

## Box 8: Mathieu Ngirumpatse, the chosen “successor” to Habyarimana

Mathieu Ngirumpatse was born on 1 December 1939 at Rulindo, Tare commune, Kigali Prefecture. Still undertaking his law studies, he was recruited by the new Ministry of Justice in Independent Rwanda. He gradually rose through several echelons of the judicial administration and became Chief of the Public Prosecutor’s Office in Butare and Kigali. In 1972, he was a lecturer in Law at the Senior Military Academy, even as he officially had no other diploma apart from a Diploma in Latin awarded by the Collège St Paul in Bukavu.

With the Second Republic, he was transferred on 15 February, 1974, to the Ministry of External Affairs and Co-operation at the time under the authority of Major Aloys Nsekaliye (Hutu, Gisenyi), who appointed him Ambassador to Ethiopia, with accreditation to Sudan and the OUA until 1979; he was then posted to the Embassy of Rwanda in Germany.

Destabilized by family problems, he withdrew from public life, and in September 1982, he was authorized to study for a Doctorate degree in Private Law in the University of Strasbourg<sup>52</sup>, where he defended on 11 October 1985, a thesis on “The Dowry or Inkwano system in Rwandan Law”.

He returned to the Central Administration on 18 February, 1986, and was posted to the Presidency of the Republic External Affairs, under the orders of Siméon Nteziryayo. He was there in charge of highly sensitive files as seen during meetings such as the Rwanda-Uganda Joint Ministerial Committee on Rwandan refugees, held in Kigali from 15 to 17 February, 1989. He worked in the Presidency until 16 March, 1990, when he was dedicated to the Ministry of Finance and appointed as Manager of Sonarwa, a highly sought-after as particularly rewarding position.

On 31 December, 1991, he succeeded Sylvestre Nsanzimana (Hutu, Gikongoro), who had become Prime Minister, at the Ministry of Justice, was replaced on 16 April, following the formation of the first multiparty government.

Regarding responsibilities as a militant, he was elected as MNRD National Secretary during the Congress of April 1992; that marked the inception of the Renovated MNRD and he organized the activities of the political bureau. His election as chairman of the MNRD at the Congress of 3-4 July, was considered an affront to President Habyarimana and a recentering of the Party in Kigali, but his victory soon became relative when Joseph Nzirorera was appointed as Executive Secretary. Once more, on 15 July, 1993, he applied to be relieved of his functions for personal matters, “given the incompatibility of his new functions with his capacity as a civil servant”. Like Édouard Karemera had done shortly before, he opened a private law firm.

At the end of the year, considering himself as targeted by northerner’s elements, he resigned from the presidency of the party and thus informed Juvénal Habyarimana. Karemera persuaded him to reconsider his decision. This succession of opportunity and indentation was often seen as a sign of inconsistency from Ngirumpatse. One of the finest analysts among Rwandan politicians summarizes

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<sup>52</sup> Obtaining that « doctorate » could give rise to a lot of questions. As a matter of fact, no previous university degree figured in his administrative file, nor in the applicant’s *curriculum vitae*. Only non-authenticated university enrolments or certificates for various refresher courses can be seen. Furthermore, the first batch of jurists trained in the National university of Rwanda (UNR) only passed out in 1977. In absence any university antecedents, he could not aspire to a diploma in higher education recognized by the State or claim to hold a Ph.D. In France, PhDs are specific University degrees awarded and authenticated by the university issuing them. They do not entitle one to equivalence or prerogatives attached to a doctorate. Candidates with no adequate university degrees are usually admitted for a Ph.D. through « validation of their professional knowledge ».

what was both his strength and his weakness: "He was the creature of Juvenal, who liked him and gave him several lives."

On 7 April, 1994, in the morning, he refused to deputize for President Habyarimana, murdered the day before, and played a determinant role in setting up the Interim Government. He then carried out diverse diplomatic missions to explain the policy of that Government. The Council of Ministers of 17 May, 1994, endorsed the appointment of new members of the President Théodore Sindikubwabo's Office, including Mathieu Ndirumpatse as *Chargé de mission* for external affairs. He kept that observant position until his flight to Zaire after the defeat.