

## The Tensions Between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda

Sudan is an example of a country facing strife between groups with genuine ethnic and cultural differences. Rwanda, on the other hand, is a tragedy of strife between two groups whose differences weren't, and aren't, all that great. Bad policies worsened tensions among the people the Belgian colonial power was trying to "elevate."

### Background of the Hutu and Tutsi Populations in Rwanda

Of Rwanda's 10 million people, 85 percent are Hutus. They were the country's original inhabitants. Relatively short, they spoke a language in the Bantu group. During the fifteenth century, though, another group began moving into Rwanda. Their descendants are the Tutsi people, who tend to be quite tall and make up 14 percent of today's population. They were cattle breeders from the Horn of Africa. They gradually **subjugated**—*conquered or subdued*—the Hutus. These newcomers set up a monarchy with a *mwami*, or king, as well as a system of nobles and gentry. This was like what existed in Europe at that time.

The Tutsis didn't control all of Rwanda, however. Some independent Hutu areas remained. And the lines between the ethnic groups weren't always clear. Many Hutus lived as serfs—bound to the land. But many rural Tutsis weren't much better off.

Europeans didn't get to Rwanda until late in the nineteenth century. In 1899 the Rwandan *mwami* submitted to a German protectorate. After World War I, Rwanda and neighboring Burundi became Belgian mandates under the League of Nations. After World War II, Belgian control continued through the United Nations.

Policies during this period sowed the seeds of trouble in the 1990s. The Belgians issued identity cards that classified people by ethnicity. They favored the Tutsis, whom they considered superior to the Hutus, with better jobs and schooling. The two groups responded as you would expect. The Tutsis welcomed their privileged treatment. The Hutus resented being treated as second-class citizens.

In reality, the differences between the two groups weren't great. In any case, whatever differences originally existed had blurred somewhat after centuries of intermarriage. But tensions persisted, and the Belgians made them worse.

Belgium did encourage the Rwandans to develop democratic institutions. But many Tutsis resisted these moves because they threatened their special status. In 1959 the Hutus' resentment boiled over. They rose up and overthrew the Tutsi monarchy. In elections held two years later, the Party of the Hutu Emancipation Movement (PARMEHUTU) won an overwhelming victory. Meanwhile, more than 160,000 Tutsis fled to neighboring countries.

Rwanda (and neighboring Burundi) became independent on 1 July 1962. The PARMEHUTU leader, Gregoire Kayibanda, was Rwanda's first elected president. He talked up ideals of peaceful negotiation and progress for the people. But in reality, his government promoted Hutu supremacy. Inefficiency and corruption soon set in.

On 5 July 1973 the military took over. Major General Juvenal Habyarimana, another Hutu, dissolved the National Assembly and PARMEHUTU. He also abolished all political activity.

Then in 1975 he formed the National Revolutionary Movement for Development (MRND). Its goals were peace, unity, and national development, within a one-party state. The movement was organized at all levels. It included elected and appointed officials.

Rwandans went to the polls in December 1978. They overwhelmingly endorsed a new constitution and confirmed Habyarimana as president. He was reelected in 1983 and 1988. Responding to public pressure for reform, though, in July 1990 he announced a plan to change Rwanda's one-party state into a multiparty democracy.

### How the Tutsi Minority Formed the Rwanda Patriotic Front

Rwandan exiles, meanwhile, had banded together as the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). Its members were mostly Tutsis. They blamed the Rwandan government for failing to democratize. They were also unhappy that it had failed to help the Tutsi refugees, now numbering half a million outside Rwanda, in Africa and elsewhere.

On 1 October 1990 the RPF invaded Rwanda from its base in neighboring Uganda. This started a civil war that dragged on for nearly two years. Finally on 12 July 1992 both sides signed a cease-fire accord in Arusha, Tanzania. The accord set a timetable for an end to fighting and a start of political talks. The cease-fire took effect 31 July. Political talks began 10 August 1992.



A formerly displaced Tutsi has been welcomed back to her Hutu neighborhood in Burundi.

*Photo by Melanie Stetson Freeman / © 2006 The Christian Science Monitor*  
While Hutus are Rwanda's original inhabitants, Belgian policies in the post-World War II period favored the Tutsis and sowed the seeds of trouble that would explode in the 1990s.



These three men are all Hutu suspects from the Rwandan genocide in 1994.

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During the genocide, which left up to 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus dead, the government-sponsored radio urged ordinary Hutu citizens to go out and kill the “cockroaches,” as they called the Tutsis.

### The Rwandan Genocide in 1994

On 6 April 1994 the aircraft carrying President Habyarimana and the president of Burundi was shot down on its approach to Kigali, the Rwandan capital. Both presidents died in the crash. No one knows for sure who shot down the aircraft, but the attack seemed to be a signal to those on the ground. Military and militia groups started at once to round up and kill any Tutsis or moderate Hutus they could find. Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana and her 10 Belgian bodyguards were among the first to die. Her attackers raped her before killing her.

The chaos that ensued was genocide. And it was unprecedented in its swiftness. It began within hours of the attack on the presidential plane. The wave of killings spread quickly from the capital to all corners of the country. It left up to 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus dead.

Key actors in all this were organized bands of militia known as the *Interahamwe*. Their name means “those who stand together.” It sometimes gets a darker translation: “those who attack together.” Another group, organized somewhat later, was the *Impuzamugambi*, “those who have a single goal.” These groups had the backing of the Hutu-led government. These killers had clearly planned their genocide well in advance. The ruling MRND Party was apparently in on the plan, too. Government-sponsored radio urged even ordinary citizens to go out and kill the “cockroaches,” as they called the Tutsis.

## The Battles for Political Power Between the Hutus and the RPF

Immediately after the presidential plane was shot down, the majority-Tutsi RPF battalion in Kigali came under attack. The RPF forces fought their way out of Kigali and joined other RPF units in the north and resumed their invasion. For two months, civil war and genocide raged at the same time.

Then in June, French forces landed in Goma, Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo). The French had been major arms suppliers to the Hutu government. But now their mission was meant to be humanitarian. They sought to stop the fighting and the genocide. They set up what was supposed to be a safe zone in southwestern Rwanda. They insisted afterward that this saved many lives. But many members of what was left of the genocidal Hutu regime in Kigali were also able to escape the country through this zone.

Then the RPF defeated the Rwandan Army. This set off another wave of refugees as Rwandan Army soldiers fled across the border to Zaire. More refugees soon followed into Zaire, Tanzania, and Burundi.

The RPF took Kigali on 4 July 1994. The war ended on 16 July. Rwanda was in shambles. As many as 1 million people had been murdered. Another 2 million had fled, and another million were displaced within Rwanda.



People tend to errands in downtown Butare, home to many of Rwanda's educational institutions such as the National University of Rwanda.

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In 2003 Rwandans elected a new president and legislature, but the country must remain vigilant to ensure against any recurrence of its 1994 nightmare.

## Bringing Rwandans Home

Since the massacre, President Paul Kagame's government has sought to bring Hutus back from abroad and make them a part of Rwandan society again. The British magazine *The Economist* said this about the effort: "Courage and even generosity of spirit in dealing with an awful situation has earned Mr. Kagame's government high marks in the West and in Africa as a whole. After all, Rwanda is the only genocide case where the victims, the Tutsi, have chosen to reintegrate their killers into the country and to live as neighbours again—a uniquely hard task, especially in Africa's most densely populated country. . . . To encourage reconciliation, Rwanda has embarked on an experiment to change completely the way a new generation thinks about itself. Now, officially, no one is a Hutu or Tutsi; there are only Rwandans. Ethnicity, the genocide's alleged cause, is being outlawed."

### After the Genocide

Rwanda's new constitution, adopted in May 2003, eliminated reference to ethnicity. No more are people officially labeled as part of one group or another. Later that year, Rwandans elected a new president and legislature.

The country still has work to do. It needs economic growth. It needs democratization and judicial reform. A backlog remains of hundreds of thousands of legal cases against those accused of taking part in the genocide. The country must remain vigilant to ensure against any recurrence of the nightmare of 1994.

### The Tensions Between Afrikaners, English, and Africans in Zimbabwe and South Africa

Racial and ethnic differences much deeper than those in Rwanda dominate South Africa's story. As you read in Lesson 2, today's South Africa is the result of joining two Afrikaner provinces, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, with the British-dominated Cape and Natal provinces. South Africa's white minority long held sway there. Only in recent decades has black majority rule prevailed.

The black-white tensions haven't been the only ones in South Africa, though. Over the years tensions between the two white communities—Afrikaners and British—have affected black-white relations as well.

Neighboring Zimbabwe's story is a little different because it had no Dutch presence. Its European colonial history began in 1888. Cecil Rhodes, an English-born mining magnate, won a concession for mineral rights from local chiefs. The area later known as Southern and Northern Rhodesia became a British sphere of influence. The British South Africa Company ran the territory from Salisbury—now Harare, Zimbabwe's capital.