

Opinion

Someone please help cure Reyntjens of obsession with divisions in Rwanda

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Professeur Filip Reyntjens

The old Belgian professor won't take his eyes and mind off Rwanda. Only it is not the Rwanda that everyone knows that he sees, but one of his imagination, a carryover from more than three decades ago.

He insists on seeing a divided country inhabited by people classified in certain unchanging percentages, its inhabitants unable to live outside those stats. He just can't see it another way.

The poor man is obsessed with Rwanda and this grows with each passing year. But Rwanda stubbornly refuses to fit his obses-

sion, however hard he tries to bend it or force it into the shape of his wishes. It will never oblige him. I am afraid this fixation will unhinge or kill him.

Professor Filip Reyntjens is at it again, this time with what he calls research on ethnic composition of various offices in Rwanda. We may ask about this supposed research : to what purpose? Certainly it cannot be to enrich scholarship and contribute to greater knowledge of Rwanda and Rwandans because clearly his interest in the country is far from scholarship. There are other, less dispassionate motives.

It is perhaps to reconfirm the views he has held all his life even when the evidence points to the contrary. But you don't need research for that. Except perhaps to give his bias academic respectability.

Or he wants to prove a point. The government of Rwanda is as bad as the one he used to advise. Of course, wishing that were the case may make him feel good but it will not alter the fact that the two are miles apart

and cannot be compared. If he wants to delude himself, let him be. No one will deny him that choice.

There is possibly even a more sinister intention : cause division which he so clearly craves and lend support to Rwandan extremist groups in Europe and other places.

It doesn't really matter. Looking for reasons for such behaviour is often futile. Sometimes hatred becomes its own logic and motive. In this case it has become obsessive. He seems to be fighting a duel with an imaginary or uninterested adversary. He might actually be fighting with himself, only he does not know or refuses to acknowledge it.

Professor Reyntens shares this obsession with Rwanda with a small circle of like-minded, hate consumed, delusional and mutually-validating individuals with strong antipathy towards the country's leadership. The likes of journalists Judi Rever and Michela Wrong, academics like Tim Longman, Susan Thompson and others, and western human rights activists.

They all have something in common. They do not like the direction this country is taking and would rather it was the old way, the one they are familiar with. Many have an axe to grind. They lived in Rwanda at different times in the past and had some sort of influence which they can no longer exercise in the new Rwanda. Or they have tried to sell their version of the country to the world but no one is buying. They cannot find a role and so feel rejected and are bitter. That may explain why they behave like a jilted lover.

This ethnic thing with which Reyntjens & co are obsessed is really nonsensical in the

context of Rwanda. Can one talk of a distinctness among Rwandans that clearly sets some apart from others? Only the reckless or diabolical can attempt that classification.

The intention can only be one : to resurrect the race division of the colonial and pre-1994 period when Rwandans were divided into so-called races. The old professor is not only fixated on division, he is also averse to the concept of unity. When he hears 'Ndi Umunyarwanda' he gets the shivers and rushes to division research template to prove that it is not possible.

The professor lives in a different era from which he needs to be rescued and brought into the present. He will then realise that employment, election or appointment to various offices in the public and private sectors is done differently from what he used to prescribe decades ago.

It is based on merit, on the knowledge and skills one has, and on technical ability to perform certain functions, and done through open competition.

Obviously, in the professor's time advising the government of Rwanda, these things were not important criteria for office. Only origin, appearance, affiliation and official categorisation that had nothing to do with the ability to perform were.

In his obsession with ethnicity in Rwanda, Professor Reyntjens descends into the ridiculous. He goes into the realm of religion and its leadership. Does he want to suggest that the state influences the appointment of heads of various religions? Even those appointed by Rome? Or elected by the House of Bishops like the Anglicans? Maybe this is how it was

in his days when church and state were fused. A lot has happened and it may be worth your
Someone needs to tell him : prof, times while to keep abreast.
have changed. Three decades is a long time.