



Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

Official Transcript: Ololade Benson (Part 3 of 9)



Role:	Translator
Country of Origin:	Nigeria
Interview Date:	23 October 2008
Location:	Arusha, Tanzania
Interviewers:	Donald J Horowitz Robert Utter
Videographer:	Nell Carden Grey
Interpreter:	None

Interview Summary

Ololade Benson speaks about her role as a translator and the challenges of communicating sensitive material such as witness statements concerning rapes and killings. She discusses her personal engagement with an international non-profit organization that she founded in 1998 to help single mothers, widows and children in Rwanda. She emphasizes the importance of transparency and accountability for charitable organizations operating in post-conflict settings. Benson draws attention to the targeting and suffering of women in Rwanda during and after the genocide.

The transcript of Part 3 begins on the following page.

Part 3

- 00:01 Donald J Horowitz: In the translation that you were doing, I take it, you mentioned witness statements. What other kinds of documents were . . .**
- 00:11 Legal documents, you know, motions, indictments every once in a while, yeah, but mostly witness statements.
- 00:19 DJH: And witness statements were people who had observed very difficult acts, if I can say it that way.**
- 00:23 Yeah, yeah, yes.
- 00:30 DJH: You're translating, you're taking it from one language to another language. Did it, over time, did that, did doing that with that kind of material have an effect on you personally?**
- 00:41 It, yeah, at the very beginning it was very difficult. Sometimes you just, I just had to stop. Sometimes you'd even cry. (____), when a woman is describing how she was raped, you know, it was a very, very horrifying stories, yeah.
- 00:56 DJH: And over time, tell us how, how that . . .**
- 00:58 Over time, I think it just became a rou-, routine. I tried to like detach myself from, from what I was doing.
- 01:06 DJH: Did you, for your own coping, if you will, did you talk with friends? Did you . . .**
- 01:13 Yeah.
- 01:13 DJH: . . . see a counselor? Did you do any of . . .**
- 01:15 No, we just used to talk with each other, just amongst each other as colleagues, that was . . .
- 01:20 DJH: So other translators were having similar problems if you will.**
- 01:22 Yeah, yeah similar problems, yeah.
- 01:25 DJH: And you try to help each other.**
- 01:27 Each other, yeah.
- 01:28 DJH: Okay. Was there a capability at that time in Kigali, did the ICTR provide some sort of counseling opportunities?**

- 01:37 They didn't until, I was transferred here, about three years ago. They did a post-traumatic stress seminar for everyone but for a long time we complained and (___) nobody really saw the need to do that, but eventually it came about three years ago.
- 01:53 DJH: And it was here in Arusha?**
- 01:54 It was here in Arusha, Impala Hotel.
- 01:56 DJH: At the which?**
- 01:57 Impala Hotel.
- 01:58 DJH: Okay, and was that an all-day seminar, half day?**
- 02:03 (___), we're there for about three days, three full days. They checked us all into the hotel. They got a psychia-, psychiatrist from Kiga-, Nairobi. Two doctors, yeah.
- 02:13 DJH: And when you say we all did, who is we all?**
- 02:17 I think they went from section to section, yeah, section to section and any, yeah.
- 02:20 DJH: S-, so you're the translators' section of, of the language department, I'll call it, was in that and were other sections of the language department in that?**
- 02:33 Yeah, yeah.
- 02:34 DJH: And were there other departments as well? I don't know what other departments you, I suppose various people in other parts of administration or . . .**
- 02:44 Yes.
- 02:44 DJH: . . . people, in, what – maybe you should tell me.**
- 02:46 Yeah, from department – they went from department to department and I know, I, I think WVSS has the witness unit. They've had this seminar about – it's run about two or three times for them, yeah, because of the kind of work they do.
- 02:58 DJH: The witness unit works with witnesses and witness protection.**
- 03:00 Yeah, they work with wi-, yeah, witness protection, yeah, so.
- 03:02 DJH: Okay, all right. Ha-, di-, did – you just had it that once, or your department?**
- 03:06 Just once, yeah, (___) the translators once yes.
- 03:08 DJH: Yes. And how, how, how was it . . .**

- 03:11 It was, it, it, I, it was very good. I liked it because we were able to, they, they broke us up into groups and they made us even share our own personal griefs. And it was really moving. It got people closer to each other. You know, you just see people and you don't know what kind of burdens they're carrying. And it was, I, I, I liked it. I found it very fruitful and very rewarding. But it just came a little bit too late. Other than that, it was fine.
- 03:34 DJH: Would it have been helpful to have had a follow up at some point?**
- 03:37 I think so, yeah, yeah, yeah.
- 03:38 DJH: Okay, and has it had some lasting effects do you think, for you?**
- 03:47 I think so. I think so. It helped. They taught us on things of how t-, how to cope with grief and stuff like that, how to deal with – how to handle stress, exercises and things like that, yeah.
- 03:58 DJH: Okay. So we're, we're going to go back to Kigali for a while, for a few minutes. And in, in Kigali you were there that period of time, did y-, I take it you also have observed not just people. You observed people, you observed the sites where things happened and so forth and (___) . . .**
- 04:18 For a long time I tried to avoid that but then I had my pastor visit from the UK and he said he needed to feel what the people felt, so we had to go to the genocide site at the Nyamata and I had to take him. So that was my first really contact with the genocide site. Other than that, I was, I will just sit in my office and translate, yeah.
- 04:43 DJH: All right, and then what was it that led you to leave Kigali and come to Arusha?**
- 04:49 They, they needed more translators in Arusha so they transferred a whole bunch of people and I was one of the people translate-, transferred to Arusha.
- 04:59 DJH: Okay, and now you've been in Arusha since . . .**
- 05:05 2001.
- 05:06 DJH: About seven years.**
- 05:07 Yeah, seven years.
- 05:08 DJH: You're, you're quite a veteran of this organization.**
- 05:11 Yeah.
- 05:14 DJH: Why don't you give us some general observations about your time here?**
- 05:18 In Arusha?

05:19 **DJH: Yes.**

05:20 When I first got here, I really, I was a bit confused. First of all, I, I really didn't know in what direction to go. I mean, there were no gen-, there were no genocide widows here so for about a year or two I didn't do anything. I can't really remember how I – okay then there was a lady in the church I used to attend. I think I had mentioned at some point that I do charity work, and she kept inviting me to that.

05:45 She had some, she had a small office, she was helping people on H – people living AIDS. And I had another friend come from the UK who also – she's the one who's doing my website for me. She decided to come and visit me and I just sat in my room and I said, "Where am I going to take her?" Because she loves charity work as well.

06:02 Then I remembered this lady from the church and I now set up an appointment and we went there and that is this HIV AIDS thing started. I went there. I saw what she was doing and I was happy with it. And now I think that was in 2004 December, and that was the f-, that's how the food, food distribution program started.

06:20 **DJH: Okay.**