

Presentation of the website

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Based on an interview given by Dominique Mbonyumutwa himself in Gisenyi in 1984 and published in « *Rwanda: 2 guerres civiles sur une génération* » (*l'Harmattan, 1989*), this website will first recount the key stages of Dominique Mbonyumutwa's life until his death in 1986.

From 1941 to 1946, Dominique Mbonyumutwa served as a teacher in Komonyi, Rutongo and Muyunzwe. From 1948 to 1952, he worked as a Belgian administration clerk in Gitarama. Later on, he was appointed deputy chief in Ndiza, where he worked from 1952 to 1959. After he became a leader within the political party « PARMEHUTU (Parti du Mouvement de l'Emancipation hutu : Party of the Hutu Emancipation Movement), he was elected first Head of the Rwandan State and therefore occupied the position of the President of the Rwandan Republic that had just been proclaimed in Gitarama on 28th January 1961, after the abolition of the millennial Tutsi monarchy. His austere life was also full of anecdotes. By way of illustration, when he was only eight years old, he displayed a revolutionary behaviour by choosing to attend school instead of accepting to take over the role of his father and to do chores for a local Tutsi master. His father had just passed away; the refusal to take over from him led the Tutsi master to dispossess his mother of her cattle.

As President of the Republic, he used to remind every Rwandan woman who was carrying a baby on her back, that she was carrying a potential president. This anecdote illustrates what democracy is all about.

II. TESTIMONIES

FILIP REYNTJENS

Public law scholar, F. Reyntjens published an article entitled « *Rwanda : Pouvoir et Droit.* » A large section is devoted to the proclamation of the Republic in Rwanda on 28th January 1961. An equally important part extensively describes how Dominique Mbonyumutwa was proposed as a candidate to the 3,000 Congress participants at the Gitarama stadium, when more than 80% of the participants elected him as the first President of the Rwandan Republic. This highest office had just been created for the first time in Rwanda after the overthrow of the millennial monarchy with the Tutsi king on that very day. The new power opponents later alluded to this event not as the "peoples' congress", but rather as the « *Gitarama coup* ».

The article goes on to say that this republic under a parliamentary governance remained provisional until shortly after the 25th September 1961 referendum, when it became a presidential system. Dominique Mbonyumutwa resigned; the Rwandan parliament elected a

new president, Grégoire Kayibanda, who was the chairman of the ruling party and outgoing Prime Minister.

The scholar explains that the proclamation of a republican regime had resulted from the political parties PARMEHUTU and APROSOMA's struggle against what they believed to be the domination by the Tutsi aristocracy on the Hutu majority, who were exploited at will. That domination had earlier been denounced throughout a document known as « *Manifeste des Bahutu* » (*Bahutu Manifesto*), published in March 1957, and also called « *Note sur l'aspect du problème racial au Rwanda*. » King Rudahigwa and the 12 keepers of the royal tradition had reacted negatively to that Manifesto, arguing that the Tutsi aristocracy had taken power from the Hutu by means of the sword and that it was therefore no question of power sharing. That's why an open conflict erupted between Hutu's and Tutsi's. The former were demanding democracy first, whereas the latter were calling for immediate independence (it was thought that this was for their sole profit!). Elsewhere, that crisis was known as a conflict between the hoe (Hutu's were regarded as farmers) and the cow (Tutsi's were regarded as cattle keepers). The positions taken by the Belgian guardianship, the allpowerful Catholic Church and the United Nations Organisations (UNO) played a major role in the outcome of that conflict.

Editor's note: 30 years later, from 1990 to 1994, that conflict resurfaced in the form of a civil war for revenge; it degenerated into mass murders and genocide, the Hutu's lost power as they were militarily defeated.

KINYAMATEKA

Kinyamateka was a monthly review associated with the Catholic Church. It was the most popular review in Rwanda. On the occasion of Dominique Mbonyumutwa's funeral on 1st August 1986, Kinyamateka devoted its front page and also pages 7 and 11 of its first issue of August 1986 to a detailed description of his life and death. For instance, around his photo, the review wrote « the first president of Rwanda passed away. ».

Théodore Simburudali : in the same edition of Kinyamateka, columnist *Théodore Simburudali* talks about Dominique Mbonyumutwa's death during the night of 25th to 26th July 1986 in Gand (Gent), Belgium. He then refers to the telegram of condolences sent by President Juvénal Habyarimana to the deceased's widow. In laudatory terms, the columnist finally emphasises that Dominique Mbonyumutwa dedicated his life to the service of all Rwandans and that he rightly deserved the ceremonies of magnificent proportions during his funeral, both at the Kabgayi Church and at the Democracy Stadium in Gitarama. According to the columnist, it was symbolic that those ceremonies were graced by the presence of all the mayors from the whole country, and all this recalled the atmosphere on 28th January 1961. In a word, the columnist concludes his article asserting that Dominique Mbonyumutwa has been a pioneer and that the Rwandans have been grateful to him during the funeral.

Innocent Gasabwoya : a comment inserted as an editorial note and signed by Innocent Gasabwoya, focuses on the following message:

- Dominique Mbonyumutwa has left to the Rwandan people a good example of love towards his God and country;
- As he accepted to be part of « *abataye umurongo* » (purges within the PARMEHUTU political party in 1968), it means that the management of that party had gone astray from God's path;
- Even during his final days when he was sick, he was one of the active members of his parish council;
- Last, we do acknowledge that he has been a tireless worker, trustworthy, full of honesty, always walking in God's ways.

Editor's note: Innocent Gasabwoya was a priest and vicar at the bishopric of Kabgayi; he bore the honorary title of Monsignor.

On page 7, under the title « the first president of Rwanda has passed away», **columnist Théodore Simburudali** also comments on Dominique Mbonyumutwa's life and death in a few lines around the latter's picture taken during his first trip in Kabgayi. The columnist points out that, by accepting to take on different missions, especially the one on 28th January 1961, Dominique Mbonyumutwa became one of the revolution and Republic pioneers. He placed the interests of the nation above his own interests : this was evidenced by his resignation in October 1961 and throughout the « *guta umurongo* » affair in 1968, when he followed his own conscience and preferred to deliberately lose his position as President and later as parliament member.

The columnist then recalls that, all along his entire life, Dominique Mbonyumutwa stood up against the philosophy that merely reduced work to « *akazi* » (derogatory word about forced and unpaid labour for colonisers in the past). According to him, any kind of work had to be done right, provided that it wasn't forced work. In this regard, as the columnist goes on explaining, Dominique Mbonyumutwa has been the model of a diligent worker. According to the same columnist, Dominique Mbonyumutwa's respectability flowed from his behaviour, which was outstanding everywhere and marked by self-denial and courage when he was deputy chief in the beginning and also in all other posts he occupied later. Finally, the columnist makes reference to Dominique Mbonyumutwa's motto: "*work with conviction, without cheating anybody, with the aim of promoting development* » (*Gukora utikoresha ntawe uryarya kandi ukurikiza ibitekerezo bigamije amajyambere*). This is a motto that he passed on to his children, and which anyone can make his. The columnist stresses that Dominique Mbonyumutwa has been a full-time activist for revolution in spite of his former role as deputy chief under the monarchy.

Editor's note: it is worth telling a quick little story about that role under the monarchy. Normally, to hold a political rally, one needed approval from the local deputy chief (mayor). As the UNAR political party supported the monarchy, it had persuaded all the Tutsi deputy chiefs not to issue the required approval to the PARMEHUTU political party. The PARMEHUTU chairman, Grégoire Kayibanda, wanted to organise his political rally aimed at launching the

party. His founding assembly took place in the sub-chiefdom of Dominique Mbonyumutwa, for the latter was the only one to accept to issue the required administrative authorisation. It was on 4th October 1959.

Towards the end, the columnist highlights that Dominique Mbonyumutwa was recognised as an apologist for ordinary people, a revolutionary, a tireless worker, a committed democrat and advocate for social justice. He points out that the reasons for his resignation were unclear, but adds that it was obvious that he had not attempted to use any means to hold onto power in 1961; that's how he had averted the threat of a fratricidal struggle for power. The country showed deep gratitude to him in 1979, when he was elevated to the highly honorary position of First Chancellor.

In conclusion, the columnist underlines that Dominique Mbonyumutwa's funeral was honoured by the army and all officials, just like when he was their boss. He ends up asserting that the only regret was to see that outstanding man die at the age of 65. He wishes his soul to rest in peace in God's house.

Still on page 7, there's a long poem in memory of Dominique Mbonyumutwa. The poem recalls his exceptional qualities all along his life. It's thanks to those qualities that the whole country not only mourned his unexpected death, but also arranged exceptional funerals for him. The poem was signed by « *activist Munyampeta-Munyuzangabo Corneille, Doctor of political sociology & international relations, Ph.D. in arts & human sciences, living in Kigali.* »

At the close of its edition that was largely devoted to Dominique Mbonyumutwa, Kinyamateka reproduced the latter's full speech pronounced in Gitarama on 28th January 1961, following his election as **1st President of Rwanda**.

IMVAHO

Imvaho was a government newspaper. In its edition of 4-10th August 1986, it devoted the front page and pages 5, 6 and 7 to Dominique Mbonyumutwa's life and death. On the front page picture, he's shown in Kirambo (Cyangugu) during a trip intended to restore peace in the country in 1961. The front page uses glowing terms similar to the ones of Kinyamateka to comment on Dominique Mbonyumutwa's life and death. On page 5, his photo illustrates his duties as Chancellor at work.

- Columnist Hategekimana V

Under the title « President Mbonyumutwa has passed away », columnist Hategekimana V. gives a detailed account of the life and circumstances surrounding the death of Dominique Mbonyumutwa, reminding that President Juvénal Habyarimana has proclaimed three dates – 31st July, 1st and 2nd August 1986 – the days of national mourning all over the country. The columnist adds that Mbonyumutwa's mortal remains were received at the Kanombe/Kigali airport by a guard of military honour worthy of his rank. With the 5th July Comrades in the front, his remains were accompanied by many friends to his final resting place in Gitarama. On

the following day, 1st August 1986, a mass celebrated by 7 bishops and presided by Archbishop Vincent Nsengiyumva, opened Dominique Mbonyumutwa's funerals and was followed by his burial at the Gitarama stadium. President Juvénal Habyarimana was present, together with all the dignitaries of the Rwandan Republic.

After the homily for the occasion, Interior Minister Thomas Habanabakize pronounced a speech on behalf of the Government. All the speeches praised the deceased's courage and exemplarity. Furthermore, the columnist puts emphasis on the point at which Dominique Mbonyumutwa's motto was mentioned by one of his sons: « *work with conviction, without cheating anybody, with the aim of promoting development* » (*Gukora utikoresha ntawe uryarya kandi ukurikiza ibitekerezo bigamije amajyambere*). Afterwards, the whole country saw him off to his last home, wishing him everlasting happiness.

In addition to a picture on which Dominique Mbonyumutwa appears only with his wife, page 6 also includes President Juvénal Habyarimana's message. In glowing terms, the President expresses his solidarity with the deceased's widow in her pain, and immediately reminds that Dominique Mbonyumutwa has been one of the first persons to take the reins of the country, Rwanda. He explains: « it is now time to remember his valiant and exemplary actions." On behalf of the entire Government and all the Rwandans to whom Dominique Mbonyumutwa had consecrated his life, President Habyarimana's telegram promises the deceased's wife to share her pain. He adds: « all the *Rwandans will always remember the deceased for his bravery. They will remember him as a man who leaves behind the memory of an accomplished Rwandan, who really deserves to be called a 'well-made Rwandan', who carried the torch of democracy we are all enjoying today*". The President concludes: « *Madam and your family, we are with you. Keep courage.* »

INTERVIEWS (IN IMVAHO)

- Gitera Habyarimana Joseph

Joseph Gitera Habyarimana was the chairman of the APROSOMA (Association pour la promotion de la masse) political party, ally with the PÄRMEHUTU political party. He knew Dominique Mbonyumutwa very well, as he had also been his unfortunate challenger at the 28th January 1961 elections for the office of the President of the Rwandan Republic proclaimed on the same date (see above). They had also worked together when Gitera was the Parliament Speaker, and then known as "Assembly Collector."

In an interview with journalist Dominique Makeri, Gitera says that those activists (*abarwanashyaka*) who have lived with Dominique Mbonyumutwa all agreed to present their testimonies, recognizing his exceptional commitment at political and human levels. Gitera confirms that he and the deceased knew each other since high school in 1932, and that he was glad that Dominique Mbonyumutwa had been the first Hutu deputy-chief.

On page 7, Gitera goes on saying that Dominique Mbonyumutwa was a hero among Hutu's, that's why he was attacked on 1st November 1959. He was an important PARMEUTU activist

and a sincere friend of Grégoire Kayibanda, who in turn appreciated him. Gitera adds that, during their struggle for independence, he had several opportunities to interact with the deceased. He explains: « *we were together at the Gitarama Congress, during which we elected him first President of the Republic. I was the Speaker of the interim legislative assembly, and I am the one who proclaimed the Republic; Dominique was present.* » Gitera goes on: « *some people say that I brought drums. I brought them indeed, and they paid him tribute, as they also paid tribute to the flag when we were flying it. Drums are part of the Rwandan tradition. I am the one who later accompanied him when he was greeting the population present at the stadium immediately after his election.*” In the interview, Gitera talks about his proposition to have a monument erected on Dominique Mbonyumutwa’s tomb as a reminder of democracy. Finally, he thanks President Habyarimana for his idea to bury the deceased in the stadium that was to contribute to his eternal fame.

- **Germain Gasingwa**

« *We travelled together across the country.* » That’s the title of Germain Gasingwa’s testimony in an interview with journalist Dominique Makeri. Gasingwa was a leader within the APROSOMA, and former Foreign Affairs Minister from 1960 to 1961. He points out that he met Dominique Mbonyumutwa at the provisional legislative council shortly after the 1960 municipal elections, and that he saw him again on 28th January 1961 in Gitarama, on the day of the ‘coup d’Etat’: “*it was the day on which we elected him President of the Republic to ‘replace’ the King, whom we had just deposed. Mbonyumutwa was the candidate of the PARMEHUTU party, which was present in 7 prefectures of the country.*” Gasigwa further explains that, as Foreign Affairs Minister, he was requested by Prime Minister Grégoire Kayibanda to accompany President Mbonyumutwa during the campaign for the 25th September 1961 referendum: “*we travelled across the whole country from April to June 1961. I was present when he was asking the population to remain calm in those troubled times.*” Journalist Makeri quotes Gasingwa as testifying that Dominique Mbonyumutwa has fulfilled his duties properly for the country as President of the Republic, and later as president of the Nyanza appeal court after his retirement from public life: “*he was a PARMEHUTU activist, but all of us, APROSOMA activists, had a great deal of respect for him; we showed the greatest admiration for his bravery until he died. In his relationships with people, he was human, he has assisted everyone, he has worked as a great and good- hearted man.*”

- **Banzi Wellars**

Banzi Wellars said : « *we used to receive guidance from Dominique Mbonyumutwa.* » The Imvaho newspaper states that Banzi was one of the pioneer supporters of the PARMEHUTU and an influential man from Northern Rwanda. Banzi stresses that he worked with Mbonyumutwa since the latter was deputy chief in Ndiza.: *his behaviour was different from that of his colleagues and gave us cause for confidence. We used to meet each other at meetings in Kayibanda’s place. Such meetings were often held in the open air and Mbonyumutwa was always present, advising people on the general political situation in Rwanda. Mbonyumutwa has never failed to meet our goal to establish democracy. He was a first rank politician whom we turned to for advice and whom we trusted.* Banzi Wellars expresses his happiness to have heard that Mbonyumutwa had resigned without seeking to cling to office: *it was a sign of nobleness, showing that his behaviour and his struggle for democracy were genuine. His concern for social justice led him to choose to lead the fight for the Hutu people so that they could be free from their condition, as they were exploited at will. He made that choice instead of striving for selfish profit from an unfair power.*

- **Byabarumwanzi François**

On 19th July 1984, Mbonyumutwa Dominique gave an interview to **Byabarumwanzi François**. That interview was published in the *Imvaho* newspaper, issue n°541. The interview reads as follows:

Imvaho: why haven't you spent a long time as President of the Rwandan Republic, and under what conditions have you left office?

Mbonyumutwa: as true activists of the PARMEHUTU party, we had promised that we would avoid divisions over positions of power or for personal gain. We were fighting only to defeat our political rivals. We were fighting some Europeans who opposed our independence. We were fighting the APROSOMA, as it was also fighting the PARMEHUTU. Of course, we were fighting the UNAR. We couldn't win all those struggles without a minimum level of self-denial. I was elected president because the chairman of my political party PARMEHUTU – didn't want to stand for elections. I left office because the chairman of my party wanted a presidential regime that combines the function of the president of the Republic with the function of the prime minister, instead of a twin-headed parliamentary regime. The poverty of the country couldn't allow us to keep both positions separately.

Imvaho: what does "*Guta umurongo*" (deviate from the party line) mean and how did it occur within the PARMEHUTU? How have you personally experienced or gone through it?

Mbonyumutwa: first of all, one should know that there was no "party line." The expression "*Guta umurongo*" was coined because individuals, particularly parliament members, could no longer understand each other. That's why one of the party members coined that expression, suggesting that any disagreement with him amounted to deviation from the party principles. Nobody deviated from the party manifesto, or from its circulars on discipline.

Some parliament members were really seeking to defend the best interests of the country, whereas some others were merely concerned about their own future within the party. The members of parliament had a very diverse education level, which played a role in that situation. The most educated were a minority and seen as « *Abataye umurongo* » (« *those who deviated from the party line* »). What was just a rumour in the beginning spread quickly and became widely known. We disagreed with members of parliament who, though they were many, didn't seem to be more educated or more intelligent than we were.

End of the interview

Page 7 is illustrated by a picture with 7 bishops at Dominique Mbonyumutwa's funerals at the democracy stadium in Gitarama.

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27th May 2016