



## MEAL OF PEACE

### About the Book

This book is written in order to honour one of the sons of the soil, a missionary missiologist, Johannes Nicolaas Jacobus Kritzinger (Klippies). The intention of writing this *feestschrift* is not necessarily to engage Prof. Kritzinger on his theology and contribution, but to lift his theology and the praxes thereof into the public square. Having studied and reflected on his theology, it remains clear that Klippies will go down in the history books and be remembered as a theologian of transformative encounters.

This *feestschrift* in honour of Klippies is entitled 'standing where God stands' and is derived from Article 4 of the Belhar Confession and Psalm 109:30f. It is a metaphor that seeks to capture the story of Prof Kritzinger's life. Irrespective of being a child of his time, Klippies's life has always been characterised by deep yearning to stand where God stands in everything.

In appraising and amplifying the voice of Kritzinger as an encountering prophet in the public square, contributors to this book addressed the following issues:

- Standing where God stands: Klippies as an encountering missionary and missiologist.
- Caring enough to confront: a missiological imperative.
- Encounters with the homeless people in Tshwane: participatory action research approach in Missiological education.
- Nkutuole's subversion of texts from the Bible: More reading strategies in the context of homeless people in the City of Tshwane.
- Christ on the streets: A call for active citizenry in the context of migration, homelessness and marginalisation in the City of Tshwane.
- When a foreign, homeless person in South Africa suffers?
- The church as a caring and humanising community of faith in the context of **xenophobic/Afrophobic** attacks against migrants.
- Migration, mission and the imperative of solidarity: Reflections on the 'Zimbabwe crisis' (2000-2017).
- A lady with a lamp: A characterisation of the Academic Oeuvre of Cella Kourie, in Honour of Klippies Kritzinger.

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## MEAL OF PEACE



Standing where God stands  
Mashau TD, (Editor)

# Standing where God Stands

Doing encountering Missiology

with homeless people on the pavements of the City of Tshwane

Mashau TD, (Editor)

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P U B L I S H I N G

## Chapter 2

# Encounters with the homeless people in Tshwane: participatory action research approach in Missiological education

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### Abstract

The aim of this conceptual chapter is to contribute to the discourse on a methodological framework for missiology. It is a very preliminary attempt at exploring the applicability of participatory action research (PAR) considerations in relation to missiology, particularly mission as encounterology pioneered by Kritzinger, JNJ. The value and relationship between PAR, Contextual Bible Study and missiology highlighted in this study shows that transformation is and should remain the aim as we work for collective wellbeing.

Building on the understanding of missiology as encounterology on one hand and on the other the use of Contextual Bible Study (CBS) as a tool to facilitate encounterological dialogue, this contribution demonstrates that 1) PAR enhances encounterology and adds value to transformative missiology 2) PAR is the most appropriate approach for mission in the 21st century because it makes missiology more participatory, a creative generator of knowledge and enthusiastically action-oriented 3) encounterological PAR has the potential to open up missiology so that it contributes towards inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary research needed to achieve collective wellbeing. With particular reference to studying homelessness in Tshwane, we (missiologists and other stakeholders) realise that PAR is an alternative approach of knowledge production based on the subjects' involvement in decisions regarding pathways out of homelessness in Tshwane.

**Keywords** Encounterology, Participatory Action Research, Contextual Bible Study, Homelessness, Tshwane

## Introduction and background

I begin with a confession. We (staff members of the Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology at the University of South Africa) never expected doing mission and building missiology with insights from the people who live on the pavements of the streets of Tshwane (Mashau and Kritzing, 2014: 10) to be so enriching in content and perspectives. This is so because of the PAR approach we have opted for.

Let me give a bit of a background. According to Van Schalkwyk (2012), the discussion on how we do community service / what we can do / what ideas for community project we have, which will result directly in the contextual praxis approach to Missiology, took place during a Discipline Bosberaad in August 2010 at Ha-Phororo Youth retreat. In essence, the Discipline envisaged starting with involvement with the people who are in need of saving themselves in order to become empowered, and who are often the research participants in our praxis research. It is here where Philemon Bengela came with his idea of a meal of peace and reconciliation with people on the streets of Tshwane, who have been left out of any form of reconciliation, social cohesion and economic development in post-1994 South Africa. Therefore, the idea was to reach out to the homeless and to learn from them what peace and reconciliation should be. It started from a vision of our discipline on how we can bring down our praxis theology to our collaborators on the street pavements.

These are homeless people,<sup>8</sup> yet in this contribution I argue that they are the most valuable collaborators for transformative action needed to address homelessness. Most of these people were forced to migrate from their hometowns, villages or home countries due to various reasons which may be personal, economic, political, war and

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<sup>8</sup> In this study, I concur with the definition of homelessness provided in Homelessness Policy for City of Tshwane and Report of Public Participation of 28 March 2013. In this policy, homeless people are regarded as all people living on the streets who fall outside a viable social network of assistance and who are not able to provide for themselves with shelter at a given time and place.

violence and familial. We encounter these people on the pavements of Tshwane and work with them for the purpose of studying and finding pathways out of homelessness. Together with us, since 2012 they have been participating in this research aiming at transformation - that is participatory action research (PAR). Why is the PAR approach important in Missiology? This is the main question this contribution attempts to answer.

In the process of answering this main question, I will firstly highlight PAR's value added to transformative missiology, especially how PAR makes mission and missiology continuously encounterological. We understand Missiology as "encounterology" – a critical study of how Christians respectfully and transformatively encounter "others". Kritzinger (2008: 764) explains: "This understanding is in contrast with what is commonly said of religious people that they are 'so heavenly-minded that they are of no earthly good'."

Secondly, I will further argue, in relation to migration, that a contextualising approach to missiology befits encounterology as it (should) guide the agents of mission to be consciously 'migrating' from preconceived mission modus operandi and to take seriously the different contexts from which communities come and that PAR is for me one of the research approaches which respects these.

Thirdly, based on personal experiences, I will highlight the potential that PAR has for making missiology truly inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary in very practical ways. This will lead to missiology being 'liberated' from various entrapments emanating from cultural and theological persuasions, which made it foster the perception of being "so heavenly-minded and of no earthly good". Finally, I will attempt to give some recommendations based on my experience and a conclusion. It is worth noting that the Biblical text has been central in our participatory approach.

## **Contextual Bible Study (CBS) as an encounterological method embedded in PAR**

CBS is a type of scripture-based focus group discussion (West & Ujaama, 2011). It is concerned with a Biblical interpretation, which is

proactive, where recognition of the ordinary reader of the Bible is given centre stage in the African context, as subjects of Biblical interpretation (Ukpong, 2000: 12). Thus, according to Kritzinger (1998: 10 – 18), it entails four commitments: 1) reading the Bible from the perspective of the South African context, 2) reading the Bible in community with others, 3) reading the Bible in critical consciousness (by taking nothing for granted and by asking constant “Why?” questions) and 4) reading the Bible for transformation.

In essence, the Bible is a tool which facilitates encounterological dialogue in CBS aimed at transformation and “befits liberation and enculturation” (Ukpong, 2000: 12). Practically, a given Biblical text is read in order to get a general impression of what the text is about in relation to a societal issue. This is followed by a guided discussion in small groups, with the assistance of a set of questions relative to the main issue in the text. Inputs generated by each small group are tabled and discussed. Participants are allowed to comment on inputs from other small groups to add or seek clarification. Furthermore, the same text is read in such a way that the issue is interrogated in relation to our contemporary context. It is expected of the participants to use the text in a “prayerful and intelligent way in order to hear the voice of God for our particular context” (Kritzinger, 1998:17) in relation to the issue in question.

Finally, the text is read in such a way that clues for transformation are singled out as a plan of action to address the issue. Simply put, this text is read with the expectation that it will give directions on how to change the situation in which the interested community finds itself. The Bible read this way motivates communities to migrate from a state of inertia to action; it empowers ordinary people to act. See – judge – act combination in logical steps unfolds in CBS in an ongoing fashion.

This combination is in tandem with PAR in that PAR weaves together “knowing, learning and doing” (Merrifield, 1997: 3)<sup>9</sup>. In agreement with CBS, PAR is done in a way that empowers people, not researchers, because in our case we assume that “sometimes the [homeless] people themselves know more than the ‘official’

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.ncsall.net/index.html?id=771&pid=479.html>

knowledge” retrievable from library and government documents (Merrifield, 1997:2). In many instances, homeless people’s own knowledge gave the official knowledge meaning, as we have witnessed in Tshwane that led to the re-drafting of a new policy on how to deal with homelessness in the city. This gives us a hint that CBS embedded in PAR could inspire transformative missiology, which points to pathways out of homelessness.

## **PAR, missiology and pathways out of homelessness**

It is apparent from the foregoing that PAR and transformative missiology could work at intertwining to facilitate concrete solutions to address homelessness. PAR processes in communities imply, as stated above, doing research in a way that empowers the people, not the researchers. These processes resonate with CBS in terms of participants being empowered to read the Bible in order to retrieve from it insights needed to transform their own plight. Thus, PAR adds value to the main aim of transformative missiology.

### ***PAR’s value added to transformative missiology and encounterology***

It could be traced back, as early as the 1950s and 60s, that one of the origins of action research and participatory research emanated from “consciousness-raising practices” and the liberation theory developed, especially in Latin America under the impulse of Paulo Freire. The effects of this impulse spread across many sectors. Thiollent (2011: 161 – 162) elaborates that participatory methodology has been applied to “several sectors of social science (education, especially adult education), social service, rural extension, organisation, communication, political practices, as well as in the fields of collective health, nursing, environment, etc.” In theology, encouraging signs are evident in practical theology where tools of action research are consciously being added to its repertoire (see Graham, 2013) and in liturgical studies where PAR’s applicability is explored (Wepener, 2005: 111).

However, as explained by Merrifield (1997:3), PAR “is not a research method, but an approach to research and to learning that may use different methods. Hence, as highlighted in Section 2, with the Meal of Peace project we use a Bible-based focus group known as CBS with groups of homeless people (Wepener, 2005: 121). For individuals, we also use narratives and a survey. The key feature of PAR is the fact that “people involved in the situation being studied, are enabled (in partnership with researchers and other role-players) to become actively involved in collective efforts to address and solve their social problems” (Wepener, 2005: 117). This feature highlights the fact that PAR is an approach that empowers local communities.

My first exposure to PAR and its potential for societal transformation took place during my training in rural community development and adult education in the 1980s and 1990s. Since then I have come to realise that PAR can be used across sectors which share a common vision of social transformation (Thiollent, 2011: 161). Thus, I argue PAR opens up missiology and mission practice to become intentionally transformative through their encounters with others. This will inevitably lead missiology in these encounters with others to come up with proposals that contribute “to nourishing the hopes of change” (Thiollent, 2011: 162), as we are starting to see with the Meal of Peace project.

In addition, a missiology inspired and influenced by the three ideas that are central to PAR (i.e. participation, action and knowledge) can only become beneficial to society at least for these three reasons:

- 1) It makes missiology participatory. Therefore, missiological research should be owned and controlled not by researchers but by people in communities and organisations who need the research to act on issues that concern them. In our case, the research should be owned by the homeless people themselves and the Tshwane Homeless Forum – an organisation formed to take the lead in addressing homelessness in Tshwane. I deduce therefore that our encounters with the homeless people should always be participatory.

- 2) Missiology will be defined by the need for action. This simply means that transformative actions should give a clear purpose for doing missiological research. Hence, in our case we came together to pose 'hopeful actions' which should address homelessness. A variety of actions ranging from empowerment, building community and enhancing social cohesion on one hand take place each year in our case. On the other, reducing social distance and exclusion, including advocacy, have been implemented since 2012. Examples include our ongoing participation in homeless advocacy work and policy revision and reformulation in Tshwane.
- 3) Embedded in PAR philosophy, missiology will create knowledge but not for the sake of knowledge alone, as it is currently the case in many missiological circles. It should rather bring together knowing and doing (cf. Maguire, 1996: 32). The starting point should be, as Cornwall and Jewkes (1995: 1670) put it, in relation to the medicine sector to "affirm that people's own knowledge is valuable". Missiologists embedded in PAR must therefore, in the words of Cornwall and Jewkes (1995: 1670), "regard people as agents rather than objects, capable of analysing their own situations and designing their own solutions". What Cornwall and Jewkes contend resonates with the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach where we start on the premise that people have resources, including knowledge, gifts and assets (see Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993:14). With reference to homeless people in Tshwane, Ntakirutimana (2015: 64) confirms that people have gifts and assets - including knowledge - that are useful for their 'release' from homelessness and that of their community. In the same vein, Mangayi (2017: 1) also advocates, "Homeless people are strategic partners who are able to identify the issues that still bind them and (...) dream of alternative solutions". Therefore, knowledge (knowing) created through the Meal of Peace project encounters engenders actions (doing) which should lead to



more learning, research and improved action and on and on  
in a cyclical reflexive praxis.

### ***Contextual approach to missiology, encounterology and PAR***

Naturally, issues, challenges and opportunities in communities enable the agents of mission to develop transformative strategies and contribute to the development of the society as a whole. The truth is that we cannot afford to do mission for any other outcome than the goals of transformation and collective wellbeing. In order to achieve these goals, these agents of mission must be rooted in their contexts through regular and ongoing encounters with communities they serve. The praxis cycle (which consists of phases i.e. insertion, analysis, reflection and plan of action) developed by Holland and Henriot (1984) and which was adapted by Cochrane, De Gruchy and Petersen (1991) in the South African context is the methodology which is often used in missiology in our context. Kritzinger (2002) expands this cycle by adding spirituality as the epicentre of praxis, which has to culminate in concrete actions or projects. He stresses this when he states:

The praxis cycle will remain incomplete unless the cumulative effect of the earlier dimensions of involvement, context analysis, theological reflection and spirituality leads to concrete projects – and unless those projects in turn lead to a renewed cycle of involvement, analysis, etc., spiralling onwards into a progressively more rooted and winged mission praxis (Kritzinger, 2002: 170).

Furthermore, Kritzinger (2002: 169) elucidates, “The praxis cycle is an approach designed for a group of committed people who wish to think together, pray together and work together to make a difference to society”. It is clear from the foregoing that relevant contextual mission endeavours in communities stand a chance of succeeding if only they involve the group. Thus, I argue that thinking together, praying together and working together enrich encounters in our case. Hence, I deduce that group participation makes PAR the most appropriate approach for mission in the 21st century. An encounterological praxis cycle embedded in PAR makes missiology participatory, a creative

generator of knowledge and enthusiastically action-oriented. In relation to the Meal of Peace project, the participatory approach has brought us, as missiologists, to a place where:

1. We find inspiration from collective and communal hermeneutics emerging from encounters through CBS sessions. We apply ourselves to reflect on hermeneutics emerging from pavements. We refer to this as encounterological reflection, so that we gain insights from our collaborators on the pavements of our streets. These emerging hermeneutics are starting to help us (academic missiologists) to see that our mission actions on many issues affecting the homeless community were deficient in many ways, because these actions did not take into account the insights of homeless people themselves.
2. We realise that these encounters afford us (homeless people and researchers) opportunity for continuous learning about issues associated with homelessness. Thus, knowledge generated is disseminated through publications in books and accredited academic journals. Materials gathered so far will be integrated in a formal course to be written on how to address homelessness. This course content comes not from academic missiologists who sit in ivory towers nor by homeless people on their own, but by both groups working in collaboration. This is, for me, one of the greatest insights as far as missiological education is concerned – a course content generated by both academics and people on pavements!
3. We have learned through the encounters that the voice from the pavement must take centre stage in an effort to design actions, which inform public policy and discourse. Indeed, the voice from the pavement took centre stage in the Homeless

Summit which was held at Pretoria, 25 – 26 May 2015. This summit brought together around the table the homeless people, researchers and academics, practitioners, NGOs and city officials in a critical dialogue focused on finding pathways out of homelessness (see <https://tshwanehomelessresearch.wordpress.com>). The momentum generated at the summit was sustained through to the International Homeless Day commemoration in October 2016 with the Mayor of Tshwane and three executive mayoral committee members in attendance. Consequently, the Mayor and the city endorse the revised policy and allocate a budget to address homelessness in Tshwane.

It is clear in this section that an effective and relevant contextual missiology can thrive only if there are continuous encounters, which involve all the people concerned. I have argued that PAR, as an approach, is most appropriate in this enterprise. It benefits missiology to be embedded in PAR.

### ***Potential of encounterological PAR towards making missiology inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary in very practical ways***

The emerging understanding of Christian mission and missiology has grown to include the whole of creation: the *oikos* (Mangayi, 2016). In the foregoing, I highlighted PAR's value added to contextual missiology, which in my opinion thrives through continuous encounters in a given context. In this section, I argue that an encounterological PAR opens up missiology and mission to contribute towards inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary research, which could promote collective wellbeing. I am convinced that the complexity and width of mission and missiology requires such openness. Botha, Kritzinger and Maluleke capture this complexity when attempting to define mission. They elucidate:

We understand Christian mission to be a wide and inclusive complex of activities aimed at the realisation of the reign of God in history. It includes evangelism, but is at the same time much wider than that. Perhaps one could say that mission is the “cutting edge” of the Christian movement - that activist streak in the church's life that refuses to accept the world as it is and keeps on trying to change it, prodding it on towards God's final reign of justice and peace (Botha, Kritzinger & Maluleke, 1994:21)

I agree with Kritzinger (2002: 150) that “what needs to be added to the definition above is the dimension of the *missio Dei*. In other words, mission as an “activist streak” in the life of the church is embedded in – and an expression of – the mission of the triune God in history”. The expression of the mission of the triune God encompasses the whole of creation. Inputs from Botha, Kritzinger and Maluleke (1994) and Kritzinger (2002) in the foregoing attest to the fact that mission is intrinsically oriented to transformative action as it participates in *missio Dei*. The fact that mission refuses to accept the world as it is and keeps on trying to change it concurs with PAR's envisaged outcomes i.e. working, learning and acting together to make the world a better place, as God intended it to be. Mangayi (2016: 510) expands this understanding by contending, “Our mission's involvement in *missio Dei* has to embrace the whole of creation (i.e. *oikos*),” as manifested in the world in general and in Tshwane in particular.

Further, Mangayi (2016: 518 – 519) elucidates:

The *oikos* metaphor provides us with insights for sustaining the whole community of life – an interdependent and interrelated web that signifies *botho* in the community of life. Thus, working with the whole community of life means that Christians need to broaden the missiological agenda (...) beyond anthropocentric concerns so as to include all living beings and systems (...), which is part of this whole community of life. This all-inclusive nature of the *oikos*, as the household of God which consists of all living beings and living systems, and which concerns the wellbeing or shalom of all

living beings radically challenges theologians / missiologists to contribute to the vision for a sustainable future (...)

Thus, continues Mangayi (2016: 518 – 519):

It implies therefore that theology/missiology should not focus solely on spiritual and faith matters, but it should also contribute toward the realisation of sustainability in different spheres of life in an integrated manner – environmental, social, economic and urban-territorial. It could also provide a new ambit and new scope for missiologists and practitioners, so as to take their understanding of mission beyond just the salvation of human beings towards a vision of the redemption and re-birth of the whole of creation (see Rom.8: 19-23).

Understanding missiology and mission beyond salvation of human beings to include the whole of creation can only be realised as missiology intentionally embraces the inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary approach to research. For me, PAR could facilitate this realisation in two ways: 1) Missiology as a discipline should participate, learn and act as one among other disciplines in projects of redemption and re-birth of the whole of creation. It thus breaks away from its own isolation so that it contributes a perspective or insights, which should improve creation. 2) Missiological projects have to invite participation and collaboration from other disciplines, professionals and scholars from other disciplines, beneficiary communities and others. This will inevitably lead to these projects becoming owned by all who participate in them.

The pathways out of homelessness project – a collaborative research project which comprises the Tshwane Homeless Forum, the City of Tshwane, the University of South Africa and the University of Pretoria – is one example where researchers, professional practitioners, public servants, community leaders, faith-based organisations, politicians and others came together in an attempt to provide solutions to homelessness in Tshwane. Insights from disciplines such as social development, anthropology, youth studies, missiology, public and social policy, medicine, architecture and the like converged in a participatory manner to suggest inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary solutions to end homelessness in Tshwane.

The participatory action research approach adopted by this collaboration with a keen interest ensured “that the knowledge generated can immediately translate into interventions” (De Beer, 2015: 1).

The Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology represents the Meal of Peace project in this collaboration. Through participation in this inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary collaboration, we as missiologists realise, in the words of De Beer (2015: 1 – 2), that:

- 1) We can contribute to the articulation of theories on homelessness and generate new knowledge that could help generate innovative solutions and just alternatives to the status quo.
- 2) We can contribute towards generating evidence in order to recommend appropriate and evidence-based policies and strategies to end homelessness, in conjunction with the homeless people themselves.
- 3) We can foster the articulation and practice of a new kind of politics – expressed in compassion, generosity and justice.

Further, missiology’s participation in this collaboration confirmed to me that cherished missiological assumptions (such as ecumenical collaboration, contextual approach, interactive and shared process, holistic and integrated approach and different sources which inspire praxis and transformation as the goal) befit encounterological PAR that we have embraced in the Meal of Peace project. This is more so in terms of being aware that we can only contribute towards finding lasting, holistic and integrated solutions to homelessness in Tshwane in partnership with other disciplines and stakeholders within the confines of ethics.

Hence, firstly, it is important to obtain informed consent, as we did with the Meal of Peace project. We reaffirmed the basic rights of groups and individuals and the goals of the research in an honest manner. Secondly, we sought informed participation by participants as far as documented data are concerned and “that their voices are an integral addition in the process of the generation of meaning and an

important correction to the perspective of the researcher” (Wepener, 2005: 122). So that, as Wepener (2005: 122) put it: “Ethics and reliability (...) overlap in PAR in that consent (the ethical dimension) and informed participation (the scientific dimension) combine to break through the traditional rational discourse of one dominant researcher by also giving outsiders a voice”.

Participants are emancipated in the process and researchers can identify with the community of homeless people being studied in our case. In the same vein and in relation to PAR, Babbie and Mouton (2001: 59) contend, “The research community needs to identify with those on the periphery, the poor and oppressed in society” as we attempt to do through the Meal of Peace project. This way, collaboration is maintained and enhanced between subject and object in the generation of knowledge. Bosch (1991: 179) refers to this when he describes “how the primary agents in the process of inculturation are the local faith community and the Holy Spirit, and not as in the past the benevolent missionary” (see also Wepener, 2005: 116).

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

This chapter contributes to missiological education by contending that PAR should be embraced in transformative missiology, especially among marginalised communities such as the homeless people. However, given the fact that this chapter dwelt more on the theoretical conceptual field, another forthcoming contribution is envisaged to demonstrate experience in practising PAR.

In conclusion, my argument in this contribution articulates that 1) PAR as an approach enhances encounterology pioneered by Kritzinger. 2) An encounterological CBS is embedded in PAR and thus it is intentionally transformative. 3) In relation to addressing homelessness in Tshwane PAR, naturally action-oriented, adds value in terms of enabling missiologists to implement an agenda geared towards transformative missiology on one hand. On the other, it provides missiology, missiologists and mission practitioners with opportunities for continuous encounters done in an emancipatory fashion with grassroots participants. 4) Missiology embedded in PAR

holds great potential towards making missiology a relevant contributor in inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary research aimed at collective wellbeing of the *oikos* in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Thus, I concur with the words of Kritzing (2002: 150): “If the 21st century is to be about anything in Christian mission, then it must be about wholeness, about a creative and meaningful integration of the diverse dimensions of Christian action in society”. Therefore, I submit PAR should be the approach for mission encounters in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, especially for marginalised communities such as homeless people in Africa, who still suffer from multifaceted entrapments in all spheres of society. This is why I recommend that missiology must continue to see itself as a humble servant of the *oikos* and one among other disciplines of science, as it continues to participate in the realisation of the reign of God.



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## Chapter 2

# Encounters with the homeless people in Tshwane: participatory action research approach in Missiological education

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### Abstract

The aim of this conceptual chapter is to contribute to the discourse on a methodological framework for missiology. It is a very preliminary attempt at exploring the applicability of participatory action research (PAR) considerations in relation to missiology, particularly mission as encounterology pioneered by Kritzinger, JNJ. The value and relationship between PAR, Contextual Bible Study and missiology highlighted in this study shows that transformation is and should remain the aim as we work for collective wellbeing.

Building on the understanding of missiology as encounterology on one hand and on the other the use of Contextual Bible Study (CBS) as a tool to facilitate encounterological dialogue, this contribution demonstrates that 1) PAR enhances encounterology and adds value to transformative missiology 2) PAR is the most appropriate approach for mission in the 21st century because it makes missiology more participatory, a creative generator of knowledge and enthusiastically action-oriented 3) encounterological PAR has the potential to open up missiology so that it contributes towards inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary research needed to achieve collective wellbeing. With particular reference to studying homelessness in Tshwane, we (missiologists and other stakeholders) realise that PAR is an alternative approach of knowledge production based on the subjects' involvement in decisions regarding pathways out of homelessness in Tshwane.

**Keywords** Encounterology, Participatory Action Research, Contextual Bible Study, Homelessness, Tshwane

violence and familial. We encounter these people on the pavements of Tshwane and work with them for the purpose of studying and finding pathways out of homelessness. Together with us, since 2012 they have been participating in this research aiming at transformation - that is participatory action research (PAR). Why is the PAR approach important in Missiology? This is the main question this contribution attempts to answer.

In the process of answering this main question, I will firstly highlight PAR's value added to transformative missiology, especially how PAR makes mission and missiology continuously encounter-ological. We understand Missiology as "encounterology" – a critical study of how Christians respectfully and transformatively encounter "others". Kritzinger (2008: 764) explains: "This understanding is in contrast with what is commonly said of religious people that they are 'so heavenly-minded that they are of no earthly good'."

Secondly, I will further argue, in relation to migration, that a contextualising approach to missiology befits encounter-ology as it (should) guide the agents of mission to be consciously 'migrating' from preconceived mission *modus operandi* and to take seriously the different contexts from which communities come and that PAR is for me one of the research approaches which respects these.

Thirdly, based on personal experiences, I will highlight the potential that PAR has for making missiology truly inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary in very practical ways. This will lead to missiology being 'liberated' from various entrapments emanating from cultural and theological persuasions, which made it foster the perception of being "so heavenly-minded and of no earthly good". Finally, I will attempt to give some recommendations based on my experience and a conclusion. It is worth noting that the Biblical text has been central in our participatory approach.

## **Contextual Bible Study (CBS) as an encounterological method embedded in PAR**

CBS is a type of scripture-based focus group discussion (West & Ujaama, 2011). It is concerned with a Biblical interpretation, which is

knowledge” retrievable from library and government documents (Merrifield, 1997:2). In many instances, homeless people’s own knowledge gave the official knowledge meaning, as we have witnessed in Tshwane that led to the re-drafting of a new policy on how to deal with homelessness in the city. This gives us a hint that CBS embedded in PAR could inspire transformative missiology, which points to pathways out of homelessness.

## **PAR, missiology and pathways out of homelessness**

It is apparent from the foregoing that PAR and transformative missiology could work at intertwining to facilitate concrete solutions to address homelessness. PAR processes in communities imply, as stated above, doing research in a way that empowers the people, not the researchers. These processes resonate with CBS in terms of participants being empowered to read the Bible in order to retrieve from it insights needed to transform their own plight. Thus, PAR adds value to the main aim of transformative missiology.

### ***PAR’s value added to transformative missiology and encounterology***

It could be traced back, as early as the 1950s and 60s, that one of the origins of action research and participatory research emanated from “consciousness-raising practices” and the liberation theory developed, especially in Latin America under the impulse of Paulo Freire. The effects of this impulse spread across many sectors. Thiollent (2011: 161 – 162) elaborates that participatory methodology has been applied to “several sectors of social science (education, especially adult education), social service, rural extension, organisation, communication, political practices, as well as in the fields of collective health, nursing, environment, etc.” In theology, encouraging signs are evident in practical theology where tools of action research are consciously being added to its repertoire (see Graham, 2013) and in liturgical studies where PAR’s applicability is explored (Wepener, 2005: 111).

- 2) Missiology will be defined by the need for action. This simply means that transformative actions should give a clear purpose for doing missiological research. Hence, in our case we came together to pose 'hopeful actions' which should address homelessness. A variety of actions ranging from empowerment, building community and enhancing social cohesion on one hand take place each year in our case. On the other, reducing social distance and exclusion, including advocacy, have been implemented since 2012. Examples include our ongoing participation in homeless advocacy work and policy revision and reformulation in Tshwane.
- 3) Embedded in PAR philosophy, missiology will create knowledge but not for the sake of knowledge alone, as it is currently the case in many missiological circles. It should rather bring together knowing and doing (cf. Maguire, 1996: 32). The starting point should be, as Cornwall and Jewkes (1995: 1670) put it, in relation to the medicine sector to "affirm that people's own knowledge is valuable". Missiologists embedded in PAR must therefore, in the words of Cornwall and Jewkes (1995: 1670), "regard people as agents rather than objects, capable of analysing their own situations and designing their own solutions". What Cornwall and Jewkes contend resonates with the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach where we start on the premise that people have resources, including knowledge, gifts and assets (see Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993:14). With reference to homeless people in Tshwane, Ntakirutimana (2015: 64) confirms that people have gifts and assets - including knowledge - that are useful for their 'release' from homelessness and that of their community. In the same vein, Mangayi (2017: 1) also advocates, "Homeless people are strategic partners who are able to identify the issues that still bind them and (...) dream of alternative solutions". Therefore, knowledge (knowing) created through the Meal of Peace project encounters engenders actions (doing) which should lead to

generator of knowledge and enthusiastically action-oriented. In relation to the Meal of Peace project, the participatory approach has brought us, as missiologists, to a place where:

1. We find inspiration from collective and communal hermeneutics emerging from encounters through CBS sessions. We apply ourselves to reflect on hermeneutics emerging from pavements. We refer to this as encounterological reflection, so that we gain insights from our collaborators on the pavements of our streets. These emerging hermeneutics are starting to help us (academic missiologists) to see that our mission actions on many issues affecting the homeless community were deficient in many ways, because these actions did not take into account the insights of homeless people themselves.
2. We realise that these encounters afford us (homeless people and researchers) opportunity for continuous learning about issues associated with homelessness. Thus, knowledge generated is disseminated through publications in books and accredited academic journals. Materials gathered so far will be integrated in a formal course to be written on how to address homelessness. This course content comes not from academic missiologists who sit in ivory towers nor by homeless people on their own, but by both groups working in collaboration. This is, for me, one of the greatest insights as far as missiological education is concerned – a course content generated by both academics and people on pavements!
3. We have learned through the encounters that the voice from the pavement must take centre stage in an effort to design actions, which inform public policy and discourse. Indeed, the voice from the pavement took centre stage in the Homeless



We understand Christian mission to be a wide and inclusive complex of activities aimed at the realisation of the reign of God in history. It includes evangelism, but is at the same time much wider than that. Perhaps one could say that mission is the “cutting edge” of the Christian movement - that activist streak in the church's life that refuses to accept the world as it is and keeps on trying to change it, prodding it on towards God's final reign of justice and peace (Botha, Kritzinger & Maluleke, 1994:21)

I agree with Kritzinger (2002: 150) that “what needs to be added to the definition above is the dimension of the *missio Dei*. In other words, mission as an “activist streak” in the life of the church is embedded in – and an expression of – the mission of the triune God in history”. The expression of the mission of the triune God encompasses the whole of creation. Inputs from Botha, Kritzinger and Maluleke (1994) and Kritzinger (2002) in the foregoing attest to the fact that mission is intrinsically oriented to transformative action as it participates in *missio Dei*. The fact that mission refuses to accept the world as it is and keeps on trying to change it concurs with PAR's envisaged outcomes i.e. working, learning and acting together to make the world a better place, as God intended it to be. Mangayi (2016: 510) expands this understanding by contending, “Our mission's involvement in *missio Dei* has to embrace the whole of creation (i.e. *oikos*),” as manifested in the world in general and in Tshwane in particular.

Further, Mangayi (2016: 518 – 519) elucidates:

The *oikos* metaphor provides us with insights for sustaining the whole community of life – an interdependent and interrelated web that signifies *botho* in the community of life. Thus, working with the whole community of life means that Christians need to broaden the missiological agenda (...) beyond anthropocentric concerns so as to include all living beings and systems (...), which is part of this whole community of life. This all-inclusive nature of the *oikos*, as the household of God which consists of all living beings and living systems, and which concerns the wellbeing or shalom of all

living beings radically challenges theologians / missiologists to contribute to the vision for a sustainable future (...)

Thus, continues Mangayi (2016: 518 – 519):

It implies therefore that theology/missiology should not focus solely on spiritual and faith matters, but it should also contribute toward the realisation of sustainability in different spheres of life in an integrated manner – environmental, social, economic and urban-territorial. It could also provide a new ambit and new scope for missiologists and practitioners, so as to take their understanding of mission beyond just the salvation of human beings towards a vision of the redemption and re-birth of the whole of creation (see Rom.8: 19-23).

Understanding missiology and mission beyond salvation of human beings to include the whole of creation can only be realised as missiology intentionally embraces the inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary approach to research. For me, PAR could facilitate this realisation in two ways: 1) Missiology as a discipline should participate, learn and act as one among other disciplines in projects of redemption and re-birth of the whole of creation. It thus breaks away from its own isolation so that it contributes a perspective or insights, which should improve creation. 2) Missiological projects have to invite participation and collaboration from other disciplines, professionals and scholars from other disciplines, beneficiary communities and others. This will inevitably lead to these projects becoming owned by all who participate in them.

The pathways out of homelessness project – a collaborative research project which comprises the Tshwane Homeless Forum, the City of Tshwane, the University of South Africa and the University of Pretoria – is one example where researchers, professional practitioners, public servants, community leaders, faith-based organisations, politicians and others came together in an attempt to provide solutions to homelessness in Tshwane. Insights from disciplines such as social development, anthropology, youth studies, missiology, public and social policy, medicine, architecture and the like converged in a participatory manner to suggest inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary solutions to end homelessness in Tshwane.

The participatory action research approach adopted by this collaboration with a keen interest ensured “that the knowledge generated can immediately translate into interventions” (De Beer, 2015: 1).

The Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology represents the Meal of Peace project in this collaboration. Through participation in this inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary collaboration, we as missiologists realise, in the words of De Beer (2015: 1 – 2), that:

- 1) We can contribute to the articulation of theories on homelessness and generate new knowledge that could help generate innovative solutions and just alternatives to the status quo.
- 2) We can contribute towards generating evidence in order to recommend appropriate and evidence-based policies and strategies to end homelessness, in conjunction with the homeless people themselves.
- 3) We can foster the articulation and practice of a new kind of politics – expressed in compassion, generosity and justice.

Further, missiology’s participation in this collaboration confirmed to me that cherished missiological assumptions (such as ecumenical collaboration, contextual approach, interactive and shared process, holistic and integrated approach and different sources which inspire praxis and transformation as the goal) benefit encounterological PAR that we have embraced in the Meal of Peace project. This is more so in terms of being aware that we can only contribute towards finding lasting, holistic and integrated solutions to homelessness in Tshwane in partnership with other disciplines and stakeholders within the confines of ethics.

Hence, firstly, it is important to obtain informed consent, as we did with the Meal of Peace project. We reaffirmed the basic rights of groups and individuals and the goals of the research in an honest manner. Secondly, we sought informed participation by participants as far as documented data are concerned and “that their voices are an integral addition in the process of the generation of meaning and an

holds great potential towards making missiology a relevant contributor in inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary research aimed at collective wellbeing of the *oikos* in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Thus, I concur with the words of Kritzinger (2002: 150): “If the 21st century is to be about anything in Christian mission, then it must be about wholeness, about a creative and meaningful integration of the diverse dimensions of Christian action in society”. Therefore, I submit PAR should be the approach for mission encounters in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, especially for marginalised communities such as homeless people in Africa, who still suffer from multifaceted entrapments in all spheres of society. This is why I recommend that missiology must continue to see itself as a humble servant of the *oikos* and one among other disciplines of science, as it continues to participate in the realisation of the reign of God.

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