

**Doing theology at the margins:
PACSA's accompaniment of communities in the
KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, 1979-2012**

Charles Manda

Research Institute for Theology and Religion,
University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Abstract

The Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action (PACSA) is a faith-based organisation (FBO) situated in Pietermaritzburg, in the uMgungundlovu region of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. It works in 27 of the most marginalised communities in the region. Established in 1979, PACSA began as a Christian agency to raise awareness among the white Christian churches about the unjust and oppressive realities of the apartheid government. Over the years, it has continued to accompany partner communities as they seek their own liberation from forces that undermine their freedom and dignity. Using textual analysis of PACSA's documents and archives, this article explores the history of PACSA from 1979 to 2012. This period is significant because PACSA worked as a Christian social awareness FBO until 2012, when it changed its name to the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action. The article further explores its role during and after the political violence of the 1980s and 1990s; and its praxis of the theology of accompaniment and the preferential option for the poor and the marginalised.

Introduction

PACSA began officially as an organisation in 1979, although preparations started much earlier than that. It started as a Bible study group of 20-30 people who reflected on the biblical interpretation of political oppression in their context. The following factors motivated them to register the organisation we now call PACSA.

Charles Manda

Firstly, Micah 6:8 moved the group to act for freedom and equality: “What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.”

This text contradicted the status quo State Theology which canonised the brutality and oppression of black people (back then “black” referred to Africans, coloureds and Indians). The Kairos theologians in The Kairos Document of 1986, define State Theology as:

... the theological justification of the status quo with its racism, capitalism and totalitarianism. It blessed injustice, canonised the will of the powerful and reduced the poor to passivity, obedience and apathy. It misused theological concepts and biblical texts for its own political purposes.¹

By rejecting State Theology, the study group opted for the theology of accompaniment and preferential option for the poor.

Secondly, the group was motivated by the Black Consciousness (BC) movement. The champion of BC, Steve Biko, argued that, “If black people felt themselves to be victims; they are victims of their own passivity; liberation, which is first of all, a psychological event, lay in their own hands.” This message echoed in “the ranks of the oppressed, first to black students and to religious leaders, and later to workers, school learners and others”². Biko’s thinking brought revolution to the minds of black people and brought a powerful vibe into the struggle for freedom.³

Thirdly, the group was inspired by the involvement of Christian bodies like the South African Council of Churches (SACC), and the Ecumenical Christian Institute (CI) in the struggle. CI for example, under the leadership of Beyers Naude, developed a study project on Christianity in the apartheid society. Through CI and BC, mainly black churches were able to add a new spiritual energy to the struggle, especially through the development of a distinctive black Theology.⁴ Fourthly, the struggle against apartheid transformed South Africa into a police state with informers, detentions without trial, and unexpected deaths in police cells with strong evidence of torture. Fifthly, the exploitation and oppression of the poor did not spell out peace. In his testimony at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on 8 December 1997, Peter Kerchhoff states that he became aware of the

¹ Kairos Theologians (Group). *The Kairos document, challenge to the church: a theological comment on the political crisis in South Africa*. (Johannesburg: Eerdmans, 1986).

² PACSA 30th anniversary collective, 2009. *Journeying for justice: stories of an ongoing faith-based struggle*. (Pietermaritzburg: PACSA, 2009), 8.

³ PACSA 30th anniversary collective, 2009, 8.

⁴ PACSA, 30th anniversary collective 2009, 8.

exploitation, injustice and oppression that was rife in South African society⁵ as early as in the 1960s. Thus, driven by a deep compassion for the oppressed, by a faith-based vision of a just society and by a determination to act, sacrificially if need be, in pursuit of that vision the group registered PACSA in March 1979. The purpose then was to raise awareness of the evils of apartheid with the white churches in the hope it would pull them into the struggle against apartheid.⁶ In post-1994 South Africa, as a practitioner in the fields of social justice and development, PACSA shifted its focus from raising awareness of the political oppression and violence, to the building of citizenship. It has done this by initiating programmes that facilitate healing and transformational development of the poor and marginalised communities. Grounded in working with people rather than for people, and being in critical solidarity with the poor as they lead the struggle against socioeconomic inequality, PACSA continues to accompany the poor as they progressively realise their destiny.⁷

With 35 years of existence it is impossible to articulate PACSA's work in detail. Therefore, in this article, I focus mainly on three areas: Firstly, I explore the historical developments of PACSA from 1979 to 2012. Secondly, I explore the work of PACSA during and after the political violence of the 1980s and 1990s which culminated in the two Seven-Day Wars of 1987 and 1990 in Pietermaritzburg and its surrounding areas. Thirdly, I explore PACSA's praxis of the theology of accompaniment and the preferential option for the poor and the marginalised.

PACSA's understanding of theology of accompaniment

In his book, *Caminemos con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latino theology of accompaniment*, Goizueta states that, "the act of accompaniment suggests going with another on an equal basis and thus, implies the transgression of discriminatory barriers". He argues, "The theology of accompaniment is not only concerned about the persons, but also about places – places where the poor live, die, and struggle for survival."⁸ In another volume: *Christ our companion: Toward a theological aesthetics of Liberation*, Goizueta contends: "To 'opt for the poor' is thus to place ourselves *there*, to accompany the poor person in his or her life, death, and struggle for survival."⁹ In his book: *The power of the poor in history: Selected writings*, Gutiérrez

⁵ Copy in PACSA Archives, *Submission to the truth and reconciliation commission by PC Kerchhoff*. Document PC11/3/1/1/2.

⁶ PACSA 30th anniversary collective, 2009, 14.

⁷ PACSA. *Home//About us//How and where we work*. 26 March 2012.

⁸ Romeo J Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latino theology of accompaniment*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. 1995).

⁹ Romeo J Goizueta, *Christ our companion: Toward a theological aesthetics of Liberation*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. 2009), 192.

Charles Manda

defines poverty as, “a social and economic issue, but it has much more than a social and economic dimension. Poverty means death: unjust death, early death; death to illness, hunger, repression; physical death; and unnatural death”.¹⁰ Therefore, if our theology is to take the preferential option for the poor, Goizueta argues that it must be, somehow, born amid the violence, insecurity, unpredictability, messiness, randomness, and chaos of those geographical spaces which function as the most basic and fundamental instruments of exclusion.¹¹ Gutiérrez warns that the poverty of the poor is not a call to generous relief action, but a demand that we go and build a different social order. It is a demand not for development, but for liberation. Although he is convinced that God has the preferential option for the poor, Gutiérrez does not mean the exclusion of the non-poor. He defends:

God has a preferential love for the poor not because they are necessarily better than others, morally or religiously, but simply because they are poor and living in an inhuman situation that is contrary to God’s will. Thus the ultimate basis for the privileged position of the poor is not in the poor themselves but in God, in the gratuitousness and universality of God’s agape love.¹²

Therefore, he invites both the poor and the non-poor to work together towards “a universality of love, reversing the usual starting point among the privileged that too often ends up excluding the least powerful”.¹³

Inspired by the Latino theologies of liberation, the study group started preliminary investigations into the establishment of a Christian social agency in the Pietermaritzburg area in late 1976. At their fifth meeting in May 1978, founders elected an inaugurating council which they mandated to establish a Christian social awareness agency in Pietermaritzburg. One of the tasks given to the council was to raise funds for the organisation.¹⁴ On 01 November 1978, the council appointed Peter Kerchhoff as organising secretary for the work of PACSA; and on 06 March 1979 the constitution was accepted by the inauguration council. Thus PACSA was founded in 1979.

¹⁰ Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Church of the poor.” In L.C. Edward & O.P. Norte Dame (ed). *Born of the poor: the Latin American Church since Medellin*. (IN: University of Norte Dame Press. 1990), 15-18.

¹¹ Goizueta, 1990.

¹² Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job*. (Maryknoll: Orbis. 1987), 94.

¹³ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The power of the poor in history: Selected writings*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. 1983), 45.

¹⁴ Copy in PACSA Archives, PACSA Overview 1979-1989, Document PC 11/3/1/1.

PACSA's response to injustice under apartheid, 1979-1990s

PACSA began as a Christian organisation.¹⁵ To include the non-poor in the struggle for liberation from "an inhumane situation"¹⁶ that was prevalent in South Africa, PACSA started as an agency with educative purposes, aimed mainly at raising the awareness of white Christians. Its main focus was to change the attitude of white Christians by exposing the un-Christian aspects of South African society. PACSA hoped that Christians might choose to say "No" to the un-Christian aspects and "Yes"¹⁷ to the quest for change.

PACSA used a communication strategy to reach its target populations. Knowing that the majority of the white population sat in "insulated houses", or "bomb shelters" unaware of what was happening in their "neighbour's yard", PACSA collected and disseminated information from the neighbours who were sitting at the margins of South African society. This information dissemination created awareness in the public at local, national and international level about the situation on the ground. PACSA published incidents of brutality, which the regime hid from the public eye. Some of the sources of information came from the many victims of violence themselves who sought medical care, counselling and support at PACSA.¹⁸

In the first months of its existence, photographs and slides were collected which showed appalling conditions in various parts of the city of Pietermaritzburg and its neighbourhood. At PACSA's first public meeting in 1979, Kerchhoff showed slides in sequence, with the title: "How my neighbour lives." These slides challenged the critics in the audience, who argued that the difference between the rich and the poor was exaggerated.¹⁹ They were appalled to see the huge disparities in housing, roads, lighting, water provision, security, schools and in nearly every facet of life. Besides photographs, PACSA began publishing and distributing fact sheets, the first of which gave an account of the income distribution disparities.²⁰

Some key aspects of PACSA's work

Support for detainees

Through his work in PACSA, Kerchhoff became involved in a Detainees' Support Committee which ministered to political prisoners, prisoners

¹⁵ Copy in PACSA Archives, PACSA Annual Report, 1984 - 1985,

¹⁶ Gutiérrez, 1983, 45.

¹⁷ Copy in PACSA Archives, PACSA Annual Report, 1984 - 1985,

¹⁸ Copy in PACSA Archives, Document PC 11/3/1/1.

¹⁹ Joan Kerchhoff. "Standing with marginalised people: a thread running through 20 years." In L. Levine. *Hope beyond apartheid: the Peter Kerchhoff years of PACSA, 1979-1999*. (Pietermaritzburg: PACSA. 2002). 6.

²⁰ Kerchhoff, 2002, 6.

Charles Manda

awaiting “treason” trials, and their families. PACSA attended the so-called treason trials and also provided food for those in prison. Being part of the “lunch brigade”, PACSA staff made and delivered meals to the “16” in the so-called Treason Trial from 1985 to 1986 where they had the opportunity to talk with people like Thozamile Gweta, Siza Njikelana and others, while they ate their sandwiches.²¹ The staff also joined them inside the courthouse on one occasion to watch videos of various meetings they had attended. They were all eventually acquitted. This involvement brought Kerchhoff and PACSA even more to the attention of the security system,²² which resulted in security police raiding PACSA’s offices and confiscating all minutes, files, books, etcetera. On 12 June 1986, two staff members’ (Gall Spiller and Kerchhoff) homes were searched and they were arrested. Spiller was detained for two weeks and Kerchhoff for 97 days.²³ Instead of instilling them with fear, the detention of PACSA staff fuelled Spiller and Kerchhoff’s efforts to get involved in the struggle against apartheid. They extended their support to other sectors of marginalised and oppressed populations.²⁴

Support for workers

PACSA took part in the programme of the MAWU/Sarmcol conflict in April 1985 to support ex-Sarmcol workers and their families when they were fired by the management of Sarmcol at the end of April 1985. Kerchhoff reports that Sarmcol dismissed almost 1 000 workers, most of whom were residents of Mpophomeni. This support programme continued for many months and included a boycott of white businesses, especially supermarkets.²⁵ Kerchhoff reported that one of the most significant incidents during this period was the funeral service for three members (two of whom were trade union leaders) of the Mpophomeni Community. The three deceased were murdered by people linked to Inkatha in December 1986.²⁶

Support for victims of violence

In her article, *Standing with marginalised people: A thread running through 20 years*, Joan Kerchhoff (2002) states that from the very beginning of PACSA in 1978 and 1979, PACSA expressed concern for the poor. For example, in the first months of its existence, photographs and slides were

²¹ Copy in PACSA Archives, *Submission to the truth and reconciliation commission by PC Kerchhoff*. Document PC11/3/1/1/2.

²² PACSA Archives, Document PC11/3/1/1/2.

²³ PACSA Archives, Document PC11/3/1/1/2.

²⁴ PACSA Archives, Document PC11/3/1/1/2.

²⁵ PACSA Archives, Document PC11/3/1/1/2.

²⁶ PACSA Archives, Document PC11/3/1/1/2.

Doing theology at the margins: PACSA's accompaniment of ...

collected depicting the conditions of various parts of the city of Pietermaritzburg and its environs. In its attempt to bring awareness to the general public, these slides and photographs were first shown in 1979 at PACSA's public meeting with the title: "How my neighbour lives."²⁷ Kerchhoff adds that through all the years of political violence and upheaval, PACSA was a place where the poor, distressed and traumatised youngsters, parents searching for missing sons and daughters, refugees with little more than the clothes they wore and activists sought support.²⁸ "They came to PACSA because they needed food and shelter as well as legal and medical assistance and money for bail and for funerals. Sometimes a large polony sandwich was as welcome as legal advice."²⁹

First Aid Station

PACSA became a refuge and First Aid station. In her article, PACSA as refuge and First Aid Station, Monica Wittenberg (2002) reported that many youths were injured during the violence. However, instead of running to hospitals for treatment, they ran to PACSA. Wittenberg says:

PACSA looked more like a First Aid Station, than like a Resource Centre or offices. Youths with stab wounds, slash wounds and of course bullet wounds came running straight to PACSA to report the matter. Peter photographed and recorded all the details of the persons and the injuries.

She adds:

There were young girls who had been hit over the back with those red square sjamboks (quirts?) that the police liked to wield; there was the young boy with bite wounds from a police dog. One day a young man came moaning: 'Monica, I'm in trouble!' He dropped his pants and showed me his private parts, riddled with birdshot, like a cactus fruit with thorns. The uncaring police had aimed their guns straight for those parts. True trouble! It took hours to remove the birdshot pellets one by one. Imagine the agony of having to run far like that!³⁰

²⁷ Kerchhoff, 2002, 6-7.

²⁸ Kerchhoff, 2002, 7.

²⁹ Kerchhoff, 2002, 7.

³⁰ Monika Wittenberg. "PACSA as refuge and first aid station." In L. Levine. *Hope beyond apartheid: the Peter Kerchhoff years of PACSA. 1979-1999.* (Pietermaritzburg: PACSA. 2002), 154-155.

Charles Manda

Although PACSA was small in size, it used the network it had with other service providing organisations to assist the victims and to support its initiative. For example, it was assisted by some doctors, like Drs Motal, Cassimjee and Haripersad who removed bullets, and stitched gaping knife wounds and stab wounds without charge and with great compassion, at both convenient and at inconvenient times.³¹

A refuge station

Not only did they treat the injured persons, they also sought places of refuge for the United Democratic Front (UDF) youth who were being harassed and killed by Inkatha. PACSA found safe accommodation for nine young men who came in April 1986 and many more started streaming to PACSA. PACSA's friends and members hid them at their homes. Thus the period between 1978 and 1986 saw much turbulence in the political and welfare arena of the poor, marginalised and oppressed groups in South Africa, in particular in the Midlands region with Pietermaritzburg as its epicentre. PACSA's core values and purpose were demonstrated through standing with the marginalised. Yes, they were "hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed".³²

PACSA as a spiritual home

The 1980s were difficult, but fruitful times for PACSA. The staff intervened in a lot of cases through its social, medical, and compassionate provisions for people whose lives were in danger of brutality or hunger. PACSA also played a significant role in spiritual support and in being a prophetic voice. PACSA – as an agency for Christian social awareness and action – has always stressed that loving one's fellow human beings, and not merely alleviating suffering, but analysing the causes of suffering and then acting to create a transformed society, are – especially today – what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Even when Kerchhoff and Spiller were detained in June 1986 PACSA, as a body, never gave up the dedication to religious and socio-political change. Instead PACSA always kept in touch with the God who is at the centre of all its hopes and work. Gardener points out that under Kerchhoff leadership and of course, in being supported by a sincere and varied community, PACSA has sought God in prayer and in people, in prophecy and in planning.³³

³¹ Wittenberg, 2002, 154-155.

³² 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 New International Version of the Bible.

³³ Copy in PACSA Archives, Some thoughts about PACSA by Colin Gardner, Document PC 11/3/1/1.

Doing theology at the margins: PACSA's accompaniment of ...

In describing his first encounter with PACSA, Graham Lindegger says:

From the time of my discovery of PACSA it was to provide a constant source of support and challenge to my life, a forum for reflection on South Africa's situation in a Christian context, and a network of social action.³⁴

John Aitchison attributes this spiritual grounding of PACSA to its inner strength, in that its core membership knew what it stood for, had been well-educated (also biblically) in the regular agape meetings, and had intense communal bonds. In many respects PACSA as a parachurch agency, was more like what the church should be.³⁵

Monitoring and communicating critical issues

PACSA monitored the political situation on the ground. Almost from the onset of the political violence in the Pietermaritzburg region, PACSA played a monitoring role. This included responding in various ways to victims of violence. At the peak of violence a crisis office was opened in response to the serious situation in the region.³⁶ Mark Butler, a PACSA staff member from 1990 to 1993, asserts that "when political violence became a dominant feature of life under apartheid in the Midlands region, PACSA was well-placed and morally obliged to respond".³⁷ "The scale and impact of the violence on the people and politics of the region was such that failing to respond was unthinkable and yet, what they could do felt hopelessly inadequate at times."³⁸

PACSA's work during those times was multi-faceted. For example, it ranged from direct welfare and para-legal work, to collecting information and sharing it with a wide range of interested parties. This was part of a broader enterprise to analyse what was really happening on the ground and share that analysis with the public.³⁹ One significant analysis, which was also confirmed by other observers and researchers, was that black-on-black violence was a lie presented by the apartheid government. In fact, the results showed

³⁴ Copy in PACSA Archives, 20 years of PACSA: a reflection by Graham Lindegger, Document PC11/3/1/1.

³⁵ Copy in PACSA Archives, Some recollections by John Aitchison, Document PC11/3/1/1.

³⁶ Copy in PACSA Archives, Document PC11/3/1/1/2.

³⁷ Mark Butler, "Monitoring political violence: some recollections." In L. Levine. *Hope beyond apartheid: the Peter Kerchhoff years of PACSA, 1979-1999*, (Pietermaritzburg: PACSA, 2002), 146-148.

³⁸ Butler, 2002, 146.

³⁹ Butler, 2002, 146-148.

Charles Manda

that the violence between the UDF and Inkatha was orchestrated by the apartheid government who lent massive support to Inkatha in that violence.⁴⁰

In his reflections on the monitoring role of PACSA, Aitchison states: "... what made PACSA to succeed was that PACSA reeled under the weight of demands placed on it by communities in need and by information seekers wanting to learn about those communities".⁴¹ Having joined the UDF soon after its formation, PACSA researched and produced a number of factsheets and newsletters which made a positive impact on some people. It published a quarterly newsletter and factsheets containing various items of interest and information for its members and subscribers. For example, Christopher Merrett, in *Innovation* No. 20, June 2000 says:

Throughout his 20 years at PACSA Peter gathered and disseminated information ... his most enduring legacy was a series of 47 factsheets published from 1980 to 1999 covering topics ranging from economic justice, and poverty and malnutrition, to censorship, security legislation and capital punishment ... their factsheets were often used by the press as the basis of feature articles, thus widening their readership.⁴²

In order to become more relevant to the communities they accompanied, the factsheets were also translated into the local Zulu language.

Awareness-raising on the effects of the Seven-Day Wars of 1987 and 1990

The period between 1987 and 1990 were trying times for the residents of Pietermaritzburg and its surrounding areas. PACSA continued its work of bringing awareness to the wider community, both national and international. One such forum was at the seminar on political violence that was organised by the Centre for Adult Education at the University of Natal, on 18 April 1988.⁴³ Kerchhoff reported several crises that people on the ground were experiencing: The first crisis was many deaths. Many families lost their homes and loved ones and almost 600 people were killed in the previous 16 months. The second crisis was serious injury. Some families now had extra burdens to care for members of their families who were maimed for life. The third crisis was unemployment. People lost their jobs as a result of the

⁴⁰ Butler, 2002, 146-148.

⁴¹ PACSA Archives, Aitchison, Document PC11/3/1/1.

⁴² Christopher Merrett, "Peter Kerchhoff: a life of networking in the human rights struggle." in *Innovation* No. 20, June 2000.

⁴³ Peter Kerchhoff. "The role of the churches: paper presented at Conference on political violence in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, 1984-1994, at the University of Natal, 28-30 January 1998." In L. Levine. *Hope beyond apartheid: the Peter Kerchhoff years of PACSA, 1979-1999*. (Pietermaritzburg: PACSA, 2002).

Doing theology at the margins: PACSA's accompaniment of ...

conflict, and some did not go to work in order to protect their family and homes; others were detained for months without being charged and on their release their jobs were taken by others who were desperately looking for jobs. A fourth crisis was education. Education of many young people was severely disrupted. This raised a concern that the pool of uneducated and unemployed people in the metropolitan area of Pietermaritzburg would increase. The fifth crisis was family and community disruption. Many families were broken up by death, detention and fear.⁴⁴ Many homes were destroyed either totally or partially, and as a result of the loss of a breadwinner, particularly through death or detention, the rebuilding of homes was an impossible task for many people. Many other families did not want to rebuild in the same area for fear of further attack. The cloud did not lift as the area plunged into the Seven-Day War of 1990. Apart from damage to property, victims suffered psychologically. Families were exposed to extreme anxiety, pain and fear, anger, bitterness and frustration. These feelings came about due to uncertainty of the whereabouts of other members of their families. In the face of all this violence and uncertainty, PACSA responded with compassion to the needs of people in distress. It did not only tend to their wounds and to their grief – listening to and retelling their stories – but also challenged the authorities and advocated for peace and reconciliation.⁴⁵

Shaping a shared future, PACSA 1994-2012

The landscape of action between 1994 and 2005 is best captured by Lapsley and Karakashian. They state that KwaZulu-Natal in particular, was fraught with problems. After many years of violence between communities which were historically loyal to the ANC while others were loyal to the rival IFP political party, they had left deep rifts and festering wounds in the social fabric.⁴⁶ While much of the violence was originally fomented by the apartheid government, once set in motion, it escalated out of control, and internecine warfare wracked the province for many years, up to and beyond the 1994 election. Unhealed wounds lay just beneath the surface but by the early 2000s the conflict had settled down. However, because of the social disruption caused by the political conflict, criminal and domestic violence were rife in families and communities, and it is no surprise that KwaZulu-Natal Province became an epicentre of HIV and AIDS infections.⁴⁷

Like many other countries transiting from autocratic repressive regimes to democratic governments, South Africa was faced with dual chal-

⁴⁴ Kerchhoff, 2002.

⁴⁵ PACSA, 2009, 50.

⁴⁶ Michael Lapsley and Steve Karakashian. *Redeeming the past: My journey from freedom fighter to healer*. (Cape Town: Struik Inspirational. 2012), 212.

⁴⁷ Lapsley et al, 2012, 212.

Charles Manda

lenges: the reconstruction of the infrastructure, and the reconstruction of the human and the nation's soul. Nelson Mandela made this call as South Africa, in the aftermath of its liberation in 1994, was immersed in an effort to understand the elements of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) that had constituted the core of the Election Manifesto of the ANC in the first democratic elections.⁴⁸ Citing Mandela, Mbeki said, "Success in linking reconstruction and development is essential if we are to achieve peace and security for all." He adds that "RDP was eminently about changing the material conditions of the lives of our people. It made no reference to matters of the soul, except indirectly." He states that "Many years ago now, Nelson Mandela made bold to say that our country needs an "RDP of the soul", (the Reconstruction and Development of the soul).⁴⁹ Not only did Mandela focus on physical reconstruction, but also on the reconstruction of the human and nation's soul. The RDP of the soul required more than brick and mortar. Rigby (2001:124) observes that "the main challenge to the reconstruction and development of the soul was how to deal with the legacy of the gross human rights violations committed under the previous regime". In response to the challenge, PACSA took its share of the "RDP of the soul". It continued to raise awareness within churches and other community structures on issues of social justice, with a strong emphasis on human rights and building active citizenship. Since 2004, "PACSA began to work towards accompanying local community partners on their journey towards healing, reconciliation, building true democracy and social transformation and development." Thus in 2012 PACSA chose process facilitation as its core strategy to work with marginalised communities.

From awareness to action

In *The Witness* news of July 16, 2012, PACSA announced a name change.⁵⁰ In her interview with *The Witness* news reporter on 16 July 2012, Gennrich announced that PACSA was no longer an agency for Christian social awareness, as it was known for the past 33 years. Instead it is an agency for community social action. This means that it is not just about awareness raising, but also about community-wide action. Although the strategy seems to have changed, the core drive is still inspired by Black Consciousness.⁵¹ Gennrich says:

⁴⁸ Thabo Mbeki. *Nelson Mandela Memorial Lecture*. University of Witwatersrand, 29 July 2006. < <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/2006/mbek0729.htm>> (23 November 2014).

⁴⁹ Mbeki, 2006.

⁵⁰ Copy in PACSA Archives, "Building democracy: from 'awareness' to 'action', *The Witness*, Monday, 16 July 2012. Document PC 11/3/1/1/8.

⁵¹ PACSA Archives, *The Witness*, Document PC 11/3/1/1/8.

Doing theology at the margins: PACSA's accompaniment of ...

In a sense the new strategy is not new at all. Rather, it is a return to PACSA's roots. When PACSA was formed, it worked mainly with white Christians to involve them in speaking out against apartheid. PACSA's founders did this out of respect for Steve Biko's injunction that black people needed to liberate themselves. The founders were aware that they were unable to liberate those most oppressed by apartheid. In the same way, in 2012, PACSA's new strategy is based on the belief that those most oppressed by the 'new apartheid' – economic inequality – are those who will liberate themselves from it.⁵²

Using process facilitation, "... grassroots organisations act in their own names and are accompanied in their own advocacy and development".⁵³ Through this core strategy of process facilitation, PACSA provides spaces in which to identify, develop and refine strategies. It works with organisations to identify their own developmental goals and take the necessary steps towards achieving them.⁵⁴

Accompaniment on healing journeys

As PACSA continued its accompaniment post 1994, new needs began to emerge. Emerging from a very violent and traumatic past, many people did not pay attention to their wounds. They simply survived and life went on. When the dust of political violence had settled, new forms of violence became evident. For example, Buckenham states that "the high levels of domestic violence, poverty, child abuse, HIV and AIDS, as well as the effects of the historic political violence left many people in KwaZulu-Natal with limited capacity and strength to engage meaningfully with their lives".⁵⁵ Van der Merwe (2008:35) observes that, "when people are traumatised, it is an experience of humiliation. People feel powerless and they need a sense of control since the violation takes away the very core of who they are".⁵⁶ The increasing burden of disease on the communities and also the intolerance often based on fear was and still is rife in South Africa. Although HIV and AIDS was first diagnosed in 1982 in South Africa, political turbulence diverted people's attention from the slowly devastating new battle front. The

⁵² PACSA Archives, *The Witness*, Document PC 11/3/1/1/8.

⁵³ PACSA, Home/about/how and where we work. <http://www.pacsa.org.za/about-us/how-and-where-we-work> (10 October 2014).

⁵⁴ PACSA Home page, <http://www.pacsa.org.za/about-us/how-and-where-we-work> > (3 October 2014).

⁵⁵ Karen Buckenham. *Violence against Women: A resource manual for the church in South Africa*. (Pietermaritzburg: PACSA, 1999), 7-8.

⁵⁶ Chris Van der Merwe and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela. *Narrating our Healing: Perspectives on working through trauma*. (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 35.

Charles Manda

remnants of political violence faced the HI virus, stigma and discrimination, and the silence that shrouded the AIDS disease.

In 2005 PACSA, in partnership with the Institute for Healing of Memories (IHOM), began creating safe spaces where people affected and infected with HIV and AIDS could meet and talk about their experiences. Many Healing of Memories workshops were organised by PACSA and the IHOM sent facilitators. Thus from 2005 to 2012, PACSA facilitated the making of “public spaces intimate to share stories by people from different backgrounds and histories”.⁵⁷ Although some critics argue that the art of storytelling is futile as it retraumatises people, evidence from these workshops show otherwise. Using group psychotherapy as a method to work through trauma and sharing of life narratives, individuals found catharsis after sharing their stories. For fear of stigma and discrimination, those participants living with HIV found space to disclose their status for the first time in the supportive and caring environment. As they were able to confront their worst fears, they gained control over their fears and began a journey towards their healing. The goal of these workshops was and is to “restore people’s dignity and humanity and help them to start personal journeys towards healing and reconciliation, thereby enabling them to develop attitudes and actions that support a just peaceful society”.⁵⁸

Around 2007, PACSA established a Church and HIV Mobilisation Unit manned by two staff. They were trained by the Christian AIDS Bureau for Southern Africa (CABSA) to facilitate Churches Channels of Hope (CCOH) workshops. These workshops were aimed at bringing awareness to churches about the realities of HIV and AIDS and invite them to care for and support people affected and infected with HIV and AIDS. Hundreds of church leaders and their members attended the workshops between 2008 and 2011. Thus PACSA did not divorce itself from its core mandate of bringing awareness to churches, though this time, it was about HIV and AIDS. However, although it has continued to offer Healing of Memories workshops, unfortunately the HIV programme was closed down with the change of its strategy in 2012 from awareness to action.

In 2009, PACSA forged a partnership with the Diakonia Council of Churches to facilitate stress and trauma healing in its community partners. As South Africa’s democracy is maturing, there is increasing evidence that “South African society is a deeply traumatised community of women, men and children. Each person has a story to tell about themselves, their friends, their family.”⁵⁹ “In the struggle for survival and liberation, there was (and, for

⁵⁷ Van der Merwe et al, 2008, viii.

⁵⁸ Philippe Denis and others. *A journey towards healing: stories of people with multiple woundeness in KwaZulu-Natal*. (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications. 2011), 3.

⁵⁹ Buckenham, 1999, 7-8.

Doing theology at the margins: PACSA's accompaniment of ...

many, is) little energy, space or time to pay attention to these wounds”.⁶⁰ “Many people experience multiple-woundedness. Because many people have to live with pain, they cannot participate in transformational development of their communities.”⁶¹ To facilitate the process of healing past and current emotional, psychological and spiritual wounds, PACSA conducted a pilot trauma healing project between 2009 and 2013, which resulted in more than 23 trained facilitators. They are facilitating stress and trauma healing in their own communities and in languages they are familiar with. Bartsch argues that the healing of a “victim identity”, which many trauma victims succumb to, “comes when victims recover their dignity and re-integrate their identity into their community with rightful respect from others, for others and with self-respect”.⁶² Thus “Through these healing processes hundreds of people who have been victims now think of themselves as survivors and are able to manage their lives, hold onto their self-respect and dignity, and take on meaningful roles in their families, in their work, in their churches and in their communities.”⁶³ Fourteen stress and trauma counsellors have completed their training; they facilitate stress and trauma healing workshops in their communities and offer counselling to those in need as part of the process of healing, recovery and redress of traumatised individuals and communities. Thus through process facilitation strategy, PACSA offers “... more integrated response to issues emerging from the struggles of local community partners as they strive for their rights, access to what they need and, ultimately, social transformation”.⁶⁴

Accompaniment in social transformation

Through its theology of accompaniment, PACSA has learnt the significance of the participation of the target group in the building of citizenship and restoring human dignity. It asserts, “We are convinced that those who carry the brunt of the problem must be a part of the solution – at the heart of PACSA’s core strategy is the notion, ‘nothing about us without us’.” Goizueta argues that to accompany another person is to walk with him or her. He asserts that it is by walking with others that we relate to them and love them. This shows that accompaniment is not simply to be with another person, but is the act of walking with the other. Thus the act of accompaniment is never the act of autonomous individuals; but it is, by definition, a

⁶⁰ Buckenham, 1999, 7-8.

⁶¹ Denis et al, 2011, 2.

⁶² Karl Bartsch and Evelyn Bartsch. *Stress and Trauma healing: A manual for caregivers*. (Durban: Diakonia Council of Churches. 1996). See also in Manda C.B. *Re-authoring life narratives shattered by trauma: a spiritual perspective*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Pretoria, 2013.

⁶³ Bartsch 1996; see also Manda 2013, 135.

⁶⁴ PACSA Archives, *The Witness*, Document PC 11/3/1/1/8.

Charles Manda

walking “with”.⁶⁵ As a social justice organisation, PACSA continues to walk with the 27 Communities in uMgungundlovu District as they lead their struggle against what it calls “the new apartheid” (socioeconomic inequality).⁶⁶

Conclusion

In this article, I have looked at the historical and political landscapes that led to the founding of PACSA as a faith-based organisation. Being dissatisfied with the status quo – state theology that justified brutality and canonised oppression of black people – a group of white Christians began to seek alternative means. Inspired by theological reflection of biblical texts, the group abandoned the status quo Christianity, and adapted the theology of accompaniment and preference for the poor. From 1979 to 2012, PACSA aligned its thinking with the Black Consciousness injunction of Steve Biko, which rested responsibility of liberation over the conscientisation of the oppressed. They registered an organisation as a vehicle to accompany the oppressed in their struggle for freedom from inhuman and oppressive laws that opposed their destiny. The strategy of creating awareness in the white community, both nationally and internationally through critical information dissemination, cannot be underestimated. It exposed gross human rights violations which the state did not want the public eye to see.

Its praxis of theology of accompaniment and preferential option for the poor and marginalised motivated PACSA to extend its tent pegs. From awareness in white churches, it began supporting detainees, workers who were unjustly dismissed, and treating and seeking refuge for victims of political violence. Through the years PACSA has adapted to changing seasons in the political climate of South Africa. Thus post 1994, PACSA has involved itself with socioeconomic and development work as it seeks to contribute to the building of citizenship. In 2012 PACSA changed its name to Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action. Like many other nonprofit organisations which have succumb to the donor’s demands, one would argue that PACSA changed its name to align with donors’ demands. Gennwich alludes to this fact in *The Witness* newspaper article:

Other Christian organisations don’t necessarily have the word in their titles. Also, the word can have negative associations with proselytising and exclusivity. We’ve always been an inclusive organisation. Besides, donors are becoming more

⁶⁵ Goizueta, 1995, 206.

⁶⁶ PACSA Archives, *The Witness*, Document PC 11/3/1/1/8.

Doing theology at the margins: PACSA's accompaniment of ...

selective. They see “Christian” on a funding proposal and they don’t bother to read it.⁶⁷

Although it began as an awareness FBO, textual analysis of PACSA’s archives shows that PACSA has always been an “action” organisation. It used both awareness and action to execute its duties. Using the process facilitation strategy to downsize the number of staff and streamline its work, PACSA closed down some vital programmes like the HIV and AIDs programme and church mobilisation. This programme was significant in the fight against HIV and AIDS-related stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV. Just like state theology was tested and found wanting by the Kairos Theologians, some church teachings continue to mix the health message and religious message in the prevention of HIV infection. PACSA succeeded in raising awareness, discarding myths in its Churches, Channels of Hope (CCoH) workshops, which were attended by hundreds of church leaders and their members. As the HIV infection rate is on the increase again in the KwaZulu-Natal province, one wonders whether PACSA’s strength in awareness-raising work would still be relevant.

However, despite the challenges in implementing the new strategy and global pressure in accessing donor funding, its change of strategy seems to address some pressing needs. For example, now PACSA offers more integrated response in its accompaniment of the 27 poor and marginalised communities in the uMgungundlovu district. PACSA’s vision and mission continues to be grounded in “working with people rather than for people” and being in critical solidarity with the poor as they lead the struggle against what PACSA calls “the new apartheid” (socioeconomic inequality).

Works consulted

- Bartsch, Karl and Evelyn Bartsch 1996. *Stress and trauma healing: A manual for caregivers*. Durban: Diakonia Council of Churches.
- Buckenham, Karen 1999. *Violence against women: A resource manual for the church in South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: PACSA.
- Butler, Mark 2002. Monitoring political violence: some recollections, in Levine, L (ed.), *Hope beyond apartheid: the Peter Kerchhoff years of PACSA, 1979-1999*. Pietermaritzburg: PACSA.
- Denis, Philippe, Scott Houser and Radikobo Ntsimane 2011. *A journey towards healing: stories of people with multiple woundedness in KwaZulu-Natal*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

⁶⁷ PACSA Archives, *The Witness*. Document PC 11/3/1/1/8.

Charles Manda

- Goizueta, Romeo J. 1995. *Caminemos con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latino theology of accompaniment*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Goizueta, Romeo J. 2009. *Christ our companion: Toward a theological aesthetics of Liberation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Gutiérrez, Gustavo 1983. *The power of the poor in history: Selected writings*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Gutiérrez, Gustavo 1987. *On Job*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Gutiérrez, Gustavo 1990. Church of the poor, in Edward, LC. & Norte Dame, OP. (ed.), *Born of the poor: the Latin American Church since Medellin*. Indiana: University of Norte Dame Press.
- Kairos Theologians (Group) 1986. *The Kairos document, challenge to the church: a theological comment on the political crisis in South Africa*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Kerchhoff, Joan 2002. Standing with marginalised people: a thread running through 20 years, in Levine, L. (ed.), *Hope beyond apartheid: the Peter Kerchhoff years of PACSA, 1979-1999*. Pietermaritzburg: PACSA.
- Kerchhoff, Peter 2002. The role of the churches: paper presented at a conference on political violence in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, 1984-1994, at the University of Natal, 28-30 January 1998, in Levine, L. (ed.), *Hope beyond apartheid: the Peter Kerchhoff years of PACSA, 1979-1999*. Pietermaritzburg: PACSA.
- Lapsley, Michael and Steve Karakashian 2002. *Redeeming the past: My journey from freedom fighter to healer*. Cape Town: Struik Inspirational.
- Manda, Charles B. 2013. Re-authoring narratives of trauma survivors in KwaZulu-Natal spiritual perspective. Unpublished PhD thesis. Pretoria: University of Pretoria
- PACSA 30th Anniversary Collective 2009. *Journeying for justice: stories of an ongoing faith-based struggle*. Pietermaritzburg: PACSA.
- Rigby, Andrew 2001. *Justice and reconciliation: after the violence*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Romero, Oscar 2001. Fourth Pastoral Letter: Misión de la Iglesia en medio de la crisis del país, in Sobrino, J., Martín-Baro, I. & Cardenal, R. (eds.), *Lavoz del los sin voz: La palabra viva de Monseñor Romero*. San Salvador, El Salvador: UCA Editores, 123-172).
- Van der Merwe, Chris and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela 2008. *Narrating our Healing: Perspectives on working through trauma*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Wittenberg, Monica 2002. PACSA as refuge and first aid station, in Levine, L. (ed.), *Hope beyond apartheid: the Peter Kerchhoff years of PACSA, 1979-1999*.