**
- 02:54 No, not really.
- 02:54 DJH: Okay.**
- 02:56 It is one of our colleagues. She organizes it and, yeah.
- 03:00 DJH: Who is that colleague; can you tell me who that was?**
- 03:02 I, I have to ask her . . .
- 03:04 DJH: Okay.**
- 03:04 . . . if she says yes I'll call you and tell you.
- 03:06 DJH: Okay. And so I'm going to ask you another question. Is there something you did that you, you're not so happy about, whether it was in your, in a translation or whatever?**
- 03:18 No, not really.
- 03:20 DJH: I'm not asking you for a confession . . .**
- 03:22 No, no, I see what you mean.
- 03:22 DJH: . . . sometimes a day (\_\_\_\_) you make a mistake and you, you wish you, it were better you know.**
- 03:26 It's not coming up now.
- 03:28 DJH: Okay.**
- 03:28 Maybe if I sit, but no, I don't.

- 03:33** DJH: I, I saw the other day and you weren't doing court work but I, I saw the other day where I was watching a trial and . . .
- 03:38 Mm-hmm.
- 03:41** DJH: . . . the defense attorney was questioning the defendant and he asked him a question in English and the defendant was mostly in French. But there was a translation into French and the defendant said, "I understood what he said in English and the translation was not correct."
- 04:02 Mm-hmm.
- 04:03** DJH: Nobody argued or said anything and then he repeated, the defense lawyer, repeated it in English again and then at that time then the defendant responded and it was translated again and then he answered the question. Do those kinds of things, I mean if you're familiar with, from time to time happen? How do they, w-, do you know about how that is worked out?
- 04:30 The, the – okay, I'm not here as a, as a – I haven't worked as an interpreter in this tribunal.
- 04:36** DJH: I kno-, I know that, yeah.
- 04:37 Okay, but what I can say is that if you've been to political meetings you know that whenever somebody makes an error they make sure it is the t-, the interpreter's fault.
- 04:54** DJH: Ah.
- 04:55 And interpreters are trained to take that. That is, they are trained to – if somebody is, says something that they don't, afterwards they feel they shouldn't have said, usually it is the interpreter, "Why, he didn't understand what I said. That's not what I meant."
- 05:15 So you have a broad back, you take it, I mean it's, it's okay . . .
- 05:18** DJH: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.
- 05:19 . . . it's okay. Sometimes it is right, sometimes it is wrong. Interpreters are human beings. But most, more often than not it is not their fault.
- 05:30** DJH: Yeah.
- 05:30 They are trained to take that; it's part of the training. Yeah.
- 05:33** DJH: Mm-hmm. Okay, that's interesting to know. Yes. You were talking earlier too about if you were going to make a suggestion, it was going – one of your suggestions would be that people learn more earlier about the legal, the legal information . . .
- 05:51 Yeah, yeah.
- 05:52** DJH: . . . because that's part of your job is to ( ) . . .

- 05:54 No, it's part of your life.
- 05:55 DJH: Yes. Oh, okay.**
- 05:56 I wasn't even talking about interpreters. I've always felt that law should be part of curriculum in schools early enough for people to, to, to understand the importance of this, because it rules our life, whether you like it or not.
- 06:15 Unfortunately the three quarters of hu-, the humanity don't know anything about law so you make errors and then you are, you are fined for these errors and, you know. So I think like in my country you, when you get to secondary school you learn English, you learn mathematics and we should have law as well as mathematics. That's my impression.
- 06:38 DJH: Yes, yes. I don't think anybody asked you this in the interview when you say my country. I know your country because we've talked before. Tell us what your country is.**
- 06:50 I'm a Cameroonian.
- 06:51 DJH: Cameroon . . . yes, okay.**
- 06:52 Yeah. I'm from Cameroon.