

Central Africa's Cycle

HUTU VERSUS TUTSI: hatred, flight, death. For almost 40 years these peoples of the African nations of Rwanda and Burundi have been killing and driving out one another in spasms of violence that grew to genocidal proportions. Perhaps a million people, or even a million and a half, have died. A great swath of central Africa has been destabilized, including Zaire, the continent's third largest nation, more than three times the size of Texas (maps, pages 126-7).

Last year nearly two million refugees were living in huge United Nations-sponsored camps. Now, ousted by their weary hosts in Tanzania or to escape the conflict in Zaire, most of the Rwandans have gone home—rivers of people walking with belongings on their heads, trailed by knots of orphaned children. After returning, thousands were arrested as suspected killers, and hordes slept in the open because their houses were occupied by others. Because civil war still wracks Burundi, some 270,000 Burundians have been allowed to stay in Tanzania.

Rwanda and Burundi, each about the size of Maryland, are part of the Great Lakes region, which extends west from Lake Turkana and across Lakes Kivu and Tanganyika in the Great Rift Valley. Composed mainly of temperate uplands, 3,000 to 6,500 feet high, the region is intensively farmed.

Even after so much slaughter Rwanda and Burundi are the most crowded nations on the African mainland; most families have no more than a few acres of land. Rwanda's population, doubling every 20 years, exceeded 7.1 million in 1991, with a density of 745 people per square mile. (By comparison the density in Maryland, which is heavily urban, is only 516.) Tensions *(Continued on page 130)*



of Violence



DAVE EINSEL, HOUSTON CHRONICLE

In nearly four decades of killing, more than a million people in Rwanda and Burundi have died and millions more have been driven from their homes. To help stop the violence, Rwanda is putting 90,000 suspected killers on trial, including these men waiting in a crowded prison.

between Hutu and Tutsi are further exacerbated by sheer poverty; the per capita income in Rwanda and Burundi is around \$200 a year.

THE CONFLICT is not tribal; Hutu and Tutsi are socioeconomic castes. They speak the same languages—Kinyarwanda in Rwanda and Kirundi in Burundi—and scholars believe that most descend from the same ancestral stock. Before the recent violence Hutu made up an estimated 85 percent of Rwanda and Burundi, Tutsi 14 percent, and Twa Pygmies the rest.

Many who have watched the hatred intensify see it as the legacy of colonial rule, which began with the division of Africa among European nations in the 1880s. Rwanda and Burundi were part of the territory allotted to Germany, but Belgium was awarded those lands in 1919, after Germany's defeat in World War I. Historians say that there is little evidence in the precolonial era of ethnic violence, much less ethnic cleansing, even though the Tutsi minority held most of the positions of power in Rwanda. (Burundi was ruled by a princely elite, the Ganwa, which was not identified with either group.)

Both the Germans and Belgians ruled through the Tutsi and Ganwa chieftains. Among them were tall individuals who appeared less "African." The Europeans concluded that their ancestors were Caucasoid, thus creating a myth that still hangs on: that Tutsi are a superior people who migrated from Ethiopia, Sudan, or Egypt.

As one expert summarizes colonial attitudes, the Tutsi were "white Africans," cleverer than the "dumb" Hutu. Hence Tutsi were preferred as civil servants, businessmen, and landlords. In Rwanda nearly all the school spaces were allotted to them. Most Hutu were exploited peasants. Identity cards that specified ethnicity confirmed everyone's place in the pecking order.

Tensions escalated as political parties organized. In 1959, after a Hutu leader in Rwanda was brutally beaten by Tutsi, Hutu attacked Tutsi with clubs and machetes. Hundreds died. At about the same time, Belgian policy flip-flopped, with the colonial rulers endorsing the Hutu majority. Rwanda achieved independence in 1962 with a Hutu government in power. A violent government massacre in

1963-64 sent tens of thousands of Tutsi fleeing, mainly to Uganda and Burundi.

These events terrified the Tutsi of Burundi, also independent but still ruled by a Ganwa king. When a mutiny of Hutu soldiers erupted in 1965, Tutsi officers not only crushed it but executed many Hutu political leaders. Afterward they seized the government. Another Hutu uprising, in 1972, was put down with a genocidal slaughter; estimates of Hutu dead range from 80,000 to 200,000.

Rwanda and Burundi became partners in a terrible dance. "They fed off each other," says Jane Rasmussen, a U.S. human rights lawyer who has worked in the region. "When Tutsi were killed in Rwanda, it intensified the fear of Tutsi in Burundi, and when Hutu were killed in Burundi, it played on the fear of Hutu in Rwanda. Hatreds built and built."

Killers went unpunished. Both Rwanda and Burundi, meanwhile, endured guerrilla attacks staged by some of the more than 600,000 refugees in adjoining nations.

At the end of the 1980s Rwanda was in crisis. The price of coffee, the main export, had collapsed. Unemployment was widespread. And many Rwandan Hutu now opposed their longtime dictator-president, Juvenal Habyarimana, who was Hutu but reserved favors for a small elite from his home district—the *akazu*, or little house, as the clique was called.

Worse, Tutsi refugees in Uganda had created a potent fighting force, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). Invading in 1990, it was beaten back but continued to raid.

Evidently hoping to buy time to shore up his tottering regime, Habyarimana radically changed course. Heeding the urgings of the international community, especially France, which backed him with arms, he allowed political reforms. His one-party state was opened to opposition parties, deeply disturbing the privileged *akazu*.

In 1992 he agreed to a cease-fire with the RPF and entered peace negotiations, further angering leaders in both the *akazu* and the army. They began to demonize the Tutsi as exploiting foreigners, harking back to the colonial-era myth of Tutsi as a people who had originated in Ethiopia or some other place. "Wipe them all out!" one political leader screamed at rallies. Hundreds of Tutsi were

