

# From Class Divide to Ethnic Conflict: The Hutu and Tutsi of Rwanda

Ruchi Negi

Research Scholar, Department of African Studies, University of Delhi

## ABSTRACT

Rwanda is home to three main ethnic groups: the Hutu, the Tutsi, and the Twa. The Hutus have been a social group that has been subjugated ever since the Tutsi feudal kingdom ruled the region in the 10th century. The hostilities between the Tutsis and the Hutus did not become centred on race until the Belgian colonisation of Rwanda. During this time, the Belgians spread the notion that Tutsis were the superior ethnicity, which contributed to the animosity between the two groups. The economic disparities that existed between the Tutsis and the Hutus were the root cause of the conflict that erupted between the two groups. People who worked in agriculture were referred to as "Hutus," while those who tended cattle were called "Tutsis." Most Rwandans were Hutus. Gradually, these class distinctions were seen as racial categorizations of people. Because cattle were more important than crops, a small ethnic minority known as the Tutsis rose to become the ruling class in their region. When Belgium took control of the territory in 1917, an ethnic Tutsi elite that had been controlling the monarchy for a considerable amount of time had already been in place by the time Germany took control of it in 1884.

**KEYWORDS:** Conflict, Hatred, Racism, Superiority

## INTRODUCTION

When Europeans first surveyed the area that is now known as Rwanda, they described the people they encountered there as descended from three racially separate tribes that coexisted in a complicated social order. These people were referred to as the Tutsis, the Hutus, and the Twa. The Tutsis were the tall and slender pastoralists who made up an elite minority of around 24 percent of the population. The majority of the population, approximately 75%, was comprised of stocky, physically robust farmers. The Twa were an oppressed minority, comprising only 1% of the total population. They were a tribe of pygmies that lived in the woods and subsisted by hunting and gathering. Although these groups were distinct from one another and stratified with regard to one another, there was some room for social mobility along the boundary between the Tutsi and the Hutu. The exclusive ownership of land and cattle helped identify the Tutsi elite as a distinct social stratum. Hutus, despite being marginalised both socially and politically, had the potential to attain Tutsi rank, also known as *kwihutura*, by amassing riches and moving up the social hierarchy. The terms Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa were used infrequently in early Rwandan oral histories, ritual texts, and biographies, and had meanings distinct from those conceived of by Europeans. This painted a picture of human cultural diversity that contrasted with what was recorded by the Europeans. In these oral narratives, the words "Tutsi" meant "rich noble," "Hutu" meant "farmer," and "Twa" was a term that was used to refer to those who were adept at hunting, using fire, producing

pottery, guarding, and other disciplines. In contrast to the common perception held in Europe, rural farmers are frequently portrayed as wealthy individuals with extensive social networks. Even though kings occasionally looked down on them, they nonetheless married members of this group and frequently awarded titles, land, herds, armies, servants, and ritual functions to them. Kings can also look down on them at times. An origin myth of the three groups was spread by elites in pre-colonial Rwanda. The purpose of this myth was to legitimise the hierarchical connection of sociopolitical inequality in terms of holy and religious concepts. According to one version of this narrative, Gatwa, Gahutu, and Gatutsi were Kigwa's three sons. Kigwa was a god who had fallen from heaven. He chose an heir by charging each of his sons with the duty of keeping watch over a crock pot containing milk during the night. Gatwa consumed the milk, Gahutu slept off and foolishly spilt his pot, and Gatutsi remained vigilant and protected his milk from being consumed by Gatwa. As a result, Kigwa chose Gatutsi to be his successor and Gahutu to be his brother's servant. Gatwa, on the other hand, was to be relegated to the position of an outsider. Gatutsi and Gahutu were both nominated by Kigwa. Gatutsi would have ownership of cattle as well as power. Gahutu would be permitted to gain livestock only in exchange for service to Gatutsi, and Gatwa would be relegated to the margins of society as a result of this arrangement. This narrative served as the foundation for the social hierarchy that put the Tutsi at the pinnacle of the social pyramid. The widespread propagation of this myth eventually served as the foundation for Rwanda's social and political inequality. Rwanda was a feudal monarchy from the 15th century, when Tutsi people first started migrating to the area that is now Rwanda to work as pastoralists, all the way up until the beginning of colonialism. A Tutsi monarch ruled, distributing land and political authority through hereditary chiefs, whose influence was visible in their ownership of land and animals. These chiefs' hereditary status was a factor in the distribution of land. The vast majority of these chiefs were identified as Tutsis. An imposed system of patronage was used to farm the land. Under this system, Tutsi chiefs required manual labour in exchange for the rights of Hutus to occupy the land that they controlled. As a result of this system, Hutus were relegated to the role of serfs. Also, when Rwanda took over the people on its borders, their ethnic identities were thrown out the window, and they were just called "Hutu." Because of this, "Hutu" became a name that didn't have anything to do with their ethnicity, but rather with being a slave.

## **THE IMPERIALIST ATTITUDE AND RACIAL SEGREGATION**

The notion that the Tutsi and Hutu peoples have fundamentally distinct racial identities was kept alive by European imperialists through the use of power dynamics and pseudoscience. The Berlin Conference of 1884 did not result in the partition of Rwanda or the Great Lakes region, in contrast to the partitioning of a large portion of the rest of Africa. Instead, the territory was split up at a conference held in Brussels in the year 1890. In return for Germany relinquishing all of its claims to Uganda, the German Empire was granted colonial areas of interest in the countries of Rwanda and Burundi. Due to the poor quality of the maps that were cited in these agreements, Belgium was able to stake a claim to the western half of the country. After a number of border battles, the colony's definitive borders were not defined until the year 1900. Along these borders were a collection of minor kingdoms that were located on the shores of Lake Victoria. Among these was the kingdom of Rwanda. During the time of European colonisation in Rwanda, which lasted from the late 1880s to the 1950s, different ethnic identities, known as "Tutsi" and "Hutu," were constructed. The existing tier-based socioeconomic system was not significantly altered as

a result of German colonisation. The Germans had little interest in interfering with the functioning of social institutions; rather, their only focus was on the expeditious collection of natural resources and the commercialization of lucrative cash crops. Colonial authorities relied heavily on native Tutsi chiefs to collect taxes from the Hutu lower classes and maintain order over those groups. Therefore, the German confirmation of the tiered social system was employed by the Tutsi nobility as a pretext for minority rule over the lower-class Hutu masses. This was done at the expense of the Hutu masses. The presence of German troops in Rwanda had a complicated impact on the authority of Rwanda's governing bodies. The Germans assisted the Mwami in expanding their dominance over the affairs of Rwanda, but the power of the Tutsi declined as a result of the entrance of capitalist forces and the greater integration of Rwandan markets and economies with those of other countries. Money started to be perceived by many Hutus as a replacement for cattle, both in terms of economic prosperity and for purposes of social standing. This was the case for both economic prosperity and social standing. Germany's imposition of a head tax on all Rwandans served to further erode the influence of the Tutsi ethnic group in the country. It was thought by some Tutsis that the levy would make the Hutus feel less connected to their Tutsi benefactors and more reliant on Europeans from outside the country. In addition, the head tax suggested that all who were counted were on an equal footing. As a result, in spite of Germany's efforts to maintain the historic Tutsi dominance over the Hutus, the Hutu people's beliefs towards this concept started to evolve. As a result of Germany's defeat in World War I, Belgian forces were able to take control of Rwanda. The Belgian government's engagement in the area was significantly more intrusive than the German administration's presence there. During the time when social Darwinism was prevalent, European anthropologists asserted that they had discovered a unique "Hamitic race" that was superior to the indigenous "Negroid" inhabitants of their time. Belgian social scientists, who were influenced by racialized attitudes, came to the conclusion that the Tutsis, who wielded political control in Rwanda, must be descendants of the Hamites, who shared a purportedly closer bloodline to Europeans. This conclusion led to the genocide that occurred in Rwanda in 1994. The Belgians came to the conclusion that the Tutsis and the Hutus each comprised an entirely distinct ethno-racial group. As a result, the Belgians held the opinion that the Tutsis were more civilised, superior, and crucially, more European than the Hutus. This viewpoint established a comprehensive race theory that would dictate Rwandan society until the country attained its independence: the racial superiority of the Tutsis and the oppression of the Hutus. This theory led to the placement of societal control in the hands of the Tutsis at the expense of the Hutus. The administrative, political, economic, and educational systems were the primary vehicles through which the Tutsi and Hutu ethnic groups were systematically differentiated from one another. At first, Belgian administrators adopted a quick system of classification that was based on the quantity of cattle a person had. Anyone who possessed ten or more cattle was regarded as a member of the upper-class Tutsi group. Nevertheless, the existence of wealthy Hutu was a source of friction. The colonial administration then institutionalised a more rigid ethnic classification in 1933 by issuing ethnic identification cards, officially branding every Rwandan as either Tutsi, Hutu, or Twa. This led to the Tutsis beginning to believe the myth of their superior racial status and exploiting their power over the Hutu majority. The history of Rwanda was created in a way that allowed for the justification of the existence of these racial divisions. To this day, there have been no discoveries in the fields of history, archaeology, or linguistics that lend credence to official history. The disparities that can be seen between the Tutsis and the Hutus are comparable to those that can be seen between the various socioeconomic strata in France during the 1950s. The ways in which people fed themselves explain a large portion of

the differences observed; for example, the Tutsis, who raised cattle, historically drank more milk than the Hutus, who were farmers. This was because the Tutsis were more likely to have access to fresh milk.

## **HUTU, TUTSI AND THE GENOCIDE**

It is conceivable that the name of President Juvenal Habyarimana was included in the lists of "traitors" that the Hutu Power group began preparing in March 1993. These "traitors" were individuals whom the group intended to assassinate. Many Hutu Power groups claimed that the country's national radio station, Radio Rwanda, had become too liberal and supportive of the opposition, and the far-right Hutu Power political party, Coalition for the Defense of the Republic (CDR), was aggressively and openly accusing the president of treason. In response, they established a new radio station known as Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines (RTLRC), on which they broadcast racist propaganda, offensive jokes, and music. The station rose to prominence across the nation very quickly as a result of its programming. Throughout the entirety of 1993, hardliners imported machetes on a scale that was significantly larger than what was necessary for agriculture. In addition, they imported other equipment that could be used as weapons, such as razor blades, saws, and scissors. The tools in question were dispersed at various locations across the nation, presumably as a component of the civil defence network. The President of Burundi, Melchior Ndadaye, the country's first ever Hutu president, was murdered by extreme Tutsi army soldiers in October 1993. Ndadaye had been elected as the country's first ever Hutu president in June of 1993. The assassination sent shock waves throughout the country and reinforced, in the minds of the Hutu population, the perception that the Tutsi were their enemy and could not be trusted. It didn't take long for the CDR and power wings of the competing parties to figure out that they could leverage this circumstance to their advantage. The concept of a "final solution" for the Tutsi, which had previously been a political stance held by a political extremist minority, was now at the forefront of Hutu party agendas and was being actively planned. A combination of factors, including public outrage at Ndadaye's murder, the persuasiveness of RTLM propaganda, and the traditional deference of Rwandans to authority, gave the Hutu power groups the confidence that they could convince the Hutu population to carry out killings. Before this, the Interahamwe and other militia organisations were only armed with machetes and other traditional hand weapons, but now the power leaders have begun supplying the Interahamwe and other militia groups with AK-47s and other weaponry. The infamous "Genocide Fax" was transmitted to the United Nations Headquarters on January 11, 1994, by General Romeo Dallaire, who was the commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR). According to the fax, Dallaire was in communication with a high-level informant who informed him of plans to distribute weapons to Hutu militias in order to kill Belgian members of UNAMIR and guarantee Belgian withdrawal from the country. Dallaire was also informed of the plans to withdraw Belgian troops from the country. An order had been given to the informant, who was a politician in the area, to register every Tutsi in Kigali. Kofi Annan, who was the Secretary-General of the United Nations at the time, repeatedly forbade any operations despite having the authority for approval until guidance was received from headquarters. He did this by citing Article 2 of the United Nations Charter. Dallaire made a request for permission to protect his informant and the informant's family. On April 6, 1994, the aeroplane that was about to land in Kigali with President Habyarimana and Cyprien Ntaryamira, the Hutu president of Burundi, was shot down and everyone on board was killed. There was disagreement on who was responsible for the attack, with radicals from both the RPF and the Hutu group being accused. After

further inquiry, the government of Rwanda determined that Hutu extremists serving in the Rwandan army were to blame. After Habyarimana passed away, the actual genocide started within a few hours of his passing. Initially, the military leaders in Gisenyi province were the most organised, as they were able to bring together a significant number of interahamwe and civilian Hutu. The commanders announced the tragic news that the president had died, pointed the finger of blame at the RPF, and then ordered the slaughter to begin. On April 7, the genocide stretched to the provinces of Ruhengeri, Kibuye, Kigali, Kibungo, and Gikongoro, as well as Cyangugu. In each instance, local officials responded to orders from Kigali by spreading reports that the RPF had been responsible for the death of the president and had ordered the public to kill Tutsis as a form of retaliation. The Hutu population, which had been trained and armed in the months prior, obeyed the commands without question since they had been prepared for them. In his book "The Rwanda Crisis", historian Gerard Prunier estimates that up to 800,000 Rwandans were slaughtered during the first six weeks of the genocide. This reflects a pace of killing that is five times higher than that which occurred during the Holocaust in Germany. With the exception of the advancing RPF army, there was no resistance force in Rwanda at the time of the genocide to prevent or impede the killings of Tutsis. The purpose of the genocide was to kill every Tutsi who lived in Rwanda. The domestic opposition had already been eradicated, and there was an express prohibition for UNAMIR to employ force in any context other than for self-defense. In rural areas, where Tutsi and Hutu people lived side by side and families knew each other, it was simple for Hutu people to recognise and target their Tutsi neighbours. In metropolitan areas, where citizens were less likely to reveal their identities, identification was made easier by the use of road barricades staffed by the military and the Interahamwe. When a person approached a road block, they were required to display their national identity card, which included information about their ethnicity. Anyone who was found to be holding a Tutsi card was promptly put to death. Many Hutus were also put to death for a variety of reasons, such as showing support for moderate opposition groups, working as journalists, or even just giving off the appearance of being Tutsi. The RPF made gradual but steady advances throughout the north and east of the country, putting a halt to massacres in every place they took. In April, the genocide was brought to a successful conclusion in certain parts of the provinces of Ruhengeri, Byumba, Kibungo, and Kigali. Additionally, during the month of April, the killings came to an end in western Ruhengeri and Gisenyi because virtually all of the Tutsi had been wiped out. A significant number of Hutu people living in areas controlled by the RPF escaped because of fear of being killed in retaliation. At the end of April, a half million people living in Kibungo escaped into Tanzania by crossing the bridge at Rusumo Falls. Once they got to Tanzania, they were put in UN camps that were run by former leaders of the Hutu dictatorship. Killings carried on during the months of May and June in the country's remaining regions, despite the fact that they became increasingly infrequent. The majority of Tutsi had already been eradicated, and the interim administration wanted to bring order out of the developing disorder and enlist the public in the battle against the RPF's advance. On June 23, around 2,500 soldiers entered the southwest region of Rwanda as part of UN Operation Turquoise, which was headed by France and was meant as a humanitarian operation. However, the soldiers were unable to rescue a large number of lives. The authorities responsible for the genocide made it clear that they were pleased to see the French by flying the French flag on their own trucks, but they continued to murder Tutsis who came out of hiding in the hope of receiving protection. After Habyarimana passed away, responsibility was transferred to the crisis committee, which was led by Bagosora. This group was the primary authority responsible for coordinating the genocide. Bagosora quickly started issuing instructions to kill Tutsi, addressing groups

of Interahamwe in person in Kigali, and making telephone calls to leaders in the regions. During this time, the genocide against the Tutsi began. The Minister of Defense, Augustin Bizimana; the Commander of the Paratroopers, Aloys Ntabakuze; and the Head of the Presidential Guard, Protais Mpiranya, were also key figures in the organization's national leadership. Felicien Kabuga was a businessman who provided financial support for the RTLM and Interahamwe. Pascal Musabe and Joseph Nzirorera were responsible for the national coordination of militia activities. The Presidential Guard was responsible for leading the genocide in Kigali. They received assistance from militias, which afterwards erected road barricades all around the capital city. In addition, militias carried out house searches throughout the city, during which they murdered Tutsis and pillaged their possessions. Kigali governor Tharcisse Renzaho played a leading role, touring road blocks to ensure their effectiveness and using his position as the head of the Kigali provincial government to disseminate orders and dismiss officials who were not sufficiently active in perpetuating murder. Renzaho toured the road blocks to ensure their effectiveness. When it came to the implementation of the genocide in rural areas, the local government hierarchy served as the line of command in the majority of cases. Acting on orders from Kigali, the governor of each province disseminated instructions to the district leaders, who in turn issued directions to the leaders of the sectors, cells, and villages that made up their respective districts. The vast bulk of the actual killings that took place in the countryside were carried out by regular citizens acting in accordance with directions from their leaders. The historical repression of the Hutu people by the Tutsi minority, the culture of obedience to authority, and the fear that non-participation would result in violent retribution were all factors that contributed to the willingness of ordinary citizens to commit acts of violence against their neighbours. On April 8, a crisis committee appointed a government to serve in an interim capacity. In place of the conditions of the Arusha Accords, the committee appointed Theodore Sindikubwabo as interim president and Jean Kambanda as the new prime minister. Both positions were established in accordance with the constitution of 1991. The government included members from all of the major political parties, but the majority of its members came from the Hutu Power wings of the parties to which they belonged. After being sworn into office on April 9, the interim administration promptly moved its headquarters from Kigali to Gitarama in order to escape the violence that was taking place in the capital city between the RPF and the Rwandan army. However, Bagosora and a few other top officials continued to exercise de facto control over the country even after the crisis committee was formally dissolved. The government was able to play some role in the mobilisation of the population, which gave the rule an appearance of legitimacy. However, in reality, the government was really a puppet dictatorship that lacked the power to stop the activities of the army or the Interahamwe. When the genocide started on April 7, RPF commander Paul Kagame issued a warning to the crisis committee and UNAMIR that he would restart the civil war if the slaughter did not stop. The following day, forces belonging to the Rwandan government assaulted the national parliament building from many directions, but RPF troops that were stationed inside successfully fought back. After that, the RPF started an attack from the north on three different fronts in an effort to immediately connect with the troops that were isolated in Kigali. Because Kagame believed that the interim administration was really a front for Bagosora's leadership and that it was not actually committed to putting an end to the genocide, he refused to talk to its representatives. The RPF made steady progress southward over the course of the following few days, eventually seizing control of Gabiro and huge portions of the countryside to the north and east of Kigali. They refrained from assaulting Kigali or Byumba, but instead carried out manoeuvres intended to encircle the cities and cut off supply routes. Additionally, the RPF made it

possible for Tutsi refugees who had fled Uganda to settle in RPF-controlled territory behind the front line. By May 16, they had severed the road that connected Kigali and Gitarama, the location of the interim government, and by June 13, they had taken Gitarama itself, following an unsuccessful attempt by the Rwandan government forces to reopen the road. Gitarama was the temporary home of the interim government. Subsequently, the provisional administration was compelled to transfer to Gisenyi in the far northwest. In addition to leading RPF forces in battle, Kagame was also actively seeking new members for the organisation. Tutsi people who had survived the genocide and Burundi refugees were among the new soldiers, but they didn't have as much training or discipline as the soldiers who had joined the army earlier. After the RPF succeeded in completing its encirclement of Kigali, they devoted the second half of June to battling for control of the city itself. Although the government forces had more manpower and better weapons, the RPF steadily expanded their territory while simultaneously conducting raids to save civilians trapped behind enemy lines. Kagame was able to profit from the attention that the government troops were devoting to the genocide and turn that attention into victories for the RPF in the war for Kigali. The government's morale suffered as it lost territory, which was another factor that worked to the RPF's advantage. On July 4, the RPF finally prevailed against forces belonging to the Rwandan government in Kigali, and on July 18, they conquered Gisenyi and the rest of the northwest, which resulted in the interim government being driven into Zaire and the end of the genocide. At the end of July 1994, Kagame's forces controlled the whole country of Rwanda, except for a small area in the southwest that was taken by a UN force led by France and called "Operation Turquoise."

## CONCLUSION

Due to the chaotic nature of the situation, there is no agreement among experts regarding the total number of people that perished as a result of the genocide. In contrast to the genocides carried out by Nazi Germany or the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, the authorities made no effort to record or organise the killings that occurred during the genocide. The subsequent government of the RPF has reported that 1,071,000 people were murdered in a period of 100 days, of which 10% were Hutus. On the basis of those numbers, one may conclude that 10,000 people are murdered each and every single day, which is equivalent to 400 people per hour or seven people each and every single minute. The number of Tutsis who are believed to have survived the genocide is roughly 300,000. It is estimated that thousands of widows, many of whom were victims of rape, are now living with HIV. In addition, the genocide resulted in the creation of almost 400,000 orphans, and of those, nearly 85,000 were coerced into becoming the primary breadwinners in their families. During the genocide, there was significant damage done to the infrastructure and economy of Rwanda. When the previous government fled the country, they took all of the country's currency and movable assets with them. As a result, many of the structures were unusable. Furthermore, human resources were severely depleted because more than 40% of the population had been killed or fled the area. The majority of those who remained were affected by trauma; they had either lost loved ones, watched murders, or taken part in the genocide themselves. The victims of rape committed during the conflict in Rwanda have reported suffering from long-term impacts such as social isolation, sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies and newborns, and some have even resorted to having abortions performed on themselves. While the government started working on the process of reconstructing the country's structures, the army, led by Paul Kagame, was responsible for maintaining law and order. After the victory of the RPF, nearly two million Hutu people fled to

refugee camps in neighbouring countries, mainly Zaire, because of concern that the RPF would exact revenge for the Rwandan Genocide. The conditions in the refugee camps were appalling, and as a result, thousands of people lost their lives to epidemics of diseases, including cholera and dysentery. The camps were established by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), but they were effectively controlled by the army and administration of the old Hutu dictatorship. This included many of the leaders of the genocide, and they began rearming in an attempt to return to power in Rwanda. At the end of 1996, Hutu militants from the camps were regularly launching cross-border raids, which prompted the government of Rwanda, which was commanded by the RPF, to launch a counteroffensive. The Banyamulenge, a Tutsi group operating in the Zairian region of South Kivu, received assistance from Rwanda in the form of personnel as well as military training, which assisted them in their victory over Zairian security forces. The refugee camps were then attacked by the Rwandan military, the Banyamulenge, and other Zairian Tutsi, with the intention of attacking Hutu militia. As a result of these attacks, hundreds of thousands of refugees were forced to escape their homes. Even though the RPF was there, many of these refugees ended up going back to Rwanda, while others went further west into Zaire.

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