



Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

Official Transcript: Colette Ngoya (Part 1 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 1 begins on the following page.

Part 1

- 00:00** Lisa P. Nathan: We are interested in your experiences and thoughts on, reflections on your time here at the ICTR and on international justice and on what it's like to be a human being grappling with some of the issues that you've faced here.
- 00:17** LPN: We have been reading and speaking with others about the genocide and this tribunal, and for the people who view your interview now and well into the future, they might not know much about the situation or about the legal system. So at times when I'm talking with you I might ask you things that you think I should already know, but I'm trying to have you explain things so that people in the future understand better.
- 00:49** LPN: I may ask why a lot and that's because I want to make sure I understand. Not that you're not giving a good answer, but I want to fully understand what you're saying. And if you use terms that are kind of technical to your role, again I might ask you to describe them a bit more. And we really want to understand your thoughts and, and how you're thinking about these things. So to begin, would you give us your full name?
- 01:22** My name is Colette Ngoya, Colette Bernadette Ngoya.
- 01:26** LPN: Thank you. And what is your role here at the ICTR?
- 01:30** I'm a translator interpreter but mostly I translate.
- 01:34** LPN: Okay, but you do both.
- 01:36** Yeah, since I came I've not enter, I've, I've not been into the booth, I translate mainly, yeah.
- 01:42** LPN: Okay, but you are trained as an interpreter.
- 01:44** Yeah.
- 01:45** LPN: But you've (____)
- 01:45** But I've nev-, I've never been, I've never, never worked as an interpreter in the tribunal, yeah.
- 01:50** LPN: Okay, how long have you been at the ICTR?
- 01:55** I came here the 26th of March, 1997.
- 02:00** LPN: Okay.
- 02:01** That is about 11 years ago, yeah.
- 02:04** LPN: And here to Arusha?

- 02:07 When I first came I was in Kigali. And I left Kigali in April 19-, 2001. That is seven years ago. Yeah.
- 02:17 LPN: And when you were in Kigali were you also a translator?**
- 02:21 A translator.
- 02:22 LPN: No interpretation?**
- 02:23 No interpretation.
- 02:25 LPN: And have you had any other roles at the ICTR? Any other jobs?**
- 02:32 No.
- 02:33 LPN: Okay.**
- 02:33 No. I did a little bit of administration in Kigali, yeah . . .
- 02:37 LPN: Okay.**
- 02:38 . . . but mostly translation.
- 02:42 LPN: And what training did you have before you started?**
- 02:47 I'm a trained translator. I, should I tell you where I studied? I studied in Cameroon, I, up to the first degree at the University then I went to Montreal, the University of Montreal where I did translation, Master's Degree in translation and I went back to Cameroon and the interpretation part I did in Buea in, in Cameroon. But I was recruited here as a translator and that is my, my training, yeah. My main training as translator.
- 03:28 LPN: So can you tell me where you were in the spring of 1994?**
- 03:33 I was in Cameroon working. I was working at the Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon in Yaoundé.
- 03:43 LPN: Do you remember when you first became aware of the genocide in Rwanda?**
- 03:51 When listening to the news, of course. We were told that something was happening in Rwanda. I knew about Rwandans because I had a classmate who was Rwandese when I was in secondary school and she was a friend, kind of, so I knew about that country. And when they started talking about Rwanda, I remembered her, but I can't say we really focus on the news.
- 04:22 You know, you know that something is happening but you never really – you don't have the whole picture because the news are not as complete as they are supposed to be. And there were a lot of Rwandans in Cameroon; a lot of them came, so there were programs to help, there were programs at the telev-, national television to try and see. So we heard about it on the news, yeah.
- 04:54 LPN: Did you find – have you ever heard from your friend, from your school friend?**

04:58 When I went to Rwanda I met her. She went back, she got married, and I just met her by chance like that. We had a meeting, a Cameroonian meeting and since she has lived in Cameroon she decided to come and then I met her, yeah.

05:13 LPN: So you found out that she was okay?

05:15 She was okay, yeah. She went back and she was okay. As a matter of fact she is okay because she's still in Kigali now, yeah.