

Box 2: Joseph Nzirorera, the President's "creation" and his "Icarus flight"

Joseph Nzirorera was born in 1950 at Busogo, Mukingo *commune*, in Ruhengeri Prefecture. In 1975, the University of Butare awarded him a Degree in Civil Engineering (construction).

Joseph Nzirorera was appointed as Principal Assistant Secretary on probation on 15 November 1977, and once confirmed on 30 July 1976, he took over the General Administration of the Highways Department, one of the most lucrative positions in the Public Service given to the budgets and contracts he managed. He benefited outrageously took advantage of them and, strange enough, he was severely reprimanded by the new Minister from Butare, Félicien Gatabazi (nominated in 1977), *rising star* of Southern politicians.

But in the May 1980 grading, the reproach had been left out. The situation of the interested official had meanwhile evolved significantly. In April 1980, Siméon Nteziryayo (*Hutu, Cyangugu*), Gatabazi's successor and Minister of Public Works and Equipment, had entered the Government on as Minister at the Presidency of the Republic, thus leaving the Ministry of Public Works and Equipment without a substantive Minister until the formation of the 29 March, 1981 Government. From that day to the formation of the first so-called «multiparty» Government on 31 December, 1991, and the appointment of a Prime Minister, Joseph Nzirorera served in all the Ministries and consolidated his hold over the Ministry of Public Works to which was added the Energy and then the Water portfolios. He sat in the CND throughout the three Legislatures (1981, 1983, and 1989). He was also appointed to the MNRD Central Committee during the 20 December 1983 Congress, and was a member of the all-powerful political Committee.

Joseph Nzirorera's position was unprecedented, thanks to the resolve shown by Juvénal Habyarimana, and once in position, he became the immovable link between his prefecture and the Presidency. Joseph Nzirorera, organizer of «leakages» for his personal benefit right from the time he left University and got employed, once more became Minister of Public Works, in charge of the king-pin of the «rhizome-like⁹» nepotistic system coordinated by the Presidency for redistributing advantages to members of the presidential clan; which scheme served as a reward for services rendered, without forgetting the gratitude owed to Juvénal Habyarimana's in-law family and precisely the prefect of Ruhengeri, Protais Zigiranyirazo, bosom and immovable friend to Joseph Nzirorera, who had given him political standing and made him untouchable.

Joseph Nzirorera was authorized to hold a personal court and could render all sorts of services: provide employment, commit credits and especially offer all the services under the competence of his Ministry. He thus created a network of obliged among the Officers from the North, notably, from Ruhengeri.

But, besides this redistributive function, he enjoyed the rarest privilege of using for personal ends, and without any limitations, the resources under his control. He was at the time nicknamed "Total".

⁹ According to the expression by former Minister James Gasana, in *Rwanda: du Parti-État à l'État-garnison*. Paris, L'Harmattan, 2002, 348 p.

Beyond the President's family circle, very few personalities of the 2nd Republic enjoyed such privileges.

That position of « second » to the President was confirmed in diverse ways, through closer links. Thus, Nzirorera's sister-in-law, Béatrice who then worked in the BCR (Commercial Bank of Rwanda) was married to the President's nephew, Ildephonse Gashumba, chief of service for foreign exchange - a strategic position for controlling the flow of foreign exchange – at the BNR (National Bank of Rwanda). Among the other important outward features that officially sealed the close links between Joseph Nzirorera and the President's family was his status as Godfather at the wedding of Marie-Jeanne Habyarimana, Juvénal Habyarimana's daughter, with Alphonse Ntilivamunda, then General Manager of the Highways Department, like him a native of Mukingo *commune*.

The transfer of Joseph Nzirorera to the Ministry of Industry and Handicrafts under the two last Governments preceding the advent of multiparty politics marks a change of direction in his public career. This was due to diverse reasons, the first being the openly expressed exasperation by international donors over the brazen manner in which Nzirorera took a cut from both projects implemented by the Minitrape and those executed in the Northern prefectures. This discontent was echoed by the President, alarmed by the megalomania that had gripped his «creature». It took the constant mobilization of in-law the family members to dissuade the President from dismissing him as a Minister. In the meanwhile, Joseph Nzirorera received copies of the reports about him through the President's own Private Secretary, Élie Sagatwa, who was Nzirorera's brother-in-law, and then deployed his greatest manipulative and seductive skills.

Finally, the President's reaction was to take two half-measures: the entry into Government in February 1991, of new personalities with a «clean» image: Enoch Ruhigira (Hutu, Kibuye), James Gasana (Hutu, Byumba), Augustin Ngirabatware (Hutu, Gisenyi) – already member of the 10 July, 1990 government – and François Nzabahimana (Hutu, Gitarama) and the transfer of Joseph Nzirorera to the Minimat, a less exposed and lucrative Ministry. Although the recently tolerated «democratic» press continued to denounce the depravity of that personage, the donors appreciated the President's gesture and their new interlocutors.

With the enshrining of multiparty politics and the formation of the Dismas Nsengiyaremye Government on 10 July 1992, Nzirorera who epitomized the failings of the Habyarimana regime was forced to retreat momentarily from the official political scene. His influence also waned within the MNRD, where the reformers had unanimously decried monolithic politics, but Joseph Nzirorera took advantage of the waning powers of the President to present himself as a rampart, as the regime's only tough candidate in a position to save what was still redeemable.

The MNRD Congress of 3 and 4 July, 1993, preceded on 30 March by the Head of State's withdrawal from the presidency of the Party to avoid accumulate administrative and political functions, opened wide the game. The «reformers» were in luck and got the idea of asserting themselves by electing Mathieu Ndirumpatse, another eminent personality aroused by the President as party chairman; but the position that was hotly contested was that of General Secretary, a post coveted by Joseph Nzirorera. Contrary to Mathieu Ndirumpatse, his loyalty to the President remained absolute and with subtle maneuvers, he won and barely settled in his position, quickly ensured the effective control of the party machinery at the expense of Mathieu Ndirumpatse, who only had the title of president (*See Box 2*).

In the Transitional National Assembly created by virtue of the Arusha Accords (See Annex 2), his name figured on the "definitive official list" of Members of Parliament (*Députés*) designated to represent the Ruhengeri Prefecture.

After the death of President Habyarimana, he kept out of the Transitional Government and prepared for the «true» succession. He achieved his goal; but shortly too late, by convening an *ad hoc* National Assembly in Gisenyi on 4 July, 1994, which elected him as President of that body. It was left now for him to organize the departure of the interim President, Théodore Sindikubwabo, in order to be confirmed as President of the Republic of Rwanda; but the RPF advance and Sindikubwabo's refusal to budge made it impossible for him to accede to that highly coveted position. This way, he was about to reach the summit of power just as the system he had nurtured came crashing down. The only time he actually reigned was in the refugee camps in North Kivu.

Hounded by the ICTR, he was arrested on 5 June 1998 in Benin and was transferred to Arusha to be judged.