

Sound of Silence as the Killers Rule in Rwanda

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CASUAL murder and the stench of genocide lurk round every turn in the greenery of the Rwanda countryside.

The national trauma springs vicious surprises and small incidents of heroism that go almost unnoticed, like the old, ragged man I saw beaten and ground underfoot before being finished off behind trees without a sound passing his lips.

It was a silent torture hardly noticed. There was no screaming abuse, just an indifference at such unrewarding sport in Rwanda's temporary capital.

Another soldier sauntered towards the man and ground the heel of his boot on to the arch of the old man's foot. Still not a sound. Survivors of the mainly Hutu-on-Tutsi massacres had said that they did not show their feelings, to deny their killers the satisfaction of seeing their fear.

The soldiers tired of the old man and handed him over to civilians, ar-

med with machetes, staves and clubs. When the group reached the end of a path between tall sorghum plants, it turned out of sight.

Not far. A few plants went into a sudden spasm as he was murdered, in the grounds of the Kabgayi Catholic seminar, still without a sound.

He was one of seven people to die outside the refugee camps around the cathedral. Five others were shot as they walked the ten yards between a clinic and their shacks. Aid workers fear that up to 500,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu may have suffered a similar fate.

The Hutu headmistress of a local high school who had complained about the rape of her pupils was hacked to death, as was another woman who had the misfortune to look like the teacher.

Foreigners are not immune from such random threats. Pointing to me in the back of the car, a drunken tribesman tapped the bloodied head of his club and said: "Is this man a Bel-

gian?" The militia hate Belgians.

"Does he look like he eats chips? He's too skinny." The joke earns a guffaw, and we are free to crawl to the next roadblock manned by men with

sharpened sticks, burning logs and bicycle spokes. "You have to laugh, or else you cry. Around bullies, if you cry you die," said the priest who is my guide.