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Re-reading Luke's community: The ambivalence of location and identification from a social identity complexity lens

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Abstract

This article interrogates and examines the community of Luke and the ambivalence of the location, composition, and identity problematics issues through the Social Identity Complexity perspective (SIC hereafter). The fundamental questions which this article seeks to grapple with are: Was the community of Luke Corinth, Ephesus, or Antioch? Which social boundary markers were erected among the multiple and complex social groups within the community of Luke? The arguments in this article are framed by insights from the Social Identity Complexity Theory which was developed by Roccas and Brewer (2002). The SIC perspective is useful and relevant in re-reading and problematizing identity markers of the numerous social groups within the community of Luke. The article also explores a significant aspect of the troubled composition of the social groups in the community of Luke. This study established that there are multiple and complex social identity formations in Luke's community. Furthermore, the social identities of the members of the Lukan community were fluid, nuanced, and troubled, as highlighted in the discussion in this article.

Keywords

Social identity complexity; Luke's community; location; Jewish Christians; Hellenistic Christians

Social identity complexity perspective

This study examines the ambiguity of the location, composition and identity dichotomises in the community of Luke. This article is directed by the following research question: What are the complexity identities that are found in the community of Luke? The article focuses on examining the social boundaries in the probable community of Luke, namely: Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, the rich and poor, God-fearers, and those living in villages and urban areas.

This research is informed by insights of the Social Identity Complexity theory in investigating the intersection and complexities in the community of Luke. The perspective will be used in the examination of overlapping and conflicting identities that are found in the first century Christianities of the community of Luke. Roccas and Brewer (2002) are the forerunners of the concept of social identity complexity as a method of interpreting social identity in groups which scholars such as Kok (2014) and Dube (2009) have applied in the study of the New Testament studies. The Social Identity Complexity theory was developed by Roccas and Brewer (2002), from Tajfel's (1982) Social Identity theory and Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherill's (1987) self-categorisation theory. The two theories examine the intergroup behaviour and the social identity of the group. Whereas Roccas and Brewer (2002) understood social identity complexity as "a new theoretical construct that refers to the nature of the subjective representation of multiple group identities" (Roccas and Brewer 2002:88–89), the theory tries to explain how a person with several group (in-group) identities (which identifies with not only other people's identities, but how diverse individualities) are independently joined to give an all-encompassing picture of a person's in-group membership. "Individuals may see their range of social identities as overlapping, whereby only individuals who share memberships across the sum of the identities are seen as in-group members, and those that share none or only a few are out-group members" (Kok 2014:20). This article seeks to make a unique contribution in the Luke-Acts scholarship by applying the models suggested by Roccas and Brewer (2002), namely, compartmentalisation, intersection, dominance and merger to the community of Luke showing that identities are not static but are fluid, complex, dynamic, and ever evolving.

The historical development of social identity complexity in New Testament studies

The contemporary scholar and precursor in utilising the social identity approach in interpreting the New Testament of our day is Esler (1998). "The social identity approach involves social differentiation based on group membership and includes consideration of salient group norm, boundaries, and rituals" as argued by Baker (2011:232). In studying the Gospel of John, Galatians, and Romans, Esler (1998), utilised several components of the social identity perspective. Esler (1998), in studying the epistle of Galatians, concentrated on inter-group dynamics and the variances which were amongst out-group and in-group membership. He suggested that Paul's fundamental objective in Galatians was to sustain and form the Christ-following identity of the group. Paul addressed the Christ-following group, which consisted of non-Judeans and Judeans. Identities were formed by constructing borders of these assemblages. Paul's concern in Galatians was not just Christian freedom but also referring to the group identities which were based on social borders among Jews' in-groups and out-group readers.

In addition to Galatians, Esler (2003) also considered Romans in a diverse style with that of Galatians. On his (Esler's) methodological approach to Romans, he concentrated his research on the growth of a broad in-group identity and intra-group dynamics. Esler (2003) observed that there was a deep-seated tension amongst the non-Judeans and Judeans Christ-followers in the congregations in Rome. This took place after the Jews returned to Rome subsequent to the declaration of Claudius. Baker (2011:232) states that "Paul, in Romans, tried to construct a common in-group identity between the two social groups who were in that community." The main focus was to form a wider possibility for Christians group identities, with both social groups.

The ambivalence of the location of the community of Luke

There is ambivalence in as far as the location of Luke's community is concerned. The community of Luke is troubled with different descriptions and counter arguments that range from destinations such as Antioch, Corinth, and Ephesus. A number of scholars, such as Esler (1994:26) and

Moxnes (1994:380) do not agree on a particular and specific location which instituted the community of Luke. The situation is different in the Gospels where there are precise environments for the authors such as Matthean, Johannine and Marcan communities. The community of Luke is dissimilar where there are several communities, as opposed to a specific community. Ephesus is the first probable community of Luke to be discussed below.

Ephesus

A number of explanations have been offered by scholars to propose that Ephesus is one among the probable communities of Luke. The main proposition was proffered by Moxnes (1994:380) who argues "that the community of Ephesus exhibits an environment which is in the Hellenistic diaspora of the Roman Empire." It is likely that the community was composed of both Gentile and Jewish Christians. It is also credible to contend that in the community of Luke, the Gentiles could have been a dominant social group which could not have been converted to Christianity but might have been acquainted with the synagogues of the Jews. The dominance of the Gentiles in the community of Luke is in tandem with Roccas and Brewer's (2002) dominant model, which argues that social identities assume one main group identity, whereas all additional possible group identities are minor. Keener (2012:428) is probably right in contending that "Luke was writing to social and religious groups which were acquainted with the knowledge of Jesus' proclamation of the gospel; otherwise, he could have explained such terms like 'the Kingdom of God' and 'Son of Man'" (Esler 1994:26). Moxnes (1994:380) suggests that Luke could have had a specific community in mind, and this could be Ephesus.

Nevertheless, researchers such as Riches (1993:234) and Esler (1994:26) argue that Luke might have been troubled by the developing and upcoming churches that were dispersed across the Roman Empire. If Riches' (1993:234) proposal is authentic, it may be problematic to conceptualise Luke's community as Ephesus alone. A fundamental claim by Esler (1994:26) is that "his intention was to show 'particular relationships' involving Luke's religious, theological, political and linguistic social settings." This interconnectedness formed Christian social groups "of a certain type, all of them being characterized by a quite circumscribed set of tensions

within their membership and with the world outside" (Esler 1994:26). It is most probable that these "tensions" mighty have been adequate in their viewpoint as it was found in the Hellenistic cities of the Roman Empire. Esler (1994:34) contends that "the address by Paul to the older people of the Church of Ephesus (Acts 20:17–35) might have implied that Luke had a particular community in mind. Such a view finds credence especially when he refers to the Ephesian Church as a "flock" where elders were the shepherds." Paul cautioned his followers that "fierce wolves" would lead them astray after his departure. It is, therefore, most probable that Ephesus might be the community of Luke as suggested by Esler (1994). Esler (1994:26) referred to the advice which "Paul gave to the older people of the Ephesian Church that they should look after the flock after his departure for 'fierce wolves' may come and misguide the community." The matter could not have been just message to Luke's community. Nonetheless, Paul had previously foretold the glitches that would disturb Christians in the near future after his departure. It is against this background that Luke champions the impression of the 'flock' in the context of predicaments of the Christian community. Luke, in his community, discovered, observed, and erected religious and social borders within his community and outsiders. This description of Luke agrees with Roccas and Brewer's model of compartmentalisation, which argues that social identities are context-specific, where the context or situation will define which group's identity will be more visible, with clear demarcations between the two social groups such as the Jews and Gentiles. According to Esler (1994:27), "this was a measure which was instituted by Luke to keep away enemies who were coming from outside and crossing into and threatening the community." There were also challenges that originated from the community Luke itself. The idea of disconnectedness of the community of Christians was typical of the environment in Luke's Gospel wherever Jesus taught: "[d] o not fear, little flock, for the Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom" (Lk 12:32). It is probable that the repeatedly used term ""flock" is suggestive of the view that the social groups were members of a small Christian community experiencing hardships from within and without" (Esler 1994:27). Several scholars, such as Schnabel (2004:265), Theissen (1982:50), Elmer (2006:1–11) and Oakman (1991:156) agree in principle that Luke was having a particular Christian community in mind, but this view is contested by others who have a different view. Yet, according to

Keener (2012:430), "Ephesus might be a plausible community of Luke." It is most likely that Keener (2012:430) advocated this since it was in Ephesus in which Luke offered more time of his missionary work and that is where the climax of Paul's ministry was reached. Furthermore, it was in Ephesus where Luke was buried. If this view is authentic, it, therefore, implies that Ephesus was possibly Luke's community.

Luke's community seems to have been located outside Palestine. This view is fundamentally grounded on the precise evidence which is from Pauline epistles and Luke-Acts. According to Moxnes (1994:380), "Luke's description of houses seems to depict a contrasting environment as well as the way of life from that of a village in Palestine." Subsequently, it is most likely that Luke's community could have been a cosmopolitan setting, possibly in Ephesus.

Corinth

Corinth is another possible locality of Luke's community. According to Keener (2012:432), "Corinth is the plausible location for the community of Luke because Christians appeared to stay there peacefully." In 52 CE, Luke and Paul arrived in Corinth in Paul's second missionary journey. Paul, when he arrived in Corinth, observed that the political environment was not the same as that of Antioch. Corinth became a great city in the third century BCE that was branded by economic boom in the Greek world. According to Engels (1990:15), "[t]he problem came when Corinth was colonised by Macedonia around 222 BCE." Throughout the period which Corinth was under the Macedonian rule, it (Corinth) had problems for a century. The condition got worse when the Romans colonised Corinth, which resulted in massive slaughter of Corinthian males, while children and women were sold into slavery (Millis 2010:21). The massacre by the Romans was championed by general Mummius, who precisely invaded Corinth. Julius Caesar ascended to power in around 44 BCE and proclaimed Corinth a Roman colony. Corinth became a brand-new city with new religious, political, cultural, and linguistic organisations. "The city of Corinth got back its glory and it returned to its original status of becoming the Roman capital in the province of Achaea" (Engels 1990:16). It is this background which motivated Luke to live at Corinth due to its

peacefulness and calmness, which turned out to be his operating base for missionary activities.

Corinth had a tactical place that favoured decent trade for the importers who journeyed from Rome to Asia. The economy of Corinth grew significantly which Engels (1990:18) noted: "Corinth is called wealthy, because of its commerce, since it is located on the Isthmus and is master of two harbours, one which leads straight to Asia and the other to Italy." The site of Corinth was geographically significant for commercial activities in the Roman Empire, which resulted in bringing a large proportion of wealth to several people of different standing and social identities. From a religious perspective, there were two gods in Corinth, namely, Poseidon and Aphrodite. The gods were a centre of attraction for several tourists from different parts of the Empire. "Poseidon was understood as a sea god along with earthquakes while Aphrodite was called a war god" (Engels 1990:99), whereas Millis (2010:30) argues that "another role of Aphrodite was in worship reflected by the nude images from her waist as she bathed which shows that she was worshipped through sexual activities." There is a probability that this could explain the reason for sexual immorality that Paul was fighting at Corinth assembly (1Cor 5:1ff). Consequently, it could be probable that Ephesus may have been the community of Luke not Corinth, as proposed by Keener (2012:432).

Antioch

This research takes the position that the community of Luke was Antioch. This is based on views of several scholars, such as Harris (1985:266) who argues that "Luke was a Greek physician who lived in Antioch in ancient Syria." Yet, some, such as Bart (1989), propose that Luke was a Hellenistic Jew. Bart (1989:157) suggests that "the theology and linguistic discourse of Luke-Acts is characteristic of a gentile Christian who was writing for a gentile audience." In addition, Bart (1989:158) claims that it is reasonable to think that Luke-Acts has been written to an audience that composed of both Jewish and Gentile Christians because there is great emphasis on the mission to gentiles. The community which is being discussed here is probably Antioch. It is probably because of the proximity between Antioch

and Jerusalem. Therefore, the Jewish people may have been significantly opposing the Gentile believers.

DaSilva (2004:371) raised several arguments which point to the fact that Luke's community could possibly be Antioch, since Antioch was the base for Paul's mission to spread the Gospel to Europe (Acts 15:40; Acts 16:11). It is most probable that Luke was one of the group members who carried missionary work to Europe. It has been suggested that Timothy, Silas, and Paul were workmates of Luke who were staying in Antioch. According to DaSilva (2004:371) "the author of Acts was Lucius/Luke of Cyrene who was known as one of the prophets and teachers in Antioch (Acts, 13:1ff)." It is probable that Lucius was the one who is found in Romans 16:21. He could have been a preacher who used to preach to Gentiles in Antioch and was most probable Paul's companion during his second missionary journeys.

According to Dunn (2006:180), "Lucius was not given his proper position and prominence in Antioch. In this regard, he could not be Lucius of Cyrene who was a very important person in Antioch." It can be pointed out that the writer could not provide the importance of name order during Luke's time. Nevertheless, Paul provided Lucius distinction by placing him on number two out of the eight people whom Paul hailed in Romans 16:21–23, indicating social, religious, and cultural hierarchy. Thus, the person Lucius could not have been Luke who resided in Antioch and was Paul's companion in his missionary activities.

According to DaSilva (2004:374), "it is possible that the author of Luke-Acts may have mentioned his own name." If it can be asked, why is it not so? It is more probable that the author(s) who wrote the Gospel and Luke-Acts mentioned their names. However, other Gospel authors, such as John and Matthew, ascribed to people who named them in their books. Furthermore, writers such as Josephus made self-references to the works they wrote. Nonetheless, writers such as Mark, Luke-Acts, Matthew, and John did not make self-reference to their works, which agreed with Jewish style of literature which could be traced as early as the historical books of the Old Testament. This style of writing could have been used in order to encourage readers to concentrate on the text rather than the author.

There is a probability that Lucius, who stayed in Antioch, could have been the author of Luke-Acts. There is a possibility that Antioch could have been

Luke's community. It is also most likely that the writer could have been Lucius of Cyrene (Acts 13:1ff), who was a witness to other proceedings which the author recounted as moving further than the "we" sections. Consequently, Antioch becomes a more probable Luke's community in which he stayed.

A relevant feature to consider and examine on the location of the possibility of Luke's communities is the geography of Antioch and Jerusalem. It is probable that Luke was more familiar with the geographical settings from Jerusalem to Antioch. This is so due to the fact that Antioch was nearer to Jerusalem than both Ephesus and Corinth. The nearness of Jerusalem to Antioch resulted in the Jewish Christians having greater impact on the Christians staying in Antioch than Christians in both Ephesus and Corinth. This close proximity also gave rise to the church of Antioch being under the church of Jerusalem (Acts 11:25–26). Due to the solid impact of the church of Jerusalem to the church of Antioch, DaSilva (2004:374) argues that "the latter church developed to be the centre of conflict based on whether or not Christians as a social group should allow Gentile converts to cross their social boundary markers to be circumcised and observe the Mosaic Law before they are accepted in the Christian community." The tension eventually resulted in the convening of the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1–35).

Significance of Antioch

Antioch became a very important city, for it was a springboard to evangelise the gospel in the Roman Empire and the diaspora. It became one of the greatest heavily populous cities during that time and was extremely polytheistic, religiously. The overpopulation which was in Antioch caused serious problems of inner strife and diseases. Strauss (2011:284) claims that "Antioch was the third largest city in the Roman Empire (after Rome and Alexandria) and some estimated that its population was about 500,000."

The other significant component for Antioch was its diversity, linguistically and culturally. Antioch as an urban centre had several similar features that bear a resemblance to a city of today. This resulted in attracting several people from a variety of countries with different cultures and languages.

"These numerous people were categorised into multiple social identity formations which included traders, travellers and the residents of Antioch" (DaSilva 2004:374). The various social identities mirrored Antioch as Luke's community. The circumstance that there was diversity of cultures in Antioch follows that there was also religious tolerance and pluralism. The array of cultures and social identities conveys in the complexities of identities and intersections as evident in Roccas and Brewer's (2002) model of intersectionality in social interface within diverse social groupings. To maintain order and peace in Luke's community (Antioch) due to the variety in religion, culture, ethnicity, culture and language, various social groupings had characterised themselves by erecting walls to demarcate different social groupings from each other. Although the numerous social groupings had been grouped this way, there were overlaps and complexities in Antioch. In the same vein, a participant of each social group in Luke's community could act in various ways in connection with the social group where they fitted, that encompassed the family situation, neighbourhood, and nationality. This is in line with Roccas and Brewer's (2002) model of intersection, where those who are not part of the common identity are the out-group members. In the community of Luke, all social groups shared the same environment, which was Antioch, though they had different identities in other situations. In agreement with Roccas and Brewer's (2002) Social Identity Complexity model of intersection, DaSilva (2004:374) aptly argues that "these walls generally acted as social boundaries among these social groups." Rowe (2012:264), in agreement with DaSilva, argues that the Jews remained inside the boundaries of their peculiar barriers and the same with the Romans and Greeks, who displayed inclusive and exclusive practices. The social boundaries they constructed signified the variances in their social identities and alignment, though both stayed in Antioch together. It is probable that identities in Luke's community, particularly in Antioch, were more ambiguous, fluid, and complex than what is prevailing today. On arrival in Antioch, Barnabas and Paul detected that there was a social boundary that separated Jews from Gentiles. From the perspective of a social identity complexity, the implication is that Jews were having their identifiable norms, values, centre of their religious faith, languages, and law. Yet, the Jews and Gentles intersected at some point in this community. These acted as social boundary markers, in contradiction with other religious beliefs and ethnic practices. It is interesting to note that the Jews

viewed their identity as divinely favoured by God and authentic. While the social identity of the Greeks was founded on wisdom and great civilisation, their "social boundary markers were centred on "gaining knowledge and cultivating the human society" (Rowe 2012:265). The Romans were the final social group. The Romans' social identity was primarily wedged on political power. The complexity is apparent once all the social groupings combine and overlap in social interface, showing that identities are unstable, dynamic, and fluid. This investigation problematises the conception that Luke's community could be Antioch, possibly due to its proximity to Jerusalem, as it is disputed by scholars stated in the above debate.

The above arguments are insightful, and they speak to the ambivalence of community of Luke location, which is in line with debates about identity construction complexity. The intricacy, ambivalence, fluidity, and troubling terrain of identity-formation is well-explored by scholars such as Hall (2003), Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987), Kok (2014), Bhabha (1990/1994) and Roccas and Brewers (2002). These scholars agree that identities are in the process of becoming, and are always, contested since there are no explicit boundaries of identification that are not troubled.

Identity complexity in Luke's community

Diverse arguments were put to the fore on the configuration of the social groupings in Luke's community (Esler 1998:31; Bock 2007:27). It has been argued that the social groupings in Luke's community consisted of (1) mainly Gentile Christians, (2) but some thought they were largely Gentile Christians with few Jewish Christians, and (3) while others assume there could have been chiefly Jewish Christians (Halvor, 1994:380; Witherington, 1998:64; Esler 1994:31; Bock, 2007:27). Esler (1994:31) claims that there are several scholars who go for argument one, while a few supports the second opinion, whereas almost none support the third view. Others have the view that probably Luke could have been writing for the Jewish audience, even if the Gentiles were more than the Jewish Christians in his congregation. This study supports view number two, that shows the environment as most probable. Esler (1994:31) is right in claiming that "the second opinion may imply that the majority of Gentiles in Luke's congregation might not have

been converted to Christianity, but chances are that they could have been familiar with Jewish synagogues."

The views presented above resonate well with the dominant model of social identity complexity, which argues that a person can have one main group identity where certain group identities could be minor (Roccas and Brewer 2002). According to the above views, the Gentiles were a dominant social group, while the Jews were secondary social group. In this case, the dominant social group are the Gentiles who are the in-groups, which is well-defined as those who are part of the membership of the main in-group grouping; the rest of the social group memberships are those which are outside the in-group being the Jews.

Hellenistic/Gentile community

In Luke's community, Jewish Christians are referred to as out-group members, while Gentile Christians are considered as the in-group members. The boundary markers of out-group members were different from those of the in-group members. Luke's community as a social grouping subscribes to Paul's teaching of 'justification by faith' that was not similar to Jewish Christianity, with its doctrine of justification by the works of the Law, paying its commitment to the Jerusalem temple (Story, 2010:34). This is based in Acts 11:19–16, in which the doctrine of justification by faith to the Gentiles is articulated. Scholars such as Räisänen (1992:186), Koester (2000:96) and Kim (2002:76) argue that the Hellenist Christians initiated the mission to the Gentiles before their expulsion from Jerusalem. Chances are that the expelled Hellenistic Christians reverted to Jerusalem during the Council in Acts 15. An examination of the material in Luke demonstrates that the Gentiles were not approached by the Hellenist Christians during the early stages of their mission in Jerusalem. There is a probability that the doctrine of justification by faith to the Gentiles could have taken place after Stephen's execution.

Elmer (2006:5) argues that "Hellenists (ἑλληνστάί) were a Greek-speaking social group that at times clashed with the Hebrews; that is, the Aramaic-speaking Jerusalem Church members over the distribution of food (Acts 6:1–6)." The clashes resulted in the selection of seven Hellenist Christian

Elders. "The Gentile Christians disregarded the essential observations and beliefs of the Jews (Judaism) such as the Temple, circumcision and the observance of the Torah as important" (Koester, 2000:98). This ultimately resulted in Judaizers executing Stephen. "[t]he Stephen group were scattered from Jerusalem to different parts of the region and, in this process, an early form of Hellenistic Jewish "Christian" emerged giving them a new identity which was independent from Jerusalem and the Temple" (Jorg 2012:456).

Joseph Barnabas was a prominent out-group member of the Hellenist Christian community who was also a notable member of the community of Jerusalem (Acts 4:36–37; 9:27). The involvement of Barnabas in the Antiochene social group is not clear. Elmer (2006:6) is probably right in alleging that "chances are that Barnabas followed Paul in Antioch probably sent by the Jerusalem Church to supervise Paul's mission to the Gentiles." Schnabel (2004:658) further claims that it could be that Barnabas was linked with the Stephen group (Acts 13:1) that at some point absconded to the Hebrew social group after the split among them and the Hellenists. Barnabas, an associate of the Jerusalem social group, was probably tasked to go to Antioch by his social group, the Church of Jerusalem, but was so enthusiastic to be part of the mission to the Gentles that he thought of joining the community of Antioch (Schnabel 2004:659; Elmer, 2006:6; Jorg 2012:457). Although the Antiochene community was still having Jewish people, a novel and distinctive form of identity developed, with diverse identity indicators such as Torah, purity laws and Temple. Barnabas became a very important figure who participated in the mission to the Gentiles.

In this study, it is essential, at this juncture, to deliberate on how Paul joined the Antiochene social group and state that he had several identities, which is in tandem with social identity complexities which Roccas and Brewer (2002) advocated. It is typical to Paul, who had several group memberships to which he belonged, due to his approach inclusivity in his mission. Paul grew up in Tarsus as a diaspora Jew, was educated under Gamalial, was radically converted to Christianity on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians, and he became a teacher of the Jewish Law (Marevesa 2019; Kok 2014; Neyrey, 1995). This is evidence of Paul's multiple identity as fluid, dynamic, evolving, and complex. "Paul claims in Galatians 1:11–17 that his gospel of justification by faith came to him through a 'revelation from Jesus Christ' and that he did not receive it through any human involvement" (Esler

1994:31). It is possible that Paul could not visit Jerusalem for fourteen years (Galatians 2:1). This view argues that Paul started to preach to the Jews, but they could not accept his preaching because they were suspicious of him and he later on went to Antioch. On the other hand, Schnabel (2004:2659) challenges this view by saying, "this reconstruction of events can only be valid if the historical situation of the entire Hellenists is rejected." One can argue that this argument could cause further complications and damage because there is no evidence to support it.

According to Jorg (2012:457), "[t] is not clear how Paul got acquainted with his mission to the Gentiles and specifically with the Antiochene social group." It can be pointed out that Paul's mission could have started in Damascus, where he was converted to become a preacher. Then at Damascus Paul's social identity changed to become missionary and he also deconstructed the social boundary which he had erected from a persecutor to an apostle. This agrees with Dunn (1997:251), who claims that "he got transformed" "from being a persecutor to an advocate of a Law-free mission to the Gentiles." In this context, one can point out that there were clearly two characteristic social groups that were found in the first century Church. Ideally, there was a Jewish Christian social group that resided in Dispersion, observing the Mosaic Law, while there was also a Gentile social group or Hellenist Christian social group which believed in justification by faith staying in Antioch.

The community of Luke and its composition is significant and quite important when considering the Lukan scholarship. The examination of the literature of Luke demonstrates that there was an existence of a Gentile addressee that got the Gospel Paul. "This argument is based on the premise that one can identify the "composition of Luke's community by observing significant pattern of emphasis among those people whom he singles out in his Gospel and in Acts as sharing in the message of salvation" (Esler 1994:33). The two social groups were in common because of the concept of table-fellowship in their community. If the contents and events in Luke-Acts are examined without relating them to Paul's letters, it is possible that the conclusion reached could be faulty, because Paul's letters act as important control of historical developments and events of the first century church. The community of Luke seems to constitute a combination of both Gentiles and Jews brought together by table-fellowship. The purpose was possibly

to bring unity and balance among the Jews and Gentiles communities. This could be the most considerable assessment on the configuration of the community of Luke, given that there were more Gentiles than Jews in the Roman Empire.

The argument above is in line with Marevesa (2019:51), who argues, with reference to compartmentalisation model, that "this representation, social identities are situation specific. In other contexts, an individual's group membership develops mainly on the basis of his/her social identity whilst some group identities may become a dominant identity in some different environments." In this context, the Jewish identity was more dominant than the identity of the Gentiles, showing compartmentalisation of identities in this community.

The God-fearers

The God-fearers is the other social grouping that existed in Luke's community. Esler (1987:24) notes that "[t]he Lukan community was composed of Jews and Gentiles but the God-Fearers were slightly different from proselytes." The God-fearers joined in ceremonial (ritual) regulations of the Mosaic Law, yet they could not participate fully in being circumcised. To be precise, God-fearers were not entirely transformed into Judaism. Collins (2000:269) suggested that in "the Book of Act, the phrases σεβομένοι τὸν Θεόν (Acts 17:4, 17) and φοβούμενοι τὸν Θεόν (Acts 13:16, 26) technically mean 'Pious Gentiles." Esler (1987:36) states that God-fearers are a social group which imitated Jewish traditions, such as loving and worshipping the Israelite God, food laws, observing the Sabbath, among others. They could also visit Jewish synagogues and believed in one God. All the same, the God-fearers did not have vibrant social class due to the fact that their social boundary markers were not well-defined.

There are several examples of Gentile God-fearers who were transformed to Christianity. Tyson (1992:67) claims that Theophilus is an example (Lk 1:3; Acts 1:1) of a God-fearer who was a lover of God. The Ethiopian eunuch is the other example of a God-fearer (Acts 8:27–39) who worshipped in synagogues whenever he came to Jerusalem. Other prominent God-fearers included in Luke-Acts are Cornelius (Acts 10:1–11:18), the second

Centurion, (Lk 23:47) Lydia and the prison guard (Acts 16:14, 25–34), and the first Centurion or the Master of the sick slave (Lk 7), among others.

It is imperative to consider how the first century Church reacted to the existence of the God-fearers. This is evident in how the Jerusalem Council dealt with Gentiles when accepting them into Jewish Christianity without observing Mosaic Law. The circumcision party or the Pharisees restricted the admission of Gentiles into the Christian community. Gentiles were expected to be circumcised and observe all the Torah requirements. Both Paul in Galatians 2:12 and Luke in Acts 11:2 are in agreement on the conditions that guided the admission of the Gentiles into the Christian community. The Council of Jerusalem deliberated on the Mosaic Law and circumcision (Acts 15) and agreed that the Mosaic law and circumcision should not be imposed on the Gentile Christians (Elmer 2006:3). An Apostolic decree was then issued and disseminated to assemblies in Cilicia, Antioch, and Syria (Esler 1997:97). It seems Luke, the author, focused on the process of convincing God-fearers to embrace Christianity. Luke could have wanted to highlight that God wanted to restore his Kingdom by including Gentiles. This is indicated by the removal of socio-religious borders, such that Gentiles and Jews could peacefully interact. According to Esler (1997:155), "regardless of the social boundaries between the Jews and the Gentiles on religious issues, Gentiles could visit and worship in Temples and synagogue in Jerusalem". This suggests collapsing and negotiation of social boundaries.

This section has explored how Gentile Christians, Jewish Christians and God-fearers intersected. The Jewish Christians did not share the shared grouping but maintained their usual social identity of exclusiveness against other social categories such as Gentile Christians. A Hellenistic Jew may take two concurrent social identities simultaneously with one in-group representation, thus defining an in-group as an intersection of several group memberships. As such, the Gentile Christians, God-fearers, and Hellenistic Jews intersect on the numerous ethnic and beliefs of the church. Culturally, the three social groupings, which are the Gentile Christians, Hellenistic Jews and God-fearer, shared identities. However, the above discussion may also be viewed from a merger model. The merger model is relevant in this section because it asserts that divergent group members are concurrently acknowledged and incorporated in their most wide-ranging form. In this

context, the in-group identities of Jewish Christians stretched to God-fearers and Gentile Christians, who shared significant social groups.

Jewish Christians

The acceptance of Cornelius and his family into Jewish Christianity is very important because he is among the first Gentile converts who joined the Jerusalem community. Elmer (2006:2–3) queries the reliability of the Cornelius conversion event. Yet, this study argues that it could be a historical event since he is regarded as one of the in-group members of the Jerusalem community, such as James, John, and Peter. Furthermore, the incident about Cornelius was utilised by Peter to approve Paul's assignment to the Gentiles at the Jerusalem Council as captured in Acts 15. There are occurrences where the apostolic circle members of the community were persecuted, arrested, harassed, and imprisoned at the instigation of Jews (Acts 4:1–22 and 5:20–21). Most importantly, the Jerusalem community was characterised by their allegiance to the temple and the Mosaic Law. The allegiance to the Mosaic Law and the temple were markers of the social identity that left out non-Jews. It is stimulating to observe that Cornelius crossed the boundary markers and joined the other different social groups that had different social norms and values. This shows fluidity of identity boundaries. Essentially, there were Jews in Paul's time who adhered to explicit boundary conservation strategies. Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:2) posit that: "[T]his would have influenced the social identity of Jews and would have been expressed in favouritism towards those who belonged to the in-group". During this period, the Jews were in control of a chosen nation, relegating other nationalities. The Jewish identity was perceived divine election characterised by holiness and separatism.

According to the above views, the Jews were a dominant social group while the Gentiles were secondary social group. In this case, the dominant social group are the Jews, who are the in-groups, which is well-defined as those who are part of the membership of the main in-group grouping; the rest of the social group memberships are those which are outside the in-group, being Gentiles – such as Cornelius. For example, a Jewish priest permits and accepts both his professional and gender title to overlap. Therefore, his/her gender and profession are pertinent and important in all situations.

Social issues in Luke's community: Material possession as boundary marker

In addition to ethnicity, Grimshaw (1999:34) notes that the social identity of Luke's community could be interpreted by its use of material possessions for identification. Material possessions acted as a social boundary marker that was utilised to exclude the out-group members of the community who were considered poor. In this regard, the community comprised both urban and rural areas and those who resided in urban areas became the in-group while those who lived in rural areas became the out-group members. Oakman (1991:152) asserts that the social groups in urban areas were rich, whilst those in rural areas were poor. However, the poor were also involved in the production of food for the rich people in urban areas (Grimshaw 1999:34). Kok (2014) argues that the in-group members always viewed the out-group members with suspicion. The implication is that the poor who stayed in rural areas suffered because their counterparts, the rich people, did not render them help. The possession of land was a critical attribute for social identity and for one to earn respect in society (Philips, 2003). It should be mentioned that even though the poor possessed land, they were not respected because they remained poor.

Poverty was not a central subject in Luke's community. In fact, Esler (1994:165) refuted the presence of particular interest in poverty and riches in Luke-Acts. Esler (1994) also posits that the poor-rich divide was mere inheritance that the author got from his sources when he compiled his book, and these sources are Mark and Q. He opines that the issue was actually borrowed from the Gospel of Mark. Yet, this argument can be contested, since nothing could have stopped the author from getting other sources. It is highly probable that the issue of social divide was characteristic of the community of Luke, which resulted in the creation of two social groups based on material possessions.

Oakman's (1991:162) social identity distinction between the urban landowners and rural peasants is slightly different from Theissen's (1982:160) study of the early Christian societies. Theissen (1982) differs with Oakman (1991) in that he says the early Christian society was not permanently settled in urban areas but was an itinerant social group in rural areas. The social group moved into urban areas from their rural settlement.

There emerged a second social group, in the form of the itinerant group, which had its own skills for personal sustenance. Particularly, Theissen (1982:58) makes a "distinction between the rural itinerant charismatics on the margins of society who leave family and house behind to wander the countryside." It is possible that these social groups came into conflict with each other in the community of Corinth.

Oakman (1991:160) and Theissen (1982:58) agree that the difference between the social groups in Luke-Acts was premised on the material possessions. They also explained that Luke's community was small, rural, and itinerant, while Acts' community was large, urban and had to share possessions. The Jerusalem community had conflict which started when Stephen was executed, and it continued until the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) when it was tentatively resolved as suggested in Acts 15.

It is pertinent to note that there was class conflict between the poor and the rich in the community of Luke. The evidence in 1 Corinthians, shows social tensions which existed between these social classes (Philips 2003; Theissen 1982). Luke showed a keen interest in meals, perhaps because the social conflicts prevalent in his community. According to Moxnes (1994), "Jesus encourages the invitation of the poor, maimed, the lame, the blind" (Lk 14:13). His argument is not to say that the poor have to make an invitation to the polluted, which is in accordance with the purity laws. Alternatively, potential visitors are received, with respect to their societal locality, as those who will be in a position to reciprocate the invitation (Lk 14:14). In Luke's Gospel, Jesus condemned the elite, saying, "[d]o not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or your rich neighbours lest also invite you in return, and you be repaid" (Lk 13:13). Luke describes the utilisation of generosity as a means of protecting and massaging the egos of the chosen few in a social group based on binary logics against out-groups. The conflict within the community of Luke was premised on exclusionary thinking and attitudes.

In the community of Luke, the urban (rich) and the rural (poor) people intersected on the basis of religion. Jewish and Gentile Christians in the community of Luke intersected on the basis of religion, that is, Judaism and Christianity. These two social groups shared the identity markers at the intersection. Also, Gentiles, who did not share the common identity,

were inclusive in their approach and outlook. In this scenario, the social identity complexity of the Judaizers, who did not belong to the shared identity, was simple because of its exclusivity. The identity complexity of Gentile Christians, who did not belong to the shared identity, was complex because of their group's plurality, integration, and inclusivity.

Conclusion

The study showed the diverse social groups in the community of Luke and established that the community comprised a mixture of two social groups namely Gentile-Christians and Jewish Christians who were coming from diverse socio-linguistic and religious backgrounds. The study has revealed the complexity of identities in the community of Luke, which are compartmentalisation, dominance, merger, and intersectionality, and how these insights were applied to Luke-Acts because this is where this study contributes new knowledge and insights to the Luke-Acts scholarship. It has been discovered that identities are fluid, dynamic, ever evolving, complex, and are in the process of becoming, as reflected in different identities studied here. It appears the location was outside Palestine, which could probably be in Antioch, due to its nearness to Jerusalem. Luke was Paul's companion, and it appears he was aware of Antioch's geography. It is appropriate to suggest that Antioch could have been the most probable community of Luke. The social identities of the members of the Lukan community were varied and complex, as revealed in this study.

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