

Prosecutor vs. Georges Ruggiu

Defence Witness on Ruggiu's Character (for mitigating purposes)

[ICTR Court Transcripts, 15.05.2000, pp. 145-174]

MR AOUINI: Madam President, our witness is [...] a character witness.

MADAM PRESIDENT: Yes, I understand, Mr Aouini. [...] [T]he witness will be identified by the pseudonym AB; and that the witness's name and identity will not be disclosed. [...] Are you ready to call this witness now? [...]

MADAM PRESIDENT: Good afternoon, witness.

WITNESS AB: Good afternoon.

MADAM PRESIDENT: You have been assigned pseudonym AB, so you will be called Witness AB for the purpose of this session. [...] You have now undertaken to speak the truth. We invite you to do so and to be careful that you do not give any details that would identify you by way of your address, your name and so on, and you are obliged to answer all questions, but if the answers to some of the questions may identify you, then you alert the Judges to that. [...] Witness AB, you have been called by the Defence to testify in mitigation on behalf of Mr Georges Ruggiu, and I am now going to hand the floor to Mr Aouini, Defence Counsel for Mr Ruggiu, and when he has completed his questions, you will have questions in cross-examination from representatives of the Prosecution, who are there on your right, and you may also have questions from the Judges. Mr Aouini.

MR AOUINI: Good afternoon, Madam President. Witness AB, good afternoon. Can we start?

MADAM PRESIDENT: Yes.

EXAMINATION IN CHIEF BY MR AOUINI:

Q. How long have you known Mr Ruggiu?

A. I know Georges Ruggiu since 1992. I met him during my work -- professional activities first of all. He was a colleague and I would see him on a day-to-day basis and we

had quite close relations, the two of us. I remember the first time we met because Georges is quite a small person and he is not very evident. He is not very easily seen, but quite quickly we struck a relationship, and he was part of our team and he had this attitude which didn't respond to -- correspond to his physical being. He responded with questions in a precise manner and in a well thought out manner, too; and that enabled him to join us and mix within our group, and this in a very positive manner. He is also someone - I am still smiling when I think about him - but he was very respectful of working hours. He was respectful of all rules, and this was a bit bothersome in him because this could cause you problems with your bosses. He was too strict with procedure and there were a lot of things he wanted to obtain for the group, for our colleagues, things for which he is remembered right up until now, and there was some kind of difficulty sometimes, some conflict when we looked at the bosses. He is someone who is very social, very open. We thought that he was not always easy to deal with and we needed a lot of patience. At work we -- Georges Ruggiu had a lot of good relationships with our clientele. He responded well to questions. Despite the little training that he had, he took the trouble to look for explanations and to have a really open contact with the clients, something which was not always easy. He was also very social towards us, his colleagues, especially in the collective meaning of the term because he was someone who was not afraid to work with us. When he had to finish with his part of the job, he would ask for work, so he was someone who was really dynamic and very generous in his outlook. So I -- for me, he was a pleasant colleague and it was nice to work with him. I don't -- I really miss him as a colleague.

Q. Thank you. Were your relationships with Mr Ruggiu strictly professional?

A. No. I had the pleasure also to know him outside the job scene, almost on a daily basis also, together with other persons whom we knew and here I discovered another Ruggiu. His personality was more varied. He had a lot of things which were interesting in him and I appreciated his humor. He is someone who jokes a great deal. He made us laugh a lot and he created this ambience of conviviality amongst us, so I have memories of these very pleasant moments, also because we had long discussions together. I imagine these were privileged occasions because Georges is someone who argues -- he argues his case. He doesn't say that this is because I say it, but he always had a background to his arguments. Over and above that, he listened well. He knew how to listen to us and he was able to share and communicate very easily, and that's why I am saying that these were pleasant moments of discussions, because these are often rare occasions between adults - real sharing and communication. We had a lot of subjects of conversation, but there are some which, I think, are -- may be important to mention here; for instance, Africa. This was a subject which we had spoken of many times. I discovered Africa in the eyes of Georges. He was impassioned with Africa and he wanted to share his dreams and his passion, and this was something that was

very important. He spoke with very respectful words, words which you don't often hear because for us we have a more or less colonial - I would not say pejorative -- view of Africa. This was the first time I was hearing of Africa from someone who was really in love, I might say. In Africa he had Rwandan friends and he spoke about them with a great deal of respect. He found there -- in them, an adopted family; I think those were his words. He had many friends there who welcomed him with open arms. He was expected there. One was waiting for him and there were messages of friendship and warm welcome from Africans that he received. For us -- that was very impressive for us that someone can integrate so well in another population, in another group of peoples. These Rwandan friendships were of great importance to him, because he spoke about them often. He is very discreet in his private life, so we didn't have much information on his private life. It is something which astonished me at this time, and that is why I am repeating it today. After having bothered him a lot on this issue, I hope that he's not going to bear a grudge on me about this: Georges one day showed me a photograph of his friends who were Rwandan, especially his Rwandan girlfriend. I think this was the first time he mentioned her and his intent to make a family there. On that day - I remember this very clearly - his emotions were such that Georges left the room for sometime. For us -- made us certain that he wanted to go there, to live there and that he had people who were waiting for him there and who loved him.

We also spoke about politics, Rwandan politics, African politicians, and it wasn't mainly with me, because I am not very interested in African politics per se. Maybe this happens because of other subjects, but he spoke about this with others. I remember him specifically -- about him speaking about the opposition between the Government and the RPF. He was speaking about the political opposition singly, and this was on the time -- on the side of the Government, and he didn't hide this from me. He spoke with a lot of argument concerning -- about the western media. He thought that the western media was not providing all the events that we decided to choose specific moments to put in newspapers. He was convinced of what he was saying and he, on several occasions, brought us newspaper articles which were talking about what he was saying, and as usual Georges was saying something which was supported by something else. He never spoke just for the sake of speaking. I didn't read these articles, simply because they didn't interest me much, but I saw them going around the group and I heard they had discussions about them, but I can't say much more. He was convinced about what he was saying. That's what I felt and that's what I can repeat now. When Georges told us that he was leaving for Africa, we were not really surprised because we already knew that there were people who were important for him there, people who were waiting for him, so we were somewhat happy for him. One day he told us that he had been found a job with a non-official radio station. We thought that this was a relief because this would mean that he could settle in Rwanda in a definitive manner. He had a job and he was able to say that he was

going to settle. He was going to set up a family and really live. So we were very happy for him that he had made that decision, because there were a lot of people who were important to him there. We had the impression that Georges over there was someone who was recognised, someone who was being waited for -- waited for at the airport. He was recognised. People in the village had accepted him and he was really part of a community. We found that quite extraordinary at the time and we were saying that he was lucky to have such an experience of having found his way, as it were, over there. Obviously now, in hindsight, we remember that - the things that I remember about this is that it doesn't correspond with what was in the Belgian media. The difference of Georges which was described and the one that I knew called me to speak, because this was something about someone who, to me, was not same person. I thought a great deal about this and I was convinced very quickly, and I am still convinced today, that, for us, Georges was manipulated because he had a love for Africa, which I have never seen in anyone who spoke to me about Africa with such passion. So I had the feeling - which is a feeling because I never saw him since he was manipulated -- I had the feeling that his social aspect, his love for Africa was manipulated for ends which he, himself, had not thought about in Belgium. I haven't seen George again since the end of 1993, but I saw him on the screens on television. I would be really happy to see him again. I am sure about that. I spoke about this with other people and I am very happy to represent him in my group of people that I know, and he is someone with whom I am not afraid or ashamed of having known and with whom I would wish to continue my relationships, my personal relationships with.

Q. Thank you. One last question: If one were to conclude, how would you describe the man that you knew; how would you summarize?

A. To summarize is very difficult because he has very strong personality, but I would like to say that Georges was someone who was very good. He gave a lot of himself without expecting anything in return. That is something very rare today. He has a personality which is very strong. He is someone who is really generous. That is the feeling that I have kept of him. Maybe he is also someone who was looking for himself at the time, looking for his identity, and maybe found himself through his African relationships, the important contact which he didn't have at home in Belgium. We -- from those who spoke to us about him, we felt that he was someone who in Africa - over there in Africa - was respected, someone who had a kind of power which he didn't have when he was at home. That's how I would describe Georges.

MR AOUINI: Thank you, Madam President. We are finished with our questions to Witness AB. Thank you.

MADAM PRESIDENT: Judge Møse has a question for you, witness. [...]

JUDGE MØSE: Your last answer to the last questions was how to briefly characterize the Accused. I have here also another way of characterizing him. Are these your words: "Un homme courageux, un peu idéaliste, certes, mais profondément imprégné de valeurs de justice et d'équité"? Is that your opinion, in brief?

WITNESS AB: Justice and equality. I will speak about a period relating to Belgium. Georges had the need to get the rules respected. He knows a bit about the law and he thought the law should be respected. Equality, fairness -- we have never had ethnic or racist discussions in relation to that. We never discussed the issue, but I think he is somebody, or at least in our circle of friends, we are all considered as equals and Georges, whenever he undertook to do an action did it not for him, but for all of us. From the professional standpoint in his discussions, he is also equally generous. I never felt bias or injustice in whatever he said. He was somebody who always had considered opinions, supported with arguments, and I think he has also come a long way. We have discussed over a long period and I think he is somebody who has developed over time and someone who tries to be very just and fair. I don't know if that answers your question, Your Honour.

EXAMINATION BY MADAM PRESIDENT:

Witness, do you see this Georges, who you spoke about? Do you see him here in court today?

A. I saw him on the screen. I haven't seen him physically, but I think so. I think I have seen Georges, and I can see a Georges who is very pensive, thinking about himself and still continues to think about himself. I can recognise him physically, and physically he is somebody who has much thought. I think it should be difficult for him to hear what I have said, because in our friendly relationship this is a judgment -- a value judgment that I am placing about his character, and this might not be easy for him to hear us speak about him in those terms, but I think it is necessary for us to do it, and I believe that that is my Georges.

Q. Do you see him in court today, right here? If you can't, you can stand up and look, but mind that you are still behind the curtains.

A. Yes, that's him.

Q. He looks the same as when you saw him?

A. He looks a bit tired, but that's certainly him.

Q. So you know him for a period from 1992 till the end of 1993 approximately?

A. Yes, that is correct.

Q. What kind of work was Georges Ruggiu doing when you were working together?

A. We had administrative and social work. I can probably write that for you. I can give you a more concrete answer if I wrote it down, if that's not creating a problem.

Q. Did the work have anything to do with conveying information to the public in terms of media or broadcasting?

A. No; absolutely not. We had no radio broadcasting contact. It is a contact with clients and a study of legal documents but, no contact, no radio broadcasts or any contact with the written media.

Q. Yes, that would be a sufficient answer. Would you say that he is an educated person.

A. Yes, and that is why it's very pleasant to chat with him. I think he is somebody who is well educated. He is educated and educated in a wide sense of the word, cultured. He can grasp things very easily and well mannered in relation to colleagues, women, respect for order.

Q. Do you know the level of academic education that he has reached?

A. I think so. I think he was an educator, but I don't think that's the link. I am not too sure about what I am saying, but I have never made a link between education and studies. As far as I am concerned, education is part and parcel of general culture and that could be acquired in many respects. Georges is curious a person. He is widely read. He talks a lot he listens a lot and he takes time to listen to interesting people.

Q. You said he was a thinker.

A. Yes. I think he is somebody who is -- who has considered opinion, who thinks deeply, but at the same time he is spontaneous. It's like two opposing aspects of his character. I have had to discuss a number of things with him -- to talk over it again, to think about it, to modify his opinion, to come up with something else. He is not somebody who is haphazard. He thinks deeply and has a very precise and coherent language.

Q. He is someone who thinks before he makes a decision?

A. He is very spontaneous. I am not too sure if he always thinks before. Most of the discussions that we have had are on very common subjects and subjects that you probably have thought through, but I know he is very spontaneous. I have seen him in a professional

setting, being nervous about finding a solution. I think he has the faculty to think through, but I cannot say he always does that before. He is somebody who is direct in the capacity to say or do certain things and correct them or adapt them to his subsequent reflection, and I think he had that capacity to very quickly get angry, but also to recognise his fault and adapt his behaviour -- his subsequent behaviour to his considered opinion.

Q. Everything that you ever told us so far about Georges Ruggiu is to the effect that he is a person who makes his own decisions, so why do you want this Court to believe that he was manipulated in Rwanda? Why do you say that?

A. I don't want the Chamber to believe that. That is not my view. What I am trying to do here is my intuition in relation to him. I'm not saying -- I don't want the Court to take my word as the gospel truth, but in relation to my relationship with him, discussions that we have had, he is somebody who can be manipulated. We have discussed extensively. We have never had any conflicts or disputes, but we have often had arguments and have managed to get him to see that we were right, and they have always been positive and enriching discussions for all you have, and that is why I think that he has a passion for Africa. He has never, never, ever spoken about ethnic -- African ethnic problems, but he also spoke in terms of political opposition. He never even told us that he was going there in Africa to -- for any political cause, but he was going for the passion to join the family that was waiting for him with open arms, and the words that he was purported to have said in the -- as quoted in the Belgian press surprised me and that did not fit in with the portrait that I knew of him. The portrait that the Belgium press painted of him -- the only explanation I can find for the portrait the Belgian press painted of him is that he was

manipulated and that at a given time he found himself in a trap, and that that is the way I see the thing.

Q. Well, I understand that that's one of the explanations that you worked out, but can you tell us of an instance where you, for instance, manipulated him to do something that he didn't want to do?

A. I'm not that type. I did not have that kind of relationship with him, because I don't use people. I can use what they know, but it will always be with their consent. It's not -- that is not in my nature to manipulate people, but that is the impression that I have, that you can manipulate, that you can get Georges to do what you want him to do. If you want him to do -- to render a certain service, you can get him to do that, but I did not abuse that.

Q. Are you related to him in any way?

A. No; absolutely not.

CROSS-EXAMINATION BY MR EGBE:

Thank you, Your Honours. Witness AB, welcome to the International Tribunal.

WITNESS AB: Thank you.

Q. I followed very closely your account of who Georges Ruggiu is and I believe you know him very well. Now, I just want to ask you a few questions just to situate that impression I have appropriately. You said you knew Georges Ruggiu in 1992. Could you try to situate us in terms of time when exactly in 1992 you met Ruggiu?

A. In my opinion, you should also know the dates, like me. It was towards the end of 1992; I can't - I think it was the second half of the last quarter.

Q. You knew him in 1992? Now you also said --

A. October.

Q. Around October; that's more precise.

A. Yes, I think so. Well, I think it should have been around October, September-October.

Q. Of '92, and you didn't see him anymore at the end of 1993; am I correct?

A. That is correct.

Q. So the personality you are describing before this Court today, you knew him from October 1992 to, say, December 1993; am I correct?

A. Yes, one year; a year and a half.

Q. To the end of 1992 gives us about one year and two months, about 14 months. Now, do you want this Court to believe that somebody whom you met for 14 months, you know him sufficiently to be a good character witness before this Court?

A. If I didn't think so, I don't think I would have come all this way. I think it's a long and tiring journey. It is just in the quest to bring out the truth, to give my testimony in the sense

that I have known him on a daily basis in the line of my duty - that is about eight hours a day - and outside working hours, I knew him. He had such a strong personality that -- an honest personality, that he had no reason to hide the real Georges from us, and I believe that is the real Georges I got to know. I travel all the way to come here, and I must say it was painful, and I think my opinion can help this Court to better perceive the personality of Georges, and I believe that is what it is going to do.

Q. Witness AB, I do appreciate the pains that you have taken to come and testify. I do appreciate that, and I am sure the Court would appreciate that. If I am putting questions to you, it is just to enable me and enable the Court to understand exactly what the nature of the relationship is? Now, you said [...] you met him in the course of the exercise of your professional functions. You both worked in the same service, and further you met him outside the context of work; am I correct?

A. Yes; that is correct.

Q. Tell us a little bit more: When you met him outside work, where did you meet him? Could you tell us where you used to meet him?

A. Can I give my answer in writing? Because that might reveal - if the Court grants leave --

MADAM PRESIDENT: Are you insisting on an answer?

MR EGBE: I am not insisting on an answer. I am just trying to explore.

MADAM PRESIDENT: It might be the local bar! We don't know.

MR EGBE: I am trying to establish something, Your Honour.

MADAM PRESIDENT: You met the witness socially; I think that was the answer.

WITNESS AB: Yes; that is correct. We were rarely together, just two of us. We were normally in a group.

MR EGBE: Within social circles. Now, you told the Court that you discovered he was a different personality outside work; am I correct?

A. I didn't say "different". I said more varied and stronger. Within a professional context, we had a working relationship, and I was able to discover the humour -- the sense of humour outside of work, so most of the discussions that we had were outside work and all the sharing

of ideas were outside work, and that was why I was able to discover and also feel the additional dimension that Georges had in relation to other subjects, apart from professional issues.

Q. Witness, I will just ask you a few more questions and I will leave it at that. Now, you did tell the Court that you had a few privileged moments with him; am I correct?

A. What I call privileged relationship is that, it's -- they are rare moments in the sense that this is somebody who can listen with real dialogue. These are rare moments. Very often what happens is that people talk to each other, but there is no communication, and that is what I referred to as privileged moments, where you have somebody listening to you, or special moments with a certain trend in the communication, in the discussion. These are very rare.

Q. Are you aware that he may have had another privileged relationship with someone else, other than you?

A. Exactly. I said in my testimony that in the circle of friends I was not discussing with him alone. We were chatting together with other people and when it was -- it had to do with political subjects. He was talking to others and I talked to others. It was not just the two of us. It was a social group, a circle of friends. Sometimes we had three people speaking at the same time. It was not an exclusive relationship.

Q. Let me draw your attention to an expression you used this afternoon in Court when President Pillay put a question to you.

A. Yes.

Q. The question -- were you able to identify if Georges Ruggiu was in Court today; am I correct? Do you remember that? Do you recall that?

A. Yes.

Q. And your answer was, "Same old Georges".

A. Yes.

Q. Do you recall that?

A. Yes, absolutely.

Q. Do you want this Court to believe that, in view of the relationship you had with Georges Ruggiu, you actually can be an objective witness as to his character?

A. Well, maybe there is an undercurrent. It was a purely friendly relationship. I would like to emphasise this. I think this is very -- I really want to emphasise to this Court that it was a purely friendly relationship, and can I give that in writing.

MR GILISSEN: It is not necessary, madam; but with your leave: I am really surprised because we are going where we are not supposed to go. In justice, you don't go where you are not supposed to go. The question was to know whether she was a girlfriend of the Accused or not, and the answer was no, and I don't think we should --

MS DEL PONTE: Madam, we are not here to speak in tongues. We asked a question. She either answers, or not. She suggests that she wants to give an answer in writing and we renounce to that. We do not need an answer in writing. If she wants to answer, she can answer. If she doesn't want to answer, that's it. There are no undercurrents.

WITNESS AB: I understood that there were undercurrents.

Q. No, there are no undercurrents. These are straightforward questions.

A. Well, in that case, the answer -- the answer may touch on my family.

Q. If you do not want to answer, you know you are free not to answer, but not in writing.

A. No, because this touches on my family. No, drop it; it's okay.

MR EGBE: Just one last question and without any undercurrents. I have listened to what you said and I have just one last question. Do you know some faults about Mr Ruggiu?

A. I don't think that my testimony was exclusively on qualities. I even said that this is somebody, that he knew the law so much. Well, that could be a fault because he could turn around his ideas several times before bringing them out, but he was quite direct, and that brought some misunderstandings in professional circles. Well, all the characteristics of a person can be seen either from a positive or negative standpoint.

Q. No, that's not the issue. My question is this: We all know ordinary faults.

A. I think he is sometimes carried away. He has so much energy that sometimes he gets carried away.

MS DEL PONTE: Thank you, no further questions, Madam President.

MADAM PRESIDENT: Witness AB, the Judges have heard your response that it is a relationship; you are a friend of the Accused.

WITNESS AB: I am stating it again. I am simply a friend, and I do not see why I would come here and deny my relationships with him. I knew him better, but I didn't have any privileged relationships with the Accused. I knew him simply as a friend. I only knew him on that basis. I didn't live with him and I didn't have any relationships, other than friendly relations with him, and I don't see why I would hide those relationships that I had with him.

MADAM PRESIDENT: Yes, thank you. I understand. Do you know whether Georges Ruggiu belonged to any political organisation in relation to Rwanda?

WITNESS AB: In relation to Rwanda, no, no; in other words, I knew that he was partisan with the Government, but I don't know whether he belonged to a group or not.

MADAM PRESIDENT: And did he express any opinions to you on -- that's critical of the Belgium Government's policies towards Rwanda?

WITNESS AB: I spoke about this again with someone who discussed politics with Georges and, in our memories, we would remember what the orientation of the western media was, and that was what came again and again in his conversation: That the western media was only providing part of the truth. And we didn't go into the Belgian or Rwandan politics at all. There was no link.

MADAM PRESIDENT: Witness AB, our Trial Chamber appreciates that you have come to testify on behalf of Mr Ruggiu, and we thank you for participating in the process to uncover the truth, and we wish you well on your return. Thank you.