

Good guys and bad guys

By Jos van Oijen

In 2003, a delegation of the radical left-wing lawyers' association *National Lawyers Guild* (NLG) visited North Korea. The delegation of four American lawyers, including former chairman Peter Erlinder, was accompanied by the Canadian communist attorney Christopher Black.

In The Netherlands, Black is known primarily for his denial of the genocide in Bosnia. General Ratko Mladic, the butcher of Srebrenica, was, according to Black, "falsely accused of crimes he did not commit". The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague he described as "Fascist Justice".

Black was also involved in the creation of the International Committee for the Defence of Slobodan Milosevic, a kind of fan club for the last president of Yugoslavia. Their website still mentions that the Committee "honours and appreciates" the efforts of non-members such as Saddam Hussein.

With kindred spirits like that, glorifying the Kim Dynasty is just a small step, the travel report of the NLG delegation reveals. Peter Erlinder turned out to be no stranger to the North Korean officers they met. He was embraced by a Major who greeted him with: "Welcome, old friend".

It won't come as a surprise that they concluded that not the delegation, but the American people had been subjected to a grand deception.

According to Black and Erlinder we live in a simple world of good guys and bad guys. The 'bad guys' are the imperialists. The ones they perceive as socialist leaders, like Milosevic, are the 'good guys' ... "whose only crime was to resist the dictates and imperialist ambitions of the United States and its allies."

They regard themselves as alternative missionaries with a duty to bring light in the darkness. "I could not rest, if I did not attempt to prevent misleading of the many socialists, who I consider friends and comrades," Erlinder wrote to the *World Socialist Web Site* in 2009.

The link

The motive for Erlinder's letter was an article about Theoneste Bagosora, one of the main leaders of the genocide against the Tutsi, which he considered to be "misleading".

Christopher Black also sent an angry letter.

"Both correspondents deny that genocide took place in Rwanda", an appalled Chris Talbot remarked in a detailed response. "Professor Erlinder refers to 'the Rwandan Tragedy ... some call genocide.' Mr. Black refers to 'the myth of genocide'."

Black and Erlinder didn't get their opinions from strangers. They represented prominent genocide suspects at the Rwanda Tribunal in Arusha, Tanzania. As early as 1995, one year after the genocide, Erlinder's client wrote that although it was true that massacres had occurred, responsibility for "the tragedy" had to be shifted to Paul Kagame's Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF).

Black in turn received a three-day briefing from his client, who told him that there had been no genocide against the Tutsi. He was next informed about the 'real' truth in great detail. Black immediately noticed the similarities between "fascist" tribunals in The Hague and Arusha: "At the Rwanda Tribunal", he said at a conference, "it's even worse than The Hague tribunal because in that instance the people that took apart Rwanda, the Rwanda Patriotic Front, are a proxy for and backed by the United States and its allies."

Towards the end of 2009, Black published an extended version of his letter entitled: "The Truth About Rwanda". In it he describes pre-genocide Rwanda as the Switzerland of Africa, a socialist state and model for social development in which Hutu and Tutsi lived in harmony, a fairy tale that was unilaterally ruined by the RPF.

Both Black and Erlinder gratefully exploit the extensive anti-Tutsi propaganda that was produced in the 1990s by representatives of the Hutu Power movement, not only in court, but also in popular publications. Their work has thus become a link between the genocidaires and the various 'revelations' we are presented with today.

Revelations

A current example of such a 'revelation' is "In Praise of Blood", a book by Canadian journalist Judi Rever, which will be published in a Dutch translation in October 2018. The Dutch title chosen by the publisher translates to: "The Truth About Rwanda". This is probably no coincidence. Some passages have been duplicated almost literally from Black's article with the same title.

In her book Rever thanks Black and Erlinder for providing access to important evidence. She also acknowledges the research of some of their allies, such as Robin Philpot and Barrie Collins. The first is a brother of genocide lawyer John Philpot. The latter we know from the

magazine *Living Marxism* (LM), which in the 1990s was questioning the genocides in Bosnia and Rwanda.

Collins, then writing under the pseudonym Barry Crawford, also published articles on behalf of the organization *Africa Direct*, such as: "Why the Rwandan war was not genocide", almost entirely reproduced in LM under the title: "Rwanda, the great genocide debate".

According to that article, the Hutu rulers were simply unable to plan and carry out a genocide. What happened was barbaric, according to Collins, but not genocide, rather a matter of force majeure, after years of interference by the West had created an explosive situation in Rwanda.

"The idea that the beleaguered Hutu government could plan and execute the deliberate annihilation of an entire people," Collins wrote, "at a time when it could not even organise to sell the coffee beans on which the economy depended, borders on the incredible."

Judi Rever's 'truth' is a synthesis of all the narratives her informants, or rather the informants of her informants, have produced over the years. Critical reflections or alternative explanations for their information are absent. To give a few examples:

In 2009 Christopher Black wrote that the many corpses that floated in the Kagera River during the genocide were not, like everyone thought, Tutsi victims of the Hutu militias, but Hutu victims of the RPF. According to his explanation, RPF troops had taken control of the area around the river fairly quickly. Rever writes something very similar in her book.

The allegation can also be found in a publication of the ousted regime from right after the genocide. What all these authors conceal is that by the end of April 1994 the RPF only controlled the river basin in eastern Rwanda. However, NGOs continued to report that upstream, in government territory, up to five thousand Tutsi a day ended in the river.

Specialized research

Even scientific research is wasted on these authors. According to Rever and her sources, the airplane of President Habyarimana was shot down by an RPF commando unit. This was also the message of the former regime and some defected RPF members. The assault was allegedly intended by the RPF to create chaos in order to seize power. Panic among the population would then have caused the mass murder of the Tutsi.

But forensic investigations commissioned by a French Judge have shown that the statements of Rever's sources cannot be true. The final report from 2012 ruled out the location supposedly used for the assault. If the missiles had been fired from there, the

damage caused to the aircraft would have been different than what has been established from the wreckage.

Witnesses near the airport during the assault would also have seen and heard something else than they actually did. According to the experts, the most likely location of the assault was a military camp near the airport, which points to a different scenario.

In her book, Rever does mention the report, but she contests its conclusions based on criticism by Barrie Collins and a Belgian colonel, in spite of the fact that it's not their area of expertise. Collins' only technical training is in optometry.

Most contentions in "The Truth About Rwanda" are, just like these examples, easy to refute with reliable documentation. Rever apparently got fixated on her one-sided sources and did very little to check the veracity of their information.

On further inquiry it appears that the Dutch and Canadian publishers have also failed to do so. The title thus becomes a wry ironic joke for the benefit of the real 'bad guys'.

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