government expected every black to become a citizen of one of the homelands and to move there. More than 99 percent of the population in the ten homelands was black.

The white-dominated government of South Africa repealed the apartheid laws in 1991. The principal antiapartheid organization, the African National Congress, was legalized, and its leader, Nelson Mandela, was released from jail after more than 27 years of imprisonment. When all South Africans were permitted to vote in national elections for the first time, in 1994, Mandela was overwhelmingly elected the country's first black president.

Now that South Africa’s apartheid laws have been dismantled and the country is governed by its black majority, other countries have reestablished economic and cultural ties. However, the legacy of apartheid will linger for many years: South Africa’s blacks have achieved political equality, but they are much poorer than white South Africans. Average income among white South Africans is about ten times higher than that of blacks.

KEY ISSUE 2
Why Have Ethnicities Been Transformed into Nationalities?

- Rise of Nationalities
- Multinational States
- Revival of Ethnic Identity

Ethnicity and race are distinct from nationality, another term commonly used to describe a group of people with shared traits. Nationality is identity with a group of people who share legal attachment and personal allegiance to a particular country. It comes from the Latin word nasci, which means “to have been born.”

Nationality and ethnicity are similar concepts in that membership in both is defined through shared cultural values. In principle, the cultural values shared with others of the same ethnicity derive from religion, language, and material culture, whereas those shared with others of the same nationality derive from voting, obtaining a passport, and performing civic duties.

Rise of Nationalities

In the United States, nationality is generally kept reasonably distinct from ethnicity and race in common usage:

- **Nationality** identifies citizens of the United States of America, including those born in the country and those who immigrated and became citizens.
- **Ethnicity** identifies groups with distinct ancestry and cultural traditions, such as African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Chinese Americans, or Polish Americans.

- **Race** distinguishes blacks and other persons of color from whites.

The United States forged a nationality in the late eighteenth century out of a collection of ethnic groups gathered primarily from Europe and Africa, not through traditional means of issuing passports (African Americans weren’t considered citizens then) or voting (women and African Americans couldn’t vote then), but through sharing the values expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. To be an American meant believing in the “unalienable rights” of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

In Canada, the Québécois are clearly distinct from other Canadians in language, religion, and other cultural traditions. But do the Québécois form a distinct ethnicity within the Canadian nationality or a second nationality separate altogether from Anglo-Canadian? The distinction is critical, because if Québécois is recognized as a separate nationality from Anglo-Canadian, the Quebec government would have a much stronger justification for breaking away from Canada to form an independent country (refer to Figure 5-27).

Outside North America, distinctions between ethnicity and nationality are even muddier. We have already seen in this chapter that identification with ethnicity and race can lead to discrimination and segregation. Confusion between ethnicity and nationality can lead to violent conflicts.

Nation-States

To preserve and enhance distinctive cultural characteristics, ethnicities seek to govern themselves without interference. A nation-state is a state whose territory corresponds to that occupied by a particular ethnicity that has been transformed into a nationality.

Ethnic groups have been transformed into nationalities because desire for self-rule is a very important shared attitude for many of them. The concept that ethnicities have the right to govern themselves is known as self-determination.

DENMARK: THERE ARE NO PERFECT NATION-STATES. Denmark is a fairly good example of a nation-state, because the territory occupied by the Danish ethnicity closely corresponds to the state of Denmark. The Danes have a strong sense of unity that derives from shared cultural characteristics and attitudes and a recorded history that extends back more than 1,000 years. Nearly all Danes speak the same language—Danish—and nearly all the world’s speakers of Danish live in Denmark.

But even Denmark is not a perfect example of a nation-state. Ten percent of Denmark’s population consists of ethnic minorities. The two largest groups are guest workers from Turkey and refugees from ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia (see Chapter 3).

To dilute the concept of a nation-state further, Denmark controls two territories in the Atlantic Ocean that do not share Danish cultural characteristics. One is the Faeroe Islands, a group of 21 islands ruled by Denmark for more than 600 years. The nearly 50,000 inhabitants of the Faeroe Islands speak
Faeroese (see red area in Figure 5-10). Denmark also controls Greenland, the world’s largest island, which is 50 times larger than Denmark proper. Only 12 percent of Greenland’s 58,000 residents are considered Danish; the remainder are native-born Greenlanders, primarily Inuit. Greenlanders have received authority from Denmark to control their own domestic affairs. One decision was to change all place names in Greenland from Danish to the local Inuit language. Greenland is now officially known as Kalaallit Nunaat, and the capital city was changed from Godthaab to Nuuk. In 2009, Greenlandic became the official language of Greenland.

NATION-STATES IN EUROPE. Ethnicities were transformed into nationalities throughout Europe during the nineteenth century (Figure 7-15, upper left). Most of Western Europe was made up of nation-states by the early twentieth century.

FIGURE 7-15 Nation-states in Europe. (upper left) In 1800, Europe’s German-speaking territory was divided into a large number of principalities. (upper right) After losing World War I, Germany was divided into two discontinuous areas, separated by the Danzig Corridor, part of the newly created state of Poland. (lower left) Germany’s boundaries changed again after World War II, as eastern portions of the country were taken by Poland and the Soviet Union. (lower right) With the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe, East Germany and West Germany were united. Because of forced migration of Germans (as well as other peoples) after World War II, the territory occupied by German speakers today is much farther west than the location a century ago.
Germany did not emerge as a nation-state until 1871, more recently than its neighbors. Prior to that time, the map of the central European area now called Germany was a patchwork of small states—more than 300 during the seventeenth century, for example. In 1871, Prussia—the most powerful German state—forced most its neighbors to join a Prussian-dominated German Empire. Germany lost much of its territory after World War I (Figure 7-15, upper right). Although the boundaries of states in Southern and Eastern Europe were fixed to conform when possible to those of ethnicities, Germany's new boundaries were arbitrary.

During the 1930s, German National Socialists (Nazis) claimed that all German-speaking parts of Europe constituted one nationality and should be unified into one state. They pursued this goal forcefully, and other European powers did not attempt to stop the Germans from taking over Austria and the German-speaking portion of Czechoslovakia, known as the Sudetenland. Not until the Germans invaded Poland (clearly not a German-speaking country) in 1939 did England and France try to stop them, marking the start of World War II.

After it was defeated in World War II, Germany was divided into two countries (Figure 7-15, lower left). Two Germanys existed from 1949 until 1990. With the end of communism, the German Democratic Republic ceased to exist, and its territory became part of the German Federal Republic (Figure 7-15, lower right).

**Nationalism**

A nationality, once established, must hold the loyalty of its citizens to survive (Figure 7-16). Politicians and governments try to instill loyalty through nationalism, which is loyalty and devotion to a nationality. Nationalism typically promotes a sense of national consciousness that exalts one nation above all others and emphasizes its culture and interests as opposed to those of other nations. People display nationalism by supporting a state that preserves and enhances the culture and attitudes of their nationality.

States foster nationalism by promoting symbols of the nation-state, such as flags and songs. The symbol of the hammer and sickle on a field of red was long synonymous with the beliefs of communism. After the fall of communism, one of the first acts in a number of Eastern European countries was to redesign flags without the hammer and sickle. Legal holidays were changed from dates associated with Communist victories to those associated with historical events that preceded Communist takeovers.

Nationalism can have a negative impact. The sense of unity within a nation-state is sometimes achieved through the creation of negative images of other nation-states. Travelers in southeastern Europe during the 1970s and 1980s found that jokes directed by one nationality against another recurred in the same form throughout the region, with only the name of the target changed. For example, “How many [fill in the name of a nationality] are needed to change a lightbulb?” Such jokes seemed harmless, but in hindsight reflected the intense dislike for other nationalities that led to conflict in the 1990s.

Nationalism is an important example of a *centripetal force*, which is an attitude that tends to unify people and enhance support for a state. (The word *centripetal* means “directed toward the center”; it is the opposite of *centrifugal*, which means “to spread out from the center.”) Most nation-states find that the best way to achieve citizen support is to emphasize shared attitudes that unify the people.

**Multinational States**

A state that contains more than one ethnicity is a *multiethnic state*. In some multiethnic states, ethnicities all contribute cultural features to the formation of a single nationality. The United States has numerous ethnic groups, all of whom consider themselves as belonging to the American nationality.

Other multiethnic states, known as *multinational states*, contain two ethnic groups with traditions of self-determination that agree to coexist peacefully by recognizing each other as distinct nationalities. A multinational state contains two or more nationalities with traditions of self-determination. Relationships among nationalities vary in different multinational states. In some states, one nationality tries to dominate another, especially if one of the nationalities is much more numerous than the other, whereas in other states nationalities coexist peacefully. The people of one nation may be assimilated into the cultural characteristics of another nation, but in other cases, the two nationalities remain culturally distinct.
One example of a multinational state is the United Kingdom, which contains four main nationalities—England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The four display some ethnic differences, but the main reason for considering them as distinct nationalities is that each had very different historical experiences.

- **Wales** was conquered by England in 1282 and formally united with England through the Act of Union of 1536. Welsh laws were abolished, and Wales became a local government unit.
- **Scotland** was an independent country for nearly a thousand years, until 1603 when Scotland's King James VI also became King James I of England, thereby uniting the two countries. The Act of Union in 1707 formally merged the two governments, although Scotland was allowed to retain its own systems of education and local laws. England, Wales, and Scotland together comprise Great Britain, and the term British refers to the combined nationality of the three groups.
- **Northern Ireland**, along with the rest of Ireland, was ruled by the British until the 1920s. The 1801 Act of Union created the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. During the 1920s most of Ireland became a separate country, but the northern portion—with a majority of Protestants—remained under British control. The official name of the country was changed to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Today, the strongest element of national identity comes from sports. England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland field their own national soccer teams and compete separately in major international tournaments, such as the World Cup. The most important annual rugby tournament, known as the Six Nations’ Championship, includes teams from England, Scotland, and Wales, as well as Ireland, Italy, and France. Given the history of English conquest, the other nationalities often root against England when it is playing teams from other countries.

### Former Soviet Union: The Largest Multinational State

The Soviet Union was an especially prominent example of a multinational state until its collapse in the early 1990s (Figure 7-17). When the Soviet Union existed, its 15 republics were based on the 15 largest ethnicities. Less numerous ethnicities were not given the same level of recognition.

With the breakup of the Soviet Union into 15 independent countries, a number of these less numerous ethnicities are now divided among more than one state. The 15 republics that once constituted the Soviet Union are now independent countries. These 15 newly independent states consist of five groups:

- Three Baltic: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania
- Three European: Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine
- Five Central Asian: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan
- Three Caucasus: Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia
- Russia

Reasonably good examples of nation-states have been carved out of the Baltic, European, and some Central Asian states. On the other hand, peaceful nation-states have not been created in any of the small Caucasus states, and Russia is an especially prominent example of a state with major difficulties in keeping all of its ethnicities contented.

### NEW BALTIC NATION-STATES.

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are known as the Baltic states for their location on the Baltic Sea. They had been independent countries between the end of World War I in 1918 and 1940, when the former Soviet Union annexed them under an agreement with Nazi Germany. Of the three Baltic states, Lithuania most closely fits the definition of a nation-state because ethnic Lithuanians comprise 85 percent of its population. In Estonia, ethnic Estonians comprise only 69 percent of the population; in Latvia, only 59 percent are ethnic Latvians.

These three small neighboring Baltic countries have clear cultural differences and distinct historical traditions. Most Estonians are Protestant (Lutherans), most Lithuanians are Roman Catholics, and Latvians are predominantly Lutheran.
with a substantial Roman Catholic minority. Estonians speak a Uralic language related to Finnish, whereas Latvians and Lithuanians speak languages of the Baltic group within the Balto-Slavic branch of the Indo-European language family.

**NEW EUROPEAN NATION-STATES.** To some extent, the former Soviet republics of Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine now qualify as nation-states. Belarusians comprise 81 percent of the population of Belarus, Moldovans comprise 78 percent of the population of Moldova, and Ukrainians comprise 78 percent of the population of Ukraine. The ethnic distinctions among Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Russians are somewhat blurred. The three groups speak similar East Slavic languages, and all are predominantly Orthodox Christians (some western Ukrainians are Roman Catholics).

Belarusians and Ukrainians became distinct ethnicities because they were isolated from the main body of Eastern Slavs—the Russians—during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This was the consequence of Mongolian invasions and conquests by Poles and Lithuanians. Russians conquered the Belarusian and Ukrainian homelands in the late 1700s, but after five centuries of exposure to non-Slavic influences, the three Eastern Slavic groups displayed sufficient cultural diversity to consider themselves as three distinct ethnicities.

The situation is different in Moldova. Moldovans are ethnically indistinguishable from Romanians, and Moldova (then called Moldavia) was part of Romania until the Soviet Union seized it in 1940. When Moldova changed from a Soviet republic back to an independent country in 1992, many Moldovans pushed for reunification with Romania, both to reunify the ethnic group and to improve the region's prospects for economic development.

But it was not to be that simple. When Moldova became a Soviet republic in 1940, its eastern boundary was the Dniester River. The Soviet government increased the size of Moldova by about 10 percent, transferring from Ukraine a 3,000-square-kilometer (1,200-square-mile) sliver of land on the east bank of the Dniester. The majority of the inhabitants of this area, known as Trans-Dniestria, are Ukrainian and Russian. They, of course, oppose Moldova's reunification with Romania.

**NEW CENTRAL ASIAN STATES.** The five states in Central Asia carved out of the former Soviet Union display varying degrees of conformance to the principles of a nation-state. Together the five provide an important reminder that multinational states can be more peaceful than nation-states.

In Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the leading ethnic group has an overwhelming majority—85 percent Turkmen and 80 percent Uzbek, respectively. Both ethnic groups are Muslims who speak an Altaic language; they were conquered by Russia in the nineteenth century. Turkmen and Uzbeks are examples of ethnicities split into more than one country—the Turkmen between Turkmenistan and Russia, and Uzbeks among Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

Kyrgyzstan is 69 percent Kyrgyz, 15 percent Uzbek, and 9 percent Russian. The Kyrgyz—also Muslims who speak an Altaic language—resent the Russians for seizing the best farmland when they colonized this mountainous country early in the twentieth century.

In principle, Kazakhstan, twice as large as the other four Central Asian countries combined, is a recipe for ethnic conflict. The country is divided between Kazakhs, who comprise 67 percent of the population, and Russians, at 18 percent. Kazakhs are Muslims who speak an Altaic language similar to Turkish, whereas the Russians are Orthodox Christians who speak an Indo-European language. Tensions exist between the two groups, but Kazakhstan has been peaceful, in part because it has a somewhat less depressed economy than its neighbors.

In contrast, Tajikistan—80 percent Tajik, 15 percent Uzbek, and only 1 percent Russian—would appear to be a stable country, but it suffers from a civil war among the Tajik people, Muslims who speak a language in the Indic group of the Indo-Iranian branch of Indo-European language. The civil war has been between Tajiks, who are former Communists, and an unusual alliance of Muslim fundamentalists and Western-oriented intellectuals. Fifteen percent of the population has been made homeless by the fighting.

**Russia: Now the Largest Multinational State**

Russia officially recognizes the existence of 39 nationalities, many of which are eager for independence. Russia's ethnicities are clustered in two principal locations (Figure 7-18). Some are located along borders with neighboring states, including Buryats and Tuvan near Mongolia, and Chechens, Dagestani, Kabardins, and Ossetians near the two former Soviet republics of Azerbaijan and Georgia. Overall, 20 percent of the country's population is non-Russian.

Other ethnicities are clustered in the center of Russia, especially between the Volga River basin and the Ural Mountains. Among the more numerous in this region are Bashkirs, Chuvash, and Tatars, who speak Altaic languages similar to Turkish, and Mordvins and Udmurts, who speak Uralic languages similar to Finnish. Most of these groups were conquered by the Russians in the sixteenth century under the leadership of Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible).

Independence movements are flourishing because Russia is less willing to suppress these movements forcibly than the Soviet Union had once been. Particularly troublesome for the Russians are the Chechens, a group of Sunni Muslims who speak a Caucasian language and practice distinctive social customs.

Chechnya was brought under Russian control in the nineteenth century only after a 50-year fight. When the Soviet Union broke up into 15 independent states in 1991, the Chechens declared their independence and refused to join the newly created country of Russia. Russian leaders ignored the declaration of independence for 3 years but then sent in the Russian army in an attempt to regain control of the territory. Russia fought hard to prevent Chechnya from gaining independence because it feared that other ethnicities would follow suit. Chechnya was also important to Russia because the region contained deposits of petroleum. Russia viewed political stability in the area as essential for promoting economic development and investment by foreign petroleum companies.
The Cultural Landscape

Turmoil in the Caucasus

The Caucasus region, an area about the size of Colorado, is situated between the Black and Caspian seas and gets its name from the mountains that separate Russia from Azerbaijan and Georgia. The region is home to several ethnicities, with Azeris, Armenians, and Georgians the most numerous (Figure 7-19).

Other important ethnicities include Abkhazians, Chechens, Ingush, and Ossetians. Kurds and Russians—two ethnicities that are more numerous in other regions—are also represented in the Caucasus.

When the entire Caucasus region was part of the Soviet Union, the Soviet government promoted allegiance to communism and the Soviet state and quelled disputes among ethnicities, by force if necessary. With the breakup of the region into several independent countries, long-simmering conflicts among ethnicities have erupted into armed conflicts. Each ethnicity has a long-standing and complex set of grievances against others in the region. But from a political geography perspective, every ethnicity in the Caucasus has the same aspiration—to carve out a sovereign nation-state. The region’s ethnicities have had varying success in achieving this objective, but none have fully achieved it.

AZERBAIJAN. Azeris (or Azerbaijanis) trace their roots to Turkish invaders who migrated from Central Asia in the eighth and ninth centuries and merged with the existing Persian population. An 1828 treaty allocated northern Azeri territory to Russia and southern Azeri territory to Persia (now Iran). In 1923, the Russian portion became the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic within the Soviet Union.

With the Soviet Union’s breakup in 1991, Azerbaijan again became an independent country. The western part of the country,
Nakhichevan (named for the area’s largest city), is separated from the rest of Azerbaijan by a 40-kilometer (25-mile) corridor belonging to Armenia.

More than 7 million Azeris now live in Azerbaijan, 91 percent of the country’s total population. Another 16 million Azeris are clustered in northwestern Iran, where they constitute 24 percent of that country’s population. Azeris hold positions of responsibility in Iran’s government and economy, but Iran restricts teaching of the Azeri language.

ARMENIA. More than 3,000 years ago Armenians controlled an independent kingdom in the Caucasus. Converted to Christianity in 303, they lived for many centuries as an isolated Christian enclave under the rule of Turkish Muslims.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, hundreds of thousands of Armenians were killed in a series of massacres organized by the Turks. Others were forced to migrate to Russia, which had gained possession of eastern Armenia in 1828.

After World War I the allies created an independent state of Armenia, but it was soon swallowed by its neighbors. In 1921, Turkey and the Soviet Union agreed to divide Armenia between them. The Soviet portion became the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic and then an independent country in 1991. Armenians comprise 98 percent of the population in Armenia, making it the most ethnically homogeneous country in the region.

Armenians and Azeris both have achieved long-held aspirations of forming nation-states, but after their independence from the Soviet Union the two went to war over the boundaries between them. The war concerned possession of Nagorno-Karabakh, a 5,000-square-kilometer (2,000-square-mile) enclave within Azerbaijan that is inhabited primarily by Armenians but placed under Azerbaijan’s control by the Soviet Union during the 1920s. A 1994 cease-fire has left Nagorno-Karabakh technically part of Azerbaijan, but in reality it acts as an independent republic.

GEORGIANS. The population of Georgia is more diverse than that in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Ethnic Georgians comprise 84 percent of the population. The country also includes about 7 percent Azeri, 6 percent Armenian, 2 percent Russian, and 3 percent Abkhazian, Ajar, and Ossetian.

Georgia’s cultural diversity has been a source of unrest, especially among the Ossetians and Abkhazians (Figure 7-20). During the 1990s, the Abkhazians fought for control of the northwestern portion of Georgia and have declared Abkhazia to be an independent state. In 2008, the Ossetians fought a war with the Georgians that resulted in the Ossetians declaring the South Ossetia portion of Georgia to be independent.

Russia has recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent countries and has sent troops there. Only a handful of other countries recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, although the two operate as if they were independent of Georgia.

Revival of Ethnic Identity

Europeans thought that ethnicity had been left behind as an insignificant relic, such as wearing quaint costumes to amuse tourists. Karl Marx wrote that nationalism was a means for the dominant social classes to maintain power over workers, and he believed that workers would identify with other working-class people instead of with an ethnicity.

Until they lost power around 1990, Communist leaders in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union used centripetal forces to discourage ethnicities from expressing their cultural uniqueness. Writers and artists were pressured to conform to a style known as “socialist realism,” which emphasized Communist economic and political values. Use of the Russian language was promoted as a centripetal device throughout the former Soviet Union. It was taught as the second language in other Eastern European countries. The role of organized religion was minimized, suppressing a cultural force that competed with the government.

In the twenty-first century, ethnic identity has once again become more important than nationality, even in much of Europe. In Eastern Europe the breakup of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia during the 1990s gave more numerous ethnicities the opportunity to organize nation-states. But the less numerous ethnicities found themselves existing as minorities in multinational states or divided among more than one of the new states. Especially severe problems have occurred in the Balkans, a rugged, mountainous region where nation-states could not be delineated peacefully.

The Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia were dismantled largely because minority ethnicities opposed the long-standing dominance of the most numerous ones in each country—Russians in the Soviet Union, Serbs in Yugoslavia, and Czechs in
Czechoslovakia. The dominance was pervasive, including economic, political, and cultural institutions. No longer content to control a province or some other local government unit, ethnicities sought to be the majority in completely independent nations. Republics that once constituted local government units within the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia generally made peaceful transitions into independent countries—as long as their boundaries corresponded reasonably well with the territory occupied by a clearly defined ethnicity.

Slovenia is a good example of a nation-state that was carved from the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Slovenes comprise 83 percent of the population of Slovenia, and nearly all the world’s 2 million Slovenes live in Slovenia. The relatively close coincidence between the boundaries of the Slovene ethnic group and the country of Slovenia has promoted the country’s relative peace and stability, compared to other former Yugoslav republics.

**KEY ISSUE 3**

**Why Do Ethnicities Clash?**

- **Ethnic Competition to Dominate Nationality**
- **Dividing Ethnicities Among More Than One State**

Ethnicities do not always find ways to live together peacefully. In some cases, ethnicities compete in civil wars to dominate the national identity. In other cases, problems result from division of ethnicities among more than one state.

**Ethnic Competition to Dominate Nationality**

Sub-Saharan Africa has been a region especially plagued by conflicts among ethnic groups competing to become dominant within the various countries. The Horn of Africa and central Africa are the two areas within sub-Saharan Africa where conflicts among ethnic groups have been particularly complex and brutal.

**Ethnic Competition in the Horn of Africa**

The Horn of Africa encompasses the countries of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia. Especially severe problems have occurred in Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia, as well as in the neighboring country of Sudan.

**ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA.** Eritrea, located along the Red Sea, became an Italian colony in 1890. Ethiopia, an independent country for more than 2,000 years, was captured by Italy during the 1930s. After World War II, Ethiopia regained its independence, and the United Nations awarded Eritrea to Ethiopia (Figure 7-21). The United Nations expected Ethiopia to permit Eritrea considerable authority to run its own affairs, but Ethiopia dissolved the Eritrean legislature and banned the use of Tigrinya, Eritrea’s major local language. The Eritreans rebelled, beginning a 30-year fight for independence (1961–1991). During this civil war, an estimated 665,000 Eritrean refugees fled to neighboring Sudan.

Eritrean rebels defeated the Ethiopian army in 1991, and 2 years later Eritrea became an independent state. But war between Ethiopia and Eritrea flared up again in 1998 because of disputes over the location of the border. Eritrea justified its claim through a 1900 treaty between Ethiopia and Italy, which then controlled Eritrea, but Ethiopia cited a 1902 treaty with Italy. Ethiopia defeated Eritrea in 2000 and took possession of the disputed areas.

A country of 5 million people split evenly between Christian and Muslim, Eritrea has two principal ethnic groups: Tigrinya and Tigre. At least in the first years of independence, a strong sense of national identity united Eritrea’s ethnicities as a result of shared experiences during the 30-year war to break free of Ethiopia.

Even with the loss of Eritrea, Ethiopia remained a complex multiethnic state. From the late nineteenth century until the 1990s, Ethiopia was controlled by the Amharas, who are Christians. After the government defeat in the early 1990s, power passed to a combination of ethnic groups. The Oromo, who are Muslim fundamentalists from the south, are the largest ethnicity in Ethiopia, at 34 percent of the population. The Amhara, who comprise 27 percent of the population, had banned the use of languages other than Amharic, including Oromo.