

# #MisconstruedIdentitiesMustFall collective: Identity formation in the current South African context: A practical theological perspective

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In South Africa, 2015 was violently ushered out by several 'must fall' campaigns, of which the most prominent were the 'fees' and 'Zuma must fall' campaigns. These 'must fall' campaigns conveyed a new sense of urgency by the disgruntled masses towards certain institutions and individuals. Aligning with the 'must fall' analogy, the focus of this article is on combatting the notion of misconstrued identities in post-apartheid South Africa. Based on negative generalisation and perceptions of the 'others', misconstrued identities prohibit the formation of a collective identity that allows for peaceful co-existence. Consequently, the dynamics of collective identity formation and some of the possibilities for identity formation that reside within the Christian faith are investigated from a practical theological perspective. Given that a practical theological investigation takes both the context and theological reflection as points of departure, it is argued that it can contribute towards the dismantling of misconstrued identities to provide clues for the formation of a positive collective identity for South Africans.

## Introduction

In South Africa, 2015 was violently ushered out by several 'must fall' campaigns, of which the most prominent were the 'fees' and 'Zuma must fall' campaigns. A semantic newcomer to the protest-ridden South African landscape, these 'must fall' approaches conveyed a new sense of urgency on the part of the disgruntled segments of the South African society towards certain institutions and individuals. Aligning with the 'must fall' analogy, the focus of this article is on the very important issue of national identity formation in post-apartheid South Africa – more specifically – on the notion that South Africans have grossly failed to form the type of identity that allows for peaceful co-existence within the current dispensation. It is argued that this state of affairs is partly the result of the misconstrued identities members of different population groups harbour of one another. Reinforced by a growing intolerance towards 'the other', the lack of a consolidated identity has become one of the most worrying South African realities. In light of this, the formation of an appropriate collective identity has become a matter of urgency. Consequently, some of the possibilities for identity formation that reside within the Christian faith are investigated from a practical theological perspective. Given that a practical theological investigation takes both the context and theological reflection as points of departure, it is argued that it can contribute towards the dismantling of misconstrued identities to provide clues for the formation of a positive collective identity for South Africans.

## A practical theological perspective

The issue of collective identity formation in the current South African context, which is the focus of this article, challenges practical theology to engage the public domain and thereby widen its scope. In the narrow sense of the word, earlier definitions of 'practical theology' had the church and the functions of the church offices in mind. This was especially applicable to earlier paradigms, such as the diaconological approach, which was interested in deducing Biblical principles for application by the offices of ministers, elders and deacons (cf. De Klerk 1978). Although the scope of practical theology, which later replaced the diaconological paradigm in South Africa, certainly had society in mind, it was still first and foremost interested in the proclamation of the gospel within the framework of the faith community. In this regard, Heyns and Pieterse (1990:7) suggest that the task of practical theology is to critically reflect on the theories underlying the practices of people's communicative religious actions in the service of the gospel – and where necessary – to produce better theory. Significantly, these communicative religious actions were best visible in congregational activities such as preaching, witnessing, pastoral care and so on, thereby confining the scope of practical theology to the congregation (Heyns & Pieterse 1990:7).

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As practical theological reflection is generally associated with critical reflection about the theory and praxis regarding the faith community, it is necessary to clarify the practical theological perspective of this article, in an attempt to move beyond the meaning of 'practical theology' in the narrower or ecclesiastical sense of the word. Osmer and Schweitzer (2003a:216) contend that practical theology should not be understood only in this confined sense, but also needs to be considered in terms of the secular world 'by addressing issues of the common life – local, national, and global public concerns – and by bringing theology into dialogue with contemporary culture'. Qualifying such an approach as a 'public practical theology', Dreyer (2007:47) denotes it as a broadening of the scope of practical theology to include the public life and also engage other academic disciplines in order to understand the psychological, social, cultural, economic, legal and political factors at work in religious praxis. Stoddart (2014) seems to suggest that all practical theological ventures that engage public issues such as health care and violence against women qualify as 'public practical theology'. Osmer and Schweitzer (2003b:6), on the other hand, qualify a public practical theology in terms of engaging a specific public aspect as well as the interdisciplinary nature of such ventures.

This article aligns with the notion that all forms of theology, including practical theology, are in fact public in nature (Koopman 2009:415). Theological interpretation never occurs in a vacuum and has implications for the context, which inevitably involve and engage society. This research is, therefore, comfortable to concur with the definition of Swinton and Mowat (2006:7) that denotes both a vertical (revelatory) and a horizontal (societal) axis: 'Practical Theology is critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive actions in, to and for the world'.

For the purpose of this article, two tenets of this definition are highlighted:

- 'Practical Theology ... is dedicated to enabling the faithful performance of the gospel and to exploring and taking seriously the complex dynamics of the human encounter with God' (Swinton & Mowat 2006:4).
- 'Practical Theology takes human experience seriously' (Swinton & Mowat 2006:5).

Starting with the focus on human experience, this definition creates space for engaging the current South African society that is suffering from numerous societal ills, such as a lack of a unified collective identity that can build towards the symbiotic co-existence of its variety of peoples, amongst others. It also creates space to focus on this experience in terms of the faithful performance of the gospel, given the perspective of practical theology as first and foremost theological. This provides an opportunity to seek new perspectives within the tension field created between the gospel and complex human experience currently encountered in the South African context.

## Identity: Identity formation and collective identity

The focus of this article makes it important to have some understanding of the concept of identity and the basic dynamics involved in the formation and functioning of identity, both on an individual and a collective level, as these seem to function in a reciprocal relationship.

Producing a simple definition of identity is a complex matter mainly because of the multi-layered meanings attributed to it in different disciplines, ranging from philosophy to social psychology. Some researchers, such as Beit-Hallahmi (1991:81), even suggest that definitions about identity are in an 'identity crisis', as definitions of 'identity' at best became vague and ill-defined, making a uniform definition challenging. A clear definition is also made difficult by the interplay between identity and concepts like the 'self' and 'self-concept' because they are sometimes used interchangeably (Slotter, Winger & Soto 2015:16).

Engaging with different authors therefore yields a variety of definitions. According to Chryssochoou (2003:227), 'Identity encapsulates simultaneously the way we think about ourselves and about the world in which we live'. Bilgrami (2006:5) contended that identity is constituted by a subjective and an objective identity. The former denotes how one conceives oneself to be, while the latter denotes who a person (in fact) is, according to certain biological facts about that person (Bilgrami 2006:5). Oyserman, Elmore and Smith (2012:69) define identity as the 'traits and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is'. The same authors also contend that individuals can have more than one identity, depending on the context they find themselves in, therefore opting for the plural 'identities' instead of the singular 'identity' (Oyserman et al. 2012:69). Another important and helpful distinction is between identity and self-concept, as they define self-concept as the sum total of different identities 'variously described as what comes to mind when one thinks of oneself' (Oyserman et al. 2012:69).

What transpires from these definitions is that identity comprises both individual and societal functions and is pivotal in connecting the individual and society. As Chryssochoou (2003:225) states, '... identity is a particular form of social representation that mediates the relationship between the individual and the social world'.

Consequently, identity, and the formation thereof, receives special focus within the field of human and social sciences because it seems to present a hermeneutical key for understanding the relationship between individuals and society as well as to explain and predict the behaviour of individuals in society. An early example of this is Erikson's (1965) development theory, which was especially concerned with how individuals negotiate certain age-related tasks in order to form their unique identities. In these earlier theories, the individual's ability to negotiate developmental tasks was

believed to be the main factor for the formation of the identity that would be able to engage society.

These days, it seems that the focus on the role of the individual in identity formation has made way for the role of society as a main factor in the formation of individual identities (Beyers & Goossens 2008:165). Referring to the so-called 'culture-identity link', social psychologist Côté (1996) stresses the role of culture as a key factor in determining the identities of especially young adults. Central to his argument is that radical changes in culture changed the way in which identity is formed and what identity eventually means. According to him, the 'problematic nature' of late modern society is responsible for the current fluid understanding of identity, namely, as something that must be continually 'discovered' by 'image consumption' and by pleasing others (Côté 1996:421–422).

The above discussion suggests that a reciprocal relationship between identity and society indeed exists, amongst others. Thus, people engage society through their individual identity, while society simultaneously exerts influence upon individuals who lead to ongoing identity formation.

Identity and identity formation is, however, not limited to individuals, but can also be used in the collective sense of the word. This makes it possible that a collective (a group of people) can develop an identity or that identity can be attributed to a collective. Based on the thinking of Von Hegel (1977), Chan (2013:21) suggests that individual identity builds the bridge to a collective identity: '... first we identify ourselves because of the existence of others. And based on the recognition of each other, a collective identity is formed'. This collective identity 'is a sense of recognition and an attachment to a certain group' (Chan 2013:12).

As is the case with individual identity, a dynamic process of internal and external factors is involved. One of the most important internal factors is the sharing of a communal history between individuals. In this regard, Muller (2008:20) suggests that collective identity as found in national groups, for example, rests on aspects such as a shared heritage, a common language, a common faith and a common ethnic ancestry that span a period of time. This implies that collective identity can grow stronger and can become more fixed over time.

Collective identity on an internal level is further formed and strengthened by the dynamics within the collective. Poletta and Jasper (2001:285) point out that collective identity is influenced by the positive feelings group members have for each other. Thus, the stronger the positive dynamics within the collective, the greater the collective cohesion and, consequently, the greater the collective identity would be.

On an external level, collective identity is formed through the identity that other collectives and individuals award to a specific collective. As Chan (2013:15) suggests, collective identity is also 'constructed by the outside world'. Collectives can,

therefore, *award* identity to one another based on factors – such as historical experience of the other or perceptions of the other – or simply by implying that *others are what we are not*. 'Others' are what our culture, beliefs, language or heritage is not. In this way, collective identity becomes socially constructed. Depending on how well a collective identifies with these awarded identities, they can either accept or reject it.

Two examples from the current South African context of such awarded collective identities are the so-called 'Black Diamonds' and the 'Born Frees'. 'Black Diamonds' refer to the growing black economic middle class in South Africa. Goyal (2010) attributes their coming into being to the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) programme that was introduced by the South African government post-1994. According to Donaldson et al. (2013:115), the term 'Black Diamonds' was coined by the TNS and UCT Unilever Institute survey in 2007 to denote the emerging economic black middle class. Referring to a rare and valuable gem, the analogy was aimed at a positive collective identity descriptive of the economic and upwardly mobile post-apartheid black middle class. Donaldson et al. (2013) ascribe three meanings to this collective identity:

First, it encompasses a category of blacks who are well-off through hard work but who are not necessarily highly educated. Second, blacks who are prosperous because they are better educated and therefore have managed to get well-paid jobs. Third is a dubious group of blacks who are wealthy because they are politically aligned to the ruling party, having greater access than others to government-related projects and employment opportunities. (p. 115)

Assuming the gemmological desirability of the rare black diamond, one might surmise that this collective identity would be embraced by all black South Africans who form part of this group. This is however not the case. As Sowetan Live columnist, Ezra Ndwandwe (2009), stated:

... I do not, in the least, like the term 'Black Diamonds'. In fact, I find it rather irritating, contrived and showing a desire to classify certain people in perception terms. As far as I am concerned it is a derogatory term ....

Ndanga, Louw and Van Rooyen (2010:298) also point out that 'The Black Diamonds are not a homogenous group'. In this group, black people differ in age, income as well as attitudes. This seriously challenges group cohesion, which is usually associated with collective identity – thereby illustrating that awarded collective identity is socially constructed and not always embraced by those to whom it is ascribed.

Another example is the so-called 'Born Frees'. 'Born Frees' is the term used to denote black South Africans born after 1994, after the fall of *Apartheid*. The following quote from Norgaard (2015) puts the inner tension that came with this awarded collective identity in perspective:

... often thought to possess an obvious and freely crafted identity. The very term suggests that young South Africans have been liberated from the weight of history, oppressive policy, and



centuries of exploitation. This generation is supposedly empowered to build for themselves a new life and for their fellow citizens a new country. Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth. (p. 233)

Although a collective identity such as the Born Frees resonates favourably with segments of society like the corporate world for its marketing purposes, it does not necessarily fit the group it is supposed to describe. As Norgaard (2015:237) states, 'While the "born free" concept may have some traction in the corporate boardroom, it remains an aspirational term all too seldom realized on the streets of South Africa'. Black people born after 1994 in fact see this awarded identity as a burden with no meaning. Like Leithead (2015) reports, with reference to a 'new and angry black consciousness', South Africa's born free generation is not happy: '... a new black consciousness is alive and well. And it is angry'.

In light of the aforementioned discussion, it seems safe to deduce that the formation of identity on both an individual and a collective level is a dynamic process. In terms of collective identity, internal and external factors work together to form the identities of collectives. On an internal level, shared experiences such as history, language and origin contribute to the formation of collective identity as well as the cohesion of members of the same collective. On an external level, the notion of awarded identity plays an important role because collective identity can be socially constructed and projected onto others as illustrated by the examples of Black Diamonds and Born Frees.

### Collective identity in the South African context

Within the framework of collective identity formation, South Africa's multi-cultured society potentially presents some challenges, which will be further explored in this section. Central to the argument is the collective identity of the proverbial 'rainbow nation', bestowed on South Africans in the advent of and shortly after the historical 1994 democratic election. Officially attributed to Archbishop Desmond Tutu (Buqa 2015:1), this term suggests an identity in which the plural converges into the singular – more accurately, where at least four different ethnic groupings (black, Asian, coloured and white South Africans) are converged into one nation. Given the fact that black South Africans alone can be further subdivided into more ethnic groups, the pluralistic nature of this collective identity becomes apparent. Irrespective of this, this awarded collective identity was promoted right from the start of the new democracy, with the late president Nelson Mandela enthusiastically applying this term in his inaugural speech on 10 May 1994 in Pretoria:

We enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity – a *rainbow nation* at peace with itself and the world.

Since then, the new South Africa has had to come to grips with its new collective identity. To aid this process, the

South African government embarked on a journey of so-called nation-building.

Horáková (2011) identifies at least three levels on which attempts of nation-building became evident. On an ideological level, 'Rainbowism' was probably most directly linked to the new collective identity of the Rainbow Nation immediately after 1994. Characterised by the euphoria and optimism of 1994, it sought to seize on the mood of the time to ingrain the newfound collective unity. Central to this attempt was the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. 'As a government-driven project, it envisaged the rapid growth of a single national identity and culture' (Horáková 2011:113).

Popular culture launched diverse marketing campaigns, such as 'Proudly South African' and 'Alive with Possibility', in an attempt to capture the imagination and commitment of South Africans to invest in the notion of the Rainbow Nation (Horáková 2011:114). Latching onto memorable moments like South Africa's Rugby World Cup victory in 1995, with the elated Mr. Mandela amongst the winning national rugby team, it indeed seemed to give impetus to the Rainbow Nation project.

In terms of political reform, 'transformation' became a bold attempt in realising the renewal of the 'old' South Africa into the 'new' South Africa. As can be imagined, this involved numerous government interventions especially aimed at getting the previously disadvantaged on board. Some of the most prominent of these interventions included outlawing racial discrimination on all levels and adopting policies like Black Economic Empowerment to give thrust to black economic inclusion (Horáková 2011:114).

Since 22 years of the new democracy has lapsed, it would not be unreasonable to probe the degree to which South Africans have accepted the collective identity of the Rainbow Nation. Even before interrogating socio-political developments of the most recent years, some observers point out that Rainbowism was sabotaged long before it had a fair chance of being accepted by the broad South African populace. In this regard, former State President Thabo Mbeki's challenge of Mandela's vision of a Rainbow nation cannot be overlooked. It effectively drove South Africans back into an explicit division between black and white, although initially based on the contrast in economic wealth (Jansen van Rensburg 2003:193). Mbeki's 'I am an African' address, which accompanied the adoption of the new constitution in 1996, and the 'South Africa: two nations' address in 1998 were significant in this instance as they changed the identity agenda from Rainbowism to Africanism (Horáková 2011:115). All of a sudden, the Rainbow Nation had to accommodate the notion of 'poor blacks' and 'rich whites', eventually sowing new seeds of distrust along racial lines.

The consequences for a positive collective identity formation were detrimental to say the least. If non-racialism was to be the glue that kept the Rainbow Nation together

(Kotze 2012:89), this unity was now under threat as a result of Mbeki's racial nationalist ideas and the notion of a 'white threat' (Johnson 2009:59). Unfortunately, it does not seem that Rainbowism was able to recover since then. Instead, the race-based fault line that prevented a unified collective seemed to deepen.

More recent probes into the state of South Africa's collective well-being do not seem to yield different results. In a recent article, which was written as part of a doctoral study, Buqa (2015) documented the lived experiences of some South Africans residing in the integrated environment of Olievenhoutbosch near Pretoria, Gauteng, regarding the notion of the Rainbow Nation and *Ubuntu*. Reflecting a good understanding of the *intention* of the Rainbow Nation as being 'united in our diversity', a *lived* experience of being united was not as obvious as a result of the persisting lack of trust amongst different groups. 't[T]rust is the number one disabler' (Buqa 2015:2), or as another respondent stated: 'Rainbow Nation means different cultures interacting together', but commenting on the experience thereof: 'Some South Africans are so stuck in *Apartheid*; other people are accusing each other on account of racial discrimination' (Buqa 2015:2). In his reflection on these reactions, Buqa (2015:4) refers to Msengana's (2006:8) claim that 'ordinary citizens do not yet have any clear sense of national identity and tend to maintain an ethnic mind-set'.

It, therefore, comes as no surprise that the demise of Rainbowism is proclaimed at a growing rate. In the *New York Times* of 12 April 2015, Sisonke Msimang declares, in a contribution entitled *The end of the Rainbow Nation myth*, 'we have lived with choreographed unity for long enough to know that we now prefer acrimonious and robust disharmony'. Leithead (2015) states that:

the coming together of the nation Nelson Mandela worked so hard for appears to have stalled. The 'rainbow nation' he spoke so much about is being seen as a failed project by many young, particularly black, South Africans.

Interestingly, the demise of Rainbowism is even welcomed by some:

Over the years, the fairy tale of the rainbow nation has quickly faded and I couldn't be happier for it. It delights me because, hopefully, we realise how complicated life in contemporary South Africa is and, hopefully, we are making the connections. (Anon 2015)

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If by these accounts South Africans failed to establish a unified collective identity under the umbrella of the Rainbow Nation, what have they established? The sources engaged in this article suggested that South Africans, instead of finding a consolidated identity, retained the mindset of 'us' and 'them'. This article however proposes that South Africans have not only remained where they were before the dawn of the new democracy, but that different racial groups have in the meantime formed and awarded identities to 'the others' that caused relations between different collectives to fail.

The endeavour to understand why this is the case has led to the notion that collectives have formed *misconstrued* identities of the 'others' over time and that this is responsible for the lack of a positive collective identity and even hostility in the current context. The term 'misconstrued' in this framework refers to an inaccurate understanding and interpretation of the others on which perceptions are based.

Placing the notion of misconstrued identities within the framework of collective identity formation yields several clues for the unfortunate state of collective identities in present-day South Africa. As suggested earlier, the formation of collective identity rests on both internal and external dynamics. On an internal level, positive collective identity formation thrives on common shared experiences such as the same ethnic origin, history, language and beliefs. It also thrives on positive mutual affinities amongst members of the same collective. On an external level, the collective identity of the 'other' is socially constructed by one collective and 'awarded' to the 'others'. This socially constructed identity is often based on experiences and perceptions of the 'other'.

Reminding ourselves about the pluralistic nature of the peoples that constitutes South Africa (Booyesen et al. 2007:1), it is difficult to locate common shared experiences on the key indicators of ethnic origin, history, language and beliefs. Rather, it can be said that the populace of South Africa find themselves on the opposing ends of these indicators: black people and white people, 11 official languages and an array of beliefs. Adding to this a history that contests to how these collectives have opposed each other for 364 years, the common shared experiences needed for collective identity formation quite frankly seem absent. Given the criteria for positive mutual affinities, the chances of positive collective identity formation seem dubious. In March 2016, the South African Institute for Race Relations released its 'Reasons for Hope' report. Although the report concluded that 'race relations remain generally sound' (South African Institute for Race Relations 2016:7), the introduction suggests that the findings of the report were made known earlier in light of the 'acrimonious race debate that gripped the country at the start of 2016' (SAIRR 2016). It further states that:

Much of the debate this year has been hostile and polarising. Social media, in particular, have spoken of an 'unbridgeable gap' that has developed between black and white South Africans. South Africans were said to have 'no interest in reconciliation, redress, and nation building'. (p. 1)

If the report found that 76% of respondents of their inquiry into race relations felt that it had improved or stayed the same since 1994 (SAIRR 2016:2), what is causing the discrepancy reflected by public opinion? This article suggests that it is the result of South Africans misconstruing the collective identities of the 'others'.

While a myriad of factors are involved in how identity is socially constructed, misconstrued identities at the very least involve generalisations and perceptions. As was the case for the Black Diamonds and Born Frees, all too often

experiences from individual encounters are attributed to a group. Through generalisation, these experiences are accepted as true for the whole group. Perception, in turn, is often formed by public opinion as expressed in all forms of the media, political forums and public institutions such as the church and educational institutions. Left unverified, public opinion turns into fact on which perceptions are based. It is contended here that these unverified generalised perceptions are at the heart of the current misconstrued identities characteristic of the volatile South African situation and it is these misconstrued identities which 'must fall' if South Africans want to be a Rainbow Nation 'at peace with itself' (Mandela 1994).

### The need for a new beginning: A theological perspective

Formation of identity is not foreign to the Bible and the Christian tradition. On an individual and collective level, a new identity comes through association with God and his Kingdom. This becomes apparent in the New Testament writings of Paul, in passages such as Ephesians 4:22 and Colossians 3:10–11, where Paul contrasts the old and new person as illustration of the new identity that results from faith in Jesus Christ. With reference to the teachings of Jesus in the gospel of Matthew, Viljoen (2014:233) highlights the example and teachings of Jesus Christ, who acts as a prototype of this new identity. 'Members of the community should follow the prototype and act in an appropriate manner' (Viljoen 2014:233), thus forming a new identity. The role of such an identity prototype is later also seen in Paul's letter to the Philippians when he urges them to 'do' what they have 'learned, and received, and heard, and seen' in him (Phlp 4:8).

Identity formation in Scriptures is, however, not as simple as merely following the prototype's example. It is in fact a spiritual process, as it is ultimately through faith in Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit that a new identity evolves in the lives of the followers of Jesus (cf. Ephesians 5). From a Christian perspective, a new identity in Christ flows from a faith relationship with him and the Holy Spirit, with a view on the immanent Kingdom of God. What is also not simple is how the identity that is projected in the Christian tradition is brought into relation with the secular world. Or, stated within the framework of this article, how can the Christian tradition contribute to a culture of positive identity formation in the current South African context?

In this regard, the thesis of Horrel (2007) is considered helpful. Horrel investigated the term *Christianos* as label and identity that designated the followers of Jesus Christ in New Testament times, as found in Acts 11:26, Acts 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16. He contends that this identity was not projected by the followers of Christ upon the world, but was in fact the collective identity *awarded* to them by the governments and society of the time (Horrel 2007:363). Because the followers of Christ distinguished themselves in terms of behaviour and values, it brought them to the attention of the rulers and

surrounding populace, thereby *earning* them the identity of Christians or followers of Christ. While this identity correctly identified believers with Christ, the meaning of this identity was at first misconstrued in that these *Christiani* were deemed 'members of this new superstition' (Horrel 2007:266) and were consequently persecuted. It was much later, under the influence of Constantine, that the collective identity of Christians gained a positive meaning.

Hence, it is suggested here that Christian faith communities can contribute to positive collective identity formation in present-day South Africa by distinguishing themselves as *Christiani* and in the process *eliciting* a collective Christian identity from society – in the process becoming a prototype worthy of assimilation. This approach, of course, also has implications for identity formation within the Christian faith community and also for how they award identity to others. Firstly, it involves identity formation as a spiritual process, assimilating the identity of Christ through knowledge of him and through the work of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, and as a result of the identity formed in this way, it urges the Christian faith community to be mindful of Christian values like love and acceptance and award identities to others through hospitable engagement, rather than misconstruing identities on the grounds of generalisations and perceptions. This may be conducive in the working towards positive, albeit a multi-layered, collective identity formation within a diverse populated country.

### Conclusion

This article focused on the lack of positive collective identity in the current South African context and suggested that this can in part be contributed to misconstrued identities different collectives harbour of one another. It raised the urgency of a positive collective identity formation within this context by aligning with the 'must fall' analogy – especially in light of the reported deterioration in relationships amongst the different collectives that thrives on misconstrued identities.

The article reflected on the issue of identity formation from a practical theological stance, with the South African society in mind, thereby investigating the issues of identity and the formation thereof on individual and collective levels. It pointed out that identity functions as an interface between the individual and society, awarding identity an important link in societal stability. It also indicated that identity formation takes place on a collective level. In the case of collective identity formation, three key factors were identified. Firstly, shared experiences such as the same history and ethnic background are conducive for collective identity formation. Secondly, a positive affinity for others within the same collective stimulates collective identity formation. A third way of collective identity formation is through the identities awarded to one collective by another. Collectives can either accept or reject these awarded identities as illustrated from the South African context by the Black Diamonds and Born Frees.



The challenging nature of positive collective identity formation was further explored by investigating the notion of the Rainbow nation as collective identity awarded to South Africans since the dawn of the new democracy. Despite concerted efforts through nation-building, popular culture and transformation, it was shown that Rainbowism was until now not accepted by South Africans, mainly because the prerequisites for collective identity formation were absent. Instead, South Africans engaged in a process of misconstrued identity formation which operates on the principles of generalisation and prejudice. In spite of statistical indications that collectives are at peace with one another, societal realities attest to the opposite and underline the urgency of a positive collective identity formation.

Framing identity formation in Scriptures, it was indicated that Jesus Christ functioned as prototype of a positive identity. Identity in Biblical terms is then formed by imitating the conduct of the prototype – not as in a mechanical fashion, but through faith and the work of the Holy Spirit.

In a pluralistic society like South Africa, it would, however, be presumptuous to assume that all people should conform to a Christian identity. Rather, Christianity must be expressed in such a way that a Christian identity can elicit a collective positive identity from society based on the Christian values of, love and acceptance rather than generalisation and prejudice, amongst others. This may be conducive in the working towards a positive, albeit a multi-layered, collective identity formation within a diverse populated country. But, most importantly, it can help to work towards the fall of misconstrued identities.

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