



Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

Official Transcript: Justine Ndongo-Keller (Part 7 of 13)



Role:	Chief of Language Services
Country of Origin:	Cameroon
Interview Date:	8 October 2008
Location:	Arusha, Tanzania
Interviewers:	Donald J Horowitz Lisa P. Nathan
Videographer:	Max Andrews
Interpreter:	None

Interview Summary

Justine Ndongo-Keller describes various roles within the Language Services Department at the ICTR, clarifying differences among interpreters, translators and reviewers. She stresses the importance of effective, high-quality translation for the Tribunal's overall success, as well as the significance of review in the translation process. An original member of the language services team, Ndongo-Keller also provides a perspective on the department's evolution. She comments on the personal toll to individuals in language services from extensive exposure to materials about the genocide.

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Part 7

- 00:00 **Donald J Horowitz: So, tell, tell us if you will, about some of the experiences that you or your staff have had and how it has affected them and, and (_____) . . .**
- 00:17 When you say experiences, what do you mean?
- 00:21 **DJH: What I mean is these are people as well as interpreters and they're translating sometimes very difficult subjects.**
- 00:30 (____) I know, okay.
- 00:30 **DJH: Yes. And you've been here (____), the whole time essentially.**
- 00:34 You know, the truth is you cannot – what we've been doing here will change anybody's way of thinking, you know. Any – th-, there's a, there's a, you, you leave this place and you're different because of the kind of thing you've seen, the kind of things you've heard. And it makes you reflect, you know, on, on, on the capacity of a human being to do wrong, to, to, to – how would I put it?
- 01:15 To, to, to be wicked, to, to – I will say in French la capacite de faire du mal, la capacite, a human being versus another human being, the kind of thing that one can do to the other. It's just unbelievable. So you, you start asking yourself if you were put in that situation, what would you do? Ho-, how do you behave in, in such a situation because you hear horrendous, horrendous, terrible things that you, you just . . .
- 01:52 I, y-, I was talking to colleagues from the ICTY in, in The Hague and they were just telling the same story. That, "Justine, you hear things here, then you leave. You, you take your car, you're driving or you're like okay, maybe the witness was adding, you know, he was making up a story. It can't be true. But then the next day somebody else comes and tells you exactly the same story."
- 02:16 And you're like, if this group could have done this, how do you know the other one will not do it? Even yourself sitting here, if you had the opportunity, you know, of – and then, you know there's a, there's a – you, you alone, you may not be able to do something but when there are ten, six, 20, 100, 1,000 people, you know, ready to kill, what do you do if you are amongst them, you see?
- 02:43 These are the type of question you start asking yourself, then as I said, I always say that when we got here, the setting, Arusha was not a friendly place to be because there was nothing. You know, we could go for a week no lights, you know, no electricity. And then the roads, there were potholes everywhere. It was difficult.

- 03:10 We didn't have cars, you know. It was very difficult when we started in 1997. Things started improving around 1998, and you know, now you have – we, there was no shop to go. Nothing. So it's not like you could take your car and just like, I would say decide to drive to have some air, or invite a friend for coffee, you know, in a café or something like that.
- 03:33 So it's like basically you came to work. You did your work. You heard all these things and then you went back home. And then you were alone because, at the beginning, not everybody brought, brought their families here because we didn't know about the schools, we didn't know about what was happening, et cetera.
- 03:50 But it improved with time. And then you hear so many things that at one point, you get used to them. And it's like they gloss over you now. You don't hear them anymore. You're, you're numb. You're vaccinated, you know. You're immune to what you're hearing. And as I always said, that's when problems start.
- 04:14 DJH: Tell me what you mean by that.**
- 04:17 For me personally, it's not normal to be a human being and to be, not to feel anything because – but at the same time it's a kind of protection. I, I will say a natural protection because you need to protect yourself and be able to live normally, you know, after hearing all these things, you know, because if they keep coming back, then you won't sleep, then you will . . .
- 04:45 Personally, I noticed I put on a lot of weight, you know, because I could just – at one point I will be eating and eating and eating and eating just like to forget about something, you know, to compensate. You know, I can't – it is very difficult to explain, you know. And I would be irritated at home when I go home with, with my, my children, and you know, shouting at them.
- 05:10 I would realize that there's something that is happening here and then, sometimes they would laugh at me and say, "You know, we were just looking at you when you came back from work, you know, and say she's going to shout again," you know. It's not normal but then when you rewind, then you, you, you, you're like, "Yes, these are all these things."
- 05:34 Then you have to stop it and by stopping it, this, I don't want it to disturb me. I don't want it to change the way I live. I don't, I will just listen; repeat what they're saying and go back home. But this is not normal as well, you know.
- 05:48 Then at that time, it would have been good if we had somebody we could talk to, because you swallow a lot and you don't know what it's doing in your system because all these thing that we hear, all these thing that you see, because they, we had – they will bring a video where people are killed there, you know. You watch it being done.

- 06:11 They'll bring a vi-, video, of a mass grave, you know, with, with layers of, you know, skulls and, you know. And then you are interpreting, and then you hear what the women say. Some women that had been raped and, you know, et cetera, et cetera. Ju-, just as a technician, you're not going to the "Who did what, did they did, wa-, were, were they right to do it, was it wrong?"
- 06:35 That's not the problem. The problem is what you see and what you hear, and what it does in your system – what are the consequences? I believe that in ten years today, some things may still be happening to me that will be related to all these things that you know, I had to, to, to swallow, you know, to, to, to see, to hear and, and I, I c-, I will say to, to live with, you know.
- 07:03 And then I may not even know that this is what is affecting me, you understand?
- 07:07 DJH: Yes.**
- 07:08 Yeah, that's, that's the, that's the problem. You know, I can speak for myself. I don't know how it affects others, you know, yeah.
- 07:15 DJH: Well . . .**