



# Stories and Letters To The Next Generation

## How it all came to be

Annemiek Richters

The stories and letters to the next generation collected in this volume were written in the context of an autobiographical project developed for staff of Community Based Sociotherapy (CBS) as implemented in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. We started with online autobiographic writing meetings during the Covid period, resulting in two 5-day writing workshops in Kigali in 2023. The first week focused on 'self-discovery' while the second one focused on experiences with participation as staff in CBS implementation and research.

Community-based sociotherapy was introduced in Rwanda in 2005 to provide psychosocial support to the Rwandan population in terms of constructively processing the impact the genocide had on their individual and social lives. CBS gradually developed – based on continuous monitoring, evaluation and research - into an integrated mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and peacebuilding (PB) approach. The intervention is implemented in groups composed of 12-15 people, who meet in 15 weekly sessions in people's living environment, whether communities, refugee camps, or prisons.

Over the years, many stories were collected among CBS group participants focusing on the influence of their involvement in sociotherapy in their lives and the process they went through that contributed to that influence. Through informal conversations among staff since 2005, it became clear that the staff's day-to-day involvement in sociotherapy had a continuous impact on their personal as well as professional lives. This made us decide to not only document stories of sociotherapy group participants but also of CBS staff members varied experiences with sociotherapy. The stories and letters collected here testify to what impressed them about CBS, the multidimensional transformation of their lives, and their wishes for the next generation in terms of prevention of the suffering the current generation has been confronted with due to war and genocide and their aftermath. We expect that the reader of this volume will find messages of hope and comfort in it, as we, the authors, found during our engagement with sociotherapy.

Annemiek Richters, interdisciplinary trained, has supported the development of community based sociotherapy in terms of implementation and research since its start in 2005 in Rwanda up to today.



## The wonders of autobiographical writing in Kigali

Susanne Gijsbers

During the coronavirus pandemic, I got to know Annemiek Richters in one of my autobiographical workshops in the Netherlands. Autobiographical writing is a method to work with life stories by associatively recalling and describing. Annemiek became enthusiastic about the method and the way I work with it in groups. She came up with the idea of offering this writing to her colleagues at CBS in Rwanda. We initially started with it online, which allowed me to get to know her colleagues. Later, I had the opportunity to facilitate a five-day autobiographical writing workshop twice in Kigali.

Autobiographical writing is an accessible method for anyone who can read and write to explore their life story. The writing provides the opportunity to recall memories, explore how they are connected, and understand how they form the basis of one's current life experiences. No matter how joyful, beautiful, but also difficult, sad, or touching those moments were. By writing about such a moment, it takes shape, it can be viewed from different angles, and a new perspective can be found. The writing also stimulates a poetic attitude to life in which a 'meaning of life' is experienced. As research shows, working with life stories has a positive effect on a person's mental health and well-being. By sharing autobiographical stories with each other in a group, often a sense of recognition arises in someone else's story. Also, by sharing unique stories in which universal values simultaneously resonate, the feeling of 'all being human in this world' is generated. This all together has a liberating and connecting effect; connecting because group members quickly get to know each other on a very personal level. In the group there is fun, wonder, and involvement in each other's lives and often a certain 'lightness' is experienced.

The weeks in Kigali made a deep impression on me. The warmth and connection between the participants in the group, all staff members of CBS. A spontaneous prayer or singing in the circle when a pause was needed after a shared memory that stirred so much. The stories in this book originated from the second week in Kigali. After an introduction to autobiographical writing in the first week, the desire emerged to write about what working with community based sociotherapy had brought to everyone. Sharing those stories, the deep-felt respect for what this work personally meant to everyone, its transformative power in each person's life and that of others, was palpably significant. It shows how community based sociotherapy brings people back together in an intensely divided society. The stories shared give me goosebumps and evoke a deep respect for the people who developed and carry out this work. It is about the wonder of resilience, the transformation of forgiveness, and how living together in connection can be restored. Essentially, how peacebuilding takes shape in practice, that is what I have learned from listening to the stories in the writing group. A selection of the stories can be read in this booklet. The participants' personal experiences with community based sociotherapy are described, along with letters to the next generation, each emphasizing the crucial importance of the CBS approach for a healthy society.

Many thanks to Annemiek Richters, who made these writing weeks in Kigali possible, and to all the participants for their time and effort. To the compilers of this beautiful booklet, which involved a lot of work. It is wonderful that these important stories can now be shared in this way. I hope they will serve as an inspiration for many.

Susanne Gijsbers (MSc Communication Science) is trained as a biographical coach and autobiographical writing coach.





# Stories



## GUIDING INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUES ON THE 1994 GENOCIDE AGAINST THE TUTSI

*By Murekatete Olive*

By the time I joined the sociotherapy program, the team was exploring a new topic, the topic of how the genocide not only affects the people who consciously lived through it, but also those who were young or were not born yet during the genocide. It was an opportunity for me to learn more about 'intergenerational transmission of trauma', which, so far, I was only a bit familiar with from the literature's point of view.

A few months later, I conducted interviews with youth in the Western province of Rwanda to understand what is being or not being said when it comes to the parental past related to genocide, ways children request this information from their parents, motivations to know more about that parental past and the impact of learning on individual and relational lives. Both youths from different historical backgrounds shared the struggle faced by their parents when it comes to discussing their histories, some even opting for silence as a coping mechanism to prevent re-traumatization or protect their positive image.

In the same field trip, I tried to explore the same issues from a parental perspective. As discussions progressed, I got several challenging questions from my respondents who would ask me, for instance, "How would you share such atrocities with your child when you have seen babies being smashed on walls?" Another one would say, "How would you respond to your child wanting to know about your family when your family has been wiped out, and what used to be your home is surrounded by bushes that got destroyed?" Another one said, "How would you get the courage to explain to your child that you have been involved in killings?"

While I did try to navigate between my role as "researcher" who was confronted by my respondents who wanted to understand how I would behave in such scenarios, I must admit that I left the place more challenged than I came, carrying not just data but also a deeper understanding of the courage it takes to confront a past that many would prefer to stay silent about.



## AT THE JUNCTION OF LAUGHTER AND TEARS

*By Rudasingwa Fidele*

I am very interested in meeting Umuhire due to the stories I have heard about her life before and after her participation in sociotherapy. I arrived at her home before she did. I am very curious to meet this fantastic woman. I must wait for a few minutes until she arrives. I see a woman coming from outside, smiling and making long steps. I must smile back. She is wearing a multicoloured blouse and a kitenge dress. She warmly welcomes me into her home and offers me a seat. She appears very happy to receive me. I also feel joy, though tempered with apprehension about the sensitive topic we are about to discuss. Though I feel so glad, I struggle to find the right way to broach the subject without dampening the mood.

Eventually, I informed her that I come from sociotherapy and wish to discuss her experiences. She quickly reassured me that she wouldn't cry as she used to do before participating in sociotherapy. "Mvura Nkuvure" [the name given to the sociotherapy intervention] has made me stronger," she said. She begins recounting her story, which is profoundly moving. Tears stream down her cheeks as she delves deeper into her narrative, yet she laughs intermittently. The juxtaposition of laughter and tears is both confusing and upsetting.

Witnessing Umuhire's ability to express both her pain from the past and her newfound strength from sociotherapy fills me with conflicting emotions. I empathize with her sorrow but also feel a sense of admiration for her resilience. Though inwardly moved to tears alongside her, I managed to maintain composure.

Umuhire appears visibly distressed as she recounts the loss of her family members, particularly her son, at the hands of neighbours and friends she had once trusted. Coping with such profound loss had driven her to seek solace in alcohol to temper her anger and despair. The commemoration period proved to be challenging for her, as it used to stir up intense feelings of anger and resentment. She describes how she would drink and lash out at ex-prisoners, especially those responsible for her son's death. She tells the story as if it happened this same day.

Through Umuhire's narrative, I gained a deeper understanding of how the memories of genocide continue to haunt the lives of survivors long after the events have transpired. It becomes evident to me that genocide is not something confined to the past. Instead, it remains an ever-present reality for survivors. I couldn't help but consider the experiences of ex-prisoners during the commemoration period, wondering how they grapple with their past actions amidst the collective mourning of survivors.



## ECOLOGICAL CONNECTEDNESS

*By Rudasingwa Fidele*

After recruiting sociotherapy staff in 2013, we met with all project staff near our autobiographic writing venue, at Ligue pour la Lecture de la Bible. How coincidental it was to be asked in our one-week writing workshop in 2023 to write about the first day I heard about sociotherapy. When I applied for a job in a sociotherapy project, I had limited information about what sociotherapy truly entailed. Nevertheless, I got the job I had applied for and gradually learned more about sociotherapy and the impact of genocide on people's lives and their living environment.

During the project staff meeting, a man stood up to share his remarks with the staff. I, still a young man, stood in my army green jacket, listening intently. One of the man's observations struck me deeply; it pertained to people's profound connection to their homeland. The man explained how, in Rwandan culture, people traditionally buried the placenta of a newborn in their own land, symbolizing a deep-rooted connection to the soil. This practice, he noted, had existed before the genocide. However, the horrors of the genocide altered this tradition, affecting not only the physical landscape itself but also the emotional and psychological connectedness of the people with it in the post-genocide period. As a young man, I grappled with the mystery of this connectedness.

This ecological bond remained etched in my mind, sparking my curiosity to understand more about it. It compelled me to contemplate life from a broader perspective, transcending the limits of what can be seen with one's physical eyes. It made me wonder how genocide affected our relationship with nature, living and non-living parts of nature, waters, land, trees, people, and animals. I started to get curious about how they all felt after seeing people killing others and after receiving many bodies thrown in the rivers. I thought they might be angry with us, but I feared they could get revenge anytime.

In my mind, one of the most memorable aspects of our sociotherapy group meetings was our choice of venue: beneath the shade of a tree. There was something profoundly comforting about gathering in such a natural setting. I found solace in observing the trees around us, seemingly dancing a silent song of happiness. It felt like a gesture of reconciliation with the land that had witnessed unspeakable atrocities during the genocide, the forests, bushes, and plantations where innocent lives had been lost.

Some of our groups also convened near rivers, and I couldn't help but sense a palpable aura of hope in the gentle flow of water nearby. The rivers seemed to echo the sentiments of renewal and reconciliation as survivors, former perpetrators, youth, and even babies brought by their mothers came together to reconnect and heal.



## RESTORING FAMILIES THROUGH SOCIOTHERAPY

*By Emile*

It is a sunny afternoon. After riding a motorbike for more than an hour, I arrive at a cell's administrative office, where I find people waiting to participate in a session of sociotherapy. We soon enter a room in the office and sit in a circle. Sociotherapists start the session with a prayer and a round of sharing news. After this round, people discuss what they experienced the previous week. While discussing, Ruth, a woman of advanced age (in her 60s), raises her hand and says immediately, "Please, I have a family problem that has been haunting me for the past 32 years, and I want the group to help me to address it." Hearing about a problem affecting someone since I was around 5 years old made me curious about what kind of problem it could be. The woman continues, "I have been married to my husband for 32 years. We have children and grandchildren. He lives in this community and works as a night-shift security guard at our sector office. However, I no longer see him at home." She also reveals that they sometimes experience a kind of marital conflict and misunderstandings between them. Looking perplexed, other participants and the two sociotherapists facilitating the group discussion started to ask Ruth questions to understand the problem in her family and its root causes clearly. Ruth tries to answer all questions. To my surprise, one of the sociotherapists raises his hand and says, "We are fortunate that the husband is our group member, and he is here today. Let us get his perspective on this issue."

Bernard, who has been silent during the discussion so far, declines all accusations against him and provides evidence of how he cares for his family. He shares that he goes home from night guard work every morning to change clothes while his wife is away for agricultural activities. He then goes to the sector office to cook for police officers and eat there with them. He also adds that he does all that to reduce family expenses by always avoiding eating at home and instead eating food prepared for policemen. He brings his earnings home monthly, leaving the total amount in their bedroom. All the people living in the same neighborhood as Ruth and Bernard agree with what he is saying. His wife also agrees. However, everyone remains confused about why he fled home and has avoided talking to his wife for a long time.

The sociotherapists now ask Bernard what problem in their home is making his wife worried despite his convincing explanations. Bernard says that since 1994, he has decided never to spend the night at home again because his wife had insulted him by saying he was lazy. She had done so since the day following their marriage day, something that was still hurting him. He discusses more about what happened. Like all of us, Ruth looks surprised by hearing what her husband revealed as the root cause of the problem in their family. Then she asks her husband, "Do you remember even that?" Please accept to come home tomorrow anytime, and we can have a more detailed and private discussion about it. Bernard receives the invitation and agrees to meet with her at home.

Two years later, I am again riding my motorbike in the same area as the group session in which Ruth and Bernard participated. I am going to meet respondents whom I plan to interview. On my way, I met the same couple walking, and I stopped to greet them. I ask them, "Do you still remember me?" "Yes, you used to come to our group," Bernard answered. I then ask them where they are from. Bernard, smiling, answers me, "Today is my birthday, and my wife has taken me to the centre behind there to celebrate." I asked them again, "What happened after that day we met in your group?" Bernard answered me again, "We are so much grateful to sociotherapy. I came home the following day, and we deeply discussed about it. We apologized to each other. I resigned from my job as a night security guard, which I was doing to avoid coming home, and rejoined my family. Today, we are a happy family, and people in our neighbourhood are happy about the changes in our household. Our living conditions have improved, and our children are happy for our restored relationship." Pleased to hear about this positive change, I thank them for sharing with me the good news and continue my journey.



## TRUST AND HUMAN GROWTH

By *Erneste*

It is an afternoon in 2015, and I am visiting a sociotherapy group. I am early and watch participants arriving at the meeting place individually, carrying small benches to sit on in the garden under a big tree (umunyinya) with its large branches creating a protective cover. Other participants are sitting on the grass in the garden around the tree. Waiting for more participants to arrive, we share ordinary life stories around farming, harvesting, and the use of crops. The time to start the group session came, and sociotherapists introduced us as visitors to the group participants, who were happy to be with us in the session.

As usual, the two group facilitators opened the session by requesting everyone to share news of the week (good or bad). Immediately, without introduction, Constance - a lady of medium size, red eyes, full of tears and anger - said that she deserved to go to prison. She went on to say that the previous night, she had planned to cut her husband, but unfortunately, the husband did not come home. But, she said, she will cut him whenever he does come home. She said she had sharpened the machete and kept it hidden where children could not find it.

Her reasons for wanting to cut the husband was because the husband was misusing family resources to buy beer and to pay other women for love. What had increased her anger, leading to wanting to cut the husband, was that a month before, when she was pregnant, she had negotiated with another woman and brought her to the marital bedroom in her house for the husband to make love with the woman. She left them both in the bedroom and slept in the children's room. Constance had hoped that with this action, her husband would see the love she has for him and that he would change his behaviour.

However, the husband remained unchanged. The worst part, Constance continued, was that, on the evening in question, the one before the session, her son-in-law came to look for his wife (her daughter) because he missed her. It was late hours in the evening. Constance feared that her daughter was with other men as her father used to spend nights with other women. She was convinced, she said, that the husband's behaviour contaminated her daughter. That is what made her feel so infuriated that she wanted to cut her husband. The story shocked all group participants, facilitators, and me.

Nonetheless, one of the two facilitators had the wisdom to open the discussion by asking the group, including the woman with this problem, about the advantages and disadvantages of cutting the husband. Everyone present took the issue seriously and had something to say. The primary advice shared was that killing would cause more problems: Constance would be punished and her children would lose all parental support, as one parent would die and another one would be in prison. After listening carefully, Constance raised her hand. She said that she had not considered the possible consequences of her plan. Now she realized, she said, that cutting her husband would leave her in a worse situation rather than solving anything. She shared that she would ignore the husband, manage the family, and live like the husband was absent. She further noted that many widows managed to care for children alone after their husbands had died or were in prison for genocide crimes, and she could do the same. Constance smiled a little, the tension leaving her face and body. She said she could accept the advice because there was already trust in the group. She would have ignored the advice from someone she did not trust.

A year later, I was in the same area where the group had met, and I asked for the news about the family. One of the sociotherapists who had facilitated the group told me that the husband had made enormously positive changes, and that the family was now living together trustfully and in peace. Community members who had not participated in sociotherapy were full of wonder about what happened to the family to be able to solve their marital problems. As recently as 2022, I was informed that Constance and her husband still lived peacefully and adequately cared for their children.



This story will never go out of my memory. I keep thinking of how many frustrated people put their lives in more disastrous situations because they do not have anyone to trust, share difficulties with, or get advice from. Trust building in a sociotherapy group helps participants to open up and speak frankly to each other in a caring way, to share problems, and to advise each other on how to take steps to restore a good life. It makes me appreciate and understand that having material and social support is imperative. To make important life decisions, it is paramount to have trusted people around to share problems with and to receive the perspective of others in a group before acting. Be constantly aware of the power of togetherness, trust, and sharing.



## From darkness to lightness

By Erneste

It is late in the afternoon in 1996. I am sitting near the road at a local community meeting. From the outside, I do not have any problems. Two of my best friends pass by coming from secondary school. They look tired and hungry because they are almost home after walking seventeen kilometres from school. Early in the morning, they walked the same distance to school. They look dirty as the long walks occur in rural areas, on dusty paths and muddy roads. They do all this daily, partaking in only one little meal in the evening. Considering how dirty they are, it is hard to believe that they are coming from school. I approach them to greet them and accompany them for a short walk. We talk as friends.

At that time, I was doing my fourth year of secondary school while the two friends were doing their fifth year. It was two years after the genocide against the Tutsi. My father had died three years before. As an older son, I felt responsible for the family, including my young brother, who was starting secondary school. Nonetheless, that year, I decided to resume secondary school, which I had stopped due to the genocide. Like my two friends, I walked about twelve kilometres in the morning to school and the same distance back home in the evening. I, too, was used to eating only one poor and insufficient meal in the evening. I had one pair of shoes, one shirt, and one pair of trousers. Each day after finishing class, I would remove my shoes, shirt, and trousers and put them in a small plastic bag to protect them from dirt so I could wear them to enter class the following day. After doing so, I remained with bare feet, short trousers, and a tattered T-shirt. No one seeing me walk back home would believe I was coming from school. The long distances in muddy hills led to strong body odours, which as I observed did annoy my classmates. I often had to miss school because my clothes became too quickly dirty and would not dry in time for the next day.

While walking together, one of my friends asked me why I had not gone to school that day. I explained that one of my classmates, a lady, had asked me how I could come from farming and enter school without cleaning myself. She was referring to the smell and the dirt. It made me so ashamed that I decided to stop going to school. Hearing this, one of the friends said, 'Look at me and see how dirty I am.' He then said that I walk a shorter distance compared to them. The other friend asked me, did anyone chase you from school, or did any teacher refuse to mark your paper because you were dirty? I responded no. He then told me that leaving school was only my loss, not the loss of anyone else, including those annoyed by my smell and dirtiness.

Hearing this, it was like a curtain was being removed from my face, and I could see clearly how I was only hurting myself by not going to school anymore. It was like I had woken up from a deep sleep. I felt re-energized, and I went back to school the following day. I never felt ashamed again of dirtiness, though harsh life conditions remained unchanged for a very long time.

From this encounter, I discovered the life-changing power of trust and social connectedness. What helped me most was having friends undergoing the same difficulties in their education as me. I quickly respected their advice because it came directly from their experience, so they understood my suffering. If they had been in better life conditions than mine, I would have hardly accepted their advice because I would have felt they were talking about something they did not know about.

Later, when I learned about sociotherapy and how it was helping people, I connected it to this experience. Sociotherapy participants are people living in the same community; they know each other's stories and struggles. It helped me understand how people are improving psychosocially and economically after participating in group sessions with people suffering like themselves, because it allows them to build empathy, trust, and respect for each other's advice.



## THE VALUE OF SHARING EXPERIENCES OF LIFE WITH OTHERS AND THE POWER OF A SAFE SPACE

*By Esther Kayitesi*

It was on a Monday afternoon that I visited a sociotherapy group session. It was the first session in a series of fifteen sessions. The group was composed of genocide survivors and ex-prisoners who had committed genocide crimes. While I was discussing with the two sociotherapists facilitating the group session, group participants joined us individually, saying mwiriwe (good afternoon). The sociotherapists warmly welcomed them with a big hug and a smile, indicating where to sit. Some participants, before sitting, first looked around, looking into the other participants' eyes and deciding whom to sit with. After being welcomed, one man automatically sat down without looking at the person beside him. Once seated, he looked at the person sitting next to him and realized that he was sitting next to a lady whom he had offended during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, having killed her parents and siblings. He then suddenly changed his seat. That lady also seemed not comfortable. She was no longer willing to sit in the circle. The other group members were conscientious and quiet.

Once all invited participants were present, the man who had changed his seat raised his hand and said: "My name is Muhizi, as you all know. I was in prison due to genocide crimes I had committed. You also know that I have finished paying reparations. So, I am wondering why I was invited to this group. I noticed that you have invited us ex-prisoners to meet with survivors, including Kanyange, whom I offended." One of the sociotherapists explained why and highlighted that the primary goal of the group sessions is not to be judged or judge but that the purpose is to share life experiences smoothly.

I revisited the same group in its next session. All participants attended this session as they had chosen to sit on the first day. Most were quiet, behaving as before, and did not ask many questions. I kept following the sessions. After the third session, participants shared their past in a general way. Some have already started sharing a little about their private life experiences. Hence, the connection between group members began. Participants were still cautious about what to say but seemingly attracted by their colleagues' stories. When I arrived for the sixth session, participants could sit anywhere; they could shake each other's hands with a smile.

They were now willing to talk. That made me wonder what had happened during the three sessions I had been absent. When sharing news of the past week, they now had more information about each other's circumstances. They knew the motive of each who was delayed or would be absent for the session. When participants shared their private lives, they learned within a couple of sessions how to receive what was shared with empathy; everyone wanted to support one another with an idea. Participants did not want to close the session. That group touched me because I saw with my eyes that what was impossible at first became possible. I wanted to know how that group developed up to the end of the fifteen sessions.

Regarding the five sessions I could not attend, the facilitators told me what happened. These facilitators played a key role in the group process. They empowered participants and created a safe and open atmosphere that generated the changes I had observed. I learned a lot from them about dealing with my life experiences. I was struggling with how to forgive people who had hurt me. I was not convinced to sit and talk with them. Based on the experience with the group I visited, I managed to sit and chat with people who had hurt me.

Initially, participants, including me, did not understand what they would discuss in a three-hour session. However, the three hours were perceived as short as soon as they experienced their meeting space as safe. Everybody was free and confident to talk, and there was harmony within the sessions.

Nearing the end of the fifteen sessions, everybody came very early, they did not want to be separated. All of them wished to stay together doing other activities. Surprisingly, the man who at first did not want to participate in the group was the one who had changed his mindset. He managed to request forgiveness from the offended people and shared the truth with the group members. I dared to approach him to understand more about his feelings. He told me that if he had known sociotherapy before, he could not have been as damaged as he was. He expressed his wish to invite more young people to sociotherapy group sessions as they are affected by what their parents did/faced. Also, what they hear can affect them. Therefore, we need to prevent our young generation but also to heal their wounds caused by the history of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, he said. He committed himself to be an ambassador for sociotherapy everywhere because sociotherapy transforms people's minds. Group members said that they are no longer living in fear due to sociotherapy. Through this group, I discovered the joy of sharing life experiences made possible by the power of a safe space.



## A ROOM FOR UNKNOWN TEARS

*By Nkurunziza Andre*

I have been following a CBS group of young people for approximately three months. Even though most of the problems shared in this group seemed familiar to most of its members and the two facilitators, there was one case that left everyone in tears.

It was the case of a 23-year-old single mother, Flora. She attended most of the sessions and was always on time. Flora rarely spoke until the day the group reached the phase of respect. One of the facilitators asked the group if they had ever felt disrespected as human beings. After a moment of hesitation and observation, Flora, this young mother, took the floor. Her first words took me by surprise.

She said, "As you see me, I am a single mother of a two-year-old boy!" Until that moment, nothing had indicated to me that Flora could be a mother. There was more to come. Flora told us that when she became pregnant by a young man who was staying with her family due to his studies, she decided to inform her mother first. It was her mother's reaction that left Flora feeling disrespected and devastated. Her mother scolded and shamed her in front of her younger sisters, not only for bringing shame to the family, but also for setting a bad example. Still full of rage and shame, her mother took Flora to the nearest clinic for a pregnancy test, which turned out to be positive.

What was interesting, though, was that Flora's father had a completely different reaction. Contrary to his wife, he was happy and supportive of his daughter, which was quite unusual for most Rwandan men in the same situation. But soon, we understood why. Flora told us that when she was born at a hospital in Kigali, she had some health issues and disabilities to the extent that one of her father's best friends advised him to abandon her at the hospital, claiming she would cause him problems. However, the father did not listen to his friend's advice and refused to abandon his daughter. So, when Flora became pregnant, he was overjoyed, seeing it as proof that his daughter was "normal" and could bear a child. For his wife, however, Flora was no longer her daughter.

One day, Flora shared with the group that the man who had advised her father to abandon her came to their home while she was pregnant. He asked her mother to bring all the children forward to greet him. The mother told the other children to step forward, but to Flora, she said, "Go and hide in the room." Flora contested this, saying, "Don't kill me, I am still alive."

It was at that moment that Flora felt her dignity as a human being had been trampled. As she reached this part of her story, she began to cry, and her tears were contagious. Everyone started crying, including the facilitators. The crying continued for a while, with no one speaking, except for one of the facilitators who sat next to Flora and tried to comfort her. The facilitator told Flora that it was okay to cry. After a while, the tears dried, Flora regained her composure and continued to tell her story. She told the group that she had never shared this story with anyone before, nor had she ever cried over it. It was the first time she had ever shared what had happened to her, and she felt immensely relieved. Flora thanked the group for listening and supporting her.

As she spoke, we couldn't help but notice how quickly the time had passed. It was already dark, around 18:30, when Flora finished her story. But no one seemed to care. These young people had just realized that, whenever someone needed a shoulder to cry on, the sociotherapy group was ready to offer it.



## THE JOURNEY THAT HEALS BODY AND SOUL

*By Nkurunziza Andre*

It was around midday on April 30th, 2009. I was sitting in the office of my friend, the coordinator of CBS in Southeastern Rwanda. The visitor we had been waiting for, a woman named Naomi, had just arrived. She was escorted to another room where I would conduct the interview. I had come specifically for this interview because my two friends, one of whom was a local sociotherapist, had told me they had a special case they wanted me, as a researcher, to investigate.

The case concerned Naomi, whose husband was in prison for committing genocide crimes in Nyamata during the Genocide against the Tutsi in 1994. After participating in a sociotherapy group, Naomi had asked one of the two sociotherapists to accompany her to apologize to one of her husband's victims and return a looted item: a calabash. The sociotherapist was intrigued by this request and wanted to understand why Naomi would want to do such a thing.

So, the purpose of my interview that day was to understand why Naomi, who had done nothing wrong herself, would feel the need to apologize for something committed by someone else, even if that person was her husband. During our conversation, Naomi explained that after going through sociotherapy, she felt strong again and fearless enough to approach survivors of the genocide and apologize on behalf of her incarcerated husband. At the same time, she wanted to return the calabash her husband had stolen from one of the victims' homes.

At that moment, I realized how profoundly CBS could change people's lives. I became even more convinced when Naomi told me how sociotherapy had helped her regain the weight she had lost after her husband's arrest and imprisonment. She had gone from weighing just 43 kilograms when she first joined CBS to 65 kilograms by the end of the sessions. Naomi was clear that she had never changed her diet in any way; all she did was attend sociotherapy sessions.

When I first heard about this dramatic change in Naomi's life, part of me was sceptical. On the other hand, I had no reason to doubt what she was telling me, especially since the sociotherapist confirmed every detail of her story. From that moment on, I found myself grappling with the question: What really happens to people when they go through sociotherapy?

Before becoming involved with sociotherapy, I hadn't given it much thought. But after conducting interviews with CBS participants, such as Naomi, whose story had even fascinated the sociotherapist to the point that he invited me to interview her, I became deeply curious. Since then, my question has always been twofold: What does violence do to a society, and can people truly recover from its impact and live a normal life again?

After speaking with people like Naomi, I have been captivated by how some individuals, after going through CBS, are able to reclaim what they once considered their "normal life." Through these conversations, I've come to learn that no matter the extent of the damage, life is still possible when people come together to heal each other.



## HERE, THERE ARE NO PEOPLE

*By Munyaneza Desiré*

It was a Friday afternoon, towards the end of the first part of the training for community-based sociotherapy facilitators. Cora Dekker and I had already paired up the facilitators, following a specific criterion designed to balance age and capabilities. Our policy was that the most experienced in understanding the approach would train alongside those evaluated as weaker in understanding the CBS phases and principles.

When it became time to announce the pairs and the villages where they would conduct the facilitator training the following Monday, Nyamata, Murama, and Kanazi, the trainees' eyes widened. Their expressions showed a mix of emotions we weren't sure how to interpret. We had explained that the allocation was random and that we had faith in their abilities and their commitment to serve wherever needed. I then proceeded to read the pairs and the villages they would facilitate a CBS group. After the assignments were made, it was clear that, except for one person, everyone was ready to proceed to their assigned location.

Jean Pierre, a young man and a genocide survivor from Nyamata, who had been paired with Jean Bosco, a primary school teacher from Murama, reacted strongly. He said, "No, it's impossible for me. I cannot go. There [in Murama], there are no people!"

I didn't fully understand what he meant at the time, but by looking at the faces of his colleagues, I could tell they were sympathetic to his reaction. I pressed him, asking, "Truly, there are no people in Murama?" He replied, "There are only evil ones. They are killers. And I see that by sending me there, you want me to be killed."

We reassured him that he would be safe with Jean Bosco and that our entire team would support him. Finally, he agreed to go. On Monday morning, I saw him join the group, ready to facilitate the upcoming session as planned with Jean Bosco. I didn't dwell on what was going on in his mind, but surprisingly, on the first day, I saw him actively engage with the local leaders in Murama. He explained what sociotherapy could bring to their community, emphasizing how sociotherapy had personally helped him. He said, "If it hadn't been for sociotherapy, I would not be able to enter this village of Murama."

I used to think of Murama as a place full of evil people”, referring to what we all know about the genocide here. “My family was killed by the Interahamwe from Murama.”

A few days later, I reminded him of his initial fear of the people of Murama. In a light-hearted manner, I asked him, “So, today, are there people in Murama?” He responded, “Today there are, but at that moment, in my mind, there were none. Because of sociotherapy, the impossible became possible. Whenever I’m alone on my bicycle, traveling to or from Murama, sometimes it feels like a real dream. The miracles didn’t stop.

They still occur. What I once thought impossible has become possible because of sociotherapy. Sociotherapy is a medicine to heal and prevent problems. I sincerely wish that all people around the world, and especially future generations, will come to know sociotherapy and integrate it into their lives.”



## A LIFE IN METAMORPHOSIS: MY STORY

*By Victor*

This story is about a young person whose isolation not only led to paranoia but also caused him to retreat into himself, hiding from the world of potential and blessings that remained undiscovered. It speaks of a journey, from bathing one's being in the sun, to exposing one's soul to a more therapeutic, harmonious, and gentle environment. In this environment, pairs of eyes and ears serve as mediators, engaging the body in the process of rallying the soul to the spirit. I am that young person.

When you read the title, "A Life in Metamorphosis," you may wonder what you've gotten yourself into. For me, this title perfectly reflects my life experience before, during, and after my journey through community-based sociotherapy.

I was born into a Christian, modest family as the third youngest child. As a young child, I witnessed several harsh reactions from my parents, which they used to correct mistakes made by their children. With them, I didn't only experience good advice. At times, they couldn't refrain from scolding or even hitting me. Growing up in the traditional African school of education, where good manners meant respecting your parents no matter what, I learned to owe them respect for the rest of my life. I am grateful for the values they instilled in me and the principles they shared. From my father, I learned honesty, generosity, hard work, intelligence, and patience. From my mother, I learned diligence, self-respect, and bravery.

Despite their good intentions to raise us well with the methods they knew, these methods had a negative impact on my behaviour. This led me to conclude that educating others is perhaps the most complex task of all. What were the consequences of the methods used? From childhood through puberty, having experienced a harsh upbringing with demanding disciplinary measures, where scolding and whipping were common, I learned to spend time alone rather than with others. I became comfortable with isolation, retreating into my own world. Sure, I loved people, but connecting with them was another matter. I felt uneasy when my siblings were closer to me than my parents were. I kept my deepest concerns to myself. Talking about myself was one of the hardest things to do. I told myself that I shouldn't be a burden, that I should remain silent and keep my worries inside. Do you know what this led to? Emotional crises, and sometimes a sense of indifference.

A radical change occurred when I took my first step into sociotherapy, through exchanging experiences with others in the group. It was a transformative journey that made me realize how sharing, in a supportive environment, can be a powerful remedy for a troubled mind. It exposed me to the reality of others' struggles and the diversity of perspectives, which for me became a source of peace and understanding. As I participated in the sociotherapy group sessions, I developed new habits, such as approaching people more easily. I learned how to correct a mistake without harming someone's dignity. Through this process, I came to believe that we are the sum of the actions we take toward others. If you treat people with dignity, regardless of who they are or how they react, whether positively or negatively and your soul remains at peace with yourself, you will experience inner tranquility, and its vitality will grow.

I realized that the person I need to understand most is myself. The better I understand myself, the less room there is for indifference toward the needs of others. The phases and principles of sociotherapy have proven to be invaluable to me since I first encountered them, and I continue to apply them in my daily life.



## MY STORY BASED ON MY SOCIO THERAPY EXPERIENCE

*By Muhindo*

The Eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been plagued for over three decades by violence, atrocities, ethnic disputes, and armed group activism. In this context, one's ethnic identity often determines whether they are seen as a "good" or a "bad" person, shaping how their behavior is perceived, whether they are considered loyal, trustworthy, or none of these. For example, Kinyarwanda speakers (Rwandophones) in my region, a minority group, are falsely accused and associated with the enemy by the majority. This is the reality I, my generation, and previous generations grew up with.

My journey in sociotherapy has been one of deep emotion, hope, and dedication. As mentioned, the way our different communities have understood each other since the Democratic Republic of the Congo's independence has been characterized by hatred, manipulation, and political ideologies rooted in ethnicity and origin.

Throughout my sociotherapy journey, I first learned to shift my perspective from judging entire groups to evaluating individuals based on their actions. I also came to understand that every ethnic group has both positive traits and flaws, and that the mistakes of one person or generation cannot be held against another. Secondly, I recognized that the narratives passed down to us, especially regarding the cohabitation of Rwandophone-speaking communities with others, were deeply affecting my generation's ability to live harmoniously with different communities. I had been trapped in the historical narrative, unable to think about the future due to a constant sense of insecurity and the ever-present reality of war, violence, and loss. I could not find a safe space to process these feelings.

However, through sociotherapy, especially by progressing through the phases of security, trust, care, and respect, I took a personal step forward. I also encouraged my friends and family members to join sociotherapy as well, so they too could find a safe space for meaningful exchanges and begin to experience life differently.

Sociotherapy had a profound impact on my personal well-being. It positively affected both my individual and social life, enhancing my resilience and that of my family. It led to visible improvements in areas such as autonomy, individual growth, purpose in life, healthy relationships with others, and improved self-esteem.



## FROM UNCERTAINTY TO RESILIENCE

*By Rurangwa Silas*

My life has not been as easy as one might think. When I was about two years old, my parents divorced. My father, a high-ranking soldier, and my mother, who started her own business to support herself. However, my mother's business required her to leave me with my grandparents for a long period of time. I didn't even know who my parents were until I turned 18, when both had the means to care for me.

At the age of 12, I lost my grandfather, who had been my father figure. His death came just after my grandmother's. While I considered my grandfather my close friend and collaborator, my life had not been easy even when he was alive. During our conversations, he often said things that hurt me deeply. When I made even the slightest mistake as a child, he would call me "son of soki olingi," which literally translates to "son of 'if you don't want to.'" This was a reference to the loyalist military of the Mobutu regime (1965–1977), who were notorious for harassing and extorting peaceful citizens. The phrase "soki lingi" was used by these soldiers to intimidate people, meaning if they didn't comply, they would be killed. When my grandfather called me that, it was a form of mental torture. He was, in effect, labeling me as the son of a dishonest, malicious person, even though my father had never harmed him, and I didn't even know my father.

The wound my grandfather's words left on me lasted for years.

Even other family members and people in my community began to label me in the same way. It became a tool to blame, silence, and humiliate me. As a result, I felt very isolated and avoided connecting with those around me, especially until adulthood.

Fortunately, the introduction of community-based sociotherapy in 2007 changed my life. Through sociotherapy, I learned to share my struggles with others, and I began to hear the experiences of people facing similar challenges. This process helped me get closer to others and allowed me to gain respect within the community.

Today, I am more resilient than before. I now see myself as someone capable of finding solutions to the problems I continue to face in life.



## THE GROUP IS OUR COUNSELLOR

*By Tumukunde*

I sit in the circle of a sociotherapy group in Bugesera, surrounded by eight group participants. We all sit on wooden benches that the participants have brought from the village for this occasion. The trees around us provide shade, protecting us from the full sunlight and creating a sheltering space of togetherness. A setting I love so much.

As the conversation flows around us, I realize that some of the participants have attended trauma counseling. This piques my curiosity. How did they perceive it? How did it help them? One participant shared: "I traveled back and forth to Kigali for a whole year to visit a trauma counselor, but to no avail. Every time I returned to my village, I came back to the same environment, nothing had changed. I was still alone, constantly confronted by reminders of what happened here during the genocide, with no one to share my feelings with. I felt isolated from the community I live in."

Another participant responded, as if in reply: "Now the group is our counselor." Quiet, emphatic nods from the entire group followed, signaling their recognition and agreement. It was clear that this sentiment resonated with them all.

The conversation continued, and after the session ended, everyone lifted their benches above their heads and made their way back to their village. The setting sun colored the sky in beautiful hues. I love that time of day.

Later, upon reflection, I realized that the phrase "the group is our counselor" was one of many key moments that confirmed for me the relevance of the "ecological approach" to alleviating suffering in the aftermath of mass violence. This approach considers individuals within the context of their lives that keeps on going, their connection to the natural world, and the interrelation between their physical, mental, psycho-social, and spiritual well-being.

In my lifelong search for ways to help people recover, I had discovered that the ecological approach was far more inclusive than the narrow training I received as a young medical doctor, which focused mainly on symptom reduction. I'm deeply grateful that my search is now bearing fruit in the later stages of my life, benefiting many people in Rwanda and beyond.



**Letters to the Next  
Generation**



**Never stay stuck amidst hopelessness.**

Dear next generation,

Over the past years, through the work I have done as a researcher in the context of the sociotherapy program, I have become much more aware of how much families, particularly the young generation, suffer from their historical and daily life experiences and how this impedes their potentials in diverse ways. While some suffer in silence, I also witnessed different degrees of resilience and hope that some people show despite life's adversities.

As a result, I learned that to better understand a person's behaviour and relations with others, one needs to be sufficiently open and willing to use the eyes of "the heart," and this from a non-judgmental and rather compassionate and supportive way. Only then will you be able to do small but meaningful things toward changing the lives of those around you.

The journey called "life" may sometimes become difficult, and challenges will undoubtedly come your way. In such situations, may you learn from the resilience of those who came before you, cherish moments of care and laughter with others, practice a deep internal reflection, and resolve to never stay stuck amidst hopelessness but instead aspire to inspire others with love.

Yours in Love,

Olive Murekatete



### *Embrace community-based sociotherapy as a life-changing and transformative approach.*

Dear little brothers and sisters of the next generation,

I am writing this letter to share my exceptional experience with the fantastic community-based sociotherapy approach. So far, I have ten years of experience with this approach. I felt attracted to it and was inspired by how it transformed my attitudes and behaviour. My engagement with sociotherapy empowered me to cope with the emotional wounds I was living with due to my painful past related to growing up without the care of both my parents.

The consequences of the genocide I was confronted with included reexperiencing my witnessing people dying during the genocide and threatened to be killed during the FDLR armed rebel group war that followed it, poverty due to family property being plundered, and delay in my education. Sociotherapy also improved socialization in our household despite growing up in a patriarchal society. I no longer considered myself as someone superior and started to treat my children with care and tenderness, taking time to listen to them. I no longer give them harsh punishments that harm them psychologically.

I also experienced dramatic positive changes among people who have been afflicted by the consequences of genocide and wars that had ravaged our country, in addition to potential other societal adversities. I interviewed many people who testified that the sociotherapy approach restored hope among those who had been feeling helpless, empowered desperate people to cope with life challenges, promoted forgiveness among people who offended each other, and improved family relationships among people who graduated from sociotherapy after having participated in its journey of 15 sessions. Beyond all the above-mentioned benefits, the approach contributed to strengthening the bond between neighbours, resulting in a culture of mutual support for socioeconomic development through learning from each other about different emotional and psychosocial skills. I recommend you embrace the sociotherapy's life-changing approach commended by all categories of people. Let it empower you to cope with the hardships you will encounter in your life journey.

Emile



### *The power of sharing and listening*

Dear grandchildren,

I am unsure if you understand what I am sharing about my sociotherapy school. The miracle happened, and the doors to that school were opened for me. I do not know the grandparent I could have been if sociotherapy had not come into my life, and your father knows neither, but they know the father I have been. I hope you understand the complexity of social dynamics and what it does to social relations, as well as the well-being of people in general.

Take your time and give it time. I have seen how much people can take and how much they can provide. People have everything in their hands. They have all the resources within reach. Learn from them and create spaces. Take time to understand. Can you know anything before you experience it? I hope you will get the opportunity to participate in a sociotherapy-like space. I know you will move in different domains of life. The common denominator is life, and "the others" are significant for life. Imagine what life would look like without the others. The others give meaning to our lives. Do not ignore or forget the power of the others around you.

Do not forget the power of sharing and listening. A good number of eyes of mine looking at the same thing. A good number of ears listening to one of the group members. It is so amazing, and it remains a secret of life.

Rudasingwa Fidele



*There is always the possibility of change for the better.*

Dear next generation,

I have learned from life experiences and my sociotherapy journey that life is composed of shadow and light, trust and mistrust, moments of being guided and being misled, inspiring and desperate events, and, above all, that life is relationships with people, whether good or bad. Therefore, it remains necessary to be connected to people, have (or regain) trust in people and life, and share our life circumstances with others, especially the frustrating ones. A key ingredient of a fulfilled life is the careful cultivation of our judgment of who to trust and who to mistrust, who to connect with, and to whom to close ourselves off.

In life, we encounter different events, stories, and experiences. All of them are there to help us think about our own lives and how to adjust what we do and how we do it. I was lucky to be involved in sociotherapy. I learned from others who shared their harrowing life experiences and courage, unexpected kindness, and healing moments. They enriched my horizons in terms of understanding the meaning of life and the power of trust and human connection. I urge you to pay attention to everything happening on your life's journey because painful and happy experiences help you grow and develop.

From the many people you will encounter, it is necessary to identify those with you who can share life's joys and suffering. This way, you can trust their advice on dealing with difficult moments you struggle with and find a way through. People can hurt and disappoint you, and life can be sour, but it is never finished. Know that there are still good people who may become necessary in your life; there is always the possibility of change for the better; you can find openings to improve your life; there are still ways to find solutions. Until the end of your life, there is always hope.

Sincerely yours,

Erneste

## *Be ready to face the challenges of life.*

Dear next generation,

In 2004, I was lucky to meet people who knew about and applied an approach called sociotherapy. At that time, I suffered from the consequences of the Rwandan history in different ways. Yet, I felt morally demanded to help others. It was a period in which almost everybody in the country was physically, mentally, and socially in need of care and support. However, no clear and tangible way existed to provide what was needed. The approach I was able to implement could not provide an adequate and sustainable solution to the situation. In what I experienced as a chaotic and confusing life, I was lucky to meet people who specialized in mental and psychosocial support who introduced sociotherapy to me. First, as one of the many wounded people, I was attracted by the support sociotherapy could offer me. Secondly, as a 'wounded healer' wanting to help my community and society, I envied it.

Participating in the sociotherapy program as it started in the area where I lived and worked, I succeeded in recovering myself, reconnecting to the sense of life, getting human dignity back, focusing on the future, feeling part of the community and the world, and have my eyes opened to see what is going on in my environment, in the existence of other human beings, and even in the existence of the fauna and flora. This helped me to dream again about big projects for the future and plan. Also, my participation in sociotherapy played a significant role in profoundly impacting my responsibilities at the time. I have enough courage and motivation to reflect and plan more and more creatively to acquire more strategies to help the community.

After experiencing the value of sociotherapy in my personal life, I started to apply the approach in the community. Many steps and processes took place until we as a community started benefiting from it and started helping others to benefit from it. It is a unique and extraordinary tool and instrument that can work anywhere, in any community or society.

I especially valued its capacity and power to help individuals regain human value and a purpose in life and live accordingly. What is remarkable is that all this happened in a reasonable time, in a convincing manner, and in a sustainable way.

Through the implementation of sociotherapy, we have several people in our community who have embraced sociotherapy and made it a momentum strategy for their everyday life changes. Because of this, those who were a problem to themselves and others have now become a solution to both sides. Many changes have taken place in their lives, families, and communities. Some of them are now important figures in their neighbourhood, others serve the community and society as local government servants or as businessmen and women, while again others are looked at as role models in peace-making in their living environment and beyond.

Dear next generation, wherever you go, you will encounter challenges. Some will be easy to understand and handle. Others will be complicated and seem to be without a way out. The latter will frustrate you and even stop you thinking. You may become desperate. Then please realize that many people have gone through more complicated situations before, while others may be in the same situation as you are. Some have fought and won, while others are still on the battlefield. All in all, 'never give up!' In my experience, I have found out that people who use sociotherapy as a master weapon are still standing up to many challenges and have hope for the future.

Sincerely,  
Aimable Iragena



## *Our legacy starts with our power to heal each other today*

Dear next generations,

As I write this letter to you, none of you have yet been seen or heard from, and you have not yet experienced the world we are shaping. Though this may seem like a natural state, it is also a pity that you have no voice, no presence, no influence over what we are doing to the world into which you will one day open your eyes.

I wish you to find a world I have known in my childhood, a world where wars, genocides, and diseases were mysteries of biblical times. I, too, was a child once, just as you will be, and the world you are set to inherit knows this well. It knows that, with people, paradises can swiftly transform into hells. People can lose everything they have loved and protected in an instant, and they may find themselves without anyone to offer comfort, support, or care. Those you love can disappoint you, and even the mere mention of their names can bring shame.

Yet, dear next generations, in my 18 years of experience in sociotherapy, I have learned that when people come together, sharing their daily lives with honesty and openness, they can rebuild the lost world of love, care, and respect.

I do not wish for you to face all that I have known in my lifetime, and may God forbid you ever do. However, you will undoubtedly face your own challenges, and I am confident that this same approach will help guide you through. All you need to do is to equip yourselves with simple yet profoundly important principles: interest in one another, trust, care, respect, and the constant drive to forge new directions and meanings for your lives. It is my deepest hope that each of you, dear next generations, will feel the call to contribute, so that the burdens of your time may be made bearable for all.

Yours, Old Generation,

Nkurunziza Andre



### *Leave the darkness for the light*

Dear next generation,

To you, the generation that comes after me, I am delighted that this letter has reached your hands. I have always been certain that one day it would find its way to you and be worthy of your attention. In this letter, I want to share how my generation and I experimented with an approach that initially faced challenges due to our ignorance but ultimately proved to be beneficial. I hope to show you how this approach has helped us in dealing with the trauma of the violence and the lack of social cohesion in our community. This approach is called 'community-based sociotherapy.'

My dear future generation, understand that collective development begins with the development of individuals. The individual aspect of development includes healing from personal traumas and injuries inflicted within our families, communities, and workplaces. Sociotherapy allowed me, as well as many others in our community, to move from darkness into light. It was as if a lamp had been placed in our community, casting its glow on a specific square, inviting people to gather, to be enlightened, and to face the real issues that plagued our lives and finding solutions that could lead to true development.

Through sociotherapy, we came together as a community, helping one another as a group. This was done without discrimination, without exclusion, and without rejection. Our exchanges were rooted in a love for one another, taking place in an environment of peace, security, trust, care, and respect. This allowed us to build a better life and reflect on our future, all while fostering harmonious relationships and understanding social cohesion as a crucial foundation for our communal existence.

Future generation, you do not have to follow our exact path to restore and maintain peace and harmony within your community. However, I urge you to give special attention to sociotherapy, to trust it, and to apply its principles in your search for social well-being within this community that is now also yours. I am confident you will never regret it. The results of sociotherapy have always been a marvel for us, and I expect the same will be true for you.

Please, remember to think about the generations that will come after you.

Your brother Victor



### *It is possible to break the chain of violence*

Dear next generation,

I believe that together, human beings have the power to transform the social environment for the better, creating lasting peace without any form of discrimination. But how can we achieve such an ideal? Take this letter as a precious guide, one meant to lead your path toward positive change, both in your own life and in your community.

Much of what we inherited from our parents is what they, in turn, received from our grandparents. Their way of life, shaped by years of violence, has torn apart the social fabric, and this destruction has been passed down through successive generations, reaching us today. I am convinced that if my generation fails to recognize its own destructive behaviour, that same behaviour will be passed on to you, continuing the cycle of social decay. This is how the wheels of violence turn, creating a cycle of negative values that perpetuate a culture of harm.

My dear brothers and sisters, when you make your choices, remember this: We are as great as the radical ideologies we promote and the way we live our lives. We have only one life to live, so we must choose our ideals carefully. Unfortunately, the ideals presented to us in today's world are often limited, though not all, certainly, but most. What a strange world it is, where people are valued for what they own, the clothes they wear, the houses they live in, and their race, origin, or sex.

But take heart, my dear ones. There is nothing to fear. The opportunity to restore the human dignity we all deserve and to rebuild the social fabric that has long been torn is within our reach. Relying on the principles of sociotherapy will offer the space needed to prevent conflicts from becoming long-lasting wounds. It will help heal the scars left by ethnic divisions and open hearts to positive interactions between perpetrators, victims, and bystanders.

I am deeply convinced that engaging with sociotherapy is one of the most powerful ways to develop a constructive outlook on life, both for oneself and for others. This belief is not just mine; it is shared by many who have undertaken the journey of sociotherapy. Participating in sociotherapy is like lighting a small torch in a dark room. Even though the room may seem vast, the light will shine throughout, touching every corner.

Dear next generation,

The strong words I share with you are grounded in what I have witnessed among my peers, a generation deeply marked by violence and trauma. Applying the sociotherapy approach has helped many people improve their lives, empower their families economically, and care for the mental health and well-being of those around them. It is possible to break the cycle of violence and move forward, free from guilt and trauma. In my own experience, I once judged others based on their external appearances, which led to negative feelings, including hatred. Sociotherapy has transformed my life and the lives of my family. I do not doubt that sociotherapy has positively impacted countless people and will continue to be a vital tool in restoring connections across the divides of ongoing hostilities in our region.

The greatest gift I can give to you, dear next generation, is this: Embrace the principles of sociotherapy. Try them, learn from them, and pass this gift on to the generations that follow.

Muhindo



### *Sociotherapy as a protective parent*

Dear future generation,

Always have hope!

My experience with sociotherapy is a powerful example of the strength that comes from sharing in unity, and I hope it will serve you as well. Before this experience, my community and I had lost all hope for the future, trapped by a lack of opportunities and spaces for meaningful dialogue where we could share our struggles. Everyone felt isolated, focusing solely on their own problems, and we all suffered as a result.

The introduction of community-based sociotherapy in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo lit the path for us, showing us the power of sharing within a group. Sitting together in small groups, people soon realized that after a 15-week journey, they could share their experiences not just to heal their own wounds but to support others in need. This process increased the confidence and safety of those with broken hearts and no hope for the future. Above all, it empowered them to take responsibility for their own destinies.

Through this process, I learned that people need support from others. Many hidden issues in our hearts were shared in sociotherapy, which significantly reduced our individual and collective traumas. Listening to others, I discovered that many people were suffering in silence due to isolation, shame, and fear. Yet, they were eager to heal their wounds for their own well-being.

Community-based sociotherapy was one of the greatest opportunities for us to begin the healing process. I realized that healing came from the community—from feeling supported by others in the group. The change was clear when people started to view the group as a protective parent. The same individuals who had been injured, not by machetes but by emotional scars, found healing, not through medication but through mutual support. Since then, we have witnessed the reconciliation within and between many families. People have reported improved mental well-being and better relationships with others, all thanks to community-based sociotherapy.

Dear future generation, given the risk of inheriting the consequences of a violent past, as my generation did, I imagine the social dynamics you will face after us will be equally tumultuous. However, do not lose hope. If you embrace community-based sociotherapy, which teaches us that we sit together when we are in distress and share our burdens and challenges, you too will experience its power of healing in unity.

Yours,

Rurangwa Silas



## *Sociotherapy as a source for a life in peace*

Dear descendants,

My involvement in sociotherapy has deepened my awareness of the legacies we, my generation, are creating with the way we live our lives. How will the lives we lead now impact the quality of your lives, both positively and negatively, in the future? How can we create legacies that you will experience as a great gift from us? These are profound questions that humankind as a whole must take seriously, but they are also deeply personal for each of us.

Sociotherapy has given me valuable insight into the harmful legacies that can result from a society burdened by an extremely violent past. But it has also opened my eyes to the possibility of coping with these legacies through healing and therefore allowing you, the generation after us, to develop the capacity to contribute to a better life for those yet to be born.

I profoundly hope that sociotherapy, or at least the impact of its principles, will enter and nourish your lives. May it empower you to live fulfilling lives for yourselves, your families, your loved ones, your communities, and the world at large. May your lives be filled with peace.

In the face of the challenges you will undoubtedly encounter, may you continue to share your troubles with one another, offering support and receiving it in return. This will strengthen the bonds that connect you. From my experience, sociotherapy has the power to make this possible.

Yours,

Your loving generation

Ange



### Making the impossible possible

To you who come after us, I ask you to pause for a moment, sit, and read this testament. It is a precious legacy, and it will serve as a guiding light on the journey I encourage you to take. This journey will undoubtedly bring both highs and lows, days under a scorching sun, nights shrouded in darkness, paths slippery from heavy rain, and slippery paths of all the challenges that life brings.

I was unfortunate to be born and raised in an environment where there was no place I could feel safe, where trust was scarce, and where I was not cared for. My human dignity was denied. My given and acquired identities, instead of being sources of pride, became curses, leaving me wounded. My deepest wound was inflicted because of my ethnicity. Many others have suffered similar wounds due to their gender, religion, economic status, race, and more. Imagine having enough food but no peace in your heart to enjoy it. Isn't that tragic? I have come to understand that those who are wounded often become wielders of weapons that hurt others, including their loved ones. Thus, a cycle of wounding is born. Take sociotherapy in your hands, it is a sword that can cut this cycle.

Before anything else, I stand in the gap on behalf of our ancestors, our parents, and ourselves. We have destroyed the socio-ecosystem that was once here to protect you and me. What you see today stems from the moment our predecessors chose to tear apart the social fabric that once covered and warmed us all. Instead of restoring that fabric, each person took a piece only large enough to cover their feet or their face. This marked the birth of a scarcity mentality that came to govern our relationships. And from that mentality arose a chain of negative forces, conflict, division, hatred, war, trauma, and poverty, that ate away our humanity.

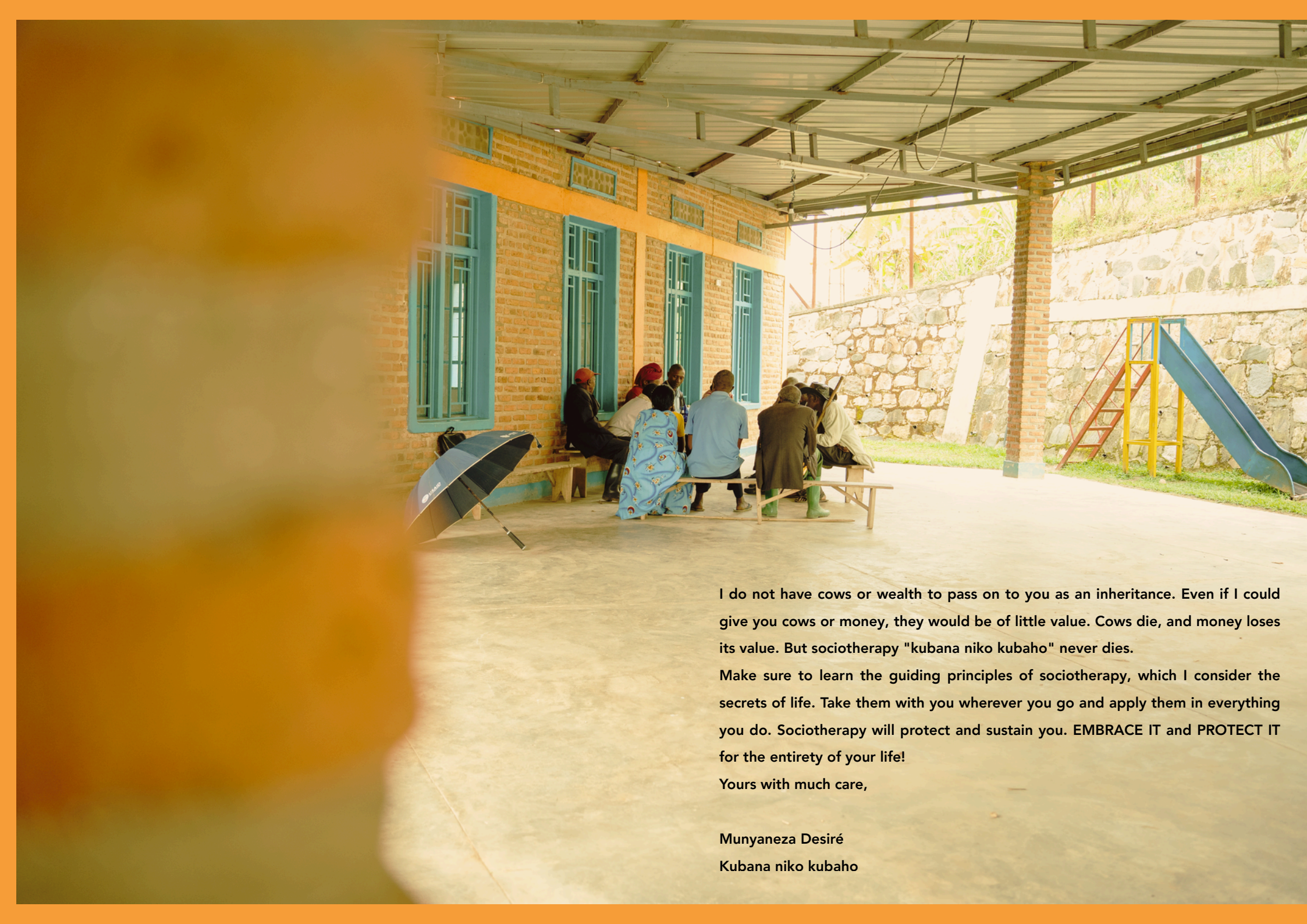
Had we all known the community doctor called sociotherapy, I am confident many of those who perished would have lived, and the suffering of today could have been avoided. Those who have committed violence never read or embraced the light found in the esoteric teachings of our ancestors, teachings that emphasize "kubana niko kubaho" togetherness is life, a phrase that expresses the core of sociotherapy.



My beloved ones, there is hope, not only for you here and now, but for your future as well, once you embrace the principles of sociotherapy. Here is a summary of what sociotherapy can offer you in the restoration of what has been destroyed and in the prevention of potential challenges that could lead to further destruction. Think of it like an experienced agronomist advising you on which fruit-bearing plants to cultivate, how to water them, and so on. It takes time and patience, but eventually, the plants will grow and bear fruit. Sociotherapy works in the same way. It will help you cultivate relationships that will nourish and sustain you. Sociotherapy is the agronomist of your human relationships. It is essential that you hold onto its principles to guarantee hope both now and in the future.

By cultivating sociotherapeutic values, safety, trust, care, and respect, you will begin to rebuild the environment that was destroyed in times past. If you protect these values with the fences of equality, responsibility, participation, democracy, and a focus on the present moment, your efforts will grow into a flourishing forest. This forest will attract rain in dry places, creating fountains that will quench your thirst and provide a home for bees that will produce sweet honey. This honey will nourish you and also serve as a medicine for the wounds that life may bring.

Dear children to come, I insist, and I persist, that the negative chain of violence and suffering must and can be broken through sociotherapy. I am a witness to how it has made the impossible possible and has become a gift that frees those imprisoned in trauma. All those who have suffered globally, those broken by successive wars, need healing. Sociotherapy, in my experience, has proven to be an effective way to transform lives from brokenness to healing. I know firsthand how it has transformed my own life and the life of my family. Through the recovery of safety, trust, care, and human dignity, all that I had lost, my life gained a new orientation. This new direction has impacted my family, and now I stand as a light in their dark lives of trauma. And I have no doubt that this new orientation has impacted many others and will continue to positively affect the lives of those yet to be born, lives that will no doubt face the challenges of today's unfinished struggles.



I do not have cows or wealth to pass on to you as an inheritance. Even if I could give you cows or money, they would be of little value. Cows die, and money loses its value. But sociotherapy "kubana niko kubaho" never dies.

Make sure to learn the guiding principles of sociotherapy, which I consider the secrets of life. Take them with you wherever you go and apply them in everything you do. Sociotherapy will protect and sustain you. **EMBRACE IT and PROTECT IT** for the entirety of your life!

Yours with much care,

Munyaneza Desiré

Kubana niko kubaho



Rwanda