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## 'A Different Kind of Genocide'

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By Michael Gerson

Thursday, December 6, 2007; A29

WALUNGU, Congo -- This village, surrounding a small Catholic church, is as far down the red dust road as you can go without entering territory controlled by the exiled perpetrators of [Rwanda's](#) genocide. The rebels often come in civilian clothes to trade in Walungu's open-air market. At other times they raid the nearby farms for supplies and women. The region is known as "the quarter of rape."

In the shadow of the church is a facility run by [Women for Women](#), an organization that matches international sponsors to local women in need of help. Listening to one of those women, I heard the story of a suffering nation in a single life.

Lucianne is 24, dressed in a red top and red skirt. She speaks quietly while looking downward, her hands trembling. Her eyes are staring and empty; her lovely mouth never smiles.

In December of 2005, while her husband was away on business, Hutu soldiers broke into her home, tied her arms behind her back, did the same to her sister-in-law and dragged them into the bush. The two women were marched to their family farm, where Lucianne's brother was also kidnapped. Other families were captured along the way.

"We were taken to a hill, and laid down for rape," she told me. "They gave a flashlight to my brother to hold while they were raping us. When he tried to resist, they struck him with a gun in the face. . . . We were near a stream. When one of them was finished, they washed the blood off us before the next was raped."

Afterward they were moved again. "I was unable to walk properly, and they were beating us along the way. The next morning we arrived" -- here she breaks down, then quietly continues -- "at the place where they killed my brother." She was tied to a tree. Her sister-in-law and most of the other women were taken away to be murdered.

A rebel officer decided that Lucianne would be kept as a "wife." "When I got in the house, I saw my younger sister," Lucianne recalls. "I thought she had died. She told me she was pregnant and ill.

"When I cooked, if there was more or less salt, I was put in prison, which was a hole filled with water. Once I spent three days in prison with swollen legs."

Eventually Lucianne was ordered to escort her sister to town so she could give birth. Lucianne was rescued by the wife of a government soldier, who got help for her sister at nearby [Panzi Hospital](#)-- but her sister died soon after childbirth.

Lucianne remained for treatment at Panzi. She had contracted a sexually transmitted disease and was pregnant herself. When she tried to return home, her husband had abandoned her, and her family farm had been occupied by others.

After delivering her child, she tried working on a different farm, but the soldiers came again. "I wanted to hide myself, and they told me, 'Why do you hide? You are Lucianne, and you have our baby.'" She recently saw two of her captors in the market. "Since that day I have never spent the night in the house, because of fear."

Lucianne -- who is young and lost and should be loved -- now sleeps with her child in the cassava fields near Walungu to avoid being captured again.

At Panzi Hospital, which specializes in treating rape victims, there was a long line of women waiting for treatment on the day I visited. By one estimate, 27,000 women and girls were raped in eastern Congo in 2006. The hospital has seen victims as young as 3.

Denis Mukwege, the hospital's medical director, explains that women are sometimes raped by six soldiers at a time and violated in front of their families to maximize the shame. "After the rape, sometimes they destroy their private parts," he says, "introducing firewood and guns. . . . Most people who come back from the bush come back with fistula; they smell bad and leak in their private parts." The excretory organs are no longer under control. "The idea is to destroy the entire community, so they can't procreate anymore, for the race to disappear."

"If they were shot by a gun," says Mukwege, "you would call it genocide. This is a different kind of genocide, which destroys women physically and emotionally over the years."

At the close of my interview with Lucianne, she finally looked up. "I beg you, my fathers and mothers, to help me get safety from these people."

No words of comfort came to me.

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