

Filip Reyntjens: Not an Expert but a Hutu-Power Ideologue

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Academics researchers have had and continue to have significant influence on how Africa is defined.

This has been particularly true of Rwanda which was little known and of little interest to the media until the 1994 genocide against Tutsi.

After the initial news reports, capturing the shock and horror, the media turned to NGOs and academic researchers whom they perceived as the experts on the hitherto little known country.

And no one has dined out more on this supposed expertise on Rwanda than Belgian professor Filip Reyntjens. His word on Rwanda has been gospel. A generation of students like An Ansoms, who have sat at his feet, reference him religiously, and their own subsequent writing is often little more than a variation on a theme of their mentor's work.

No programme or documentary on Rwanda is complete until he has pronounced his views on it. It is therefore worth taking a closer look at the basis of this expertise.

In a long paper published in *The Journal of Democracy* magazine in 2015, Professor Reyntjens groups opinion about Rwanda among those held "by most international aid agencies,

and has been voiced by public figures such as Bono, Rick Warren, Bill Clinton, and Tony Blair" who speak admiringly of the RPF, and, "scholars" among whom he naturally counts himself.

Reyntjens dismisses the former as misguided dupes, and invites the reader to trust him and "other scholars."

But some of the scholars for whom he seeks to speak beg to differ. Jacques Morel, a French academic who has written extensively about the role of France in the Tutsi genocide, says of Filip Reyntjens, "he is a friend of genocidaires . . . often quoted in the media as an impartial expert".

"He is famed for having published a book which supposedly identified the missile launchers which brought down the then President of Rwanda, Juvenal Habyarimana's aeroplane."

"While most of the facts he [Reyntjens] reports point to Hutu extremists having been responsible, his conclusion blame the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) fighters."

Morel goes on to state, "doubts about his objectivity are confirmed by his autobiography in which he says that he participated in the drafting of the 1978 Rwanda constitution. He therefore instituted an apartheid regime

against part of the population.”

In fact Professor Reyntjens headed the team which drafted the 1978 Rwanda constitution. Professor René Lemarchand, an American academic describes Reyntjens as an “eminent and reliable analyst” of the pre-genocide Rwandan politics and “the most reliable source on post-genocide developments in Rwanda”

Lemarchand and Reyntjens form a mutual admiration society in which one praises the other and roundly attacks any other academic who disagrees with their anti RPF line. But this “most reliable source” on post-genocide Rwanda, has little knowledge, and even less understanding of post genocide Rwanda.

Since 1994, Reyntjens has been in Rwanda for all of one week (15th-22nd October 1994). Even calling him an “eminent and reliable analyst” of pre-genocide Rwanda would be overstating the case.

It is however true to say that his knowledge of Rwanda leading up to the genocide against Tutsi is both extensive and intimate. In November of 1990, a month after the beginning of the war with the RPF, Habyarimana’s government organised two delegations, one for Europe and one for North America.

The purpose of these delegations was to drum up support for the Habyarimana government, and to counter what they called “RPF propaganda.” Professor Reyntjens was part of the delegation to Geneva, representing the Habyarimana government. Hardly the objective scholar he styles himself can

stoop that low.

The European delegation, of which Professor Reyntjens was part, was led by none other than Ferdinand Nahimana, an historian who was later described by a witness at the International tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), as “Rwanda’s Joseph Goebbels.” The leader of the North American group was Leon Mugesera. He is now serving a life sentence for genocide crimes.

Contrary to Reyntjens’ assertion that he is part of some scholarly opinion, he rightly belongs with the framers of the genocide against Tutsi, the likes of Ferdinand Nahimana, and Leon Mugesera.

And for being “most reliable source on post-genocide developments in Rwanda”, that would require objectivity which cannot get past Professor Reyntjens’ seeming pathological hatred of the RPF. And it would require actually being in post genocide Rwanda to conduct research. The most cursory dispassionate observation would be enough to show that Professor Reyntjens has neither of these requirements.

Many genocidaires and apologists, have a lot in common but I will mention only four : They hate Tutsis and RPF by extension, Denial of the existence of a plan of genocide against Tutsi, fancying to say Juvenal Habyarimana’s plane crash was the cause; denial of the existence of a genocidal ideology, its roots, and the need to overcome or suppress it; and that Rwandans’ Unity and reconciliation are RPF’s political artifices.