

# It's swim or sink – RPF's obsession with Accountability

The RPF executive committee meetings usually take place in the presence of members only. However, every once in a while they are opened up to guests as observers and witnesses to a matter of particular importance. On Friday 26 June 2020, RPF's obsession with accountability went on display. It was so intense that one could not help but notice that the RPF is obsessed with accountability as if its life depends on it. It does depend on it, and here's why.

My friend Thierry Gatete, in his signature cadence, argued that the RPF takes accountability seriously given the fact that Rwanda is a land-locked country without natural resources. Gatete's eloquence was matched by senior writer Joseph Rwagatare's trademark prose that similarly buttressed the economic argument. Both argued on the moment being a turning point, as the titles of their pieces indicate: "[RPF – the age of accountability](#)" and "[Time to renew commitment to the nation](#)" respectively.

I, however, am of the persuasion that RPF's obsession with accountability is an existential question. Sure, the country that the party oversees lacks material resources, but to be poor is not a death sentence. Two death sentences await the RPF should it veer off its accountability path. Neither of these is economic.

The first death sentence is to the party itself. Left on their own, the corrupt elements within the party will continue to grow and ultimately form a critical mass that will challenge the party's value system in word and in deed. This would essentially form "two parties" within the same party: the corrupt wing and the wing that remains true to the founding principles of the party. Ultimately the power of impunity

would triumph as the corrupt wing might overthrow the principled wing.

The party would gradually decay as corruption and decadence might become entrenched in its operations. The sacrifices of those whose blood was spilt in the liberation struggle would then amount to nothing. The sense of urgency that many subscribed to and, as a result, dedicated their lives to hard work and sleepless nights, would amount to wasted energy. Out of frustration of what would have become of their party, the principled wing would walk out to form a breakaway party – to start afresh. With state power in the hands of the corrupt, all the breakaway group would boast of would be principles, which they would be unable to effect in practice. In private conversations, they would nostalgically refer to times past when it meant something to be a member of the RPF. With nothing to show for a sense of direction or conviction, it would not take long before the corrupt wing also loses power. But in the process, a disaster will have been nurtured, perhaps unwittingly.

The second death sentence is to society. Accountability is a sufficient basis for state legitimacy. Elsewhere, political systems that have failed on accountability have invested in ethnicity-based politics as a shortcut for state legitimacy. In Rwanda, therefore, only accountability prevents the return of ethnicity-based politics. Ethnicity-based politics is a form of corruption: it's a moral corruption that places society on a hierarchy of those who are deserving and those who aren't. At times, it operates at the level of nepotism and when it is strained by any pressure, its logic descends to determining who is deserving to live or to die, as our country's history demonstrates.

If corruption is allowed to triumph, it will be accompanied by this type of politics. In this type of politics, the logic of elimination has been, in the past, justified as a legitimate political choice in Rwanda. This is the existential threat to

society that those who engage in corruption don't see because they consider it something that is far removed from their lives. It's not.

In the end, therefore, the existential threat to the RPF explains its obsession with accountability. As bad as this sounds for the party, the second death sentence—a threat to society—is much worse.

Faced with this twin-threat, the punishment is often imminent, swift, and harshest for those who should know better. They are not being punished for stealing per se; they are punished for placing the party and society on the path of destruction.