



Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

Official Transcript: Colette Ngoya (Part 7 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.

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Part 7

- 00:00** Donald J Horowitz: Now you did apparently learn a little bit in the course of this about the, the law that is being use-, or the legal system that's being used in the tribunal; a combination of the civi-, the French civil code and the English American Common Law.
- 00:16 Yeah.
- 00:16** DJH: When – I'm not expecting that you're going to answer me as an expert - but when you learned a little bit about, about the law, did it help you in your work?
- 00:26 Yes, but I have to say that my being from Cameroon . . .
- 00:32** DJH: Yes.
- 00:33 . . . makes it that I know because my country is bilingual. In my country we speak English and French. And the English part of the country use common law and the French part use civil law.
- 00:46** DJH: Ha, I didn't know that, that's interesting.
- 00:47 Yes, yes. So our lawyers – and that is why some of them – a lot of them came here. When they are trained in the university, we have this individual bilingualism which is such that at the university the law course, the, the teacher who's – they, they hire everybody; the English speaking Cameroonian and the French speaking.
- 01:10 And when you are a teacher of law, you teach what you know. So our lawyers came out, come out with a knowledge of common law and a knowledge of civic law. If you are a Cameroonian lawyer, you have to know both in order to get your Degree. So I had some knowledge; when you go to the university you have your friends and that is how the law is done in my country. So we have both systems.
- 01:38 So I didn't learn about the systems here as such, but since I didn't have to work with it before I had a very, you know, vague knowledge so when I came here I had to learn the language mostly. While, when you learn the language you learn the concepts of course and that is what I meant.
- 01:58** DJH: And that made you more effective as a translator?
- 02:00 Of course. As, and as a human being.
- 02:02** DJH: And as a human being, of course.
- 02:03 Because now I know more about law you know. I know how it is discussed, how to go about it, yeah.
- 02:11** DJH: Well, that's very interesting. You're, I'm, you're teaching me now, thank you.
- 02:16 Thank you very much.

- 02:17** DJH: I guess if, you know, we know unfortunately what's going on now in Darfur and what's going on in Congo and so forth and so on and it may be that someday we will need another tribunal.
- 02:33** DJH: If that was going to happen, what suggestions would you have to make the tribunal better and to make your job the job that – not that you would necessarily be there but a, of a person who does your work – make it a little bit better, make it have a better result, make it a little easier for the people doing the job. And maybe make it more effective in preventing, yeah.
- 03:01** DJH: I know that's a lot of questions . . .
- 03:02 Yes, but . . .
- 03:02** DJH: . . . but I'm sure you've thought about it.
- 03:03 No, as a human being hopefully, I hope there won't be any other tribunal because we don't need that. But in my specific field, I think that now a-, it's already easier for us to translate because we have jurisprudence, the ICTY has – all these documents have been translated, we have – and . . .
- 03:30** DJH: ICTY – I'm going to interrupt you – is the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia?
- 03:34 For Yugoslavia.
- 03:35** DJH: So they had other documents translated?
- 03:38 They had, yeah, okay. So by – and it is legal history in the making, because of the fact that this combination of system is happening here. I don't know what is going to come out of it but having done all these translations, already the work is easier because you have jurisprudence to fall on.
- 04:05 Like at the beginning we didn't even – the, the, our statute and our rules of procedure and evidence have been corrected and amended and amended because as we were going along we knew that at the beginning some words were not where they were supposed to be.
- 04:24 Some concepts were translated badly at the beginning, the correc-, some corrections were made. So it's already easier to translate now than it was at the beginning. And these amendments have made it more accurate, the translation more accurate, because when you, when you are a French translator, you tend to fall on the civic system and there are some concepts that exist in the, in the common law that do not exist in there.
- 04:59 And we had to forge translations, we had to work on it and now we have words to say things that we didn't have words to say before. So I think the mere existence of this tribunal has made it easier for a translator to work on that, kind of. And we use a number of technical things like MultiTrans, that is another, I mean some technical

documen-, things the, like their software and, you know, that we use to help us translate.

05:38 And while doing this, this, the, the, the software or the technical – this help have gone better, have been made better by our working with them because at the beginning we didn't have the, the words, we didn't have the – they were quite empty if I can put it like that. Now they are more accurate, more efficient so I think it's getting easier for a translator to work in this kind of tribunal in this specific field.

06:16 I suppose that for lawyers also, the fact that these two systems were put together at some point, you will be able to, to see that this type of thing is better in the civic law and this is better in the common law and how to put it together to have a common system. I hope that is what we are (___), getting towards.

06:38 I don't know how la-, legal people do it, but for translators I think we have heard a number of concepts that are new and that are helpful that we didn't have in the French language. I mean we didn't put the same words to mean the same things. So we've had new concepts, new words to translate things that we didn't have words to translate before. So I think we've made quite a progress.

07:04 **DJH: Good, thank you.**