Voices from the Rwanda Tribunal

Official Transcript: M-L. Lambert (Part 5 of 8)

Role:	Associate Legal Officer
Country of Origin:	England
Interview Date:	23 October 2008
Location:	Arusha, Tanzania
Interviewers:	Donald J Horowitz John McKay
Videographer:	Max Andrews
Interpreter:	None

Interview Summary

M-L. Lambert describes her personal relationship with convicted genocidaire Hassan Ngeze, who she worked closely with at the Tribunal. She speaks at length about her responsibilities researching and drafting judgments for Military 1, reflecting on the difficulties of assessing the credibility of witnesses and evidence in a post-genocide climate. She talks about the harrowing evidence presented to the court and recounts the case against Colonel Bagosora who was accused of masterminding the genocide against the Tutsis.

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Part 5

00:00 **Donald J Horowitz: You say, you were talking about the content of what you were reading. Do you also look at the video from time to time?**

00:06 I haven't done. It would have been useful on occasion to do so, but, you know, the main assessors of whether a witness are credible are the judges and they were there, and they know. And there are, you know, witnesses that stand out more than others. The victims, mostly the women that lost their husbands.

00:26 **DJH: Mm-hmm.**

00:27 The girls that, who, you know, at the time of the atrocities would have been ten or eleven, who, you know, were raped. You know, I mean I think, the, I think the one that stands out most, I mean, there's, there's transcripts that stand out all the time, and we read the transcripts.

00:49 And it's sometimes, I mean it's, it's harrowing. It's difficult for words to be harrowing on a page during testimony. It's sometimes so disjointed and the detail is, is not always focused on the actual crime but who may have been there, because it's a, a case of, you know, who's responsible.

01:09 But there are moments at which you know, you're reminded. And the one that sticks out most, I think, is the testimony of a UNAMIR officer, called Major Brent Beardsley. And I can talk about it, because it's . . .

01:23 **DJH: UNAMIR is?**

01:25 UNAMIR was the UN peacekeeping mission or force that were placed in Rwanda in 1994, who were overseeing the peace process and the implementation of democratization that were occurring between the Hutu government and the RPF Tutsi, predominately Tutsi forces.

01:46 **DJH: This is immediately post the, or was it during the, the violence or immediately after the violence?**

01:53 No, this is prior. This is prior to . . .

01:55 **DJH: Prior to the violence?**

01:55 This is prior to 1994.

01:56 **DJH: Okay. Okay. Sure.**

01:57 In Rwanda, what you had in 1994 is you had two sides that were negotiating for peace and a UN force that were facilitating those negotiations.

02:03 **DJH: Right. Okay. So this was pre-, I, and I remember there was something called . . .**

02:06 That's right.

02:07 **DJH: . . . the Arusha Accord.**

02:08 That's exactly right.

02:09 **DJH: Okay.**

02:09 So at the point at which the violence occurred, the eruption of violence occurred sort of you know, on the 7th of April, you still have this, you know, peacekeeping force in Rwanda, on the ground.

02:22 And one of them was a man called Major Brent Beardsley. He worked very close with General Dallaire, who was head of this peacekeeping force. And he testifies that on the morning of the 8th of April, he received a radio transmission from two Polish military observers.

02:41 Now, when you're reading their testimony of these you know UNAMIR guys, they're military, they have military backgrounds, but they're very succinct with their use of language. And their observations, to my mind, at least, when I'm reading, you know, are almost always neutral and trustworthy, I believe. That's the impression I've received from their testimony, and his.

03:08 So when you, when he describes the scene on the 8th of April, of arriving at a church where he opens you know the doors of the church and observes the scene of men, women, and children who've sought refuge there, who've been rounded there, being massacred in ways . . .

03:32 And I remember his words. He says that the people at the church were killed in a way that was designed to cause maximum amount of pain and for it to be as drawn out as possible. And he describes that in the context of civilians. And he describes that in the context of unarmed civilians who are mothers and fathers and young, innocent children.

03:56 And he does it in a way which is poignant and succinct, and then he describes what occurred to the Polish observers who were there to report on, on, on what's happening in the country and they were forced by the perpetrators of the crime to watch this entire process by being forced against a wall with guns to their heads and being told they'd be shot if they didn't keep their eyes open.

04:22 And we have that on, on the morning of the 8th of April described by someone who is neutral in the conflict and, and that sticks out, and that's what judgment drafting in-, involves, is reading that evidence. Yeah.

04:38 **DJH: And the, despite all, all efforts to remain somewhat judicial or detached or whatever, I gather from what you're saying, it's difficult.**

04:52 Of course it's difficult. I mean, the, of course, our job is not to allow what we're reading to cloud our decision on whether the f-, you know, whether the factual allegations have

been proven. And how, the ones that have been proven, or not, relate to, you know, a legal standard. That's what we do.

05:11 **DJH: And to, and to these particular people who are being charged? Yeah.**

05:14 Exactly. But there are moments in which, you know, you leave the office and you think that, that really all humanity was lost in Rwanda during that hundred day period. And you wonder what would have driven people to do that and where that evil came from. And you cry. Basically, yeah.

05:41 **DJH: And you, you've read a lot of this material over the course of these years.**

05:44 I have, yeah, in the last two. I've been engaged a lot with it.

05:48 **DJH: And how do you deal with it? How do you c-, I mean, personally, I'm talking about personally cope with it. Do you . . .**

05:58 That is kind of one of the difficulties of, of the work that we do here. Recently, we, the, the tribunal employed a counselor. And when I say recently, I think, you know, he was employed in March, 2008. Up until that point, I saw no sign of a counselor. So there was no one, really, to talk to.

06:20 I think people repress what they feel when they read this. They either toughen up. I've seen people develop, you know, what to outsiders would seem to be a morbid humor. Or you know, or comic relief elements of, to the work that we do. Which, to an outsider, I think they would find that vulgar and unthinkable, but may be a way of coping with what we're reading.

06:52 So, but that it affects you is without question. It's just a question of, of the outlet that you find. And within this environment, it's difficult to talk about how it's affecting you, because you have to be professional at work.

07:07 And you know, you don't sometimes realize that it's affecting it (___) until maybe you've had, you know, four glasses of wine or you've had a really bad day. At which point that you might turn to people outside of work, who are your friends in this environment who don't necessarily understand what it is that we're doing or why we're doing it.

07:28 And in Arusha or in Tanzania where we're located, perceive what we're doing to be a, a big waste of time and money, so finding sympathetic ears or people that really understand can be hard. Yeah.

07:43 **DJH: Okay. Have you, and you don't have to answer this, have you sought out the services of the counselor here?**

07:50 I have done. It was not necessarily for, it wasn't for, for the work that I was involved with here. My father recently passed away . . .

08:00 **DJH: Ah.**

08:00 . . . so I went to see the counselor for those reasons. But certainly, I felt that, you know, dealing or grieving with the loss of one's close family member or someone important in your life is, it's difficult to forget or move on from that when your job is to daily read transcripts of, about people who, you know, either perpetrated killings, were alleged to, or did, or, it's difficult to escape death.

08:29 And so I, I wanted to, not escape it, but talk about that I was finding it difficult to do so, and that's why I went to the counselor.

08:39 DJH: Okay.

08:39 It's okay.

08:40 DJH: Find it, did you find it somewhat helpful?

08:42 Somewhat helpful. Yeah. Yeah, as with all things.

08:44 DJH: Do you, do you share also, and I'm not talking about your father's death, necessarily, but with, there are a number of associate legal officers here . . .

08:52 Mm-hmm.

08:53 DJH: . . . do you have friends that you are able to share with here, who may be having some of the same . . .

08:58 You know, in this environment . . .

08:58 DJH: . . . some of the same issues?

08:59 Yeah of course, I find, well, I found in, in this environment, it's unusual in that your, your closest friends will often be your colleagues.

09:08 DJH: Yes.

09:09 I think elsewhere or back home, or my prior experience at working in you know, Malaysian Borneo or for this finance firm in London, I found that there was a distinct line between work and private life. And here, the two are very much blurred.

09:22 It's a very intense environment to be working with. The work is intense. The, the, the content of what we're doing is intense. We're all away from our families and friends, for the most part, in a, you know, unusual or, you know, foreign cultural environment.

09:38 So we, you come to rely on your colleagues more than you would do elsewhere. So you, you do have a support network. But within that, then comes the, should I, should I engage in that? Or do I want to just be a work colleague? And, and that's the distinction, that's the sort of gray area that you have to sort of tread around. You know. And, and navigate, yeah.