Summary

This study aims to underpin the training in the basics and skills of community-based sociotherapy as provided in Rwanda, in Byumba (2005) and Nyamata (2008), in East Congo, in Nya-Ngezi (2007), and in Liberia, in Kakata (2013), and to learn from these. To this end, the occasion, preparations, design, development process as well as the results of the training in supervising sociotherapy groups have been described, analysed and embedded in a theoretical framework. The thesis consists of four parts.

Part I. Firstly, the introduction to this participative action research, which comprises four case studies, describes the basic premises of the clinical and the community-based methodology of sociotherapy and the format and design of a training in supervising sociotherapy groups. Secondly, a theoretical framework is explicated, and studies into the impact of practical hands-on community-based sociotherapy that were conducted between 2005 and 2015 are discussed. Thirdly, the research set-up is discussed.

Part II sketches the historical contexts of Rwanda, East Congo and Liberia within which the training programmes took place, and gives an account of how the exploratory talks with representatives from the local population prior to the training programmes were processed.

Part III starts with an introduction of the sociotherapy-trainees in the training, then goes on to describe, in chapters 4-12, how the training programmes evolved and developed, and to analyse these.

Part IV rounds off the study with answers to the sub-questions, a discussion and a final conclusion.

Part I

Chapter 1 consists of three parts. The first part concerns the difference between the work done in clinical and in community-based sociotherapy and the description of a set of principles that constitutes the backbone of group-oriented counselling. The set comprises the principles inter-est, equality, democracy, participation, responsibility, ‘here and now’ and ‘learning by doing’. Changes in processes of being together take place stage by stage. In the group-oriented learning process of a sociotherapy training in post-conflict settings, the developmental stages of safety, trust, care, respect, rule-making and the processing of emotions are expected to present themselves. In all likelihood, the stages will appear in succession, but this is by no means necessarily so.

The design for the training plan to guide sociotherapy-trainees how to supervise sociotherapy groups is based on a combination of theoretical knowledge and hands-on experience with sociotherapy with refugees affected by war conflict. The length and the activities of the training and practice stages were made to tie in with this combination. The sketch of the training plan includes a guideline for organising the training.

The second part of chapter 1 describes the theoretical framework. The first discusses the combination of theories on group dynamics, brought together by Johnson & Johnson (2008). Then theories about social order based on kinship and social order on the basis of citizenship, for which the doctoral thesis by Van der Klei (1989) and publications by Raatgever (1983), Davidson (1992) and
Prunier (1996) have been consulted. The third is the framework of Bunge (1999), of which deals with indicators of social change. Last, the theories of social transition as developed by Davidson (1992), Van den Broek (in: Remmerswaal 2006), Lewin (in: Johnson & Johnson 2008) and Leininger (1991) have been set out.

In addition, an analysis is provided of publications on the impact of the experiment with the community-based application of sociotherapy in African practice. It is from the theoretical framework and from the analysis of what was already known about community-based sociotherapy in practice that the main research question emanates:

How did the process of training in community-based sociotherapy in four geographically and politically different post-conflict contexts pass off, what did the process of social change entail, which elements in the training proved to be effective and what were promoting and hindering factors as sociotherapy-trainees applied in actual practice what they had learnt?

In the third part of chapter 1, the research design, based on participative action research departs from an orientation to change together with interested parties. Action research, which takes place while actions are carried out in the natural environment, is, according to Reason & Bradbury, not so much a methodology as an orientation to questions. The third part of chapter I introduce information about the training locations, followed by an explanation of the research unit. The research method, which harbours various aspects, is described in detail. The chapter ends with information about the consent given to the research, the introduction of the research team, the role of trainer/researcher and the way in which validity requirements were met.

Part II

The second chapter discusses, for each individual case study, the literature on the various contexts as well as the exploratory talks. The chapter starts off with the view that there are no fixed methods or techniques for assisting people in non-western countries whose social biotope has been disrupted by poverty and political violence that has gone with impunity. The view shows how relevant it is for caregivers to have knowledge of the historical, socio-economic and political contexts of survivors caught up in war conflict. War victims’ needs and requirements spring from contexts that are fraught with problems. It is for this reason that the exploratory talks with representatives from local organisations were of vital importance in designing possible training content.

Within the various contexts, the local collocutors’ viewpoints became leads for assessing the chances of embedding the methodology locally. The talks with the local representatives were also of consequence for the joint formulation of the intervention goals, which were deliberately phrased in broad terms. This, and the joint setting of the recruitment criteria for the first sociotherapy-trainees, provided a basis for garnering support and for furthering the practicability of the training programmes.

Part III

It is explained in the third chapter how the recruitment criteria were established, and, with reference to various sources, why these were adequate.
The chapters **four to twelve** describe how the training programmes evolved in practice, without the use of a text book. **Chapter four** offers insight into the manner in which communication initially came about, both between the sociotherapy-trainees and the trainer and among the trainees themselves. The unfiltered initial situation, where everyone was searching for something to hold on to, is described and analysed. During the introductions, the trainees presented themselves as classical caregivers, as promoters of the material interests of ‘victims’ of the vicious circle of poverty and violence. In response, the trainer qualified any expectations of material aid, which resulted in disbelief, since: ‘How could a training be suitable if people were left empty-handed?’ However, trainees showed themselves surprised at the effect of the ensuing interventions. Upon request they participated in a procedure where they themselves drew up rules for their own group. They thus gave themselves as well as the trainer something to go by in the way of a ‘locally appropriate’ range of behaviours in their own group. Their surprise illustrated that sociotherapy-trainees were not accustomed to using their head in this manner.

**Chapter five** deals with trainees expectations of the training and of what the trainer would offer. It describes how trainees were found to be unused to having attention directed at their well-being and were not accustomed to giving voice to their expectations. The fifth chapter clarifies the connection between measures of safety and trust in a beginning training group and differences in sociotherapy-trainees initial reactions. In this chapter, the significance is examined of the efforts it took trainees to formulate their expectations at the start of the training.

**Chapter six** describes the first impressions of the Byumba trainees on the trainer. In this chapter, the trainer weighs the advantages and disadvantages of a decision to ask additional questions about the burden trainees had been made to carry. The chapter describes and justifies the trainer’s decision to ask these questions, together with their outcome and the significance they had for the trainer’s subsequent actions.

The **seventh chapter** elucidates how the trainer’s subsequent actions were directed at the joint creation of training activities within the scope of the deliberately general goal: restoring dignity. This chapter describes how methods were found and developed that enabled sociotherapy-trainees to take part and develop new skills. It is also shown in this chapter how, within the methodology of a training in supervising sociotherapy groups, activities were chosen that followed on logically from each other and thus supported a process of discovery and development. By these means, trainees were introduced to the ‘learning by doing’ method, which appeals to trainees existing knowledge, skills and talents. Every day, trainees were surprised to notice that they were capable of more than they had earlier thought possible.

**Chapter eight** describes how situations from the daily living environment, which had earlier been discussed by trainees, were acted out and how trainees as they played a game (the knotting game) gradually came to understand that disentangling the tangles in their daily environment was not impossible but, rather, instructive and challenging. Chapter eight further describes how the trainees in the training discovered the significance of values and found out means that could provide some
direction to use with future participants in sociotherapy groups. The discoveries helped bring about increased decisiveness.

Chapter nine conveys how the theory of open communication supports the gradual placement of greater responsibility for fleshing out the training programmes in the hands of the sociotherapy-trainees. The shift is illustrated by means of an activity using screw caps for bottles with which the Nya-Ngezi trainees learnt to explicate what they understand by land conflicts. This chapter also clarifies how an attractive form of explicating matters could affect the course of the training.

Chapter ten shows how the trainees in the training were introduced to a quartet game and how they were taught to make and then play it. The account of this activity reveals what trainees had internalised of their relation with what they already knew and what they had recently learnt. The process lays bare new talents and – due to the variation in training methods – limitations that so far had gone unnoticed. For the analysis of this experiment in which components of the training integrate with each other, the objectives have been used that Remmerswaal (2006) identifies with reference to group learning, and which centre on orientations to perception and experience (the heart), to cognition (the head) and to behaviour and skills (the hands).

Chapter eleven illustrates how on the basis of the newly acquired insights sociotherapy-trainees were involved in the organisational aspect of the training. In comparison with the first days, they now carried out complex tasks. This chapter tells the reader about the tasks where trainees practised formulating and deciding on criteria for the recruitment of tens of new colleagues, and about how they in pairs learnt to draw up a training program for these new colleagues. Described is also the surprise they felt upon experiencing that all were able to do these tasks. Even though the tasks appeared to be of a different order, they were, in fact, a continuation of the 'learning by doing' principle. The chapter sheds light on the uncertainty that carrying out the tasks revealed. Trainees realised that taking more steps forward might have consequences for their position within the hierarchical, traditional community. However, it turned out that the confidence in the training and in each other that they had so far built carefully provided sufficient motivation for them to still continue work in a disciplined manner and with a great deal of energy. This phase of the training demonstrated that each group had developed in its own manner, subject to differences in historical background, in levels of understanding, in expectations and depending on the atmosphere within a group.

It is also discussed in chapter eleven how in the course of the training the role of the trainer changed, as she moved from defusing tensions to giving encouragement from the sidelines. And while it was possible to explain matters in greater theoretical detail, such lengthy explanations had not been part of the initial set-up of the training. The concise theoretical explanations were shown to suffice for a start with basic level sociotherapy.

The group tasks from chapter eleven were analysed with reference to the characteristics of effective decision-making in groups as listed in Johnson & Johnson (2008). The end result of the first sixteen days per group was that sociotherapy-trainees showed that sufficient self-confidence and mutual trust had developed and that they were equipped to both recruit and train new colleagues and, together, supervise sociotherapy groups.
The twelfth chapter covers how the trained groups applied in actual practice what they had learnt. The observations constitute some of the joint input for the agenda for follow-up training programmes. The trainer visited a few functioning sociotherapy groups in two locations (Byumba and Nyamata). In Nya-Ngezi the programme coordinator organised very similar requests in different ways. Thus, the trainer met there hundreds of participants of the first and second cycle of fifteen meetings. The observation focused on the cooperation between pairs, the experiences with supervising the sociotherapy groups and on the adequacy of what had been learnt during the preceding training.

Most pairs of trainee sociotherapists had been able to give some leeway to the participants in the sociotherapy groups, and as a result they, too, had learnt to give voice to what they had got out of their participation. Participants identified changes in behaviours and relations that they had noticed in themselves and in their home environment.

Chapter twelve puts the spotlight on the written, variously formed reflections of the sociotherapists, who, over a facilitating period of nearly two years, invested in the recovery of the living environments surrounding them.

Part IV:

Chapter thirteen rounds off the investigation of the ways in which the training in community-based sociotherapy enabled its trainees to bring about a process of social change in the training areas as it provides answers to the sub-questions of the research, discusses the main findings and offers a conclusion.

In this chapter, it is concluded that the process of change that was set in motion through the training in community-based sociotherapy, in the participants in the sociotherapy groups and their family members, in the community leaders and in the trainee sociotherapists themselves. The latter developed from protective helpers into challenging sociotherapists. The joy over this development proved stronger than the uncertainties that also manifested themselves.

The transformation of a clinical to a community-based methodology not only achieved considerably more volume but also new forms of work were developed. Mistrust and unconcern were replaced with renewed contact where care and consideration, advice and joy at the ‘unbelievable changes’ were shared. The volume of positive experiences continued to reflect on the social environment.

Certainly, a number of limitations and obstacles remained, yet what prevails in this doctoral thesis and in the other studies is the emancipating impact that emanates from the accessible and attractive way in which a new social order, and support for this, could be brought about in the post-conflict areas.