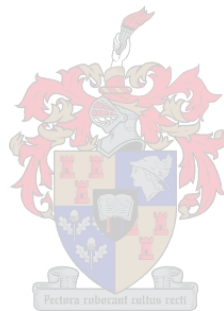


South African land reform as peacebuilding: integrating perspectives from Social Identity Theory and Symbolic Politics in a peacebuilding conceptual framework

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Abstract

This study considers land reform as an essential part of the South African transformation. In particular it considers land reform as having the potential to impact social relations and therefore as an initiative that has the potential to either normalize or further entrench conflictual social relations. In order to address this conflictive potential the study suggests that land reform should be considered and conducted in terms of a peacebuilding framework. The study argues that existing approaches to peacebuilding are lacking in their integration of Social Identity (as represented by Social Identity Theory and Self-categorization Theory) and Symbolic Politics concepts (as developed from Symbolic Interactionism and the notion of Symbolic Politics in Murray Edelman's heritage) in their conceptual frameworks. Lederach's (1997) comprehensive peacebuilding framework, it is argued, offers sufficient conceptual complexity to integrate these ideas in peacebuilding thinking and practice.

The absence of the application of these concepts is apparent in current research on South African land reform, an initiative seen as a necessary transformation process but one characterized by intergroup conflicts. Existing literature exhibits limited exploration of the complex social identities and symbolic interpretations that are prevalent in land reform, especially those represented by the perspectives of current land owners. These limitations, it is argued, can be addressed by application of concepts from the Social Identity perspective and a Symbolic Politics perspective.

The purpose as well as limits of the research are indicated by the following research questions: 1) How do land owners experience land reform, particularly in terms of their social identities and the symbolic dimension of politics? 2) How can these experiences be explained in terms of the Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives? 3) What can these perspectives contribute to a peacebuilding framework for land reform?

The research questions are pursued through an ethnographic case study using qualitative data collected from 2011-2014 from 42 individual, semi-structured interviews with land owners in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. The individuals interviewed are all land owners that are actively involved in agriculture. Their involvement ranges from large scale commercial practices that incorporates an extensive agri-business dimension to small scale, family-owned commercial farming enterprises. The agricultural activities they are involved in include fruits, forestry, livestock and game farming.

The key findings are that 1) land reform reflects complex interpretive processes as seen by the fact that land owners rely on various identity categories and meanings when assessing land reform; 2) land owner categorization preferences are less explicitly based on racial categories and more on role/function categories, although examples of both are found in the data; 3) as such they consider the land reform context less in terms of racial relations (white/black) and more in terms of relationships between 'farmers', 'government officials' and 'claimants' with a strong negative sentiment towards 'government officials' and a more sustainable sentiment towards 'claimants'; 4) land reform represents a form of identity threat to land owners and as such has significant implications for their categorization, identification and social comparison processes and thus for their long term social relations; 5) apart from the threats perceived, land owners find significant structural reassurances in the political and legislative frameworks that are intended to govern land reform; 6) existing research on land reform also needs to take the perspectives of land owners into account if a peaceful resolution to land reform challenges are to be found; 7) the Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives can, at least conceptually, be integrated in a peacebuilding framework such as that proposed by Lederach (1997).

Opsomming

Hierdie studie ag grondhervorming as 'n essensiële deel van die Suid-Afrikaanse transformasie. In die besonder ag dit grondhervorming as in besit van die potensiaal om 'n impak op sosiale verhoudings te maak en daarom as 'n inisiatief wat die potensiaal het om sosiale verhoudings met konflikpotensiaal óf te normaliseer óf verder te verskans. Ten einde hierdie konflikpotensiaal aan te spreek, stel die studie voor dat grondhervorming in terme van 'n vredebou-raamwerk beskou en uitgevoer word. Die studie voer aan dat bestaande benaderings tot vredebou te kort skiet in hulle integrering van sosiale identiteit (soos verteenwoordig deur Sosiale-identiteit-teorie en Selfkategoriseringsteorie) en simboliese politieke konsepte (soos ontwikkel vanuit Simboliese Interaksionisme en die idee van simboliese politiek in die tradisie van Murray Edelman) in hulle konseptuele raamwerke. Lederach (1997) se breedvoerige vredebou-raamwerk, so word aangevoer, bied voldoende konseptuele kompleksiteit om hierdie idees in vredebou-denke en -praktyk te integreer.

Die afwesigheid van die toepassing van hierdie konsepte is opvallend in huidige navorsing oor Suid-Afrikaanse grondhervorming, 'n inisiatief gesien as 'n noodsaaklike transformasieproses, maar ook as een wat deur intergroepek konflikte gekenmerk word. Bestaande literatuur toon beperkte eksplorاسie van die komplekse sosiale identiteite en simboliese interpretasies wat algemeen in grondhervorming is, veral dié verteenwoordig deur die perspektiewe van huidige grondeienaars. Daar word aangevoer dat hierdie beperkings deur toepassing van konsepte vanuit die Sosiale-identiteit-perspektief en 'n Simboliese politiek-perspektief aangespreek kan word.

Die doelwit, sowel as die beperkings van die navorsing, word deur die volgende navorsingsvrae aangedui: 1) Hoe ervaar grondeienaars grondhervorming, veral in terme van hulle sosiale identiteite en die simboliese dimensie van politiek? 2) Hoe kan hierdie ervarings in terme van die Sosiale-identiteit- en Simboliese politiek-perspektief verklaar word? 3) Wat kan hierdie perspektiewe tot 'n vredebou-raamwerk vir grondhervorming bydra?

Die navorsingsvrae word aangepak deur 'n etnografiese gevallestudie, waarin kwalitatiewe data, versamel vanaf 2011 tot 2014 vanuit 42 individuele, semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude met grondeienaars in die Limpopoprovinsie van Suid-Afrika, gebruik is. Die individue waarmee onderhoude gevoer is, is almal grondeienaars wat aktief by landbou betrokke is. Hulle betrokkenheid strek van grootskaalse kommersiële praktyke met 'n uitgebreide agri-ondernemingsdimensie na

kleinskaalse kommersiële boerderyondernemings in familiebesit. Die landbouaktiwiteite waarby hulle betrokke is sluit vrugte-, bosbou-, vee- en wildsboerdery in.

Die sleutelbevinding is dat 1) grondhervorming op komplekse interpretatiewe prosesse sinspeel, soos sigbaar uit die feit dat grondeienaars van verskeie identiteitskategorieë en -betekenisse gebruik maak met die assessering van grondhervorming; 2) grondeienaarkategoriseringsvoorkeure word minder eksplisiet op rassekategorieë gebaseer, en meer op rol/funksie-kategorieë, hoewel daar voorbeelde van beide in die data te vinde is; 3) as sodanig beskou hulle die grondhervormingskonteks minder in terme van rasseverhoudings (wit/swart) en meer in terme van verhoudings tussen 'boere', 'regeringsamptenare' en 'eisers', met 'n sterk negatiewe sentiment teenoor 'regeringsamptenare' en 'n meer volhoubare sentiment teenoor 'eisers'; 4) grondhervorming verteenwoordig 'n soort identiteitsbedreiging vir grondeienaars, en as sodanig het dit beduidende implikasies vir hulle kategoriserings-, identifiserings- en sosialevergelykingsprosesse, en dus vir hulle langtermyn- sosiale verhoudings; 5) buiten die bedreigings, soos deur hulle ingesien, vind grondeienaars betekenisvolle strukturele gerusstellings in die politieke en wetgewende raamwerke wat daarop gemik is om grondhervorming te beheer en te bestuur; 6) bestaande navorsing oor grondhervorming moet ook die perspektiewe van grondeienaars in ag neem, om 'n vreedsame oplossing tot grondhervorming te vind; 7) die Sosiale-identiteit- en simboliese politiek-perspektief kan, ten minste konseptueel, by 'n vredebou-raamwerk, soos die raamwerk deur Lederach voorgestel (1997), geïntegreer word.

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List of abbreviations

AgriSA	Agri South Africa
ANC	African National Congress
BBBEE	Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment
CDE	Centre for Development and Enterprise
CRLR	Commission for Restitution of Land Rights
DLA	Department of Land Affairs
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
EPLO	European Peacebuilding Liaison Office
LARP	Land and Agrarian Reform Project
LRAD	Land Reform for Agricultural Development
NLC	National Land Commission
NP	National Party
PLAAS	Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies
SACP	South African Communist Party
SAT	Structural, Attitudinal, Transactional
SCT	Self-Categorization Theory
SIT	Social Identity Theory
SLAG	Settlement and Land Acquisition Grant
SU	Stellenbosch University

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: CONSIDERING CONFLICT, PEACE AND LAND REFORM IN SOUTH AFRICA IN TERMS OF SOCIAL IDENTITIES AND SYMBOLIC POLITICS	1
1. Introduction	1
1.1 The South African transformation: a necessary process characterised by potential conflicts	1
1.2 Research design.....	2
1.2.1 General problem statement and key concepts	2
1.2.2 Research questions	10
1.2.3 Strategy of inquiry and analysis.....	11
1.2.4 Sampling	12
1.2.5 Data collection	15
1.2.6 Data analysis.....	15
1.3 The use of theory.....	19
1.4 Generalizability in qualitative case studies	21
1.5 Ensuring quality: reliability and validity.....	23
1.6 Ethical considerations	25
1.7 Impact	26
1.8 Chapter outline	27
CHAPTER 2: LAND REFORM: HISTORY, PROCESS AND CONFLICT	28
2. Introduction	28
2.1 Land reform, justice and peace	30
2.1.1 The development of current land ownership patterns	30
2.1.2 Land reform purposes during Apartheid.....	33
2.1.3 Post-1994 Policies and Legislation	33
2.2 Land reform: the current mechanism	35
2.2.1 Land Restitution.....	35
2.2.2 Land Redistribution.....	36

2.2.3	Tenure reform.....	37
2.3	South African land reform: complex literature, complex problem.....	38
2.3.1	Current perspectives.....	38
2.3.2	The conflictual nature of land reform in South Africa	42
2.4	Identities and Symbolic Politics: inextricably linked categories in land reform 43	
2.5	Summary.....	45
CHAPTER 3: PEACEBUILDING: A REVIEW.....		46
3.	Introduction	46
3.1	The nature of South Africa's post 1994 social conflict.....	46
3.2	Problematizing 'Peacebuilding' as an analytical concept.....	48
3.2.1	The temporal dimension of peacebuilding.....	49
3.2.2	The goals of peacebuilding	50
3.2.3	Peacebuilding actors.....	52
3.3	Conceptualizations of conflict: rational choice or psychological explanations?	54
3.4	Conceptual limitations of peacebuilding literature.....	56
3.5	Lederach: An integrative peacebuilding framework	57
3.6	Enhancing peacebuilding literature: The Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives.....	60
3.7	Social definitions of conflict and peacebuilding.....	61
3.8	Land reform as subject and object of peacebuilding.....	62
3.9	Summary.....	65
CHAPTER 4: THE SOCIAL IDENTITY PERSPECTIVE: AN OVERVIEW		66
4.	Introduction	66
4.1	SIT and SCT: the Social Identity perspective	68
4.2	Constituent parts of the Social Identity perspective	69
4.2.1	Social Identity Theory (SIT) and intergroup relations.....	69

4.2.2	Self-categorization theory and group formation	75
4.3	Constituent themes in the Social Identity perspective	77
4.3.1	Self in the Social Identity perspective	77
4.3.2	Groups and categories.....	79
4.3.3	Categorization and salience.....	81
4.3.4	Social comparison, distinctiveness and differentiation	85
4.4	Application of SIT: recurring research themes.....	87
4.4.1	Context and Social Identity: the role of identity threat.....	88
4.4.2	Commitment and Social Identity: identification as a moderating variable 91	
4.4.3	The content of Social Identity: norms and values	95
4.5	Summary.....	97
CHAPTER 5: SYMBOLIC POLITICS: AN OVERVIEW.....		99
5.	Introduction	99
5.1	Reconsidering the symbolic dimension of political analyses	100
5.2	The social world as symbolic construction: The Symbolic interactionist foundation.....	103
5.2.1	Contextualizing Symbolic interaction	104
5.2.2	The basic premises of Symbolic Interactionism.....	105
5.3.3	The nature of symbols and symbol use.....	109
5.3.4	Objects.....	111
5.3.5	Acting and Interaction	113
5.4	Developing Symbolic Interactionism concepts for the analyses of political activities: Murray Edelman and Symbolic Politics.....	114
5.4.1	Symbolic Interactionism as the root of Edelman's Symbolic Politics framework	115
5.4.2	Explaining political behavior: The symbolic nature of politics	116
5.4.3	Explaining political behavior: Participating in politics	120

5.4.4	Explaining political behavior: The function of symbols in politics	123
5.4.5	Explaining political behavior: The mechanisms of Symbolic Politics....	126
5.4.6	Explaining political behavior: Communication as Symbolic Politics	129
5.4.7	What is useful about Edelman's conceptualization?	130
5.5	Developing Edelman's heritage	131
5.5.1	Elder and Cobb: a systematic framework for reading Edelman	131
5.5.2	Kaufman's Symbolic Politics theory of ethnic war	138
5.6	Summary	143
CHAPTER 6: SOCIAL IDENTITIES AND INTERGROUP RELATIONS IN LAND REFORM		147
6.	Introduction	147
6.1	Land owner experiences of land reform.....	149
6.1.1	Social Identity and land reform: the cognitive process	149
6.1.2	Land owner perceptions of land reform: interpersonal or intergroup behavior?	161
6.1.3	Land reform and status differences	162
6.1.4	Land reform and identity threat.....	165
6.1.5	The role of identity norms and values in land reform	167
6.2	Summary and conclusion	170
CHAPTER 7: LAND REFORM AND MEANING: THE SYMBOLIC POLITICS PERSPECTIVE		174
7.	Introduction	174
7.1	Accounting for land owner experiences of land reform	175
7.1.1	Land reform as symbolic experience	175
7.1.2	Relevant symbols	177
7.1.3	Orientations toward land reform symbols.....	180
7.1.4	Land reform meanings: individual or collective?	194
7.1.5	Interaction and meaning in land reform.....	196

7.1.6	Threat and reassurance in land reform	198	
7.1.7	Myths and land reform: accounting for reality.....	201	
7.2	Summary and conclusion	203	
CHAPTER 8: TRANSFORMING LAND REFORM CONFLICT: SUGGESTIONS FOR A PEACEBUILDING FRAMEWORK FROM THE SOCIAL IDENTITY AND SYMBOLIC POLITICS PERSPECTIVES			206
8.	Introduction	206	
8.1	Summary of empirical analysis	206	
8.1.1	Land owner perspectives on the purpose and process of land reform.	206	
8.1.2	Land owner experiences of land reform: the Social Identity and Symbolic perspectives	208	
8.2	Transforming the land reform conflict: Contributing to a peacebuilding framework from Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives	211	
8.2.1	The Social Identity perspective and peacebuilding	212	
8.2.2	The Symbolic Politics perspective and peacebuilding.....	216	
8.3	Some challenges regarding the application of the Social Identity perspective 219		
8.4	Future research	220	
8.5	Conclusion.....	222	
9.	BIBLIOGRAPHY	225	

Chapter 1: Considering conflict, peace and land reform in South Africa in terms of social identities and Symbolic Politics

1. Introduction

1.1 The South African transformation: a necessary process characterised by potential conflicts

The socio-economic transformation of post-conflict South African society remains one of the most challenging and necessary aspects of the country's peace process. Most recently this issue has been highlighted again as populist movements in South Africa gather support in pursuit of transformation. It has been argued that the political transition witnessed in 1994 is only one dimension of the entire transition and that the transition will continue to be incomplete while meaningful and sustainable socio-economic transformation eludes the country (Bosman 2008). One aspect of this transformation process, the one this study is concerned with, is land reform.

Of course transformation does not only imply a redistribution of resources, wealth and changes to the structural properties of the economy. One of the points of departure for this particular study is that considering the extent to which conflicts change relationships (Dovidio, Gaertner, Dittmann and West 2012), conflict transformation should also imply a process of reconfiguring and normalizing intergroup relations (Lederach 1997). In the context of this study's concern the statement suggests that consideration of the impact of land reform on intergroup relations is an essential part of this transformative imperative.

A seeming paradox in the South African transformation (and indeed transformation processes elsewhere) is that such transformation processes often heighten tensions in intergroup relations. They are ostensibly processes that pursue justice but as Austin (1979) argued, attempts at promoting justice in social relations often increase tensions between groups. In the South African context Holborn's (2010) research on the media coverage of racial tensions and racial discourse in different parts of society (eg politics, sport, economics etc) offers conclusions that indicate the potential for transformational policies, such as South Africa's Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) policy, to increase intergroup polarisation.

1.2 Research design

At the outset it should be made clear that thinking about approaches to and practices of social science research is by no means an exact exercise that necessarily conforms rigidly to existing categories of description (Guba and Lincoln 2005). This is to be expected given the complex philosophical issues related to social scientific enquiry (Rosenberg 1988). The distinctions made between research strategy, research design and research methods are artificial but analytically necessary. Ultimately decisions made regarding research strategy, design and method are philosophical decisions. It is therefore not unreasonable to consider some of the philosophical issues pertinent to the decisions about design, strategy and method. This section thus requires that decisions be made about the use of different concepts that may not coincide with how readers view these concepts. However, in all instances attempts have been made to clarify the decisions made and to offer justification for these decisions.

Research design, as described by Bryman (2010) is a description of what is to be studied, how data is to be collected to complete the study and how this data is to be analyzed. Importantly though, it is not only these elements of the research design that is to be taken into account but also how they are logically and analytically connected. The purpose of making the design decisions explicit, Bryman (2010:45) says, is to ensure research that will hold up to evaluation. The description of the research design of this study starts with a description of the broad problem statement followed by the research questions, the strategy of inquiry, the sampling strategy and the approach to analyzing the data.

1.2.1 General problem statement and key concepts

The utility of peacebuilding as a concept to describe the South African transformation

One of the assumptions reflected by the title of this study is that the changes South Africa has seen in the last two decades can and should be thought of as, at least minimally, constituting peacebuilding (see Knox and Quirk 2000). Of course this is not the only concept used to describe the changes wrought in South Africa. Among the other analytic concepts used 'democratic consolidation' (eg. Suttner 2004), 'nation-building' (eg. Bornman 2006) and even 'conflict transformation' (eg. Auvinen and Kivimäki 2001) are probably the most well-known. It should be stated at the outset that this study does not

consider these concepts to be mutually exclusive. Nor is the intention to suggest that one of these should receive preference over the others. However the concepts are distinct in nature and especially intention and analyses of cases benefit from maintaining a distinction between them (even though in reality their methods and goals often overlap).

Even though there are sensible arguments for considering the South African transformation (and in particular land reform) as peacebuilding, the concept itself is not unproblematic. A cursory review could suggest that the South African transformation does not analytically fit comfortably with traditional peacebuilding literature, most probably because it is a process that lacks significant third party intervention (often one of the defining characteristics of a peacebuilding process). This preference of peacebuilding literature to advocate third-party involvement in peace processes is probably a function of the historical development of the practice and the subsequent conceptual advances made to describe and analyze these practices.

The limited use of the concept for analytical purposes can further be ascribed to the conceptual diversity that both enhances and hinders the use of the concept (Barnett, Kim O'Donnell and Sitea 2007). However, as this study attempts to show, it is necessary and possible to combine various theoretical positions in a coherent fashion in a peacebuilding organizing framework. As Maxwell (2012:86) states when describing the constructivist epistemology of critical realism "Since... no theory or model can be a complete picture of what exists, it may be desirable to have multiple theories, each helping you to understand some aspect of the phenomena you're studying".

Thus, generally speaking peacebuilding literature tends to focus on specific, externally driven processes with specific and measurable outcomes as examples of peacebuilding. If such a limited definition is adopted it could, at worst exclude the South African case from a description as peacebuilding which in turn would deprive the analyses of the unique contributions to be had from peacebuilding literature and experience or, at best, lead to conceptual confusion and an ultimately unsatisfying analysis.

It is of course legitimate to ask if this is only an exercise in semantics. What difference does it make whether the South African process is described as peacebuilding, democratic consolidation, nation building or something else? The argument presented

here attempts to show that describing and analysing the South African process as peacebuilding is not only justified given a broader and more comprehensive definition of peacebuilding but also necessary in order to address specific concerns that are the result of this process. There are thus conceptual and empirical advantages to describing the South African transition as a case of peacebuilding. In the context of this study the most important avenue for investigation opened by such a description is related to Lederach's (1997) conception of peacebuilding. His concern with subjective aspects (experiences, emotions, perceptions and relationships) of peace processes encourages us to pursue the investigation conducted in this study as analyses that extends its focus beyond rational or mechanical statist processes that leave significant subjective dimensions of peace processes unaccounted for.

I consider the South African transformation in general and land reform in particular as phenomena that are better understood through the application of the concept peacebuilding. There are at least six reasons for the decision to link this study about the land reform transformation process to the concept. First, as a concept, peacebuilding is a useful analytical tool. Gerring (1999) argues that 'conceptual goodness' is determined by a concept's response to a set of criteria. These are familiarity, resonance, parsimony, coherence, differentiation, depth, theoretical utility and field utility. Without exploring the concept in detail here, the study takes the view that the concept to a greater or lesser extent meets all these criteria. There are some obvious deficiencies. For example, in terms of the differentiation criteria the concept often suffers from the way in which it is used interchangeably with other concepts such as 'conflict transformation' (eg Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse 2005). However, generally speaking, as a concept peacebuilding offers the 'goodness' Gerring (1999) refers to.

Second (and related to the first), there is a conceptual and practical relationship between South Africa's transformation project and peacebuilding. The connection between socio-economic transformation and development on the one hand and peacebuilding on the other is widely acknowledged (Tschirgi 2003; Warnecke and Franke 2010; O'Brien

2007).¹ Development is defined, in broad terms, as the enhancement of human capabilities in order to reduce vulnerability (EPLO 2011). Peacebuilding in turn is understood to refer to an effort to address the root causes of conflicts through transformation processes and the development of capacity to deal with conflict thereby preventing the start of or return to conflict in divided societies (Doyle and Sambanis 2000). Taking a more comprehensive view, one that connects the cessation of violence and the post-violence development/transformation processes in a unified manner in the concept, Kriger (2003) describes peacebuilding as potentially consisting of two phases namely the war-to-peace transition and the peace consolidation phase. Elsewhere Babbitt and Hampson (2011) have referred to this as “resolution as settlement” and “resolution as transformation”. The road to peace is thus thought of as not only ending or preventing violence but also as restoration, development and socio-economic transformation. Given the important role of transformation in the consolidation of peace, this study then assumes, as a point of departure, that any consideration given to transformation processes in societies coming out of a conflict phase, is consideration given to peacebuilding.

A third important consideration in the decision to describe and analyse the South African transition as peacebuilding is the correspondence to reality. By this I mean that thinking about the South African transformation process in peacebuilding terms acknowledges the fact that the current process is connected to a particular preceding conflict. Here Mac Ginty’s (2010) description of “no war, no peace” post-settlement situations is useful. This description refers to situations in which there are unresolved matters that continue to have the potential (real or imagined) to reignite large-scale conflict. They may be situations that are not characterised by high levels of ethno-national or political violence but they do not necessarily represent an improvement in post-conflict living. As Mac Ginty states, these situations are known for “continuation of indirect violence, the failure to deal with underlying conflict causes, and underdevelopment” (2010:147). Understanding this historical congruence is important to understanding current transformation processes.

¹ Although it may not be clear whether social transformation should be thought of as a goal of peacebuilding or an instrument of peacebuilding it should be clear that they are intimately connected.

Next, and following from the previous, it allows us to question the quality of South Africa's post 1994 peace (Mac Ginty 2006). The tendency for the international community has been to present the South African case as the example of successful transition. This is mostly based on the fact that, despite expectations to the contrary, the transition was not characterized by extensive or organized violence. However, Mac Ginty (2006) has argued that many peace settlements offer those affected only a poor quality of peace. In the South African case du Toit's (2001) description of the post-settlement peace as 'brittle' suggests such a low quality peace.

Fifth, the decision indicates the conflict potential inherent in the transition process. The potential for transformation processes to increase rather than reduce conflict has been explored in different ways by different scholars. Examples of the conflict resulting from transformation processes can be found in seminal works, like those of Arendt (1963), as well as more recent ones, like Snyder (2000). And of course, from a South African perspective, the conflict potential of transformation processes has also been confirmed (Holbron 2010).

Finally, Loode (2011) argues that peacebuilding cannot be conceptualized as a hierarchical and linear process but should rather be thought of as an operation in complex social systems where there is an equal focus on formal state development and relationship building and transformation. If we consider the analytical avenues offered us by some peacebuilding literature (eg Lederach 1997), the concept allows us to explore the South African transformation not only as a process of institutional realignment but also the transformation of intergroup relations.

Thus, for the purpose of this study I argue that peacebuilding is not only an empirical category but also a conceptual one. The challenge then is not to determine whether the South African transformation meets in any measurable way the minimum requirements to qualify as peacebuilding, but rather to specify the conceptual links between the South African process and the concept.

Land reform and the South African transformation process

Among the many socio-economic transformation challenges that face South Africa, land reform is, for various reasons, one of the most complex (de Wet 1994; Hall 2004; Walker

2003; Sender and Johnston 2004; Cliffe 2000; Attfield, Hattingh and Matshabaphala 2007; Gibson 2010). Yet a successful and sustainable land reform programme is essential for an enduring peace. However, as Du Toit (2013) argues convincingly, land reform should not be viewed in isolation to other transformation initiatives. He states that making the South African transformation project contingent only on land reform that is often framed in liberal terms as necessary development and reparative justice and in African nationalist terms as the necessary conclusion to demolishing colonial heritage, places unrealistic and unhelpful symbolic burden on the process. What is needed is a process that is conceptualised in a way that contributes productively to reconciliation and real, legitimate socio-economic transformation.

Responses to land reform, especially opposition to it, is often explained using stereotypes or by individualizing the responses. In terms of the former it is not uncommon to hear from both popular and scholarly discourses that opposition to land reform by (white) land owners is a reflection of racial bias or even racism. In a recent study, for example, Swart (2010) pointed to the fact that just over 40% of South Africans consider contestation of land reform as racism. Gibson (2009:153) has claimed, referring to racialized variation in attitudes towards land policy, that "A basic fact of land politics is that whites do not want to address the past; blacks do". And elsewhere Cousins has stated that "Current owners cannot be assumed to be motivated by the spirit of transformation" (2002:83) while similarly Tsawu (2006) claimed that "The willing seller wants to get rich overnight by asking high prices for land without interest in the redistribution process" (2006:83). Such claims ascribe a certain characteristic to all members of a particular group based on their membership. The alternative is to individualize the explanation to opposition. This Turner and Oakes (1997) claim is a general but problematic tendency in psychological explanations of social conflict. Such explanations hold prejudice as an attitude of the individual based on cognitive distortions (1997:361) and disregards the social nature of political behavior and attitudes.

Neither of the preceding arguments (stereotyping and individualization) is sufficient. While there are almost certainly racial prejudices or instrumental decision making among land owners in general, stereotyping all white land owners/land owners' opposition as racial prejudice or self-interest produces explanations that have not empirically been shown to

be valid or reliable². Similarly reducing all explanations to individual level characteristics fails to account for the social dimension of cognition (Turner and Oakes 1997).

Analyzing the conflict potential of land reform

Understanding and managing the conflict potential of South African land reform is both an essential academic and necessary societal endeavour. Having argued that peacebuilding as a concept is useful for analysing the South African transformation in general and land reform in particular, I now turn to what is required of a concept or conceptual frameworks if it were to offer rigorous analysis. Through a review of literature Leshem and Trafford (2007) have indicated that conceptual frameworks are generally understood as integrative instruments that relate different concepts or theories to each other in a coherent way. The purposes of such frameworks include providing a common language to describe the object of study, formulating principles against which judgements or predictions can be made, offering reference points from which the research questions can be related to existing literature, directing the research design and providing coherence between empirical observations and conceptual conclusions (Berman 2013). Or, put differently, as Miles and Huberman (1994:18) state, such a framework “explains...the main things to be studied – the key factors, constructs or variables – and the presumed relationships among them”.

While it is probably not possible to conceptualize a unified framework that bounds our entire understanding of complex issues (Maxwell 2012:86) such as the South African land reform, it is still necessary to approach the investigation of any activities that is part of this process using a particular framework. We might not be able to reduce the whole transformation process to a single analysis but rigorous investigation offers the opportunity to develop theoretical and conceptual tools that can be applied to a variety of activities that are generally acknowledged to be part of the larger transformation process. Ultimately such development will allow researchers to understand patterns of relationships that extend beyond the capabilities of focussed theories.

² This is not a denial of the racially distributed nature of land in South Africa that could be construed as a form of structural racism. Rather, it is an argument against negative stereotyping of people based on group membership.

Social identities, Symbolic Politics and peacebuilding

I have already suggested that current mainstream peacebuilding literature is insufficient in terms of providing comprehensive analytical tools for the investigation of transformation processes as sites of potential conflict (Lederach 1997; Mac Ginty 2006). There are of course numerous bodies of knowledge from sociology, different strands of psychology, philosophy, anthropology and possibly even theology that could enhance the analytical value of the concept. In particular I include an exploration of the potential offered by the extensive research that comprises the Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives. Social Identity refers to the particular research tradition associated with Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner 1986) and Self Categorization Theory (SCT) (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher and Wetherell 1987) (collectively referred to as the Social Identity perspective). Tajfel (1981:255) defines Social Identity as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership”. Symbolic Politics refers to a tradition that has its origins in Symbolic Interactionism and found expression for political analyses in the work of Edelman (1964; 1971; 1977; 1988) and later Kauffman (2001). It refers to an approach to politics that is not based on rational actor explanations of political decision making and behavior but rather concerns itself with the interpretation of the meaning of political events and the emotions accompanying these meanings.

The selection of the Social Identity perspective from among the various bodies of knowledge reflects the conviction of this study that 1) land reform as a transformation process plays out against the backdrop of intergroup relations and 2) that intergroup behavior is inextricably linked to social identities.

While land reform often has the semblance of conflict-of-interest-contestations, especially where access to land is seen as a necessary survival mechanism (see Lahiff, Maluleke, Manenzhe and Wegerif (2004:5-6) for an example of this argument), the point of departure for this study is that the operation of social identities are at least a necessary condition for such contestations. The basis for this assumption comes from Lederach’s (1997) argument that at the heart of conflict (and therefore peace) is relationships.

Without social identities contestations such as those characterising land reform, would have no organizing principles.

The importance afforded symbolic approaches to analysing political behavior is based on one of the basic ideas of Symbolic Politics (in turn built upon the constituting elements of Symbolic Interactionism), namely that people act towards objects (including events, processes etc) in terms of the meaning ascribed these objects. If we argue for the intergroup nature of land reform, then Symbolic Politics would suggest that the construction of meaning in this context is of vital importance in order to facilitate intergroup interaction.

1.2.2 Research questions

In the discussion of the general problem addressed in this study I pointed out that existing literature is limited in its focus thus leaving us with analytic frameworks to explore transformation processes that are insufficient. In order to show how this deficiency might be addressed, I argue that the inclusion of theories or concepts that allow for the analysis of intergroup relations, identities and symbolic meaning is necessary. The research question for this study is thus formulated to show the contribution that such theories and concepts can make to our understanding of land reform as a transformation process and to make suggestions to enhance this transformative process as a peacebuilding process.

It is accepted that previous research on the conflict potential of land reform is a sound point of departure for this study. In this regard the work of Gibson (2009) is of importance as it points to the reality of this conflict between different groups as well as the extent to which the conflict might be prevalent. However, Gibson's work does not address the nature for this conflict nor the understanding of this conflict by those affected by it. The first step in this study is thus to provide a naturalistic description of this conflict. More specifically the description is framed in terms of the Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives. The research question for this study is thus: 1) How do land owners experience land reform, particularly in terms of their Social Identities and Symbolic Politics? 2) How can these experiences be explained in terms of the Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives? 3) What can these perspectives contribute to a peacebuilding framework for land reform?

The purpose of these questions is not to show that land reform is either conflictual or harmonious as I accept the findings of Gibson (2009) that indicated an underlying conflict to the process. The first two questions are an attempt to explore the lived experience of land owners using two specific perspectives. A natural extension of this description is the explanation of these experiences in Social Identity and Symbolic Politics terms. The final question represents a non-empirical problem (Babbie and Mouton 2001:175) and attempts to indicate why it is useful to think of land reform as both a subject and object of peacebuilding, why the Social Identity and symbolic traditions are relevant analytic instruments for the description and explanation of land reform and how these two traditions can complement each other as well as peacebuilding knowledge to provide an even more comprehensive framework for addressing land reform challenges in both descriptive and normative terms.

1.2.3 Strategy of inquiry and analysis

Inquiry in this study can be described as qualitative. Traditional methodological approaches to qualitative studies are often restrictive and as a result qualitative researchers in various disciplines have started pushing against the boundaries of these traditional categorizations (Thorne, Reimer Kirkham and O'Flynn-Magee 2004). Miles and Huberman (1994) also hint at this when they argue that a rigid distinction between inductive and deductive studies that rigorously coincides with the distinction between qualitative and quantitative strategies is probably not tenable. It is with this mind that the strategy of inquiry for this study is constructed. The strategy does not fit entirely with classical categorizations of qualitative studies but it does find a point of reference in interpretive phenomenology (Maxwell 2012).

The phenomenological characteristics of this study are found in the fact that the study focuses on the "lived experience" (Cresswell 1998:51) of the participants. It is concerned with highlighting the essence (or invariant structure) of the experience. Upon reading a phenomenological study, Cresswell (1998:55) points out, the reader should have a sense that their understanding of the particular experience is improved. In the words of Polkinghorne (1989:4) the reader should "understand better what it is like for someone to experience that".

Although phenomenological studies are generally characterized by the exclusion of preconceptions, Miner-Romanoff (2012:9) argues that while this might be true of descriptive phenomenology, the reality is that researchers conducting interpretive phenomenological studies are encouraged to use theoretical frameworks to develop research questions, interview schedules and guide their analysis of data. If deemed necessary, findings are returned to the theoretical frameworks in order to continue the development of these frameworks. In this regard the present study thus differs from classical descriptive phenomenology in that it approaches the understanding of a particular experience with guiding precepts. In this sense the study is, what Miles and Huberman (1994:17) call 'confirmatory'. It is not an attempt to shape data to fit pre-existing theoretical concepts but rather to determine whether the lived experience of participants coincides with the theoretical explanations provided. If the essence of the experience is found to be usefully described by the Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives, these can, in turn, be usefully employed in expanding the theoretical understanding and practical implementation of peacebuilding. The arguments about perceptions of land reform are thus not made from the data itself but rather from the theoretical frameworks employed. The data serves to support or contradict these arguments.

The analysis of data in phenomenological studies is highly complex (see Miner-Romanoff 2012:20 for a graphic representation of this complexity). Maxwell (2012) has suggested two different analytic strategies available to those engaging with qualitative data. These strategies, categorizing and connecting strategies, are in turn based on the idea that two fundamental modes of relationships exist in human societies – those based on similarity and those based on contiguity³. These will be discussed below.

1.2.4 Sampling

Understanding perceptions of land reform and their implications for peacebuilding across a broad spectrum is more than what a single study is capable of. Thus, it is with due

³ Maxwell (2012) derives his ideas of relationships of similarity and contiguity from Hume's (1978) *A Treatise of Human Nature* in which it was suggested that ideas can be related to each other in terms resemblance, contiguity or cause and effect. Associations of similarity are not reliant on real connections but rather on comparison. They are independent of time and space. Associations of contiguity, on the other hand, are based on real relations that are dependent on actual connections (Maxwell 2012:54).

acknowledgement of the breadth of this subject, that this study focuses specifically on the perspectives of white land owners in terms of their Social Identity and Symbolic Politics interpretations of land reform. The sampling choice is an acknowledged limiting factor but necessitated by the particular research question.

The population, white land owners, was selected for at least three reasons. First, with the exception of a few limited contributions to the literature on land reform, the perspective of land owners has been left largely unexplored (see CDE (2008); du Toit (2004); Fraser (2008) for exceptions). Numerous studies have focused on the experiences of land claimants or disadvantaged communities (see for example Walker, Bohlin, Hall and Kepe 2010; Gibson 2009; Lahiff, Maluleke, Manenzhe and Wegerif 2008). What seems noticeably absent from the body of knowledge on land reform in South Africa is work that pays particular attention to the experience of white land owners. The research that has attempted perspectives other than that of land claimants has tended to focus on outcomes of land reform processes rather than experiences (see for example du Toit 2004). If land owners are to be partners in the land reform process, their experiences and perspectives are important to consider given the description of land reform as a process that is meant to contribute to reconciliation (DLA 1997).

The decision to focus on a pre-defined group is also contextually determined as land reform in South Africa is expressed (unfortunately) primarily in strict racial categories. The legislation regulating the process as well as much of the public discourse around land reform expresses this transformation in racial terms. The context thus provides salient Social Identities. Other expressions, such as the land-owner – commercial farmer – subsistence farmer – landless claimant tensions are also used but the racial distinctions remain obvious in both the formal and informal discourses.

Finally, from a practical point of view, access (both in terms of physical and cultural access) to the white land-owners was easier to obtain for the researcher. Having cultural and linguistic ties with this particular group made it possible for the researcher to access participants, who are generally reserved about discussing the politically sensitive issue of land reform. These ties, while allowing access to the participants, is also a potential risk

to the analyses of data and as such remained a pertinent challenge throughout the research.

All data were collected in the Limpopo province of South Africa. Two reasons are offered for the selection of this site. First, land reform in the Limpopo province is characterized by large numbers of land claims. Therefore, in terms of availability of participants and data the site offers good potential (the fact that much of the case study research in land reform thus far emanates from the province, bears witness to this). Second, agricultural practices in parts of the Limpopo are such that the travel distances between land owners are less than what they generally would be in provinces such as the Free State and Northern, Eastern and some parts of the Western Cape. Accessing research participants is thus simpler and a less costly endeavor.

In the case of this study a first, purposive decision was made to contact representatives from AgriSA in the province. The representatives then suggested some participants based on the participants involvement with land reform issues. Once these participants were interviewed theoretical sampling techniques were employed to select further participants. This approach to sampling was necessary to ensure participants that could offer contributions relevant to the study (Silverman and Marvasti 2008). Non-probability sampling is of course not without difficulty. The criticism against this approach is that it detracts from the eventual results' ability to generalize. However, where studies are concerned with depth of description rather than frequency, non-probability sampling seems to offer more appropriate selection instruments (Babbie and Mouton 2001:167). And, as Bryman (1988) argues, research such as conducted here is not interested in generalizing to populations but rather in making theoretical contributions. It is therefore appropriate to purposively select samples that can make a theoretical contribution.

In order to provide context for the sampling strategy as well as the questions explored in this study, it is necessary to note that despite the difficulty of presenting exact figures, the majority of privately held agricultural land in South Africa is owned by white land owners. In most of these cases (and this is certainly true for the sample population of this study) the agricultural activities engaged in on these lands are for the purpose of producing

surplus for the market (as opposed to subsistence farming). These lands are generally acquired through market processes (buying and selling) or inheritance.

1.2.5 Data collection

Data were collected from 2011-2014 using in-depth interviews from the pre-identified population. In total 42 interviews were recorded and augmented with extensive notes taken during and immediately after the interviews. As per requirement of the ethical clearance provided for this study by the University of Stellenbosch, all participants signed informed consent forms and were offered the opportunity to withdraw their contributions at the end of the interview (or at any subsequent stage of the process). All participants were assured anonymity and no details that could lead to the identification of any of the participants were included in the data analyses.

The interviews were conducted using an interview schedule that was devised using the concepts and theoretical positions of the Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives as well as the research questions that guide this study (see addendum A). Initially the interview process was an iterative process as changes were made to the interview schedule based on experiences of previous interviews.

While the interview schedule was the primary instrument for eliciting information from participants, the researcher allowed participants freedom to venture their contributions into areas that may not be directly related to the schedule. Strict adherence to the schedule would have detracted from the ability to report on participants' lived experience and could have resulted in the analysis not reflecting the actual nature of the context.

1.2.6 Data analysis

In order to make sense of qualitative data, it is necessary to organize the data and to establish internal connections between units of meaning. This process generally requires decontextualization to a certain extent. However, care should also be taken not to decontextualize the data to such an extent that its meaning is changed or lost (Maxwell 2012:115). When the connection to the context is entirely lost a view of the data can be created that does not reflect the reality from which the data was collected.

Earlier the distinction between categorizing and connecting analytic strategies was pointed out. Maxwell (2012:118) has argued that while these are legitimate approaches in their own right, there is value in using both in the same analytic process. One way of doing this would be to employ the strategies sequentially. In other words, first applying the one and then the other. While this allows the researcher to investigate differences and similarities in the data as well as the narratives of the phenomenological accounts, it often results in two sets of conclusions rather than a single set of descriptions, claims or explanations. Maxwell (2012:119) thus suggests an approach that considers the analytic approach as singular but consisting of categorizing and connecting “moves” in order to produce a final result that is not stripped of context nor limited to individual accounts.

Categorizing strategies are probably the better known approach in the analyses of qualitative data. It entails the segmentation of data in order to compare similar and different units. Once data have been segmented it is reconnected based on these similarities rather than on actual connections. In other words it creates a view of the data that is based on similarity type relationships rather than contiguity relationships. Thus it creates connections between categories rather than the actual data (Maxwell 2012:114). The end result could be that the relations indicated from such analyses could be found to have little to no resemblance to the actual relations in the sites from which the data were collected (Miles and Huberman 1994:151). Connecting strategies, on the other hand, analyze data by considering the connections in the data and removing from the data that which is not relevant to the explored relationships.

While the procedures are likely to show variance from study to study, most have certain steps in common. First, the analysis begins with some preliminary observations. This is an essential process to ensure that the researcher’s first impressions are not lost once an interview is concluded. The process involves the researcher taking extensive notes during the interview and reviewing these, along with first impressions upon conclusion. The review leads to theoretical observations, referring to the “researchers’ reflections and derived meanings as informed by prior theory” (Maxwell 2012) as well as changes to the interview schedule for improvement of future interviews. Throughout the analysis of the data, the study will thus refer to this early analysis and how it influenced the subsequent processes. Early analysis is followed by data reduction. This is a process that involves

reading transcripts and highlighting 'meaning units' that represent themes related to the research questions and theoretical frameworks (Miner-Romanoff 2012:9). 'Meaning units' are then related and clustered and codes are assigned that facilitate the further relation of clusters and the identification of patterns. Once the data reduction is completed the essence of the lived experience is described by referring both to what was experienced (textual description) and how it was experienced (structural description) (Cresswell 1998:55). This strategy, consisting of both categorizing and connecting strategies, will be used for analysis.

In this study the categorizing "moves" are based on general coding practices with codes being understood as segments of data or units of meaning that are labeled using specific themes/concepts for descriptive, interpretive and explanatory purposes (Miles and Huberman 1994). Importantly it is not necessarily specific words that are labeled but rather their meaning (Miles and Huberman 1994:56). For categorizing strategies Maxwell suggests (2012:111) two different types of codes, namely organizational codes and theoretical codes⁴. The former are broad organizing categories that do not make specific claims about data. They are simply for organizational purposes. The latter, in contrast, represents organization of data in a way that makes certain claims about the relationships between the segments. As Maxwell (2012:112) states, "they could be *wrong*, rather than simply being conceptual boxes for holding data".

Initially codes are only descriptive as they serve the purpose to organize data in a particular way. Once this organization process is complete it is possible to explore the connections between units of meaning for interpretive purposes. This means that the units of meaning are further classified to reflect important contextual nuances. Finally the meanings are connected inferentially as explanatory links are established.

This study initially uses organizational codes in order to reduce data. For the Social Identity perspective the following are used:

⁴ Maxwell (2012:112) notes that substantive and theoretical codes are similar in that both address meaning of data. However, as substantive codes are more often than not the result of a process of open coding, they are not used in this study as coding here is based on existing theoretical accounts of social phenomena.

- Categorization
- Social Identity
- Comparison and differentiation
- The nature of interaction (intergroup vs interpersonal)
- Perceived status differences
- Identity threat
- Identification
- Norms and values

For the Symbolic Politics perspective these are employed:

- The meaning of land reform
- Meaning derived from interaction
- Interpretation of meaning

Thereafter the study turns to theoretic codes provided by both perspectives.

The connecting “moves” in this study are made in a similar way to what Miller (1991) did in a study briefly described by Maxwell (2012). In this study Miller found that the initial coding process limited her interpretive account of the data. She found overlap between the different codes used to analyze the data suggesting that there was more to the meaning of the data than could be extracted from the particular codes. She also found that meaning expressed by her interviewees was not limited to segments of data but rather integrated with larger narratives connected to context, something the codes could not adequately capture. To address these challenges she turned to narrative summaries that sought to “preserve the context and story of the relationships” (Maxwell 2012:121). This connecting approach entails identifying related meanings in each account and then connecting these meanings in context into first-person accounts while stripping away the meanings/data that are not related or relevant, the purpose being to note the relations within the data rather than between the codes. In such a way the “story” with its embedded meaning is retained

It has to be noted that both approaches are not considered to be empirical generalizabilities but rather as instruments for analyses. As a result the conclusions

drawn from the data analyses are more complex and reflect greater internal dynamics than the experimental results or philosophical musings on which both approaches are based. In the Social Identity perspective, for example, experimental research often creates conditions of very limited complexity (eg by setting up intergroup contexts with singular social categories only binary possibilities). While the value of these approaches are acknowledged for developing theories (Jackson and Sherriff 2013) they are not conducive for analyzing the complexities of intergroup relations in real situations. This is not seen as a departure from the positions of both approaches but rather as a true reflection of the complexity of human behavior.

1.3 The use of theory

Thinking about the use of theory in research can be done according to where in the research process theory features, the purpose of the theory and the scope of the theory. In terms of where (or when) theory is used in research, the traditional distinction between inductive and deductive uses of theory could apply. Cresswell (1998:85) represents this distinction as one between using theory before the study or after data collection. He, however, does not consider this distinction to be a strictly binary one but rather thinks of it as reflecting two extremes on a continuum. He argues that theory is not always used only before a study commences or after data has been collected. He rather suggests that theory can be used at different times in the process for different purposes.

In order to consider the purpose of theory in research it is important to take note of Denzin's (1970) distinction between theory-work and theory. Reviewing the definition of theory in sociological research, Denzin (1970:35) concludes that "Given this position, it is clear that contemporary sociology has few, if any, theories...There exist, instead, small attempts at theory, many conceptual frameworks, a few propositional systems without deductive schemes, and, more often than not, vague explanations that bear little formal relationship to theory". Much of the work in social research claiming to be theory is in fact, according to Denzin's definition, theory-work. For theory to exist concepts that offer a conceptual scheme, propositions that explain relationships between two or more concepts in the conceptual scheme and the potential to deduce further propositions from the primary ones are required (Denzin 1970:34-35). Where these are present prediction outside the empirical case on which the theory is based, becomes possible.

The scope of theory is very much related to its specific purpose and nature. A useful but broad distinction to start with when considering the scope of theory is one between highly abstract and general theories that are related to broad societal issues on the one hand and more limited theories that focus on specific areas of social reality or behavior on the other (Bryman 2010:6-7; Blaikie 2000:142). The distinction is important as it suggests that some types of theories may be better suited to general sociological explanations while others are more likely to prove useful for empirical enquiry. With this, and the distinction between theory-work and actual theory, in mind, it is possible to describe different types of theory. Here again Denzin (1970), along with Glaser and Strauss (1967) has probably provided the most substantial thinking. Denzin (1970) proposes at least four types of theories, each with distinct goals as well as advantages and disadvantages. The first type, grand or general social system theories, offers a macro perspective on society without necessarily indicating or explaining specific relationships (Blaikie 2000:144). An obvious advantage of this type of theory is that it can reflect large amounts of empirical deductions, provide broadly applicable frameworks and highlight *lacunae* in existing knowledge. The drawback of this kind of theory is related to Denzin's (1970) description of taxonomies and conceptual frameworks. As is the case with these levels of theory-work, grand theory suffices for descriptive purposes but has limited value for explanatory and predictive purposes (Denzin 1970:70). The next two types of theory, middle-range theory and substantive theory, are closely related. Both are more limited in the sense that they focus on specific aspects of social behavior (rather than social behavior in an all-encompassing sense). The difference, says Blaikie (2000:145), is in the fact that middle-range theories apply to various contexts and problems while substantive theories are explanations in specific contexts of specific problems. A simple distinction to explain this difference might be between theories that explain intergroup relations in general and theories that focus on relations between specific groups (eg race groups) or in specific contexts. The disadvantages of these kinds of theories are that they tend to fracture disciplines (Denzin 1970:71) and promote theory verification rather than continued theory generation (Denzin 1970:72). The last type of theory, formal theory, is an attempt to offer universal explanations for all cases related to the specific theory. While this is based on contested

ontology (Blaikie 2000:145) it does offer the advantage of allowing for comparisons between cases using the same theory (Denzin 1970:72).

It is important to conclude with a reference to the use of theory in qualitative research in particular. Traditionally qualitative research has been seen as only inductive in nature and as such should not prejudice any research findings by imposing pre-existing concepts or patterns of relationships on the inquiry. However, qualitative researchers contest this view themselves (Miles and Huberman 1994). In describing their own approach to qualitative research, Miles and Huberman (1994:17) argue that all qualitative researchers start with some ideas that are in all likelihood theoretically informed. Without these it would be impossible to design a study. Furthermore, without some conceptual guidance, studies would struggle to select appropriate samples or undertake effective analyses. Finally, they also indicate that the distinction between theory testing and theory generation, generally associated with the quantitative-qualitative distinction, is an overly rigid one when applied to qualitative research. In fact they argue that qualitative research can be “outright “confirmatory” – that is, can seek to test or further explicate a conceptualization” (1994:17).

1.4 Generalizability in qualitative case studies

Because of the particular epistemologies and ontologies that often characterize qualitative studies, such research is still questioned by methodology scholars or those that employ positivist/postpositivist methodologies. The argument goes that since qualitative research often arrives at conclusions based on data collected from limited cases and that such research does not employ the same rigorous sampling strategies often observed in quantitative research, its value in terms of generalizability is limited (Gobo 2008:193).

Gobo (2008) has argued against this traditionally accepted dictum. In reviewing the position adopted in qualitative traditions on this issue, he finds that the tendency has been to propose two different types of generalization to account for the value that qualitative research offers. The first kind determines the distribution of features in a population to ensure that these are accounted for in research. The second kind concerns itself with determining the relationship between categories and then extrapolates from these the

involvement of categories in all instances of the particular relationship. This dual position has given rise to different conceptualization of generalizability in qualitative tradition. Gobo (2008) lists five such conceptualizations. The first, and most extreme, argues that generalization is not the goal of qualitative research as this would disregard the complex influence of context (Denzin 1983). This position does provide for transferability of information (Guba and Lincoln 2005) but this transfer is not an activity of the researcher but rather one performed by the reader of the research. So, based on the persuasiveness of the researcher's arguments and similarities between the context of the research (sending context) and the context the readers choose to apply the findings to (receiving context), the readers make decisions about the transferability of hypotheses (Gobo 2008:197). A second conceptualization of generalizability returns agency to the researcher. Stake (1978) has called this "naturalistic generalization" and argues that it is based on the researcher's experience of different contexts. This experience allows the researcher to distinguish the similarities between contexts and to expect (rather than predict) outcomes. Stake (1978:6) concludes that such generalizations can pass from "tacit knowledge to propositional" but that such knowledge has not yet complied with "empirical and logical tests that that characterize formal (scholarly, scientific) generalizations". The third conceptualization suggests that generalizations from qualitative studies are not aimed at generalizing causal relationships but rather the mechanisms that underlie these relationships. This position of theoretical generalizations can be related to Glaser and Strauss's (1967) idea of "theoretical sampling". The intention, Gobo (2008:198) states, is "not to generalize to some finite population but to develop theoretical ideas that will have general validity". A fourth conceptualization is readily associated with evaluation research and suggests that qualitative findings accumulate to the point where understanding of "general mechanisms" (Gobo 2008:198) are possible. Finally, at the other extreme of the qualitative generalizability- continuum, is Znaniecki's (1934) idea of analytic induction. This entails that a set of cases are selected from which explanatory hypotheses are derived. These are then applied to similar cases. If the hypotheses cannot be confirmed, they are revised and again applied to similar cases. At least three reasons have been advanced to indicate that this position is not justified, at least as far as social science is concerned. First, probability sampling (often

associated with quantitative approaches) and statistical inference are often too limited to account for the complexities of social science research. Second, there are numerous examples of social science theories based on conclusions reached through analysis of data from only a few cases. Finally, vast amounts of social scientific knowledge are idiographic (Gogbo 2008:194) meaning that they are by nature only applicable to a very specific case.

1.5 Ensuring quality: reliability and validity

While there is an inherent qualitative difference between quantitative and qualitative research, this does not mean that qualitative research is excused from the quality standards that apply to quantitative studies (Silverman and Marvasti 2008:257). However, there is no single, consensual approach to thinking about the quality of qualitative social research. Boeije (2010) points to at least three perspectives on quality of research. The first comes from the idea that social science research is just another form of science (in the same way that physics or chemistry is science). The result of this perspective is that social sciences adopt the same value-free, objectivist approaches to research that is prevalent in the natural sciences. A counter position to this is found in constructivist approaches. This perspective questions whether it is possible to represent reality in research in any objective measure, especially when studying humans, cultures or societies⁵. Finally, a third perspective on the quality of qualitative research returns to the notions of reliability and validity but employing different procedures to ensure quality. It is within the last of these perspectives that the discussion about reliability and validity in the present study continues.

The nature of qualitative instruments make reliability a difficult measure to attain as qualitative instruments are rarely standardized (Boeije 2010:172) and qualitative analysis ultimately relies on interpretation (Silverman and Marsvati 2008:272). However, if ensuring reliability is understood as a process (Cresswell 1998) it becomes possible to argue that the researcher can increase reliability by clearly documenting the detail of the

⁵ See Guba and Lincoln (2005) and Cresswell (1998) for this perspective that represents the more 'traditional' approach to qualitative research that characterised the last part of the twentieth century.

entire research process and ensuring conceptual unity throughout (in other seeing to it that concepts are consistently used in a clearly defined way).

General methods of ensuring validity in research, such as triangulation and respondent validation may not be appropriate or possible in qualitative studies (Silverman and Marvasti 2008:260). There are, however, some other approaches to increasing the validity of a qualitative study. Silverman and Marvasti (2008:261) identify these as the refutability principle, the constant comparative method, comprehensive data treatment, deviant case-analysis and use of appropriate tabulations.

The *refutability principle* is similar to the idea of critical rationalism that suggests that all knowledge is provisional and should constantly be subjected to efforts to find alternative explanations. As alternative explanations are discounted, the validity of findings increases. The *constant comparative* method suggests that findings should be critically examined across numerous comparative cases. In qualitative research this might not always be possible as comparative data may not be available outside the particular study. In order to avoid a biased selection from available data, *comprehensive data treatment* is required. This involves the researcher returning to data continuously until “generalization is able to apply to every single gobblet of relevant data you have collected” (Silverman and Marvasti 2008:264). *Deviant cases* should not be ignored but rather identified for explicit analysis in order to account for their apparent deviance. Important here is to note that deviance is not inherent (in other words it is not an ontological issue) but rather is such in terms of the particular approach used in research (Silverman and Marvasti 2008:268). Finally, where appropriate, the validity of qualitative studies can be increased by taking note of the number of participant references to relevant categories. This *tabulation* may sound like a contamination of qualitative methods with quantitative measures but, as Silverman and Marsvati (2008:270) argue, it could provide the reader with an overview of data that is generally lost by the researcher entangled in qualitative data analysis.

The above are all related to the process analysis. In this particular study another operation was added in order to increase validity (although it potentially suffers from the same challenges faced by participant validation). At various times during the research the

researcher discussed findings with leaders in the agricultural communities where interviews were conducted. These discussions were used to confirm or adapt the researcher's interpretations of findings. The discussions were also recorded and by the time the research was concluded a series of discussion about the interpretation of findings had been had. This collection of critical discussions became an index used to confirm the validity of the interpretations of the individual interviews.

1.6 Ethical considerations

A study such as this present a few ethical considerations. In terms of the more common issues such as protection of the individuals participating the study followed Stellenbosch University's (SU) requirements for ethical clearance. The Humanities sub-committee granted clearance for the study once they were satisfied that participation held no risks.

As the context to which the Social Identity and symbolic perspectives are applied is an emotive one I relied on the insights of the organized agricultural structures to identify potential participants (as indicated above in the description of the sampling strategy). The access and insights provided by these bodies were crucial to ensure that no participants were exposed to unmanageable discomfort. Furthermore, as land reform is a sensitive issue, many land owners are suspicious of the motives of researchers meeting them. Where the suspicions cannot be allayed the researcher runs the risk collecting data that is potentially distorted through the self-regulation of participants while participants possibly find themselves in uncomfortable positions. Again, the assistance from the organized agriculture structures were invaluable in addressing these ethical risks.

There is a common popular discourse in South Africa that portrays arguments in the land reform debate made from the perspective of land owners in a negative light. Generally these arguments are presumed to reflect racial bias or principled opposition to the pursuit of land reform justice. My study ventures into this challenging area. It is done with due acknowledgement of the injustices suffered by South Africans because of racial prejudices, whether these were codified or not, as well as the need for transformation that will see just outcomes. However, pursuing these goals without paying attention to the perceptions of land owners risks at best research that is empirically not valid and at worst a delegitimization of a segment of South Africans' experiences. Any binaries that suggest

arguments made from one perspective necessarily means opposition to other perspectives, should be avoided.

1.7 Impact

As should be clear from the description of the research design of this study, both an empirical and non-empirical component is presented here. The impact should be seen in a parallel distinction between practical/applied and analytical/conceptual contributions. The practical contribution is a direct result of the analytical contribution. By expanding a framework for the analysis of transformation processes it becomes possible to indicate what real life operations are required in order to achieve the outcomes of the transformation process. In very real terms these suggestions could contribute to the management and transformation of the conflict potential of land reform. Given the increasing pressure to fully implement the land reform agenda as well as the pressures of food security, land reform should be considered as a priority issue in South Africa. All attempts to provide comprehensive descriptions of intangible processes to be managed in this undertaking should be welcomed.

Furthermore it is important to note that the Social Identity perspective is a highly theoretical one mostly developed through the use of experimental research. As such there have been questions about the application of the concepts from these traditions in real world situations (Huddy 2001; Hymans 2002). This study is an attempt to show how the Social Identity perspective can be related to real world situations and that it can contribute to our understanding of such a real world situation.

Apart from the practical and immediate value, the contribution made to the body of theoretical knowledge should also be considered as of importance. Greater understanding of Social Identity (as an important variable in explaining and describing intergroup behavior) and symbols and symbolic actions (as instruments informing intergroup behavior) will contribute to conflict literature in general. It should also give an indication of the applicability of the Social Identity perspective to social problems, something Brown and Capozza (2000:ix) argue is still not often evident in literature. Furthermore, the analysis conducted in this study offers some suggestions for relating distinct theoretical traditions to each other. While distinct and clear theoretical approaches

are necessary to precise explanations of particular phenomena, there is also a need for an integrative approach to knowledge for the purpose of knowledge building.

1.8 Chapter outline

This study is presented in eight chapters, including this introductory one. As part of the literature review Chapter two provides a brief background to land reform including its present legal and political contexts as well as an overview of descriptive, argumentative and evaluative literatures. This is followed by a conceptual consideration of peacebuilding, including its evident conceptual deficiencies. Chapters four and five then explore the two bodies of literature that could enhance peacebuilding literature, namely the Social Identity perspective and the Symbolic Politics perspective. Chapters six and seven represent the empirical contribution of this study. They offer analyses of qualitative data in order to address the stated research question. The final chapter summarizes the findings and makes some suggestions about the application of the Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives to a peacebuilding framework that can be applied to land reform. The chapter also considers theoretical and methodological issues raised throughout this study as well as potential future research needs.

Chapter 2: Land reform: history, process and conflict

2. Introduction

This chapter forms part of the literature review of this study and has two purposes. First it provides an indication of what research findings regarding land reform are available and applicable to the research questions posed for this study. As such it considers descriptive as well as argumentative and evaluative works. Regarding the *descriptive* works I focus on those that provide background and context to the current South African land reform question as well as a brief indication of the current institutional framework that is meant to facilitate land reform. The works providing background to the land reform question in South Africa actually represent an overlap of various disciplines including works from history, sociology, economics and law. In terms of *argumentative* works, those that take normative positions regarding land reform are considered. These offer more than descriptions of history and the *status quo* by arguing what land reform and its outcomes ought to be. They are more often than not based on ideologically informed theoretical positions and generally represent community specific ethnographies. Finally I review *evaluative* works. These are works that consider the outcomes of actual land reform initiatives. They often overlap with argumentative research as they evaluate the outcomes in terms of predetermined normative notions. I distinguish them from argumentative works based on the fact that they present empirical findings on which judgment about the success or failure of land reform can be based rather than only moral or political arguments.

A comprehensive review of available literature on land reform is of course not possible here. The land reform debate is a complex one and the various literatures associated with it originate in different disciplines and have different purposes. Exploring all these will not necessarily contribute to an improved understanding of the primary problem that I concern myself with in this study. At most I will categorize the various literatures (as proposed above) and refer to those that have a direct or indirect bearing on the problem of social conflict and intergroup relations in land reform. Throughout the exploration of literature in these three categories (descriptive, argumentative and evaluative) is guided by the research questions posed in the first chapter. In other words, the literature is investigated

to determine what descriptions of experiences of land reform are available as well as what it states regarding the influence of land issues on intergroup relations and the (potential) impact of land reform on intergroup relations.

The second purpose of this chapter is to explore how land reform is analytically and practically related to peacebuilding. This includes exploring what I consider to be deficiencies in the land reform literature and in particular how the land reform literature relates to peacebuilding concepts.

As mentioned this review cannot be comprehensive. It does not, for example, present a historical overview of the struggle over land in South Africa. Such an undertaking requires a study on its own, as evidenced by the works of Changuion and Steenkamp (2011), Davenport and Saunders (2000) and the two volume collection of the *Cambridge History of South Africa* (2012), to name but a few. It would also require an extensive examination of the different approaches to historiography that is very evident in the recording and interpretation of South African history. As such this chapter is also not an attempt to offer an historical argument in opposition to or in favour of land reform. This is not to suggest that history should not play any role in informing the descriptive or normative positions we take on land reform. It is simply indicative of the limits of this particular study. Making normative arguments from history is fraught with difficulties as histories are interpreted and framed in specific paradigms and discourses that need to be considered whenever any reading of history is done. Etherington (1995) and Saunders (1995) to name a few, have argued that history has in past been used in some way or another as a tool to promote political positions in South Africa. Similarly, Cooper (1994) has argued that historiographies of colonized lands often revert to the perpetuation of dichotomies in the way that imperialist historiography did. He states that while colonial historiography was characterised by the “civilized colonizer and primitive colonized” binary, there is a real danger that those opposed to this binary simply offer a different one, “destructive imperialist versus the sustaining community of the victims” (1994:1517), in their readings of history.

The manipulation of historical interpretation becomes evident in the debate about South African land distribution patterns when the construction of the Mfecane history is

considered. What we can then conclude from these arguments, for the purpose of this study, is that arguing from history is no simple exercise. As Cooper (1994:1545) states “Africa’s crisis derives from a complex history that demands a complex analysis: a simultaneous awareness of how colonial regimes exercised power and the limits of that power, an appreciation of the intensity with which that power was confronted and the diversity of futures people sought for themselves, an understanding of how and why some of those futures were excluded from the realm of the politically feasible...”. Thus, while it is vitally important to consider historical development and influence in the treatment of land reform, it falls beyond the scope of this study.

The review of land reform literature starts in the next section with a very brief reference to the historical developments that led to South Africa’s land ownership patterns. The purpose of this section is only to contextualize the debate. This is followed by a description of the legal mechanism used to facilitate land reform. While this study does not focus on the legal mechanism, it is part of the instrument through which land owners experience land reform and as such is part of their frame of reference. The penultimate section considers the variety of land reform literatures available (dealt with as descriptive, argumentative and evaluative literatures) as well as a description from existing literature of the conflictive nature of land reform. I then conclude with an exploration of absences in the literature and argue that this study is an attempt to address some of these gaps.

2.1 Land reform, justice and peace

2.1.1 *The development of current land ownership patterns*

The presentation here of some historical events is not, as stated above, to provide arguments for or against land reform. This would require an extensive review of historical literature as well as an ethical appraisal framework in which such an effort can be conducted. Rather, my intention is to avoid this unfortunate binary (for or against land reform) as far as possible. However, the reality within which the land reform question is debated came about through historical events and as such needs some historical contextualization.

The land reform process pertinent to this study refers to a particular one in the history of the country. However, historical review will show that the practice of manipulating land

ownership and tenancy patterns has seen repeated iterations⁶. And while the tendency (for understandable reasons) has been to consider the role of land ownership and tenancy in South Africa from the arrival of the Dutch East Indian company in 1652, the reality is that land was contested even before that time. Certainly the understandings of ownership were different in the pre and post 1652 eras but the reality is that contestation over land existed before this date (Collins and Burns 2007).

Once the Dutch East Indian company arrived, a particular concept of ownership was introduced to South Africa⁷ (see van der Merwe (1989) for a discussion of the legal principles *res nullius* and *dominium* introduced). Initially the Dutch East Indian company sought to acquire land, either through transaction or violence, in order to access the productive characteristics of land. There are, however, also suggestions that access to land provided more than a means of survival and prosperity for the Dutch East Indian company employees released from service (the so called *free burghers*). Davenport and Saunders (2000), for example, explore how identities developed in those initial years and how those identities were reflected in the contestations⁸.

⁶ Starting shortly after the arrival of the Dutch in 1652 land became a contested resource competed for between various groups claiming control over it. After Dutch rule the British introduced at least two distinct formal land policies, mostly for economic and security reasons, that resulted in further manipulation of ownership patterns (Duly 1965; Christopher 1971). In protest of British policies large communities left the Cape colony to resettle further north and east. As their settlements became formalized, so did policies that determined how land should be divided. With the discovery of mineral riches late in the 19th century the British push for control over the newly formed republics increased. As the nature of the economy and the use of land changed, so did the principles that guided land ownership patterns. Eventually, after conflicts that left South Africa under British control a political regime (including land ownership policies) that favoured whites was established (Dubow 2012). And of course the unfortunate history of land disenfranchisement starting in 1913 is well known. Apart from the manipulations wrought by European powers, South Africa also saw local influences on land settlement/ownership patterns. The Mfecane history is probably the best example of this. It should thus be clear that the current land reform programme is not the first attempt by power to manipulate land ownership patterns on a large scale in pursuit of specific political goals.

⁷ While politically South Africa only became a formal entity in 1910 as the Union of South Africa, this chapter also applies 'South Africa' when referencing the country's pre-history for ease of use.

⁸ See Gilliomee (2003) for a more comprehensive discussion of the development of the 'Afrikaner' identity and the role the access to land played in this development.

Scholars present somewhat differing views on how and why the current land ownership patterns developed (see Cobbing (1988), Omer-Cooper (199), Etherington (1995), Saunders (1995) and Changuion and Steenkamp (2011) as examples of how these different perspectives are represented in historical characterization). General consensus though is that however the patterns developed, it was characterized in many instances by a systematic dispossession and exclusion of non-white South Africans. This dispossession found the apex of its expression in the Apartheid policies that formalized ownership patterns that excluded the majority of the South African population from ownership, tenancy or use (see Hall (2010) for a comprehensive overview of the policy and legislative developments that facilitated this process).

A common claim has been that 87% of land in South Africa is owned by white South Africans with black South Africans owning 13%. These figures Walker and Dubb (2013) point out are based on the Apartheid legislation that intended to divide South African land in such a way that about 13% be allocated to the 'homelands' with the remainder under white ownership. By 1994, Walker and Dubb point out, the segregation plan had not been fully implemented. While these figures may not be completely accurate they do give an indication of an extensively skewed pattern of land ownership at the end of Apartheid with about 70% of the area of South Africa covered by white owned farms. By 2012 about 67% of South Africa's area was covered by commercial farming activities including those owned by large corporations and those held by single family unit owners. Apart from this there were also tracts of land used for subsistence and/or occasional farming. The known transfer of land suggests that 7-8% has been transferred from white owners to black owners (either individuals or communities) (Walker and Dubb 2013). Figures about the area of land that has come into black ownership through normal market mechanisms are not known but it is a category that should be kept in mind if land reform were only about area owned by black and white South Africans.

This last claim is indicative of one perspective on land reform, namely that land reform is a matter of transferring ownership until a certain ownership goal has been achieved. This perspective is overly simplistic and does not take into account, at a philosophical level, the justice needs of land reform nor, at a practical level, fluidity of property ownership. A second perspective then is less concerned with the actual figures and argues simply that

continued skewed patterns of ownership of land is a perpetuation of the injustices of Apartheid and should, as such, be urgently addressed. The difference between these perspectives is evident from how they separately determine success in the land reform process. The former would, in a simplistic way, determine land reform to have been successful once the pattern of land ownership is more representative of South Africa's demographics. The latter concerns itself not just with land ownership but also with stakes in the economy and control over the agricultural sector in general. Importantly, none of these perspectives consider the nature of intergroup relations as an indicator of the success or failure of the land reform process.

2.1.2 Land reform purposes during Apartheid

While the struggle for land in South Africa has a long history, the particular struggle to overcome the restrictions of segregationist policies probably found its most well-known expression in the Freedom Charter of the African National Congress (ANC). While earlier calls for access to land were common, the 1955 clause in the Freedom Charter that read "The land shall be shared among those who work it. Restrictions of land ownership on a racial basis shall be ended, and all the land re-divided among those who work it to banish famine and land hunger" (ANC 1955) became the basis of centrist thinking in the ANC in the period preceding the 1990 unbanning of the party (and other exiled parties).

Of course the calls for land reform also included more radical positions as well as those that sought essentially a retention of the *status quo* (Hall 2010). The former is evidenced by the advancement of arguments for nationalization and expropriation and is most commonly associated with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the National Land Commission (NLC) (Hall 2010). The latter, in turn, can be inferred from, what Hall calls (2010:137), "pre-emptive reforms" by the National Party (NP) government. These included a White Paper (1991) on land reform that argued explicitly against redistribution of agricultural land.

2.1.3 Post-1994 Policies and Legislation

One of the most significant outcomes of South Africa's negotiated settlement was the new Constitution, drafted by a democratically elected Constitutional Assembly, adopted in 1996. The constitution provides, *inter alia*, a framework for dealing with issues related to

land in the post-settlement era. True to the nature of the negotiated settlement, this framework also attempts to provide for the diverse needs of South Africans in terms of access to land (Rugege 2004). On the one hand a clause was included that protected the right to private property. At the same time though it provides for the three pillars of the land reform efforts since. Section 25(7) makes restitution possible by defining the victims (those dispossessed after 1913 due to discriminatory laws), the outcomes (restitution of property or some other equitable compensation) and the mechanism (an Act of Parliament). Similarly section 25(5) provides for redistribution. In this provision the state is identified as the primary agent for ensuring redistribution with the outcome described as “conditions which enable citizens to gain access to land on an equitable basis”. The instrument for enacting this constitutional imperative can be legislation or any other reasonable means taken by the state. Finally, section 25(6) establishes tenure security as a constitutional imperative. Again, the section is aimed at individuals or communities that have legally insecure tenure because of discriminatory laws. The Constitution specifies that such individuals or communities are entitled to legally secure tenure, through an Act of parliament (Kloppers and Pienaar 2014).

In keeping with the obligations stated by the Constitution, a White Paper on South African Land Policy (1997) was published that suggested three broad areas of reform related to land – restitution, redistribution and tenure security. These were meant to address five themes prevalent in South African land ownership and use, *viz* i) the injustices of racially based land dispossession of the past, ii) the need for a more equitable distribution of land ownership, iii) the need for land reform to reduce poverty and contribute to economic growth, iv) security of tenure for all and v) land management which will support sustainable use patterns and rapid release of land for development (DLA 1997). Further analyses of the policy has led McCusker (2004:52) to include two further important matters addressed by the policy *viz* the need to record and register all rights in property and the need to administer public lands in an effective manner.

Of course all these measures were preceded by the promulgation of an Act to undo the various legislations that formalized racial segregation and discrimination in terms of access to land. The Abolition of Racially Based Land Measures Act was passed in 1991 and was aimed at undoing laws such as the Natives Land Act No 27 of 1913, the Natives

Administration Act of 1927, the Native Trust and Land Act No 18 of 1936, the Group Areas Act 41 of 1950 and the Group Areas Act 36 of 1966 (see Kloppers and Pienaar (2014) for a description of each of these). Such legislation institutionalized European forms of landholding and racial distinctions and ultimately left black South Africans, who subscribed to a different form of landholding (Tswau 2006:21), landless.

The national Land Summit held in 2005 questioned a number of the foundations of the policy and legislative framework that was in operation until then. For example, a decision was taken to reconsider the practice that government does not intervene in the land market (Koppers and Pienaar 2014:693). In other words, the 'willing buyer, willing seller' principle was considered an obstacle to the advancement of the land reform project (although Kloppers and Pienaar (2014) argue that no research has been presented by government to support this statement).

Many of the decisions taken at the Land Summit have found expression in new strategies (such as land taxes and ceilings) and proposed legislative measures (such as the draft Expropriation Bill) (Cousins 2016). Arguably the most significant formal expressions of these though, have been a new Green Paper on Land Reform (published in 2011) and the Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Acts of 2014 (to be discussed below). There have been other formalized attempts at advancing the land reform programme (see Cousins (2016) for descriptions of these) but generally speaking they have had little actual impact.

2.2 Land reform: the current mechanism

2.2.1 *Land Restitution*

As stated earlier, the purpose of land restitution activities is to return land or provide just compensation to those who were dispossessed after 1913 because of discriminatory laws. The Restitution of Land Rights Act of 1994 allowed claimants until 31 December 1998 to lodge claims with the Commission for Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR). About 80 000 claims were lodged. The claims process was fraught with difficulties. Numerous potential claimants did not meet the deadline. Administratively the process also did not proceed according to expected timelines. Initially the expectation was that all claims would be implemented and settled by 2005 (Rugege 2004). However, Cousins (2016)

reported that “thousands” of claims are still to be settled and at least 20 000 to be implemented.

The selection of 1913 as the *terminus post quem* for dispossession that can lead to restitution claims has remained controversial. Partly in response to the controversy The Restitution of Land Rights Amendment Act was passed in 2014. This reopened claims until 2019 although the period of dispossession was not back dated to 1652 as some would have it. Cousins (2016) has argued that reopening the claims raises at least two concerns for the overall restitution process. First, with more than 120 000 new claims lodged, existing unsettled claims are at risk of being swamped or overruled. Second, with the claims increasing dramatically it has become unfeasible to settle all of them as the cost would extend the state beyond its capabilities.

2.2.2 Land Redistribution

Redistribution is intended to empower the poor by giving them access to land for both residential and productive purposes (DLA 1997). The conceptualization of redistribution has seen some variation over years, reflected in policy changes, since it was first institutionalized in the 1996 Constitution. Initially the intended beneficiaries of distribution were those who did not qualify for restitution settlements (de Wet 1997). In the period immediately after the first democratic elections in 1994 redistribution was located in the Settlement and Land Acquisition Grant (SLAG) programme. This framework identified the landless, labour tenants, farm workers, women and the rural poor and emerging farmers as the beneficiaries of redistribution and subjected all to a means test to determine eligibility (Hall and Cliffe 2009:5). The beneficiaries were responsible for the acquisition of land from willing sellers and state intervention consisted of the provision of R15 000 grants per household (later increased to R16 000).

Following a suspension from 1999 to 2001 SLAG was replaced by the Land Reform for Agricultural Development (LRAD) programme. This programme offered a different policy direction and changed the focus of redistribution to emerging farmers and the economic outcome specifically to commercial practices (Hall and Cliffe 2009:7). The grant structure was changed to a sliding scale offering from R20 000 to R100 000 per applicant and the means test was done away with to allow any black South African the opportunity to apply.

Various other policy and operational instruments were to follow. For example, in 2008 the Land and Agrarian Reform Project (LARP) was announced. It introduced collaboration between the then Department of Land Affairs and Department of Agriculture on redistribution projects with the aim of offering better post-settlement assistance. It was, however, not clear to what extent LARP will complement or replace LRAD (Hall and Cliffe 2009:9). In essence though the LARP was still a transformation instrument that focused on increased commercial rather than social outcomes. Other similar attempts have also been documented by Cousins (2016).

More recently populist pressures have shifted the land redistribution conversation again. Calls for nationalization and expropriation without compensation have become more common since the rise of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in the South African political landscape. It seems that balancing the need for justice and an economically viable agricultural sector is becoming an increasingly difficult challenge for the ANC government.

2.2.3 *Tenure reform*

Tenure reform is intended to improve the security of landholding for the rural urban and poor (DLA 1997). Under the apartheid framework tenants, laborers, renters and squatters held land under tenure dispensations that left their right to the land insecure at best (de Wet 1997). The legislative framework proposed by the land reform policy allows for improved security of access by exchanging *de facto* ownership rights to legal ownership rights (DLA 1997).

The legislative framework for tenure reform includes the Provision of Land and Assistance Act (1993), Restitution of Land Rights Act (1994), Land Reform (Labour Tenants) Act (1996), Development Facilitation Act (1996), Extension of Security Act (1997) and Interim Protection of Land Rights Act (1996). The Communal Property Associations Act (1996) contributed in a more indirect way in that it provided for the creation of communal entities that could pool Settlement/Land Acquisition Grants (SLAG) received by poor households to obtain land (McCusker 2004:53).

Tenure reform remains the most underdeveloped leg of the land reform project, both in terms of policy frameworks and outcomes (Cousins 2016). While a legislative framework

exists to both inform and facilitate the policy, regular claims of arbitrary expulsion of workers/tenants are levelled against mostly commercial farmers (see for example Visser and Ferrer 2015). In turn the organized agricultural sector has often challenged these claims referring to the inflation of figures relating to evictions, arguing that it is part of a concerted effort to influence public opinion (Uys 2015).

2.3 South African land reform: complex literature, complex problem

2.3.1 *Current perspectives*

A review of available literature on South African land reform reveals vast differences in approaches and purposes. This suggests that the issue is a complex one that requires extensive and varied engagement. For the purpose of this review, land reform literature is divided in three categories. As with all analytical distinctions, this one is not perfect and does not provide for all the literature available. It is, however, general enough to be relevant to the majority of literature. Furthermore it defines the differences between the categories in a way that sufficiently distinguishes them from each other.

The first set of land reform literatures are mostly *descriptive*. They tend to focus on the legal aspect of land reform and often explore the legislative framework within which land reform is conducted. So, for example, Feinberg (1995) explores deeds and transfer records as historical sources that indicate land ownership patterns among black Africans before and after 1948. Miller and Pope (2000) in turn investigate the legislative mechanisms that were introduced in the years following the transition to democracy to facilitate land reform. Primarily, they argue, the principal mechanism for land reform is now the Constitution and that ownership does not hold the almost sacred position it used to. As they say “Its power and position have been and are in the process of being devolved and fragmented” (2000:194). Other than literature that has legal processes as its main concern, historical texts also fall into the category of descriptive literatures. One example of this is Bergh’s (2005) description of the Bafokeng community’s loss of land in the 19th century and their subsequent struggles including the reclamation of some of what they lost. And then of course there are numerous descriptive reports on land reform initiatives compiled for donors. While these do present certain land reform goals as normative pursuits, they generally do not engage with theoretical concepts of empirical data in more than a descriptive way. They are often case studies that offer excellent insights into

particular land reform initiatives. The work by Lahiff, Maluleke, Manenzhe and Wegerif (2008) is a good example of this kind of literature. They explore the impact of land redistribution on poverty reduction in the Limpopo by presenting four case studies of communities that benefited from land reform.

The next broad category of literatures I refer to as *argumentative*. This is the most extensive category of literature on land reform and can be further subdivided. One collection of literatures in this category argues for land reform as the pursuit of justice. Mostly this body of knowledge argues for justice from the perspective of those that were victims of Apartheid removals and continue to suffer under structural constraints such as poverty. Calls for a fair distribution of land has been part of liberation political discourse for as long as the disenfranchised have organised against the ruling authorities in South Africa. In mainstream scholarly circles though, these calls are relatively young. Among the early proponents of a land reform programme that does not enshrine the sanctity of private property, van der Merwe (1989) argued that South Africa is in need of a Rawlsian pursuit of justice in tenure reform. This simply means that reform should result in outcomes that offer the greatest benefit to the least advantaged. Another example of this kind of literature is found in the work of Attfield, Hattingh and Matshabaphala (2004). They contend that arguments against land reform, such as its potential inefficiency, do not take sufficient account of values like justice in its consideration. Instead they argue that land reform should be pursued both on principled grounds and in terms of the outcomes it can potentially deliver. Similar arguments about land reform can be found in the works of Thomas (2003).

Also under this category of papers fall those that explore the connection between land reform and agrarian reform. Schirmer (2000) argues that land reform policy has failed because it has not taken sufficient notice of South Africa's agrarian past and present realities. In making recommendations to improve land reform policy he suggests that the programme should take an explicitly agricultural view and support land reform beneficiaries in the pursuit of agricultural success. The implication of such an approach, he says, is that only a small number of people will directly benefit from land reform. With this in mind he argues that policy makers should formulate other strategies to improve the livelihoods of rural South Africans. Hall (2004), taking a political economy approach, also

argues that land reform needs a focus on agrarian restructuring saying that the land reform initiative has been co-opted by the established commercial farming enterprise in South Africa. With the retention of the status quo a reorganization of ownership demographics become all but impossible as poor, rural black South Africans cannot afford to acquire land on the open market. In terms land reform purposes Ferguson (2013) presents a contrary argument to that made by agrarian reform proponents. He contends that in rural areas livelihoods are far more diverse than what land reform policies provide for. If land reform is to be a success, he argues, it should not be reduced to an agrarian question.

Another extensive body of literature on land reform explores the impacts of the programme in more nuanced terms. Here the literature on the gender dimension of land reform is a prime example with Walker (2002; 2003; 2005) probably the preeminent scholar in this regard. She, for example, explored the precarious social and economic positions of rural women and how the policy changes that made productive agriculture the focus of land reform has the potential to negatively affect these women.

The final category of literature on land reform concerns itself with the actual *impacts* of the programme. A study by McCusker (2004) considered whether the land reform programme had achieved its purposes in certain rural areas of the Limpopo province. Using remotely sensed images and survey techniques he found that land was used less productively after redistribution. With the intention of the land reform programme being to “enhance rural livelihoods and alleviate rural poverty” (2004:71) through productive agriculture, the lack of productive use leads him to conclude that the land reform programme he investigated, failed. The primary reasons for this failure, says McCusker, were policy failure (with policy being biased towards agriculture and not considering other forms of rural livelihood), insufficient capital and labour, gender inequalities, an urban bias. Similar findings of ineffective policy resulting in failure were published by Lahiff (2007). Anseeuw and Mathebula (2008) also considered the impact that land reform has had on improving rural livelihoods. Their research found that success in these terms has been only marginal or non-existent. Their recommendations focus, for the most part, on strengthening institutional infrastructure to support the uptake of land redistribution opportunities.

Much of the land reform literature takes an ideological perspective on land reform. It generally concerns itself with land reform as contestation between two or more opposing and irreconcilable positions. So, for example, there is the literature that presents the land reform question as one that is characterized by class divisions in the agricultural sector. The evaluation of land reform efforts and the goals pursued are then stated in ideological terms that concern themselves with these divisions and their implications. Much of the work of the Institution for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) can be characterised as such. These positions have found well-articulated expression in the voices of the likes of Hall (2015; 2004a; 2004b) and Cousins (2014; 2015).

Others that also base their work on ideology, but more specifically race based ideology, follow a similar pattern. They review land reform efforts and outcomes in terms of convictions related to racial demographics. This position has more often than not been associated with official government policies and has found expression in the formulation of policies, legislation and reports detailing the successes of or obstacles to land reform. In particular the White Paper on Land Reform (1997) expresses this perspective as it provides for the division of land along racial lines. Approaching land reform in racial binaries is, however, not limited to these official positions. It is also found among those that argue for a *status quo* that sees white farmers dominating agriculture. An example of this approach is found in the work of Du Toit (2004). He takes a strong position against land reform based on the failure of the restitution programme to maintain previous levels of agricultural production. His work is a collection of case studies that presents his arguments from the perspective of land owners that had sold land to the DLA as part of the restitution programme. While he presents an important perspective, his work unfortunately suffers from ideological preferences referred to in the first chapter.

Having taken in a view of the kinds of land reform literatures that are available I now point to two absences that I perceive in this broad collection. First, with the exception of du Toit (2004) and Fraser's (2008) work there are few representations of land owner perspectives in the literature. Where they are referenced they are generally portrayed as opposed to land reform based on racial prejudices (Claassens 1991) or they simply appear as passive participants in a larger process. Second, and related to this lack, is the absence

of literature that considers intergroup relations, using a dedicated intergroup framework, in the context of land reform.

2.3.2 The conflictual nature of land reform in South Africa

Bosman (2008:8) has stated that transformation processes have distinct conflict potential as they require in essence a revision of the rules regulating power relations. Land reform is no exception. It is a process that is divisive and emotive and as such has a particular conflict potential, both in South Africa and other sub-Saharan countries (de Wet 1997; Pankhurst 2000, Manji 2001, Binswanger & Deininger 1996:94; du Toit 2013; Gibson 2010; Akinola 2016). This conflict potential is also reflected in some of the apparent paradoxes, discussed in the literature on the goals of land reform. In the case of South Africa, land reform was intended, at least initially, to be part of a process promoting reconciliation by addressing injustices and inequalities (Manji 2001:330). The Green Paper stated that “Our vision is of a land policy and land reform programme that contributes to reconciliation...” (DLA 1996:1) as well as “The primary reason for the government's land reform measures is to address the injustices of apartheid and to alleviate the impoverishment and suffering that it caused” (DLA 1996:5). These positions were confirmed in the soon to follow White Paper on Land Policy (1997). Some have argued that these goals are at odds with each other. De Wet (1997:356) claims that it might prove impossible for the land reform programme to pursue distributive justice and reconciliation without recreating inequality, competition and conflict while du Toit (2013) has pointed out how various ideological positions accord different and sometimes irreconcilable meanings to land reform. Similarly Hall and Ntsebza (2007) have argued that a fundamental distinction exists between those that view land reform as an economic activity and those that conceive of it as a political endeavour.

Anseeuw and Alden (2011:25) note two important facts about South African society that complicate our understanding of the land reform debate and coinciding conflict. First, South Africa can readily be described as an urban rather than a rural society. Second, South Africans seem to report the need for employment as the most pressing matter of the day, even more so than access to land. So why does the land reform debate have such evocative conflict undertones? It is my contention that current land reform literature, as pointed out in the previous section, suffers from distinct gaps that prevents it from

exploring this problem sufficiently. I now turn to what I believe the literatures are that could enhance the land reform body of knowledge.

2.4 Identities and Symbolic Politics: inextricably linked categories in land reform

Despite the acknowledged need for land reform little critical review of some of the dimensions involved in the process has been offered. Theorists and practitioners have tended to focus on tangible and institutional dimensions of the process such as economics, policy, legislation and justice outcomes and this often leads to a preference for descriptions and explanations that focus on the competition for scarce resources or justice for victims of dispossession (see as examples Ferguson 2013; Thackwray 2007; Lahiff, Maluleke, Manenzhe and Wegerif 2008; Wegerif 2004; Schirmer 2000; van der Merwe 1989; McCusker 2004; Miller and Pope 2000).

While these are crucial perspectives on their own they offer only a limited perspective on land reform. It should by now be clear that to many land is more than a simple economic unit with only instrumental value. South Africa's first land claims commissioner, Joe Seremane, has been quoted as saying "Land is a birth right. The umbilical cord between us and mother earth that tells us where we belong" (Fairweather 2006:197). While this statement is quoted to argue the depth of meaning that land has for South Africa's black African⁹ population, this meaning can be extended to all the population groups of South Africa. Fraser (2008) has found that the unwillingness of white land owners to sell their land for redistribution purposes is closely related to their symbolic connection to the land. In a different study du Toit (2004:vi) states that "One cannot simply "resign" from farming and get another job. It is a holistic profession, and the land is an emotive element in the equation". Although du Toit's (2004) work has been questioned for its ideological bias, it does highlight a particular perspective in the entire land reform debate that is often missing from the mainstream literature, namely the experiences of those that are required to give up land for the sake of the land reform process. The distinction between white and

⁹ Although the need for such a designation is, in my opinion, unfortunate, it reflects the realities of the South African political narrative. Distinctions between "white" and "black" is particularly common in the land reform context as both the legislative frameworks that guide the process and the popular narrative that informs public opinions and debate are characterised by such categorization.

black perspectives, although unfortunate, still represents one of the primary identity divisions in South African land reform, namely the racial division (Holborn 2010; Swart 2010). It seems then that, contrary to suggestions by Gibson (2010), land is related to issues of identity (Derman, Odgaard and Sjaastad 2007:9) for both black and white South Africans and that land means more than just wealth, material survival and post-Apartheid justice. In this sense land (and land reform) can be considered to have a significant symbolic dimension.

Of course symbolic elements have no inherent value or meaning. They have only ascribed value and meaning for either individuals or groups (Elder and Cobb 1983:28; Klatch 1988:139). Where symbols have meaning for groups they are particularly important in conflicts and post-conflict situations because they are attached to identities. Klatch (1988:139) states that “It is because symbols represent this common membership that they evoke such strong feelings of identification” while Elder and Cobb (1983:1) argue that “Symbols serve to link the individual to the larger political order and to synchronise the diverse motivations of different individuals, making collective action possible”. The importance of symbols in conflict and post-conflict situations is thus related to the importance of identities (Kaufman 2006:204). Once we acknowledge that the importance of symbols is inextricably linked to the importance of social identities, it becomes possible to analyse the intersection between symbols and social identities in social processes (in this case land reform). Such analysis is located in the broader concern with intergroup relations.

My attempt to analyze land reform using the theoretical frameworks focusing on intergroup relations and symbolic value, is also an attempt to integrate knowledge from these theoretical perspectives. This integration allows us to avoid the trap of misrepresenting the Social Identity perspective as a theoretical instrument that considers intergroup conflict to be inevitable. If we do not consider the mediation of social context, in other words what is valued by an identity in specific contexts, we are doing the Social Identity perspective an injustice (Reicher and Hopkins 2001:34). An added advantage of the integration suggested here is that it accords symbols and symbolic actions their rightful positions in the analyses of intergroup relations. Thus, in order to consider the intangible and non-rational/non-instrumental aspects of land reform in South Africa, I

argue that the phenomenon needs to be analyzed using both the Social Identity perspective and the theoretical approaches to Symbolic Politics. Kaufman (2006) in fact argues that such approaches are necessary if peace building processes are to succeed. An analysis of this kind would offer us the insight that Huddy (2004:949) argues for when she says that we should not ask if group relations will be conflictual but rather "...under what circumstances, group membership is translated into ingroup political cohesion, divisive intergroup behavior, political conflict, and political action". This study thus considers the peacebuilding process that is land reform from the perspective of Social Identity and intergroup relations on the one hand and Symbolic Politics and its contribution to social relations on the other.

2.5 Summary

This chapter started by describing the broad historical, political and legislative context of the land reform debate in South Africa. While it acknowledged the complexity of the debate at both conceptual and empirical level (in terms of land ownership, transfer and goals of reform initiatives) the main focus of the review conducted here was to highlight the symbolic and identity nature of the conflict that characterizes the debate. After considering the general tendencies in existing literature I argued that current research lacks comprehensive, systematic and theoretically informed consideration of these dimensions and suggested that analyses relying on the Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives could contribute to existing understandings of the tendencies in the land reform debate.

The chapter also pointed out that that existing literature in general offers insufficient representation of the perspectives of current land owners. In the absence of these perspectives it is difficult to envision land reform activities that contribute to the realignment of intergroup relations and, ultimately, a sustainable peace.

The next chapter offers a review of peacebuilding literature. As this study takes sustainable peace as a point of departure for any land reform research, it is important to explore current thinking about the processes that contribute to or detract from peace and, in particular, consider how this thinking potentially intersects with conceptual developments in the Social Identity and Symbolic politics perspectives.

Chapter 3: Peacebuilding: a review

3. Introduction

The literature on the pursuit of peace in South Africa abounds. In this chapter I explore those literatures that are concerned with peacebuilding as both a process and an outcome in the South African context. The review, however, is more than just an overview of literature on the defining characteristics of peacebuilding. It also makes evaluative judgments regarding the insufficiencies of these literatures and proposes that the Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives can make significant contributions to this body of knowledge.

In order to apply the Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives in later chapters and integrate these explanatory findings in a normative framework, the chapter introduces Lederach's (1997) integrative peacebuilding framework. This framework offers both the conceptual complexity and real-life application to accommodate the contributions from the Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives in the pursuit of a normative goal.

3.1 The nature of South Africa's post 1994 social conflict

Analyzing South Africa's post conflict processes is probably just as complex as implementing the initiatives that are meant to normalize society. As mentioned earlier various concepts have been applied to the description of the South African peace process and transition. While each of these have analytic merit and offer something unique to the description and understanding of the South African peace process, they also represent an artificial distinction of the kind that is often the primary focus of criticism leveled at the social sciences. This distinction does not account for the overlap between the practices and goals envisioned by the different concepts and in effect discounts the integrated and dynamic nature of the challenges faced by the South African peace process.

Of course South Africa's post 1994 situation does not represent a state of conflict that is characterized by direct or systematic violence. However, Mac Ginty (2006) has argued that a negotiated settlement that results in the cessation of direct violence does not necessarily imply a normalized or harmonious situation. Rather, he refers to many post settlement situations as "no war, no peace" situations. This means that despite the end of violence, the "affective and perceptual issues of reconciliation, exclusion, and the

restoration of dignity” (Mac Ginty 2006:4) have not been addressed. Such a description of South Africa’s post settlement state is apt given the continued socio-economic inequalities and continued racially based intergroup competition (Holborn 2010).

Mac Ginty (2010) offers at least three reasons why it is important continue to study “no war, no peace” situations as a separate analytic category. Firstly he notes that “no war, no peace” situations often reflect unresolved matters that will always have the potential (real or imagined) to reignite large-scale conflict. Secondly, while “no war, no peace” situations are not characterised by high levels of ethno-national or political violence, they do not necessarily represent an improvement in post-conflict living. As Mac Ginty states, these situations are known for “continuation of indirect violence, the failure to deal with underlying conflict causes, and underdevelopment” (2010:147). Finally, “no war, no peace” situations challenge us to revisit our conceptualisation of ‘peace’. Often “no war, no peace” situations are based on limited or restrictive understandings of peace that have the absence of violence as the only necessary condition for peace.

This limited conceptualization of peace is often reflected in peacebuilding practices that are restricted to quantifiable and institutional change, an approach that has been questioned (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013). There are peace scholars, like Lederach (1995; 1997), that take a more inclusive approach to peace – one that recognizes the interconnected nature of efforts to produce sustainable social relations and argues that “peacemaking activities overlap, complement, and, more importantly, are mutually supportive and dependent” (1995:14). Lederach’s views suggest that the realization of conflict (and peace) is connected to the relationship between levels of power (i.e. balanced and unbalanced levels of power) and levels of awareness of conflict of interest (Lederach 1995:12). Lederach acknowledges that this paradigm does not necessarily suggest linear or sequential development of conflict or peace but that its usefulness should be sought in its reflection of long-term view of conflict and conflict resolution, that is “a vision of where we are going and a multiplicity of activities to get us there” (1995:14). At the heart of this paradigm (and Lederach’s subsequent thinking about building peace) is the idea that conflict is just as much relational as it is structural and therefore requires a transformation of relationships. In fact, this approach implicitly discounts any strict division between structural and relational approaches to conflict by considering the

dynamic relationship between these two broad approaches. Lederach expresses this succinctly when he notes the appropriateness of ‘transformation’ as a concept to describe peacebuilding activities, saying that it assumes “a transformation of the system and structure...in which the relationships are embedded” (1995:18).

This chapter takes Lederach’s (1995:14) descriptive view that peace activities are relational and his normative view that justice should be the goal of these activities. As such I employ the concept peacebuilding in a broad sense (as Lederach also does). In order to eventually argue that land reform in South Africa is both in need of peacebuilding activities and characteristics and that at the same time it also has the potential to restructure social relations and the structures in which these are played out, this chapter starts by considering the concept itself. On the one hand this consideration is an attempt to justify the use of the concept in terms of the theoretical concerns prevalent in conflict literature. On the other it is also an attempt to transcend these strict analytic categories to suggest a more integrated way of thinking. After considering the appropriateness of the use of the concept ‘peacebuilding’ in this study, I turn to the idea that land reform can be both an instrument or mode for peacebuilding as well as an object that requires peacebuilding interventions or that at least should be structured according to peacebuilding principles in order to prevent it from entrenching relationships that are characterized more by conflict than by peace. The chapter concludes by considering the connection between two aspects of subjective experience and land reform, namely the symbolic mediation of reality and the role of identity in interpreting and relating to reality.

3.2 Problematizing ‘Peacebuilding’ as an analytical concept

The study of peacebuilding is often characterized by conceptual confusion. Call and Cook (2003) describes this field of inquiry as consisting of at least three different traditions. The first is related to Boutros Boutros Ghali’s *Agenda for Peace* (1992) and suggests that peacebuilding is concerned with capacity building (state building) and reconciliation in order to prevent a return to conflict (Call & Cook 2003:235). The second tradition relies on the work of Galtung (1975). While the first approach can be said to describe elite-led attempts at capacity building and reconciliation, the second approach’s focus is on initiatives by actors other than the state (Call & Cook 2003:235). The third type of peacebuilding literature identified is very different to the two mentioned above in that it

dispenses with the idea of “post-conflict societies” as scholars in this tradition believe that there is in principle no difference between peacebuilding in such societies and peacemaking and conflict prevention in other societies. For these scholars there is then little utility in distinguishing between peacebuilding and other forms of conflict prevention (Call & Cook 2003:235).

Given the historical understandings of peacebuilding and the resulting conceptual confusion, it is only appropriate to explain the decision to describe the South African peace process as peacebuilding. Mullenbach (2006) has identified a number of characteristics that, he argues, are required in order to speak of a process as peacebuilding. These focus on the temporal dimension of peacebuilding (i.e whether peacebuilding belongs to the pre or post-conflict phase of a dispute), the goals of the process and the agency dimension (i.e who the actors are involved in peacebuilding processes). I briefly investigate each of these dimensions in order to improve understanding of peacebuilding and, ultimately, to argue for the value of viewing analytically the South African land reform process as an example of peacebuilding.

3.2.1 The temporal dimension of peacebuilding

There seems to be significant differences between theorists regarding the timing of peacebuilding. This difference has mostly to do with their understanding of the goals of peacebuilding as well as its relationship to other forms of peace activities. Diehl (2006), for example, has argued that peacebuilding follows a peace settlement between parties involved in military hostilities. He states that “Peacebuilding then takes place after prevention has failed, *after* traditional peacekeeping (if this occurred), and *after* peacemaking” (2006:109). He thus separates peacebuilding from other activities such as preventative diplomacy and peacekeeping. Although he acknowledges some overlap between preventative diplomacy (or other forms of preventative negotiations) and peacebuilding, he still maintains the distinction between these concepts based on the assumption that a violent conflict changes relationships to such an extent that diplomatic efforts would no longer be sufficient (2006:109) to address hostilities. This approach is similar to that first suggested by Boutros Ghali (1992). For him preventative diplomacy and peacebuilding, although related, were two distinct sequential processes. He claimed that “Preventive diplomacy is to avoid a crisis; post-conflict peace-building is to prevent a

recurrence” (Boutros Ghali 1992). Others have offered a broader definition of peacebuilding that allows them to categorize a number of peace activities as peacebuilding and therefore also to situate it differently in temporal terms (Mullenbach 2006). Fisher (1993), for example, has argued that peacebuilding efforts should de-escalate conflicts and should therefore be understood as an intermediary phase between peacekeeping and peacemaking. His description of peacebuilding allows for an understanding that locates peacebuilding both in the phases of conflict and post-conflict reconstruction. In Boutros Ghali’s (1995) *Supplement to an agenda for peace* he also seems to have allowed for a broader definition of peacebuilding, stating that peacebuilding can either be exercised in a context where a settlement has been negotiated or one where no settlement agreement has been reached. In the case of the latter he notes that peacebuilding can either be a preventative or a post-conflict process. In order to understand the temporal dimension of peacebuilding, this study adopts Lederach’s (1997) view that because conflict is by nature a process that can potentially vacillate between peace and the absence of peace, peacebuilding need also be thought of a process rather than a single or limited event at a point in time. As Richmond says (2002:96) says, “...peace is never made but always in the making”. Thus peacebuilding is thought of as a complex collection of different strategies for different contexts that has the ability to transform the conflict regardless of the stage of the conflict. The peacebuilding process ultimately moves the conflict to a stage of, in Lederach’s (1997:71) words, “restructured relationships”. It is thus not really a question of the “when” of peacebuilding as if stages of conflicts are mutually exclusive and clearly distinct from other stages, but rather what peacebuilding activities are required at which stages of the conflict process. Disregarding this process of peacebuilding leads to a lack of appreciation for the important roles that different activities play in the long term transformation of the conflict and the complex relationships between these different roles.

3.2.2 *The goals of peacebuilding*

The timing of peacebuilding is closely related to understandings of the goals of peacebuilding. While these goals may seem obvious considering statements such as “the main goal of most peacebuilding efforts is to prevent the occurrence or recurrence of hostilities and to facilitate the peaceful settlement of disputes” (Mullenbach 2006:56),

there is, considerable theoretical disagreement about the purpose of peacebuilding. This disagreement can be described in terms of two opposing views, expressed by Haugerudbraaten (1998) in the form of a question - "Is peacebuilding about removing the root causes of a conflict or about finding ways to resolve old and new disputes in a peaceful fashion?". Diehl (2006) frames the diverging viewpoints as presenting, on the one hand, positive peace and on the other, negative peace as the aims of peacebuilding. The former refers to a state in which the root causes of a conflict have been removed through processes such as reconciliation and value transformation (2006:108) while the latter refers merely to the absence of violence (or the no war, no peace state that Mac Ginty (2006) describes). If we accept that peacebuilding intends to foster sustainable peace, or positive rather than a mere negative peace, we cannot but conclude that peacebuilding must be aimed at addressing the root causes of conflicts. While this may seem a satisfactory description of the goal of peacebuilding it leaves us with numerous unresolved questions regarding the actual root causes of conflicts. The ideal theoretical approach to conflict and peacebuilding should certainly reflect holistic or integrative thinking. The reality is, however, that the study of conflict presents a fragmented appearance due to the diversity of academic disciplines from which theorists posit their ideas. This is especially true concerning theorizing about conflict causation. In the absence of, what Mac Ginty (2006:67) calls, a "precise science of conflict-causation", analyses of factors contributing to conflict is left to the prejudices and biases of the researcher. Although mono-causal explanations of conflict are generally disowned, there is a strong preference for explanations that are related to the discipline of the individual theorist. Referring to the extent of complexity posited in social scientific theorizing Ragin (1989:20) states categorically that the complexity of causal explanations depends absolutely on the interests of social scientists.

Approaches to conflict causation can be divided into two broad categories namely subjective and objective approaches. Objective explanations are such that they are not concerned with thoughts, feelings or perceptions but rather focus on competition for scarce resources (Bosman 2008:36). This approach was well theorized by Sherif (1966) in what has become known as "realistic group conflict theory". According to this approach competition for scarce resources leads to real (as opposed to perceived) conflicts of

interest, resulting in intergroup conflict. The scarcity of resources rather than the way in which relations between groups are constructed, is then considered to be the necessary condition for conflict. Subjective approaches, on the other hand, turn to perceptions and interpretations for explanations of conflict and has repeatedly been acknowledged as indispensable (see Schlee 2004; Louis and Taylor 2002; Monroe, Hankin and van Vechten 2000; Bourhis, Turner and Gagnon 1997 for some examples). These approaches hold that perceptions and attitudes rather than competition, determine conflict (Bosman 2008:37). While not denying the role played by objective elements, such as resource scarcity, Tajfel and Turner (1979:34) have in fact argued that objective causes, although they may be sufficient, are not necessary conditions for the initiation of conflicts. The argument formulated in this study is a continuation of the one posited by Tajfel and Turner (1979) and takes as basic premise the idea that causes of conflicts are to be found in the realm of the psychological as it interacts with context.

Are these distinctions between subjective and objective causes important for the study of conflict and peace? If we consider understanding of the nature and causes of conflict as essential to supporting the processes of dealing with conflict, we must conclude that the distinctions are important. Misunderstanding of the nature and causes of conflict is likely to result in poor or ineffective conflict management strategies, as is rightly pointed out by Kaufman (2006). Here we are reminded of Lederach's argument that conflicts are driven by "real-life experiences, subjective perceptions, and emotions" (1997:24) and therefore require peacebuilding efforts that are rooted in and responsive to this subjective dimension.

3.2.3 *Peacebuilding actors*

While peacebuilding represents a wide variety of actions, it is mostly described as an intervention, in other words as a process driven and often facilitated by parties external to a conflict. Although not denying the role played by local actors, commentators tend to mostly present peacebuilding as an externally initiated, managed and driven process (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2005; Crocker and Hampson 1996; Mullenbach 2006; Diehl 2006; Pugh 2005; Barnett *et al* 2007). It is quite understandable that the involvement of third-party actors as primary agents has come to be taken for granted in most descriptions of peacebuilding. When Boutros Ghali (1992) put forward the concept

as an important peace activity he did so in the context of post-Cold War peace operations. Since that time consideration of peacebuilding has been greatly informed by observations of peace efforts in conflict and post-conflict situations with significant external involvement. Taking into account the seemingly “interventionist” nature of peacebuilding the decision to describe the South African peace process as peacebuilding could be questioned. The South African process is in many regards a unique process that makes it difficult to categorize it using all the criteria that applies to other cases. The absence of significant external intervention is accounted for by Crocker and Hampson (1996:56) in their argument that in the South African case the severe levels of disintegration of central authority are absent from the equation¹⁰. This, however, does not disqualify the process as a form of peacebuilding.

The recurring (some would say intractable) nature of many of the world’s contemporary conflicts seem to confirm the failure of conflict settlements that are elite driven and focus exclusively on institutional reform. In fact, there is a growing realization among practitioners (which has only recently started to establish itself among theorists) that sustainable settlements and peacebuilding efforts require multi-level interventions involving multiple actors. The ultimate goal of these interventions should reach beyond the mere cessation of hostilities to reconciliation and the establishment/restoration of cooperative relationships and the empowerment of communities (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2005:215). Thus, in order to construct sustainable peace, more than institutional transformation and intervention is required. What is required, in conjunction with sound policy and sufficient institutional capacity and resources, is an approach that seeks the restoration of relationships (Bar-Tal 2000; Lederach 1997) and the generation of sufficient alternatives to the diverging interests of parties involved in a conflict (Rubin, Pruitt and Kim 1994:12). And this is where the challenge of social transformation processes are to be found. These processes, more often than not, represent a continuation of divergent interests if they continue to be exercised in a zero-sum framework.

¹⁰ Although Crocker and Hampson (1996:56) do acknowledge that there were significant external influences on the locally led settlement process.

3.3 Conceptualizations of conflict: rational choice or psychological explanations?

One of the difficulties regarding the concept peacebuilding is that it is often preceded by a conceptualization of conflict that limits its application. Kaufman (2001) provides a summary of some of the prevailing approaches to conflict as a way setting the stage for his particular approach to conflict and peacebuilding. These other approaches, he argues, offer useful contributions to understanding ethnic conflicts but are inadequate on their own. His suggestion is that ethnic conflict, as a multi-faceted phenomenon, requires multi-dimensional explanations.

Kaufman's Symbolic Politics theory offers an alternative to rational choice theories often employed to explain ethnic violence. Despite claims to the contrary (see Grigoryan 2007), Kaufman does not deny the valuable contributions made by these theories. In response to Grigoryan's (2007) criticism he (Kaufman) argues that different approaches to understanding ethnic conflict offer different perspectives that should be considered in any attempt to develop comprehensive understanding of conflict (Kaufman 2007).

Kaufman (2001; 2006; 2007) argues that existing explanations of ethnic conflict are on their own both analytically and practically insufficient. In *Modern Hatreds* (2001) he investigates two distinct theoretical schools of thought. The first, rational choice theories, he argues, are based on the idea that ethnic groups are primarily instrumental and that such groups are formed merely to compete for whatever they need. Different versions of rationalist theories define the object of this competition differently. The "economic rivalry" approach suggests that competition is for material resources and that ethnic groups are formed to pursue these interests. Although this particular school of thought also has different perspectives, it is often construed as an elite-led explanation (Kaufman 2001:17). He rejects this approach on empirical as well as logical grounds (2001:18). He argues that this approach fails to account for the choice of violent conflict as a mode of dealing with the rivalry. At a rational level, violent conflict is probably the worst option for dealing with economic rivalries. Kaufman (2001:8) argued that this explanation needs to be augmented with contributions from other approaches, especially one that focuses on deep emotional experiences.

Another set of ideas considered to be rationalist suggests that social conflict is really the pursuit of personal security rather than tangible resources. This approach argues that as individuals feel more threatened they are compelled to band together in groups. The strengthening of group boundaries is then interpreted as mobilization which in turn encourages others to mobilize and thus creating a security dilemma. The important variable in this explanation is the disintegration of central control or the emergence of anarchy (see Posen 1993 for an example of this argument). To this Kaufman replies that the causal sequence actually works the other way around: mobilization along ethnic lines and the resultant security dilemma leads to the emergence of anarchy (2001:20). A final kind of rationalist explanation that Kaufman rejects is one that considers competition between groups to be the pursuit of any kind of goal (not only economic profit), including group values or norms. While he concedes that this set of arguments is logically more coherent, it only assumes the norms and values that groups pursue rather than explaining them (2001:22). In order to account for these he turns to psychological explanations of conflict.

A first psychological position Kaufman considers is the primordialist view of ethnicity (2001:23). This position suggests that group identities are fixed and marked by physical characteristics (such as racial characteristics) and that these groups have distinct values that determine how members see themselves and others. This kind of thinking is what is at the root of, what Kaufman (2001:4) calls, the 'ancient hatreds' explanation of ethnic war. According to this explanation modern ethnic groups are direct continuations of ancient ones and conflicts between such groups are historical inevitabilities. The problem with this explanation is at least threefold. First Kaufman (2001:3) points out that explanations resorting to 'ancient hatreds' are in fact inappropriate as the historical bitterness it assumes has to be renewed in each generation through the revision of existing myths. The events these hatreds are based on need to be newly interpreted in each generation and as such he does not consider them to be 'ancient' in the strict sense of the word (2001:4). In this Kaufman shows clear dependence on Symbolic interactionist thinking. The relevant symbols, while they may refer to historical events, require interpretation in each generation. As Oliver (2012:411) states "Individuals and society are in a constant state of flux as our definitions of each moment shift through the continuous

dialectical process of interpretation and action". Animosity between groups also has the tendency to rise and fall depending on other factors, rendering a simple reference to a past enmity insufficient as it does not account for these factors. The direct connection between current conflicting parties and some historical referents is also problematic. In the case of the Middle-East, for example, the fact that current Israeli citizens are quite different to those of say, the middle ages makes it challenging to link them to some historic conception of the Jewish people. If the 'ancient hatreds' thesis were correct, conflict would be inevitable and perpetual. Both casual observation and empirical evidence suggest that this is not the case.

A second psychological explanation goes some way to addressing some of the concerns raised above. The constructivist view of ethnicity suggests that the markers of ethnic identity (and thus ethnic identity itself) is created and then ascribed. Not all ethnic identities are newly created though. They could also be new interpretations of existing myths by leaders (Kaufman 2001:24). By being more flexible than the primordialist view, this psychological theory begins to account for the complexity that characterizes ethnicity and ethnic intergroup behavior.

In synthesizing a psychological theory of conflict he highlights at least three important perspectives. First, referring to the Social Identity tradition as well as the work of Horowitz (1985), Kaufman suggests that at the heart of intergroup contestation is the struggle for relative status. Importantly he states that the pursuit of status is almost without exception cast in the format of arguments about legitimacy as groups seek to show moral and historical legitimacy of their claims. Second, prejudice and negative feelings have been shown to be important variables in explaining ethnic conflict. Finally, the fear of group extinction also characterizes violent ethnic conflicts.

3.4 Conceptual limitations of peacebuilding literature

If we accept that peacebuilding literature provides us with a useful point of departure to conceptualize a framework to consider the South African transformation process, we also need to acknowledge some of the limitations of this literature and its contribution to the concept. Peacebuilding literature has been faulted for its often singular focus on objective elements of the transformation process (such as the redistribution of material goods or

the restructuring of the modes of production). This is often the result of peacebuilding activities that are limited to these objective elements. Such limitations in peacebuilding are likely to result in processes that are “not only ineffective but also in many settings irrelevant or offensive” (Lederach 1997:24). For transformation processes, as a necessary part of peacebuilding efforts, to succeed they need to address not only the objective aspects of the conflict and the subsequent transformation processes, such as resources, powers, skills, allies and enemies (Deutsch 1991:28) but also the subjective elements such as accumulated perceptions, animosity, fear, values, goals, expectations and stereotyping (Lederach 1997:23, 24; Deutsch 1991:28). The latter is what Mac Ginty (2006:4) refers to when referencing “affective and perceptual” issues. To achieve such a comprehensive transformation an explanation of the conflict that also focuses on the psychological dimension of intergroup interaction is required (Billig 2002; Kaufman 2001). In this study two particular aspects are considered to be absent from peacebuilding literature in general – social identities (and their role in intergroup relations) and symbolic meaning and behavior. In their absence the concept limits the ability to analyze the conflict potential of a situation as well as the possible processes to pursue a peaceful resolution of potential conflict situations.

3.5 Lederach: An integrative peacebuilding framework

Among the numerous approaches to peacebuilding a few are exceptional for the fact that they present peacebuilding as an integrated initiative. In particular Lederach’s (1995; 1997) approach to the integration of structure and process is informative. As a point of departure Lederach (1997:24) emphasizes that at its core peacebuilding is an exercise in reconstructing or transforming relationships. In order to develop an understanding of reconciliation (i.e the reconstruction or transformation of relationships) in peacebuilding, he starts with three basic assumptions. First, he suggests that relationships contain the potential to be both the cause of and solution to conflict. Second, he posits that reconciliation is both backward and forward looking. It must satisfactorily deal with the past as well as envision an improved future without prejudicing either. Finally, he suggests that innovative ways need to be sought outside of traditional frameworks to conceptualize and enact reconciliation. As a relational approach to conflict, reconciliation must manage the opposing positions in the resolution of a conflict. Lederach (1997:31) suggests at least

three such opposing positions that have to be held in creative tension. Attending to only one of the positions in these binaries results in an inability to move beyond the seeming intractability of internal conflicts. The three paradoxical extremes he refers are 1) expressing a painful past and the pursuing a sustainable, interdependent future; 2) the pursuit of truth to unmask injustice and the expression of mercy in order to establish renewed relationships; 3) redressing past wrongs and imagining a common future.

Once he has established the relational importance of peacebuilding, Lederach turns to the integration of structure and process in his framework. In terms of structure he focuses on two sets of distinctions - that between different levels of actors involved (top leadership, middle-range leadership and grassroots leadership) (1997:39) as well as the immediate issues and systemic concerns to be addressed (1997:55). The various levels of leadership allows the framework to envision different kinds of needs for peacebuilding activities at different levels of society. Top level leaders are those public figures (generally top tier of political leaders) that are explicitly associated with a particular position in a conflict. While they are often tied to a particular position in the conflict their role is important as they operate at the level where overall goals, strategies and policies are formulated. Middle-range leaders are not bound to seemingly intractable political positions as the top level leaders are. Conceptually they connect the top leadership and the grassroots leadership. Typically this would be an individual that is well known and respected at the level of formal government activities as well the local level. While top level leaders tend to focus on the architecture of a particular peace the middle-range leaders are responsible for the infrastructure. Finally, grassroots is where the conflict is experienced on a day-to-day basis. The leaders at this level are confronted with the challenge of daily survival. It is at this level that most of the real reconciliation and imagination of an interdependent future happens.

Regarding the distinction between issues and systems concerns, Lederach (1997:55) points out that understanding both levels in a conflict is essential to constructing solutions. A denial of the immediate issues is a denial of the day-to-day realities experience at the grassroots while and inability to address systemic issues prevents peacebuilding from offering long term sustainable solutions.

In terms of the process dimension of peacebuilding, Lederach (1997:63) starts with the argument that conflict is a process that starts before open confrontation and that continues even after the open confrontation has ceased. As such it requires that peacebuilding also unfolds as a progression that starts before the conflict turns into open confrontation and continues beyond the cessation of violence. Peacebuilding activities should then be appropriate to the particular stage of a conflict but also be connected the ultimate goals of the process.

In his integrated framework, Lederach (1997:79) suggests that structure (who are the involved and what are the immediate and systemic issues) and process (at what point in its progression is the conflict) intersect at five points that represent specific needs and roles in the peacebuilding process. The first intersection, *root causes*, is where the focus is on the systemic issues that ensure the continuation of the conflict. *Crisis management* refers the activities that deal with the immediate issues and sufferings experienced on a day-to-day basis. The primary purpose at this point is to end suffering. *Prevention* also happens at the level of the immediate issues but is forward looking. It concerns itself not so much with the ending of suffering on a day-to-day basis but more with the prevention of recurrences of the crisis. *Vision* from an immediate to a future focus and operates not at the level of a particular issue but rather the systemic in order to find a better way for future generations. These four connections represent four quadrants in Lederach's framework. *Transformation*, the fifth intersection, represents the connecting level between these quadrants. It is the level at which middle-range actors hold the short and long term as well as the grassroots and the top level concerns together. As Lederach (1997:83) states

“...conflict transformation represents a comprehensive set of lenses for describing how conflict emerges from, evolves within, and brings about changes in the personal, relational, structural, and cultural dimensions, and for developing creative responses that promote peaceful change within those dimensions through nonviolent mechanisms...The overall process of conflict transformation is related to our broader theme of reconciliation inasmuch as it is oriented toward changing the nature of relationships at every level of human interaction and experience”.

3.6 Enhancing peacebuilding literature: The Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives

In order to achieve sustainable peace, land reform needs to be more than one-dimensional structural realignment facilitated by legislative imperatives. The kind of multi-level peacebuilding activities that Lederach (1997) suggests is in fact what is required to manage the potential conflicts that arise from both the *status quo* of land affairs as well as the land reform programmes. For transformation processes, as part of peacebuilding efforts, to succeed they need to address not only the objective aspects of a conflict and the subsequent transformation processes, such as resources, powers, skills, allies and enemies (Deutsch 1991:28) but also the subjective elements such as accumulated perceptions, animosity, fear, values, goals, expectations and stereotyping (Lederach 2004:23, 24; Deutsch 1991:28). The Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives offer two frameworks from which analytical apparatus can be appropriated to provide this dimension to peacebuilding literature.

A focus on intangible elements like symbolic meaning and identity, argues Kaufman (2006)¹¹, is required if peace processes are to succeed and indeed survive for intangibles such as symbolic meaning are essential to peace processes (Du Toit 2001:50). Where such elements are left unaddressed or disregarded by peace processes they have the potential to ignite or reignite conflicts (Horowitz 2000:216). If we then accept the premise that land reform has the potential to disrupt intergroup relations and thus increase conflict then a logical conclusion would be that in order for land reform to contribute to the peaceful advancement of South African society, the process needs to consider both its tangible and intangible dimensions. From the scholar's point of view then a next logical question would be how to go about an analysis that provides a perspective on the tangible and intangible.

To summarize, the argument thus far has been that analysis of the South African transformation benefits from the use of the concept peacebuilding. The concept, however,

¹¹ Although Kaufman's (2001; 2006) theory of Symbolic Politics is designed for explanations of violent ethnic conflicts, he has also argued that the theory can be applied to other political contexts of mass-elite relations (Kaufman 2007).

is not unproblematic and often excludes or negates a focus on the intangibles that have an influence on conflict situations. In particular two intangibles are of importance to enhance the concept and any analysis it is used in – intergroup relations and symbolic meaning.

3.7 Social definitions of conflict and peacebuilding

Having highlighted the theoretical contestation surrounding the concepts conflict and peacebuilding, this study now adopts a specific definition of both for descriptive as well as normative reasons. The preceding sections indicated my preferred description of conflict as a social interaction between groups when they hold perceived irreconcilable goals or contesting values and interests. The description could be extended to suggest some purposeful attempt to neutralize or change the other in pursuit of these goals or values (Anstey 2008). I have chosen, however, not to include this in the description for two reasons. First a truly social account of conflict would allow for conflict orientations even in the physical absence of the 'other'. Second, and related, such an account would allow for conflict orientations that are minimally a psychological reality. In other words, even though group members are not in the presence of the opposing other and even though there is not physical expression of conflict between them and the 'other', the conflict is still real because of its psychological reality. While acknowledging the destructive power of conflicts, this study also shares the view that conflicts can have positive effects (Rubin, Pruitt & Kim 1994). The challenge, as Matlosa (2004) argues, is not to have no conflict at all but to find ways to constructively transform conflicts.

The definition of peacebuilding suggests a similar social character. Rasmussen's (1997:41) statement that "Peacebuilding, whether in the post-conflict resolution phase or as efforts to prevent the eruption of nascent conflict, depends on the ability to transform the conflict situation from one of potential or actual mass violence to one of co-operative, peaceful relationships capable of fostering reconciliation, reconstruction, and long-term economic and social development" is a good starting place. This is similar to Lederach's (1997:21) description of peacebuilding as "a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships". While this definition provides for the development of state institutions as a necessity in promoting and

institutionalizing peace, it extends beyond a statist definition, such as proposed by Barnett (2006), to include the need for a reconfiguration of relationships. Peacebuilding, at least in this study, is thus not defined by timing, actors or methods but primarily by the goal of transformed relationships. Kauffman's (2001) description of peacebuilding is thus probably the best reflection of the definition employed in this study. He says

“What peacebuilders do is to bring people from opposing sides of a conflict together to replace the myths about the other side with better information, to replace the hostility and fear with understanding, and most of all to build cooperative interethnic relationships to replace stereotyped hostile ones”.
(2001:42)

3.8 Land reform as subject and object of peacebuilding

Various land reform cases have confirmed that land and land reform have distinct conflict potential. Apart from the Zimbabwean example already mentioned, others also confirm this. One of the best examples of land's potential to contribute to conflict (or to be the arena in which deep rooted animosities are played out) is of course found in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although the conflict is an extremely complex matter involving issues of *inter alia* identity, religion and international alliances, land (as an indivisible good and a symbol) remains at the heart of the contestation. Another example is found in Suliman's (1999) description of the conflict in the Nuba mountains of Sudan. His description is conceptually useful as it acknowledges the complex interaction between different variables in operation in this conflict where land is at stake. Pankhurst (2000) also claims that although violence has not realized in the Namibian land reform process, the threat remains a real and clear one.

Conflict arising from matters relating to land, however, need not necessarily be violent, especially when a broader definition of conflict, such as the one noted earlier, is adopted. Linhares (2004) has, for example, described the Brazilian Kilombo communities' non-violent struggle for land rights while the Indian Janadesh campaign is steeped in the Gandhian tradition of non-violence. Yet even though these conflicts are not overtly violent they still require a peace process in order to ensure that the conflicts do not escalate or damage intergroup relations. In other words, that they do not result in societies

characterized by broken or antagonistic relationships between different groups. In terms of Mac Ginty's (2006:59) definition of conflict noted earlier, we can conclude that non-violent conflicts also have the potential to be destructive by exploiting, excluding and the limiting opportunities of individuals or groups (ultimately creating conditions conducive to violent actions).

If we accept the defining characteristics of peacebuilding postulated earlier (namely that peacebuilding is a process that attempts to prevent conflict by transforming a conflict situation), it becomes possible to describe land reform programmes as peacebuilding activities. The caveat here though is that while land reform has the potential to be a peacebuilding activity (as is suggested in the White Paper) it also has the potential to damage the socio-economic fabric of South African society by impacting on the potential to contribute to food security¹² as well as to distort intergroup relations. And, of course, if land reform fails to address the symbolic and real needs for socio-economic transformation it could also be argued to have damaged the future of the country by simply maintaining the *status quo*. That land reform has this potential is suggested by McCandless (2000) when he states that land reform in Zimbabwe is a necessary process that “fosters constructive intercommunal relationships (reconciliation) and builds a *sustainable peace*” (2000:225). Of course, whether the Zimbabwean process has in fact achieved this is another matter. The point made here though is that land reform and intergroup relations are closely connected.

There are of course various reasons for the conflict potential inherent in land reform. Pankhurst (2000:239) has noted the emotive nature of land stating that it functions as a productive asset, political territory and, importantly, as a marker of identity. Huggins and

¹² It has been argued that food insecurity is caused mainly by poverty and that poverty is best addressed through sustainable economic development (Tweeten 1999). In terms of land reform this means providing broader access to productive agricultural means. However, some studies have shown that redistribution of land is not sufficient to ensure productive agricultural activities (McCusker 2004) and that in rural areas agricultural activities are not necessarily the primary provider of food security (Thornton 2008). Even more conservative arguments hold that the small scale farming activities envisioned by land and agricultural reform in general are not as efficient as large scale capitalist farming activities (Sender and Johnston 2004) in terms of production and wealth generation. Regardless of the position we take on the relationship between poverty, food security and access to land, the fact seems to remain that if the process is characterized by “misguided public policies” (Tweeten 1999:486), it will have severe implications for food security in South Africa.

Clover (2005:6) have also pointed to the emotional connection to land stating that it is linked to individual and group values while Ramirez (2002) highlighted the importance of access to land stating that such access encompasses both material and social goods. In the absence of access to land, individuals and collectives (families and communities) are left without the possibility of food security as well as the “foundation on which to assert self-determination within their society, culture, agroecosystem and economic context” (Ramirez 2002:7). Land reform thus has implications for the psycho-social wellbeing of parties (in terms of the importance of land as an identity marker) as well as their material wellbeing (in terms of the importance of land as a financial unit). While these two aspects of wellbeing are conceptually separate they are in fact organically connected. Put differently it means that economic survival and self-definition of individuals or communities are closely related and that in practical terms the one without the other is not really a feasible proposition.

In isolation none of the above is a sufficient condition for conflict. However, when we consider that the elements discussed above (ie the land as a social and material good or land as a subjective and objective good) are operational in the framework of intergroup relations, the conflict potential becomes clear. Ramirez (2002) describes the interplay between the access to social and material goods and intergroup relations succinctly in stating that “Land reform brings about changes in social power balances, rules and norms, as well as institutions; as such, it tends to provide solutions to some members of a society, while creating sources of conflict for others” (2002:7). Social Identity, which is an acknowledged influence in intergroup behavior (Hogg and Vaughan 1995:313), is thus a key variable in conflict that results from land reform. In this study the focus is on how this variable interacts with another, namely symbolic value and perspectives, in South African land reform. Thus, while not disregarding the importance of objective explanation of the conflict associated with the land reform process, the study concerns itself with the subjective or non-rational dimension. In order to analyze this dimension the study relies on two theoretical perspectives namely the Social Identity perspective and the Symbolic Politics perspective.

3.9 Summary

In this chapter peacebuilding was explored in order to develop the argument that there is utility in conceptualizing the South African transformation in general and land reform in particular as such. It is important to note that simply adopting a 'problem solving' approach to land reform as peacebuilding is not sufficient (Mac Ginty 2006). The description of this transformative process as peacebuilding needs to engage critically at a conceptual level with the literature in order to ensure a framework that is not only technocratic. As we have seen, such frameworks often lead to limited understanding of the causes and operations underlying conflicts and is, at best, only able to produce negative peace (Deutsch 1991).

The chapter identified at least two broad bodies of literature – the Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives – that can be investigated to enhance peacebuilding literature. On their own these literatures offer valuable explanatory insights. But in order to apply them to a normative goal – the pursuit of peace – they need to be integrated in a framework that is designed for such an endeavour. The introduction of Lederach's (1997) peacebuilding framework provides both the conceptual and practical space for such integration. These literatures, the Social Identity perspective and Symbolic Politics will be investigated in the next two chapters.

Chapter 4: The Social Identity perspective: an overview

4. Introduction

The SIT perspective provides us with a view on the cognitive processing of information. In particular it suggests that a psychological construct – identity – ultimately mediates between stimuli and behavior. The implication of this statement is that behavior should be understood as mediated rather than instinctive or predetermined. For this study it means that attitudes and behavior in the context of land reform are influenced by identity processes and that any attempt to explain these attitudes and behaviors should account for the role of social identity. As a theory of intergroup relations this perspective also allows for a view of land reform in terms of intergroup interaction rather than as an activity that is determined by individual and instrumental preferences.

Later in this chapter I will return to a comprehensive definition of Social Identity. For the moment though it should be sufficient to point out that this study adopts Tajfel's definition of Social Identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (1981:255).

As the case study presented in chapters six and seven focuses on the intergroup context of land reform it assumes identity influences at the level of the group. These can be diverse and include racial, cultural, ethnic, class and possibly even professional group influences. The importance of being able to identify specific attitudes, beliefs or behaviors as based on Social Identity as opposed to personal identity should be obvious from both an analytic and practical point of view. While this separation is maintained at an analytic level, Social Identity theorists have pointed out that even though Social Identity is in a sense individual and social at the same time (Reicher, Spears and Haslam 2010), no individual claim to identity can be divorced from the context in which that particular category has been socially constructed. They also argue that the self-definition in terms of group categories should not be explained in terms of individual needs in a way that would render the individual identity "more basic...than Social Identity and Social Identity processes" (Reicher, Spears and Haslam 2010:). In other words, where claims are made that suggest that certain attitudes and behaviors in land reform originate from personal

identity, these should be carefully considered because of the pervasive influence of social relations on self-definition.

This is not a trite observation nor is it semantic indulgence. Conceptually it is essential as it paves the way for the explanatory role of Social Identity in human behavior. The claim that social influences (rather than idiosyncratic personal ones) at least intervene in social behavior is in turn a rejection of many of the assumptions of social psychology regarding the role and nature of the group. Although the focus on groups is not new in social psychology, it is a topic in which interest has waxed and waned (Hogg and Abrams 2000). Hogg and Abrams (2000:2) points out that during the 1960s and 1970s the prevailing tendency in social psychology was to view group behavior only as an amplification of interpersonal factors¹³. The conclusion from such reasoning was that “there is nothing qualitatively different to groups” (Hogg and Abrams 1988:12). This conclusion, it has been argued, is both metatheoretically and empirically questionable (Turner *et al* 1987). Therefore an approach that acknowledges the group-based (as opposed to individual-based) nature of intergroup interaction is preferred for this study. The Social Identity perspective offers such an approach. In order to employ the Social Identity perspective as an explanatory framework, an exposition of the constituent theories and important themes that comprise the perspective is required.

Before a brief description of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self Categorization Theory (SCT)¹⁴ is offered a word on the designation of these theories as a unitary approach is required. Once both theories have been described the chapter presents a review of important concepts in the Social Identity perspective. These are a) self, b) groups and categories, c) categorization, d) salience and e) social comparison, distinctiveness and differentiation. The chapter then concludes with a focus on three dimensions of Social Identity thinking that has dominated its research agenda. Ellemers, Spears and Doosje

¹³ See Hogg and Abrams (2000) for a detailed description of the decline and rise in focus on group research in the last quarter of the 20th century.

¹⁴ For an exhaustive account of the origins of the theories see Hogg and Abrams (1988); Hogg and Abrams (2000); Goethals (2005); Reicher, Spears and Haslam (2010); Turner and Bouris (1996).

(1999) identify these as 1) the interaction between context and Social Identity, 2) commitment to salient ingroups and 3) the content of specific social identities.

While it is acknowledged that the Social Identity perspective is not unproblematic, the purpose of this chapter is not to consider these challenges. The reader is rather referred to more detailed expositions of some of these challenges (eg Thoits and Virshup 1997; Huddy 2001; Billig 2002; Mummendey, Klink and Brown 2001). These challenges vary from conceptual to methodological to interpretative and should not be disregarded as they serve to better inform us of the particulars of Social Identity perspective.

4.1 SIT and SCT: the Social Identity perspective

The Social Identity perspective consists of both Social Identity Theory (SIT), as initially espoused by Tajfel and Turner (1979; 1986) and Self-categorization Theory (SCT), as formulated by Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher and Wetherell (1987). The latter has been described as an “an important and powerful new conceptual component of an extended Social Identity theory” (Hogg and Terry 2000:123) and a “cognitive elaboration” (Turner *et al* 1987:42) of Tajfel’s earliest formulations of SIT. Despite the differences between the two theories, Turner (2000:7) has linked them based on their shared meta-theoretical origins and use of the concept of Social Identity. In Turner’s (2000:8) words the theories do “different jobs from the same social psychological perspective”.

Apart from their shared origins, which is mostly rooted in Tajfel’s perceptual and minimal group research (as well as Sherif’s “Realistic Group Conflict Theory”) both theories argue that Social Identity has a cognitive as well as motivational base (Huddy 2001:132). Both theories turn to comparison and categorization to explain and describe the formation of social identities (Thoits and Virshup 1997). Both theories also proceed from the idea that the principles that dictate the categorization of objects are also applicable to the categorization of people into social groups (Huddy 2001:132).

The differences between SIT and SCT seem to be ones of focus. SIT is concerned primarily with the impact of Social Identity on intergroup relations while SCT provides a clearer understanding of the cognitive processes that underpin Social Identity and group formation. In this regard Billig (2002) argues that SCT is aimed at a different set of

problems than SIT. In tracing some of the differences between the theories he argues that while SIT started with a focus on the outgroup and the (possible) negative implications of categorization, SCT changed this focus to the self and consequently expressed categorization as a positive process in the sense that the individual gains identity from this process (2002:182). SCT is thus more concerned with how Social Identity comes about than it is about what the implications of social identities are for intergroup relations (Thoits and Virshup 1997). Despite this seeming discontinuity, SCT is connected to SIT in such a way that if the arguments of the former are followed through to their logical conclusion, it would incorporate the suggestions of the latter. Thus, although SCT has a different focus to SIT (Huddy 2001:132; Thoits and Virshup 1997), and is in fact acknowledged as a different theory (Turner 2000:7), it is compatible (Hogg and Terry 2000) with and complementary to SIT (Turner 2000:7). Turner et al (1987) argues that SCT is more general than SIT and as such subsumes SIT as an assumed derivative - an argument already alluded to above. It is therefore not inappropriate to speak of the "Social Identity perspective/approach" (Hogg and Vaughan 2005:408; Turner and Reynolds 2001:133; McGarty 1999:106) as long as SIT and SCT are not confused in terms of their aims and propositions (Turner *et al* 1987:ix).

4.2 Constituent parts of the Social Identity perspective

4.2.1 *Social Identity Theory (SIT) and intergroup relations*

In Turner's (1996:10) estimation of the development of SIT, Tajfel was attempting to formulate an approach that could be described as acknowledging the social dimension of conflict, locating intergroup behavior in its social context while at the same time giving due consideration to psychological aspects of intergroup behavior that could have "autonomous and decisive consequences" (Turner 1996:10). SIT itself is, by Turner's (1996:17) admission, a complex and evolving theoretical approach. It should also be understood against the backdrop of Tajfel's own intellectual development. Billig (2002) has described Tajfel's thinking about prejudice as a response to instinctive and irrational theories of conflict that rendered conflict an inevitable fact of human nature. Against such positions Tajfel (1969) argued for a shared human rationality and that social conduct (even prejudice) stemmed from this rationality. From this followed arguments that suggested that the process that results in prejudice is rational in the sense that it is related

to a cognitive attempt to make sense of all the sensory information available (as opposed to a process that has no cognitive regularities and is simply instinctual). The problem is that in making sense of all this information, humans tend to distort the world by over exaggerating intragroup similarities and intergroup differences (Billig 2002:175). As we will see shortly, these over exaggerations are at the heart of distinct social identities.

SIT (Tajfel and Turner 1979; 1986) grew out of Tajfel, Flament, Billig and Bundy's (1971) now well known "minimal group paradigm" research. In order to determine the minimum conditions for discrimination between groups they set up experiments in which the variables normally considered to influence intergroup discrimination were removed. The experiments were however intergroup as the participants were categorized (using relatively arbitrary criteria) to form distinct groups allowing members to clearly identify themselves as members of one group but not another. Individuals were then asked to allocate small financial gains to other members known only on the base of their group membership. The groups were considered to be minimal as they had no history, no existence beyond the experiments and the members remained anonymous to each other. Self-interest was also controlled for by designing the distribution tasks in such a way that there could be no individual benefit (Tajfel and Turner 1979:38). The result, contrary to assumption (Turner 1996:15), was that participants consistently preferred to allocate more resources to members of their group even if this meant their group was worse of in absolute terms. Similar subsequent experiments (Billig and Tajfel 1973; Turner 1978) further denuded the groups rendering them even more "minimal". The findings consistently suggested the same as the initial experiments, namely that "under certain conditions social categorization alone – the mere perception of belonging to one group in contrast to another- can be sufficient for intergroup discrimination in which members favour their own group over the other" (Turner 1996:16; see also Turner 1999:8). The reason advanced for this behavior was that categorization in the experiments created a Social Identity for the participants and that participants sought to perceive their Social Identity in a positive light by conceiving the ingroup as positively distinct from the relevant outgroup (Reynolds, Turner and Haslam 2000:64) through social comparison. The SIT research questioned both the individualistic explanations of intergroup conflict (such as authoritarian personality theory and the frustration-aggression hypothesis) as well as

more socially inclined theories such as Sherif's (1966) Realistic Conflict Theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979:33-34). It is important to note that this line of reasoning never suggested that cognitive processes alone can account for social conflict. Rather, it highlighted the operative processes that interact with social reality to create conflict (Turner 1996:17).

In the Social Identity literature the definition of "Social Identity" is based on various constituent elements. First there is the observation that Social Identity is, as other kinds of identity are, a self-definition and part of the self-concept. The self-concept has been described as "an organized collection of beliefs and feelings about oneself" (Baron and Byrne 1997:152) that play a part in the cognitive processing of information. A second constituent element of "Social Identity" is the idea that Social Identity is contingent on group membership. This implies that the perceiver views himself/herself (and others) as a member of the particular group. It is more than knowledge of the attributes of the group or simply being designated as a member of that group by others (Hogg and Abrams 1988:7). SIT, while acknowledging that the self can be defined in terms of an individual's relation to other individuals, posits that there is also the potential, under certain circumstances, to define the self through the groups (not only in terms of the group and its characteristics) that individuals belong to (Reicher, Spears and Haslam 2010). In its most extreme form, definition of the self in terms of group membership results in the exchangeability of individuals of the ingroup. This makes Social Identity a truly social phenomenon and highlights the importance of the interaction between self and context in the construction of Social Identity. People thus define themselves in terms of the groups to which they perceive themselves to belong. A final important element of the definition of "Social Identity" is that the definition of self in terms of group membership should be accompanied by some emotional attachment or value (Turner 1999:8).

SIT has been described by Tajfel (1979) (see also Turner 1996 and Reynolds and Turner 2001) as consisting of three essential parts. The first is the psychological analyses of the **cognitive process that result in the need for positive Social Identity**. Turner (1996:16) has described this process as a causal sequence that begins with

categorization, leading to Social Identity, followed by comparison to other groups and finally leading to differentiation for the sake of positive distinctiveness¹⁵.

Although many consider this psychological analysis to be all that SIT offers, there are developments beyond this that are essential to the understanding of the theory (Turner 1999:8). Thus, the second integral part of SIT addresses the **movement between interpersonal and intergroup behavior**. In essence it concerns itself with the socio structural conditions under which behavior will tend toward the interpersonal or intergroup. It is based on the suggestion that all social behavior can be plotted on a continuum ranging from interpersonal as the one extreme to intergroup as the other (Tajfel and Turner 1979) and that movement on this continuum is associated with other overlapping continua. The first of these overlapping continua is the “belief system” continuum with social mobility and social change reflecting its two extremes. It has a causal relation to movement on the interpersonal-intergroup continuum. “Social mobility” refers to the belief that the nature of society is such that structure and categories are not binding on individuals and that these can be transcended allowing individuals to move to other groups if they are unsatisfied with the implications of belonging to a specific group, while “social change” refers to the belief that stratification of society is such that movement for individuals between groups is nearly impossible (Tajfel and Turner 1979:35). While adherence to the former belief system allows individuals a number of strategies to pursue positive distinctiveness (eg by changing group membership) the latter belief system offers only acceptance or challenge of the status quo and then only as a group member. Tajfel and Turner (1979:36) viewed this continuum as influencing the location of behavior on the interpersonal-intergroup continuum.

Two further overlapping continua represents the consequences for behavior of gravitating towards either the interpersonal or intergroup extreme. The first suggests that the closer one is to “social change” on the belief system continuum and “intergroup” on the intergroup-interpersonal continuum, the more uniform behavior will be toward the relevant

¹⁵ Even though analyses of the cognitive dimension was not initially the primary concern of SIT, developments during the 1980s eventually rendered it a truly socio-cognitive theory (Hogg and Abrams 2000) to which the formulation of SCT was a logical next step in its evolution.

outgroup. Similarly, gravitation to the “social mobility” and “interpersonal” poles of the continua will result in more varied behavior towards the members of the outgroup. The final continuum that Tajfel and Turner (1979) discuss is closely related. It suggests that proximity to the “social change” and “intergroup” extremes results in increasing treatment of members of the outgroup as “undifferentiated items in a unified social category, rather than in terms of their individual characteristics” (1979:36). In essence it depersonalizes members of the outgroup, dissolving the perception of individuals in that of the group.

The third important part of SIT speaks to how the above described psychological dynamic relates to social context and beliefs about groups’ **status differences** in a given context. For Tajfel society has a structure in which intergroup relations are played out. The social categorizations that function in the identification of individuals with specific groups are both objective and socially situated. They are adopted and internalized by individuals in order to construct the social dimension of their self-concept. Context thus provides the categories that are salient in intergroup relations (Turner 1996:18; Billig 2002:175). While it would be difficult to consider context as structurally objective, SIT does concern it with the “shared interpretations of social reality” (Tajfel 1979:186). These interpretations provide the psychological structures of intergroup relations such as stable or unstable status positions and legitimate or illegitimate status positions (Turner and Haslam 2001).

Far from suggesting inevitable bias toward outgroups, Tajfel and Turner (1979:36) cite a great deal of empirical research to show that subordinate or deprived groups often exhibit positive attitudes toward depriving outgroups. In fact, Turner and Haslam (2001) suggest that there are at least five influences that could account for bias. First, degree of identification with the ingroup plays a role in the extent to which people perceive a situation as intergroup or interpersonal. If identification with the ingroup is high, the response to certain stimuli will be different than if identification with the ingroup were low. It is important to understand identification with the group as a continuum of possibilities rather than a simple binary as research has shown that identification is not fixed but rather also influenced by contextual factors (Spears, Doosje and Ellemers 1999:59). Second, salience of a particular categorization in the specific context is necessary for intergroup categorization, intergroup behavior and therefore bias. Third, intergroup bias only

becomes possible when the dimension of comparison is important to the particular ingroup and if it allows for negative differentiation (Reicher, Spears and Haslam 2010). Fourth, the comparability between groups is necessary for differentiation. Where there is no perception of relevance of comparison (based on similarity, proximity or salience in the particular context), groups are not likely to compare (Tajfel and Turner 1986). Finally, the perceived relative status position of a group influences the extent to which it will contribute to Social Identity and ultimately attitudes and behavior that are negative or hostile towards an outgroup. If, for example, a group's status position relative to that of a relevant other is too low, the contribution it makes to a positively distinct Social Identity is limited and possibly not useful (Tajfel and Turner 1979). One explanation for this seeming anomaly is that social status influences the nature of the group's self-image. In other words, in situations where a minority or deprived group (ie low status group) is viewed as "inferior" and this perception is pervasive and widely accepted (also by the deprived group) the tendency is that these groups will resort to self-derogation and positive attitudes toward the perceived depriving group. Important to understanding the function of status in intergroup comparisons is Tajfel's (1974) distinction between "secure" and "insecure" group comparisons. The former refers to situations in which there are no cognitive alternatives to the existing outcomes of comparisons. Thus, if existing status positions are considered immutable, intergroup comparisons are not meaningful and therefore have no influence on Social Identity. If, however, the status quo is questioned (in other words if comparisons are perceived as having the potential to produce a different outcome to the existing state), social identities are "insecure" resulting in active intergroup comparisons regardless of status differences. Importantly, Tajfel and Turner (1979:38) argue that only when the subordinate group rejects its negative self-image and start working toward a positive self-image does unequal distribution of objective resources lead to intergroup antagonism thus rejecting "conflict of interest" hypotheses about the causes of intergroup conflict. This does not mean that status should be viewed as a scarce resource contested by groups. Tajfel and Turner (1979:43) rather conceive of it as an outcome of comparison. Thus groups do not compete for status as if though it were an objective resource. They perceive for themselves a certain status based on comparisons with other relevant groups.

To summarize the basic tenets of SIT Hogg, Terry and White (1995) argue that social identities are descriptively, prescriptively and evaluatively necessary as they inform the self-concept, prescribe behavior in terms of the categories used for (social) self-definition and allow for social comparisons and evaluations that in turn lead to the satisfaction of the need for positive distinctiveness (note that this does not necessarily imply discrimination towards the outgroup as a form of differentiation).

4.2.2 Self-categorization theory and group formation

SCT is concerned with the nature of groups and the psychological processes underlying group formation, group behavior and the identification with groups (Turner *et al* 1987; Turner and Reynolds 2001:135). It relies on categorization (which I will return to shortly) as the primary psychological mechanism of group formation and suggests that group behavior can be explained by variations in self-perception (McGarty 1999:110). Put differently SCT holds that people act according to how they perceive themselves in a specific situation and especially how they perceive themselves to be similar or different to others in that situation. Turner (1999) has described the underlying process in terms of a causal sequence beginning with self-categorization that leads to stereotyping of the self and finally resulting in depersonalization of the self. It is this movement from an individual self-concept to a collective self-concept that enables people to act in terms of their group membership (group behavior).

Although the personal-Social Identity distinction features prominently in SIT, it is not the basic idea of SIT and belongs rather to SCT (Turner and Reynolds 2001:135; Turner 1999:10). In fact this distinction proved to be SCT's point of departure (Turner 1999:10). It is a distinction parallel to Tajfel's (1979) distinction between the interpersonal and intergroup behavior. SCT posits that salience of Social Identity over personal identity results in depersonalization of the self and increased perception of being "prototypical representatives of their ingroup category" (Turner 1999:11). Under these circumstances intragroup similarities and intergroup differences are accentuated. Importantly the group norm adopted (that is the focus on ingroup similarities and outgroup differences), is not the average position of people who are members of the group but rather the position that best corresponds to the intragroup similarities and the intergroup differences (Van

Avermaet 1996:517). The prototype position is thus not the sum of individual positions but rather a unique, group-based affirmation of similarity and distinctiveness. It represents the defining characteristics of a social category (Hogg, Terry and White 1995:261) and has a normative function in that group members strive to attain correspondence with this position. The prototype can either be real or imaginary (Moreland and Levine 2005:370) but that which it represents is an ideal (Hogg, Terry and White 1995:261). Prototypes are also context dependent being determined by the salient outgroup in a specific situation. This process of depersonalization of the individual self and identification with the group consisting of the categories of the social-self is what makes collective behavior possible. In SCT then Social Identity is considered a process that changes interpersonal behavior into intergroup behavior (Turner 1999:11).

Because SCT argues that group behavior is possible as a result of this sequential process, it is important to understand how categories are identified and used for the categorization process. The Social Identity perspective answers this question by referring to the importance of category accessibility and category fit. I will return to these later in the chapter but for the moment I describe accessibility as that which is psychologically salient to the individual and fit as the correspondence of accessible categories to reality. Category fit is governed by the meta-contrast principle, that is the postulation that the category most likely to be used in a particular context is the one that minimizes the differences between self and the ingroup (as represented by the most prototypical member of the group) and maximizes the difference between the ingroup and the outgroup (Brown 2000:270). Accessibility is determined by the individual's previous experiences, the individual's own disposition (the extent to which categorization is important for the self-definition) and the individual's current motives or goals (Brown 2000:273; Voci 2006:74).

The basic tenets of SCT then are, as indicated by the causal sequence stated earlier, 1) that people categorize themselves and others according to their "motives, values, expectations...background knowledge and theories, and the social context within which comparison takes place" (Turner 1999:14), 2) that salience of Social Identity results in a

depersonalization of the self-definition and 3) that this depersonalized self-definition allows for group behavior.

4.3 Constituent themes in the Social Identity perspective

4.3.1 *Self in the Social Identity perspective*

A proper understanding of the self, Turner has argued (1999:28), is at the heart social psychology. Along with colleagues (Turner and Oakes 1989; Turner and Onorato 1999) he has questioned the traditional psychological view of the self as a fixed cognitive structure that responds to the immediate context. It is worth quoting him extensively regarding the Social Identity perspective on self.

“The self is a varying, reflexive representation of the perceiver which is inherently fluid and flexible because it is a comparative, relational judgment. It defines the individual in a social context, or if one prefers, it defines the individual in social relational terms. To define the self as male is to represent it in terms of similarities with other males and differences from females, reflecting the perceiver’s goals, theories and knowledge and employing particular relevant dimensions of comparison in a given situation. This is the outcome of an active process of judgment in which the self-category of male is given a specific meaning and form as a function of the particular set of relations being represented. It is not the activation of some stored, invariant generic concept of ‘maleness’” (1999:29).

Traditionally the idea of self has been equated with personal identity. However, as Ellemers, Spears and Doosje (2002) argue, sufficient empirical evidence exists to indicate that self includes social identities and that these influence “perceptions, emotions and behavior” (2002:163). This is most obvious in cases where individuals act in terms of group membership for the benefit of the group. In such instances the individual becomes exchangeable with other members of the group. One example from South African social life exhibits this sufficiently. It has become common practice among high level sporting teams for team leaders (whether they be managers or team captains) to apologize to supporters for poor team performances on behalf of the teams they are part of. In other words, as individuals they act for the group or as replacements for other individuals in the

group. Furthermore they expose themselves to negative responses as supporters could project their negative feelings about poor team performance at them as individuals. As suggested by the Social Identity perspective this only applies when the particular Social Identity is salient. Once the individual acts in a different context he/she will not act as a substitute for other members of the group anymore. There are thus times when the social self instead of the personal self will be the active self. The important argument from the Social Identity perspective though, is that both social and personal self are equally part of the individual's self concept.

Initially conceptions of self in the Social Identity perspective considered two possibilities for the construction of self - social and personal identity representing two extremes of a dichotomous continuum (similar to the interpersonal-intergroup continuum suggested by Tajfel and Turner 1979). However, this conceptualization has been called into question and by the time Turner et al (1987) formulated SCT it had been revisited. In the revised conceptualization self-categorization was thought of as multi-leveled with social and personal identity representing two levels of self. Preference for social over personal identity (or vice versa) is still determined by salience but because it could happen in certain situations that there might be conditions promoting both personal and Social Identity salience, SCT provided for relative salience.

From the above at least two important features of the role of self in the formation of Social Identity can be inferred. First, self-reference is essential to identification with a particular group. In other words, without identifying oneself with a particular group, the required psychological connection will be absent to facilitate behavior in terms of group membership. However, Tajfel and Turner (1979) also argued that the definition by others can, in the long run, become an important influence on self-definition. Second, and related to this point, is the fact that self is dynamic and not necessarily fixed in relation to social categories (Onorato and Turner 2004). McGarty, Bliuc, Thomas and Bongiorno state that "Membership of a social category cannot constitute an in-group membership unless the perceiver is subjectively identified with that category" (2009:842). In other words if two or more individuals define themselves as members of a group (the definition of a group in Self-categorization theory), a psychologically significant group exists, regardless of

whether a corresponding category exists in the social structure. This means that self is not only constructed in terms of existing social categories but also in terms of considerations that do not comfortably fit into broad social categories (such as race, gender, religion). McGarty, Bliuc, Thomas and Bongiorno (2009) suggest that identities are often formed around shared opinions regardless of category membership. One example of this would be social movements that coalesce around a specific issue even though the members belong to various social categories. In South Africa, for example, the movement that supports constitutionally guaranteed press freedom (the so-called R2K or “Right to Know” movement) consists of people belonging to different race, gender, religion and even political affiliation categories.

Consistent with the meta-theoretical approach of the Social Identity perspective discussed earlier, the above description clearly argues against static, reductionist and individualistic views of self. It conceives of the self as a social rather than a cognitive construct (see also Hogg and Abrams 1988:132) that is fluid (Onorato and Turner 2004) and relational. Such a conception of the self is necessary in order to explain intergroup processes in terms of self-definition (Turner, Oakes, Haslam and McGarty 1994). It also suggests that changes in self-definition can result in changes in “values, self-relevance, goals, knowledge, the boundaries of social influence, the perception of agreement and disagreement...” (Turner and Oakes 1997:366). The importance of self is in fact captured succinctly by Turner and Oakes (1997) when they state that “All cognition, including basic processes like categorization, takes place from a specific vantage point, a singular perspective: that of the self currently salient” (1997:366).

4.3.2 Groups and categories

Another important set of concepts in the Social Identity perspective (and more so for SCT than SIT), ‘groups’ and ‘categories’, highlight the important question about the psychological distinctiveness and nature of the group. As already indicated, earlier theorists, of whom Allport (1924) was probably the most notable, questioned the idea that a group was anything more than the sum of the individuals that comprise it. In this line of reasoning intergroup behavior is nothing more than a sufficiently large number of cases of interpersonal behavior that happen to be similar. Reacting to these arguments the likes

of Asch (1952) and Sherrif (1966) suggested that the group is something qualitatively different from the sum of the individual actions of its members. Out of the dynamics of the relation between members comes a set of social institutions (norms, values etc) that can in turn be internalized by individuals to guide their behavior (Brown 2000:6). When resorting to these in their actions individuals are in fact behaving in a certain way because of their association with a group. It is from this tradition that the Social Identity perspective, and particularly its view on the distinctive nature of groups, developed.

While earlier research tended to focus on interpersonal interdependence and attraction as explanatory variables in group formation, Turner *et al* (1987) have argued that the minimal paradigm research referred to earlier refutes such claims. They state that it is categorization, rather than personal attraction, that leads to group formation (1987:28). Elsewhere Turner (2000:15) concluded that “group formation is not based on interpersonal attraction...but creates identity-based liking between members in terms of their mutually perceived group similarities”. What Turner (2000) does acknowledge is that perceived interdependence can be both a cause and effect of group formation (2000:15). Such interdependence should be distinguished from interpersonal attraction. Where any variables that influence categorization, such as common fate or shared threat, feature, these can result in group formation even before there are any thoughts of positive outcomes related to group membership. At the same time though, where groups exist in a psychological sense, membership of such a group can influence members’ perceptions of goals (2000:16).

The Social Identity perspective resorts to subjective conceptions of groups suggesting that a group is to be conceived as two or more individuals perceiving themselves as members of the same social category (Turner 1982:15). This definition has been expanded to include a relational aspect (Brown 2000; Hogg and Abrams 2005). In other words, apart from suggesting that groups exist where two or more individuals are psychologically attached to a social category, there is also a need for groups to be acknowledged as such by other individuals or groups that do not share the self-definition of the group that they acknowledge. Psychologically the group is thus defined as a configuration that is “significant for the members, to which they relate themselves

psychologically for social comparison and the acquisition of norms and values... (one) that they privately accept membership in, and which influences their attitudes and behavior” (Turner *et al* 1987:1-2).

While the Social Identity perspective employs the term “category” (in the sense of self-categories), it distinguishes between this term and “groups”. The distinction is based on the understanding that self-categories are cognitive structure (in other words psychological mechanisms) while groups are real collections of people with actual relationships among each other (Turner and Reynolds 2001:137). In a brief overview of the definition of ‘group’ Brown (2000) points out that various aspects of ‘groupness’ has been employed as defining characteristics. So, for example, there have been attempts to define groups in terms of a shared fate for its members. Others have turned to structural characteristics of groups such as specific relationships while a third approach has suggested that face-to-face interaction is the necessary condition for group existence (Brown 2000:2-3). However, as Brown (2000:3) has argued, most of these approaches limit our understanding of groups to small collectives at the expense of larger social groupings (such as nations). Groups, in the Social Identity perspective are thus understood to be both a psychological and social reality. In other words they are based on cognitive structures (categories) but exhibit socially explicit characteristics.

Two final arguments are important to the Social Identity perspective on groups. First, intergroup activity is not determined by the number of individuals involved in the interaction. It is quite possible for two individuals to be interacting with each other in terms of their group memberships. Second the physical presence of members of other groups is not required for people to feel, believe or act in terms of their Social Identity. As long as people maintain a cognitive distinction between the group they perceive themselves to belong to and other groups that are dissimilar to their group, they can act in terms of their Social Identity.

4.3.3 Categorization and salience

Categorization is a cognitive process that orders the world into distinct categories. It has been defined as “the process of understanding what some thing is by knowing what other things it is equivalent to and what other things it is different from” (McGarty 1999:1). Such

distinction between stimuli is necessary as it facilitates everyday interaction without having to resort to in-depth analyses of every stimuli (Moreland and Levine 2003:370). One function of this cognitive process is thus to reduce variability in observations and perceptions by grouping certain stimuli together and distinguishing between others. It has been argued though that categorization is more than just a process required because of limited processing capacity (Oakes 1996). The process has also been shown to be a meaning giving process (Oakes 2001:3) as it offers people knowledge of what things are (as opposed to only knowledge of where things belong) and how they relate to each other in specific contexts. In the Social Identity perspective the psychological functions of categorization are that it transforms potentially infinite stimuli into manageable units, reduces uncertainty and assists in the search for positive self-image (through the Social Identity processes) (Worchel 2005:484).

If the reduction of perceptual uncertainty was the only function of categorization, it could easily be argued that categorization results in perceptual distortion (McGarty 1999:20). However, as Oakes, Haslam and Turner (1994) argued, the Social Identity perspective suggests that categorization does not distort reality but mostly reflects it. This is probably why perceptually salient categories (such as race, religion, gender etc) are so deeply entrenched – because they offer a fit with reality that is easy to perceive.

The importance of categorization does, however, not end with its cognitive influences. The process also has the potential to influence behavior (Fazio and Olson 2003:147; Oakes 2001:3) but this potential needs to be understood in a specific way. Oakes (2001) investigated the notion that categorization leads to discrimination in a deterministic way by considering the effect of the process on activation, construal (that is intragroup similarity and intergroup differentiations) and intergroup discrimination. Previous research had suggested that categorization is a sufficient condition to provoke discrimination in the presence of relevant cues or perceptions (Wilder 1986). Contrary to this position Oakes (2001) argued that cues or perceptions alone do not trigger categorization and that the relationship between different cues as well as the cues presented by other people in the particular context, affects categorization.

In the Social Identity perspective (and particularly in SCT) categorization is understood to be hierarchically structured (McGarty 1999:111). This means that categorization is active in all perceptions but at different levels of abstraction (Oakes 2001:8). In order for stimuli to be compared they must be identical at higher levels of abstraction. So, for example, it is possible to compare the groups 'male' and 'female' as both are identical at a higher level of abstraction, namely 'human'. The idea of hierarchically structured categorization is a reformulation of the original SCT ideas (Turner 1999:11) and resulted in the distinction between personal and social identities as two extremes of a bipolar continuum with categorization happening only at one end of the continuum, being revisited. Accordingly Turner (1999:11) has argued that it is possible that, under certain conditions, both personal and social identities (in other words different levels of categorizations) could concurrently be salient self-categorizations. It is when a specific level of self-categorization is salient that behavior gravitates toward the interpersonal or intergroup poles of the behavioral continuum. Thus personal identity reflects self-categorization that emphasizes differences between the individual and other ingroup members (in other words less inclusive categorization) while Social Identity reflects the self-categorization that "define the individual in terms of his or her shared similarities with members of certain social categories in contrast to other social categories" (Turner 1999:12) (in other words more inclusive categorization). This reformulation of SCT ideas is vital to the understanding of social comparison in the Social Identity perspective.

Another important insight of the Social Identity perspective is that the categorization process is context specific or at least responsive to context (Turner *et al* 1987:131; Oakes 2001:8; Haslam and Turner 1995). In order for a category to be employed in the perceiver's self-definition, the category has to be salient. Salience in turn requires an interaction between accessibility of the category and fit with reality. These are discussed below. First, though it is important to note that in the Social Identity perspective salience is not that which is perceptually apparent but rather that which is psychologically significant (Turner *et al* 1987:118). That which is perceptually apparent may be a causal antecedent of what is psychologically significant but should not be confused with it.

Accessibility has been described as “the relative ‘readiness’ of a given category to become activated” (Turner *et al* 1987:127). In other words, it refers to the categories that are readily available to the perceiver to employ. The accessibility of a category is based on the perceiver’s preceding experiences, expectations, current motives, the relative importance of a specific category membership and the emotional significance of a categorization (Turner 1999:12; Turner *et al* 1987:128-129; Brown 2000:273; Voci 2006:74).

Categories that are accessible do not necessarily become activated. It is only when a stimulus with the characteristics of the accessible category becomes available that the category becomes salient (Turner *et al* 1987:128). Or, in Voci’s (2006:74) words “If the category adequately explains reality, then it is likely to be used”. If, for example, the categories English/Afrikaans are accessible to the perceiver but not relevant to the situation (eg the situation reflects competition between different age groups), these categories will not be employed as they do not reflect the reality of the particular situation. This is referred to as comparative fit and is assessed through the meta-contrast principle which states that when the differences among stimuli are smaller than the differences between them, they are more likely to be grouped together. Comparative fit alone is not sufficient to explain categorization as it relies only on perceptual stimuli and does not consider the social meanings of the stimuli. For this purpose the concept normative fit was introduced to SCT. Normative fit relates to the meanings associated with the content of the categories. In practical terms it suggests that, apart from differing more from people in other groups than from each other (comparative fit), the similarities and differences perceived should also be aligned with the meanings of the relevant categories. Thus, even if people are perceived as more similar or more different, they will not necessarily be categorized in a group unless their similarities or differences are consistent with what is considered defining characteristics of the relevant group.

As far as fit is concerned then I summarize by saying that in order for a particular category to be used the differences between groups must be greater than the differences within groups (comparative fit) and these differences must reflect existing beliefs about the meaning of these categories (normative fit) (Turner 1999:13). The interaction between

accessibility and fit dictates that when two equally accessible categories are available, the one that best fits the situation perceived will be selected and, similarly, that when two categories that are an equally good fit for a situation exists, the one that is more accessible will be selected (Turner *et al* 1987:55).

In terms of social groups this process accentuates both the similarities between individuals that belong to the same category and the differences between distinct categories (Hogg and Abrams 1988:19). This accentuation effect has been shown to distort perception of both physical and social stimuli (Hogg and Abrams 1988:20) and to be relevant only when categories (eg black/white, French/German) are thought to be associated to specific perceptual dimensions. In the South African context, for example, if the perceptual dimension was 'wealth' it is likely that the accentuation would be present for the categories black/white but less so for English/Afrikaans. This example leads in a natural way to a next observation about categorization namely that the dimensions on which distinctions between categories exist are subjective conclusions that result from the cultural history of a particular society (Hogg and Abrams 1988:20).

4.3.4 Social comparison, distinctiveness and differentiation

Tajfel and Turner (1979) introduced the idea of social comparison to the Social Identity perspective as an explanation of the mechanism involved in seeking a positive self-evaluation. The relationship between comparison, distinctiveness and differentiation is relatively complex but for the purpose of this review it is sufficient to think of them in a chronological/causal relationship with comparison being the cognitive mechanism employed to evaluate stimuli, distinctiveness being the goal pursued and differentiation the cognitive and behavioral processes turned to in order to increase or maintain distinctiveness.

At the intragroup level the process of social comparison is intended to confirm the truthfulness of our perceptions. By comparing perceptions to that of the ingroup, members find consensus positions from which they judge their perceptions to be more truthful than perceptions based in other consensus positions (Hogg and Abrams 1988:22). Comparison to the consensus position held as normative in a group, shapes the

perception of members as they strive to hold a position similar to these normative views for the sake of a positive evaluation.

At the intergroup level comparisons are made with relevant others, regardless of whether these are superior or inferior others (Sedikides and Gregg 2003:113). Relevance of comparison is determined by both context and categories. A comparison according to specific characteristics (eg language) that is relevant in one context could be less so in another. Relevance could be dependent on, *inter alia*, similarity, proximity and situational salience (Tajfel and Turner 1986; Turner and Haslam 2001). Where these are present comparability is more likely, resulting in increased pressure for ingroup distinctiveness through positive differentiation (or ingroup bias). The goal of such differentiation is to hold a superior position to an outgroup on certain dimensions (Tajfel and Turner 1986:102).

Jetten, Spears and Manstead (2001) argue that a contradiction seems to exist between SIT and SCT predictions regarding the relation between group distinctiveness and differentiation. For SIT differentiating behavior is described as socio-motivational. By contrast SCT tends to explain the relation between distinctiveness and differentiation more in terms of the perceptual principles of meta-contrast and comparative fit. Based on these principles SCT suggests that greater distinctiveness allows for greater differentiation (as opposed to greater similarity leading to greater differentiation in SIT). Jetten, Spears and Manstead (2001) argue that this discrepancy can be solved by integrating the opposing predictions. First they argue that positive differentiation will be most apparent when groups are similar enough to evoke comparison (the SIT prediction) while at the same time sufficiently different to be regarded as independent groups (the SCT prediction). Somewhat similarly Brewer (2001) suggests that the tension between the human need for similarity and uniqueness is resolved through Social Identity (2001:247). The similarity need is satisfied through group membership while the uniqueness need is satisfied through intergroup comparisons. Extending the argument Jetten, Spears and Manstead (2001) also suggest that cognizance of certain moderating variables will help to explain the contradiction described above. One such variable they explore is the level of identification with the group. Where identification with the group is

high the SIT explanation of the relation between distinctiveness and differentiation holds while for low identifiers the SCT explanation is more likely.

Turner (1975) has argued that groups engage in at least two different types of comparisons, namely social and instrumental/realistic comparisons. On the one hand social comparisons are not contingent on incompatible goals (such as struggle over indivisible goods). This is illustrated by the minimal group research where participants selected biased behavior towards the ingroup despite the fact that comparisons between the ingroup and outgroup were not based on competition over real resources. Categorization alone was sufficient to result in biased behavior. Instrumental/realistic comparisons, on the other hand, are based on realistic competition and require incompatible group goals. When comparisons are instrumental/realistic, the group that 'lost' is more likely to be hostile to the group that 'won'. In the case of social comparisons, however, the 'losing' group is more likely to accept an inferior status if the competition was deemed to have been legitimate (Tajfel and Turner 1986:102).

4.4 Application of SIT: recurring research themes

In the previous section key concepts of the Social Identity perspective were discussed. These concepts are important to understand the nature and focus of the Social Identity perspective. The present section moves beyond the basic theoretical concepts to themes related to the application, or, for want of a better description, the operation of Social Identity. The themes are highlighted by Ellemers, Spears and Doosje (1999) as recurring research themes in Social Identity research. These themes are the influence of context on the management of Social Identity, commitment to the group as both a dependent and independent variable and the role of content or group-norms in the behavior of groups. While these are by no means the only important themes in Social Identity research, they are theoretically well-grounded in the research tradition, a fact that protects their exploration in real life situations from misguided interpretations. Collectively these themes also allow for an investigation of the role of Social Identity in real life situations that is broad enough to offer comprehensive and integrated explanations.

4.4.1 Context and Social Identity: the role of identity threat

In the introduction to their review of Social Identity research, Ellemers, Spears and Doosje (1999:1) state that the meaning of group membership, even in the case of experimental research, is derived from social context. Furthermore, it has been argued that interaction between the social context and group identification results in social perceptions and that these perceptions in turn are related to collective behavior (Spears, Doosje and Ellemers 1999:59). Context is therefore important because it shapes not only cognition but also behavior.

One contextual factor that has received significant attention in Social Identity research is identity threat. Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears and Doosje (1999) propose a taxonomy of the classes of threats that can be posed to Social Identity. Their taxonomy provides for categorization threats, distinctiveness threats, threats to the value of a Social Identity and threats to acceptance by a group. In the case of each class of threat they propose that responses to the threat will be, to an extent, determined by whether the individual is a high or low identifier with the particular Social Identity. High identifiers are more likely to act in a way that is protective and affirming of their group, sometimes in a way that results in personal psychological dissonance while low identifiers tend to attach to the group in a more opportunistic way that is intended to enhance their personal status (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears and Doosje 1999:54). Of course weak commitment to a group should not be seen as morally inferior as it can mean rejection of anti-social behavior that characterizes the group as well as a more likely response of remorse when their group adopts morally questionable positions or behaviors (Ellemers, Spears and Doosje 1999:4).

Briefly, categorization threats refer to the possibility of being stereotyped and treated as a member of a group based on certain characteristics when in fact the individual wishes to interact on an interpersonal basis. In this instance association with a group does not enhance individuals' feelings of esteem but rather leaves them feeling judged on a basis that is not their preference. This could be because the individual does not identify with the group, feels that group categorization is not appropriate for the given context or perceives the categorization as detracting from their self-esteem if the categorization is for a group

that is socially of less status than the personal self (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears and Doosje 1999:41). The idea of categorization threat also confirms some preliminary research that indicates that people are more likely to be committed to groups they select than categorizations that are externally imposed on them (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears and Doosje 1999:38).

Distinctiveness threat refers to the possibility of not having a Social Identity that can in a meaningful way distinguish the group member from members of other groups. The idea that people need social identities that are significantly distinct is at the heart of the Social Identity perspective. Self-categorization theory argues explicitly, using the meta-contrast principle, that people derive social meaning from distinctiveness (McGarty 1999; Turner *et al* 1987) as social categories contribute to the perceptual and conceptual organization of the world and social comparison helps people to understand where they fit in this world organized according to categories. Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears and Doosje (1999:43) further argue that a distinct identity is probably more important than a positive one. They suggest that distinctiveness from other groups is obtained on two dimensions, numerical frequency of the members and dissimilarity between the ingroup and relevant outgroups. In terms of numerical frequency research has shown that identifications with distinct groups are stronger than with non-distinct groups because of the reduction in identity threat. Regarding similarity between groups it is suggested that where ingroups and outgroups are too similar, members experience a threat to their Social Identity. In the absence of sufficiently distinct social identities people are likely to turn to differentiation (e.g bias, discrimination) or other identities to clearly distinguish their Social Identity from others. One very important inference from this research on group distinctiveness is that intergroup relations can potentially be improved by increasing distinctiveness because this results in a reduced need for bias and discrimination (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears and Doosje 1999:46). Van Knippenberg (1978) has in fact shown that one strategy comparative groups adopt to address the threat to their distinctiveness is to expand the dimensions on which they compare (as opposed to competing over a single dimension). Group distinctiveness is thus not necessarily a challenge to positive intergroup relations (although under specific conditions it can be).

Groups often experience threat to their Social Identity when the value of their distinct identity is challenged. This challenge can come either directly from the outgroup (e.g. derogation of the ingroup), from third parties or from a negative comparison to the outgroup (e.g. poor performance of the ingroup compared to the outgroup). Interestingly Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears and Doosje (1999:46) argue that the threat can also come from the ingroup itself as the history of the group can define the dimensions on which the intergroup comparisons happen. As far as direct threats to the ingroup is concerned, Social Identity research has shown that both direct derogation of the ingroup (e.g. direct insults) as well as perceptions of the ingroup being done injustice (e.g. perceptions of racial discriminatory behavior by the outgroup) can result in increased acceptance of the ingroup (eg by low identifying members) and increased derogation of the outgroup. When the ingroup is not devalued by direct attacks from the outgroup but rather through some symbolic event that is interpreted as a representation of the relationship between the ingroup and the outgroup, similar trends emerge. In a seeming contradiction¹⁶ to this, Branscombe and Wann (1994) confirmed that the extent to which an individual identifies with the group (low or high identification) also determined the response to identity threats. In their experiment high identifiers exhibited reduced collective self-esteem and a concurrent derogation of the outgroup while less reduction in collective self-esteem was apparent among low identifiers under conditions of identity threat. Also, when a group's status is called into question on a moral dimension (mostly because of the history of the group), responses are largely similar – high identifiers tend to adopt strategies that confirm the homogeneity of the group and redefine the status of the group on other characteristics while low identifiers even show a reduction in self-esteem (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears and Doosje 1999:48). From their review Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears and Doosje (1999:50) conclude that identity threat that originates from the ingroup actually has more impact than threat from the outgroup. This is an important conclusion

¹⁶ This should in fact not be understood as a contradiction of the statement that identity threat can increase the level of identification with the group, but rather as an indication that level of identification can be both a dependent and independent variable.

as it suggests that ingroup threats create more dissonance resulting in greater opportunity for change.

A final type of Social Identity threat relates to acceptance by the valued ingroup (for newcomers or peripheral members) or exclusion from the ingroup (for established members). In both cases research has shown that people tend to adopt what they consider to be prototypical behavior of the valued ingroup in order to gain acceptance or maintain their current position (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears and Doosje 1999:51-54). This proto-typical behavior can include derogation of the relevant outgroup. The level of identification of the individual with the group is again important. High identifiers tend to go to greater lengths to gain or maintain acceptance while low identifiers more easily distance themselves from identification with the group. Managing rejection by the ingroup (because of dissimilarity with what is considered prototypical of the ingroup) can become very challenging if there are no alternatives or if lack of social mobility prevents the individual from joining a different group. Under such conditions it is possible that the individual may resort to even more extreme behavior to confirm his/her similarity to the ingroup (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears and Doosje 1999:55).

4.4.2 Commitment and Social Identity: identification as a moderating variable

Spears, Doosje and Ellemers (1999) argue that categorization alone is not sufficient to account for intergroup behavior. Only once categorization has been subjectively internalized can it be the basis of self-definition and social differentiation. This again suggests a psychological sequence leading to behavior. Categorization leads to cognition which in turn leads to behavior. Along this sequence identification plays an important moderating role in that it influences whether cognitions lead to more individual or group-based behavior (1999:59). Initially the impact of identification on cognition is discussed after which its impact on behavior will be considered.

Reviewing research on the moderating role of identification (defined by Doosje, Ellemers and Spears (1999:85) as “the extent to which group members feel strong ties with their group”), Spears, Doosje and Ellemers (1999) consider the effects of different factors on self-definition. These factors include identity threat, contexts with obvious social category

salience¹⁷ and contexts that have an influence on the availability of cognitive resources needed to process social information. In terms of identity threat they conclude that high identifiers tend to define themselves as more prototypical of their group under conditions of threat to the group while low identifiers tend to attempt to distance themselves from the group under these circumstances (ie high identifiers self-stereotype more). A similar pattern emerges for stereotyping of the ingroup – high identifiers tend to stereotype the ingroup more (on both positive and negative comparative dimensions) than low identifiers (ie high identifiers exhibit greater ingroup bias). Significantly though, this happens only if identity threat is at the level of the group and not the individual. Finally high identifiers tend to show greater differentiation between their group and an outgroup and they perceive less intragroup differences in both the in and outgroups (ie they consider both in and outgroups as more homogenous).

This pattern is repeated in contexts where social categories are salient but not necessarily threatening. High identifiers are more prone to viewing themselves as members of specific groups (if these categorizations are relevant in the particular context). Interestingly though, high identifiers also seem, more so than low identifiers, to disregard categorization of individuals in specific groups when such categorization is perceived as not relevant in the particular context. Spears, Doosje and Ellemers (1999:76) conclude that when identity threat and category salience combine high identifiers are more likely to hold on to categorization even if it has negative implications while low identifiers are more prone to disown their categorization in order to protect themselves from the threat posed.

A final factor that could influence self-definition is the availability of cognitive resources to order social information. The general hypothesis in social psychology is that because ordering great deals of social information requires significant cognitive resources, people are more likely to resort to categorization (because it is efficient and requires less resources) when they have limited cognitive resources available (Fiske and Neuberg 1990). Social Identity research has, however, indicated that categorization is not a default

¹⁷ Spears, Doosje and Ellemers distinguish between the contexts of identity threat and social category salience by considering the latter “less emotionally charged” but still varying “the salience of the social categories involved” (1999:72).

operation for high identifiers when they have limited cognitive resources available but rather a preference. The conclusion is that, at least for high identifiers, group identification has extensive influence regardless of cognitive load (Spears, Doosje and Ellemers 1999).

Before proceeding it is important to note that while identification has been shown by research to have a marked influence on group related cognition, it should also not be considered a sufficient condition for intergroup behavior (including discrimination), even though it might be a necessary condition (Reicher, Spears and Haslam 2010). Group norms and beliefs (ie the content of the ingroup identity), the interaction between psychology and context and features of the context itself are all variables that influence group identification and Social Identity responses (Spears, Doosje and Ellemers 1999:59). Thus, if context does not dictate that a specific interaction is an intergroup interaction, identification with the group becomes irrelevant as the response will not be an intergroup response (Tajfel & Turner 1979). This is of course something that is easier to control in experimental research and therefore conceptually less problematic in such research. In real situations though, understanding the context and the extent to which it dictates that a situation is intergroup, is far more challenging, simply because context is not a fixed or objective set of circumstances. It is also a created process based on interaction by those involved. Put differently this means that context is not always dictated externally. It can also be the result of interaction and interpretation in the absence of relatively clear objective indicators.

Having described the moderating role of identification in cognition, I now turn to its significance for behavior. In further review of research on intergroup behavior Doosje, Ellemers and Spears (1999) focus on group norms, intergroup contextual variables, the stability of status hierarchy, intragroup variables and the moral status of a group as factors that intersect with identification to eventually influence behavior. In terms of group norms they found that it is more likely that high identifiers will be influenced by group norms than low identifiers (although a study by Jetten, Spears and Manstead (1997) argue that the extent to which this is true depends on what exactly the norms are) and act accordingly and that context also has a significant influence on how people respond to group norms. About the relationship between group norms, ingroup identification and behavior they

argue that research shows that “people who value their group membership, in particular, are influenced by their group in terms of displaying normative behavior as suggested by self-categorization theory” (1999:89). Next they conclude that intergroup contextual variables, like the status of groups (low or high status) and the permeability of group parameters have less impact on high identifiers than on low identifiers. The former seems content to be loyal to their group, despite a potentially low status or the possibility of upward mobility while the latter again prefer to seek upward mobility even though it might not be objectively possible. Considering the stability of status hierarchy (ie the extent to which low/high status relations are entrenched or open to change), research shows that low identifiers opt for group level responses to intergroup context when there is a real possibility of the status of their group improving. Intragroup variables, moderated by level of commitment, were also found to have an impact on behavior. When identity threat is perceived, members that are respected by fellow group members are more likely to discriminate against outgroups and act to improve the position of their group. Under more positive conditions those members that are less respected by their fellow group members are more likely to support their group (perhaps in the form of ingroup bias or outgroup discrimination) with the purpose of enhancing their position in the group. Finally, research found that high identifiers are less likely than low identifiers to exclusively feel collective guilt for historical wrong doing of their group when presented with ambiguous information about the history of the group. In the face of ambiguous information high identifiers tend to focus on the positive elements of their history while low identifiers are more influenced by the negative aspects. When information is exclusively positive or negative both low and high identifiers tend to respond in the same manner¹⁸.

Of course relating behavior to single variables is problematic and not something the Social Identity perspective has ever advocated. If, for example, level of identification were to be considered as the only variable influencing compensatory behavior, the conclusion

¹⁸ Of course individuals can behave in ways contrary to these suggestions if at a personal level they approve of the poor treatment of a particular outgroup. In fact Doosje, Branscombe, Spears and Manstead (1998) showed in a laboratory test that where personal bias is pre-existing, perception of group wrongdoing has little influence on the behavior of individuals.

based on what has been said above, would be that high identifiers would only engage in compensation or restitution if presented with exclusively negative information about the history of their group. This is both empirically and theoretically an unsound conclusion. It, for example, disregards the influence that group norms have on behavior. Where compensatory behavior is possibly dictated by a group norm that prescribes this, high identifiers' dedication to the norms of their group could result in such behavior regardless of their assessment of the group's treatment of an outgroup.

4.4.3 The content of Social Identity: norms and values

As has been pointed out, Social Identity research has shown that people tend to harmonize their behavior with group values, probably best understood as expectations (Smith and Hogg 2008), and group norms, defined as "regularities in attitudes and behaviors" (Hogg and Reid (2006:7), if the group is salient in a particular context (Doosje, Ellemers and Spears 1999). This suggests that the content and meaning of Social Identity has an influence on how people behave in terms of these identities. More specifically, Livingstone and Haslam (2008) argue that this content and meaning, as mediators of Social Identity, has an influence on intergroup relations. They explain the theoretical connection between the content of social identities and the resulting behavior using self-categorization theory. After categorization (or self-stereotyping) individuals adopt what they perceive to be the values of the category with which they associate.

Livingstone and Haslam (2008) thus hypothesize that if the content of Social Identities suggest hostilities between different identities, it is more likely that these hostilities will be reflected in intergroup behavior than if the content of the identities did not suggest such hostilities. While this may seem an obvious statement, it is important in the development of the Social Identity perspective as it argues against deterministic accounts of the perspective that suggest that mere categorization will inevitably lead to antagonism. It also offers an explanation for empirical findings that have at times seemed to disagree with the Social Identity perspective. In the words of Livingstone and Haslam this means that "conflict with a particular out-group or out-groups may not just be a *consequence* of identification with a social group (although identification is a necessary component of acting as group members) – it may itself actually be *an important part of in-group identity*"

(2008:3). Through a series of empirical studies they confirm their hypothesis and conclude that where social conflict abides, the content of a Social Identity mediates the effect that identification (with this particular Social Identity) has on negative behavioral intentions (2008:16).

An obvious response to this research is to ask how the meaning or content of social identities is created. Livingstone and Haslam (2008) also offer two suggestions in this regard. First, as their research is situated in the context of a chronic conflict (Northern Ireland) they argue from their data that content is informed by subjective experiences and understanding of history. The mechanism at work is in a sense iterative as it is suggested that the content is formed by understandings of history and personal experience which in turn results in particular meanings that influence how intergroup relations are conducted, something that again influences how intergroup relations are experienced. Second, they propose that the broader intergroup context can have an influence on processes within the group, possibly leading to some segments of the group becoming more 'prototypical'. This in turn results in the norms and values of the group being dominated by those that reflect the particular values of the prototypical element. This is well explained by Stott and Drury (2000) when they argue that where the wider context bestows prototypical status on the militant element of a group, this element is given a platform to pursue values that result in intergroup conflict and pressurize other group members to adopt the same values for the sake of conformity and group coherence (this is in line with Self-categorization theory's arguments that categorization consists of a process of depersonalization and conformity with the prototypical member of the group).

Terry, Hogg and White (1999) have confirmed a link between the meaning of identities and behavior. While their empirical research tended to focus on the influence of self-identity on behavior (through behavioral intentions), they also found that intentions are influenced by the meanings of social identities (1999:238). This agreed with their theoretical arguments about the Social Identity-behavior link, which hypothesized that "social identities should influence behavior through the mediating role of group norms – people will be more likely to engage in particular behavior if it is in accord with the norms

of a behaviorally relevant group membership, particularly if the identity is a salient basis for self-definition” (1999:228).

4.5 Summary

This chapter has offered an overview of the Social Identity perspective, attempting to locate it both historically and intellectually. As such it attempted to cover a vast body of knowledge in a relatively short span. No amount of brevity will, however, render this area of study any less complex.

In short, the Social Identity perspective suggests that in the context of land reform social identity processes such as categorization and comparison can account for some of the preferences and behaviors observed. From this perspective these should be understood as forms of intergroup interaction rather than as individually motivated and instrumental interactions.

In order to employ the perspective in this investigation of land reform, six different propositions regarding Social Identity are taken from the review above. These propositions will be used to investigate the perceptions of land owners regarding land reform.

- The first is that the need for positive Social Identities is varied in the context of land reform because of differences at each of the steps in the causal sequence (Turner 1996). This means that in the context of land reform there are probably different Social Identities at work, each with substantively different requirements for the attainment of positive Social Identity. In order to explore these potential differences, elements of the causal sequence itself has to be investigated.
- Beyond this psychological analysis a second proposition states that land reform is for the most part engaged as a form of intergroup interaction. Where instances of interpersonal responses are found, these should be explained by the Tajfel and Turner’s (1979) description of the factors that influence movement between the interpersonal and intergroup extremes of the interaction continuum.
- The next proposition is that contextual structures (derived from the interpretation of reality) provide the framework within which intergroup relations are conducted

and status positions determined. In the context of this study it means that in order to have a perspective on land owner views of status positions in land reform, an investigation of the contextual psychological structures of intergroup relations is required.

- The fourth proposition is that identity threat, perceived as a contextual factor, shapes land owners' land reform cognitions and behaviors.
- Finally it is proposed that group norms and values prevalent among land owners do not dictate conflictual relations in land reform. The nature of land owners' opposition to land reform are better explained by some of the preceding propositions than by the content of their social identities.

Chapter 5: Symbolic Politics: an overview

5. Introduction

This chapter forms the final part of the theoretical approach for the study. It serves the dual purpose of providing a theoretical perspective on the general problem statement of the study as well as offering the study further analytical tools to conduct an empiric investigation. It thus gives us a way of understanding the problem as well as the conceptual tools to formulate research questions that make it possible to research the problem. The chapter starts with a focus on the resurgence of the use of explanations of political behavior that do not coincide with rational actor models, specifically the tradition of Symbolic Politics. It is then followed by an exploration of the development of these ideas, tracing them from the social psychological ideas of Symbolic Interactionism, through the meta-level analyses of Murray Edelman (1964; 1971; 1988) and the extension of his work by Elder and Cobb (1983) to the more systematic theorizations of Kaufman (2001).

One important omission from this review should be noted. The Symbolic Politics theory as formulated by Sears (1993) is not included here as it my contention that while it reflects important similarities with Symbolic Interactionism and the work of Murray Edelman (such as the rejection of rational choice theory and the role of emotion in decision making), it also contains some deviations that are difficult to reconcile with the approach taken here. First, Sears' argument that attitudes and behavior are determined by relatively stable affective predispositions gives his version of Symbolic Politics a sense of structured inevitability. This is very different to the Symbolic Interaction idea that meaning is potentially created from moment to moment making the connection between meaning and behavior more important than the mediating role of affect. Furthermore, while Elder and Cobb (1983) also argue for the influence of socialized beliefs on the attribution of meaning and the relatively stable character of these, they state that beliefs may be subject to "continual modification and revision" (1983:38). And, according to them, meaning is not only influenced by these beliefs but also group membership. In other words, it is possible to suspend socialized beliefs in order to attribute meaning to something based on the perceived beliefs of the relevant groups. Thus, while affect is important in the approach used here it should be understood as a mediator of meaning rather than behavior.

Second, the argument that predispositions are conditioned responses is also at odds with the underlying principles of Symbolic Interactionism. In Symbolic interaction response to stimuli is not conditioned but rather constructed through interaction. Finally Sears' approach focuses primarily on ethnic or racial prejudices as explanatory variable for political attitudes and behavior (Wilson 1999:23). This focus in fact finds a logical expression in Sears' (1988) conceptualization of symbolic racism. With this focus on racial prejudice the response to political symbols is again determined before sufficient attention can be given to the meaning of symbols.

5.1 Reconsidering the symbolic dimension of political analyses

It has been argued, repeatedly so, that traditional approaches (such as rational actor and conflict of interest models) to explaining political behavior are not sufficient to account for all aspects of such behavior (Kaufman 2006; Lederach 1997; Brysk 1995; Robinson and Powell 1996). As an indication of the importance of these aspects that are not traditionally covered, Brysk (1995:560) listed a number of studies that towards the end of the 20th century offered reconsideration of subjective influences on political thought, processes and behavior. Developments in psychology, social psychology, sociology and anthropology made this possible as these disciplines engaged specifically with challenges related to epistemology and methodology. This engagement was, to an extent, borne out of response to the positivist traditions of Comte and Durkheim that tended to dominate social science thinking until the early twentieth century. In response to the positivist tradition, the interpretive metatheory highlighted the importance of human consciousness in the study of society as humans are "continuously constructing, developing, and changing the everyday (common-sense) interpretations of their world(s)" (Babbie and Mouton 2001:28).

Among the important traditions that have been revived in the study of politics is one that focuses on the symbolic dimension of political analyses. It is, however, important to note that the study of Symbolic Politics is also characterized by diversity of approaches and often a lack of methodological consistency (Burnier 1994). Burnier (1994), for example, distinguishes between, on the one hand, approaches that focus on symbols as empirical categories and, on the other, symbolic analyses as a process more concerned with

epistemology rather than the ontological nature of the symbol. Broadly speaking these two approaches reflect the positivist and interpretive approaches to the study of politics referred to above.

In reviewing a number of works on Symbolic Politics, Burnier (1994) points out that the approach that originates from the positivist tradition considers symbols to be something apart from the observer, rendering them an objective reality to be studied. Furthermore, this approach generally conceives of politics in instrumental terms meaning that it concerns itself with questions about the distribution of material goods and power. As a result symbols are separated from politics as some byproduct of actual political behavior (Burnier 1994:241). Symbols thus operate in service of “real” politics.

The second view of symbols and symbolism that stems from the interpretive tradition suggests that symbols are not byproducts of real politics but rather the medium through which politics is constructed. It conceives of politics not so much as a struggle for material goods but rather as a struggle over meaning. The reality of politics, in this view, is not self-evident but can only be known through a symbolic system such as language. This approach is thus more concerned with how and why meaning is constructed rather than with the material outcomes of political action. As such a study of politics from this perspective will focus not on which symbols are apparent in a given political context or how they are used to achieve a specific political outcome but rather on how symbolic meaning is constructed and interpreted in the particular context.

Another kind of distinction apparent in the Symbolic Politics literature focuses on the status of symbols as either dependent, independent or intermediate variables. The Symbolic Politics traditions that have evolved around the work of Sears (1993)) have tended to focus on symbolic attitudes as variables that develop early in life and that have an influence on decisions and behaviors later in life. Citrin, Reingold, Walters and Green (1990), for example, argue that the predispositions (or symbolic attitudes) associated with feelings of nationalism are of primary importance in explaining the preferences in the USA at the end of the last century for a monolingual national culture (with English being the single, official language), even though the alternative (a bilingual national culture) would have little to no short term effect on the majority of citizens. Their explanation of this

preference is that nationalism is an attitude that is established early in life and that the use of English is included in the meaning of this attitude. Similarly Huddy and Sears (1995) suggests that the emotional significance of political symbols is related to certain predispositions they evoke rather than to the actual benefits associated with the symbol. In these cases symbols are understood to influence or at least moderate political behavior. At the same time though, symbols can also be understood to be dependent variables of which the meaning can change to ultimately evoke different symbolic predispositions.

A cursory glance at some of the applied work that has been done in the last thirty years reflects the diversity of approaches explored above. Fried (1988), for example, demonstrates the interpretive approach to analyzing abortion politics. Using a Symbolic Politics approach she concluded that the intensity and polarization of perspectives could be explained by the symbolic nature of the issue and argued that dialogue is very difficult between conflicting groups because they attach different meanings to specific symbols. Importantly she suggested that when people engage with an issue in symbolic terms, they are more likely to adopt extreme positions to that issue (1988:153). Hinckley (1990) analyzed communication acts of US presidents resulting in her identification of a consistent pattern of forms employed, a phenomenon she refers to as the 'symbolic presidency'. Her study is insightful in that it offers a clear methodology for the study of the symbolic dimension of politics, something that for the most part has been absent from this kind of research (Burnier 1994). Harrison's (1995) argument that symbolic conflict (struggle based on the manipulation of political symbols) is a struggle for symbolic capital can also be described as a continuation of the revival of symbolic approaches to political concerns. And of course Kaufman (2001; 2006; 2007) challenged traditional (and often rationalist) explanations of ethnic conflicts. He argued that traditional explanations only make sense if the affective dimension of ethnic conflict is understood and that a Symbolic Politics framework makes such understanding possible.

While the above mentioned are by no means an exhaustive list of studies that reflect a renewed appreciation for the subjective (and specifically symbolic) dimension of politics, it does indicate that this focus has developed a significant history in political analyses. It

should also show that theoretical development in Symbolic Politics has been limited. Most of the research referenced above used the ideas of symbols and meaning in order to analyze specific cases. Others, like the work of Edelman, presented macro-level analyses but is still lacking in theoretical development. The work done by Sears (1993) and Kaufman (2001) probably represents the most extensive theoretical developments regarding Symbolic Politics.

Of course much work in this area is a continuation of the work of Edelman (1960; 1964; 1971; 1977; 1988) who, Dittmer (1977) argued, is in turn indebted to Lasswell (1936). Edelman's arguments regarding politics as a symbolic form have been acknowledged as introducing an avenue of analyses that is of vital importance to political inquiry (Elder and Cobb 1983; Graber 1976). His collective arguments have been summarized by Burnier (1994) as suggesting that 1) politics is not necessarily about who gets what, as Lasswell (1936) stated, but rather about how peoples' political preferences are influenced and shaped by "symbols, myth, ritual and political language" (1994:243) and 2) politics, through symbolism and language, is about maintaining the status quo of power relations. Politics then is not only about the distribution of goods but also about the construction of the frameworks and discourses within which elites and masses think about and evaluate matters pertaining to goods. Although Edelman's work is not without its critics (see Fenster (2005) and DeCaino (2005) as examples) and seems largely devoid of methodological suggestions for the study of politics using his framework (Burnier 1994:244), it offers valuable conceptual insights for political analyses.

Of course most applied social sciences are indebted to the idea that interaction with and understanding of the world is not direct but mediated. The idea has a long history but in social scientific terms it probably finds its best expression in Symbolic Interactionism. Thus, for the intellectual origins of Symbolic Politics we need to look to these ideas.

5.2 The social world as symbolic construction: The Symbolic interactionist foundation
The works cited above highlight the importance of political analyses with a focus on the symbolic capacity of humans (as opposed to a rationalist or structuralist approach to human conduct). Although this tradition (the symbolic tradition, for lack of a better description) is not as systematized and comprehensively conceptualized as other

approaches to political analyses, its focus on meaning and interpretation provides it some coherence. While not always explicitly acknowledging a connection with Symbolic Interactionism, the works mentioned above rely on concepts and propositions that are central to Symbolic Interactionism and that have been developed by proponents of this tradition. The focus of Symbolic Interactionism is of course much broader than the focus of many of the works referred to earlier but its idea that human action is symbolically mediated (Joas and Knöbl 2009) has opened the way for scholars to focus on how reality is mediated in specific areas of human concern, including politics. Plummer (2000) and Maines (2003) have in fact both stated that Symbolic Interactionism has been present in much of social theory over the last forty to fifty years, even if it was not always explicitly acknowledged. The direct application of Symbolic Interactionism to the analyses of political behavior, however, has been limited. The attempts of Brooks (1969), Hall (1972) and Kanter (1972) have been notable exceptions. Despite this, the influence of Symbolic Interactionism has been widely acknowledged, most notably in the work of Edelman.

Given the importance of Symbolic Interactionism to the analyses of social processes (including politics), this chapter now proceeds with an overview of Symbolic Interactionism. Thereafter it considers a number of contributions to the Symbolic Politics body of knowledge. Specifically the work of Edelman, Sears and Kaufman will be considered briefly. This selection reflects a conceptual continuity of Symbolic Interactionism. Numerous interpreters have identified Edelman's Symbolic Politics as a Symbolic interactionist reading of politics (Hall 1972) while Kaufman (2001) in turn has acknowledged his indebtedness to Edelman. These works are thus considered to be an extension and further elaboration of Symbolic Interactionism as applied to politics.

5.2.1 Contextualizing Symbolic interaction

Symbolic Interactionism is a social psychological theory based in the philosophical school of pragmatism (Joas and Knöbl 2009). The influences of George Mead, John Dewey, Charles Cooley and William James are acknowledged but Herbert Blumer is credited with coining the phrase and producing the first systematic formulation of the theory (Denzin 1992). In psychology Symbolic Interactionism, like behaviorism, focuses on the study of that which is observable. However, it takes a drastically different position to behaviorism

as far as the construction of society is concerned. For the behaviorists society comes about through conditioned responses while symbolic interactionists maintain that society is constructed through social interaction. While Symbolic Interactionism does not deny learned behavior, it suggests that such learning is “more global, more complex, more social, and more dynamic” (Hewitt 1997:13) than what is proposed by behaviorists. For the interactionist what sets humans apart in terms of learned behavior is their ability to control and manipulate their responses and to direct these in terms of their social relations and not just in terms of the satisfaction of needs.

For Symbolic Interactionism to offer useful contributions to understanding social relations it also needs to respond to other broad social theories. Arguably the most prevalent of these has been rationalism, structuralism and structural functionalism. While these offer valuable explanatory insights, they do not account sufficiently for the influences of subjective and creative experiences in the shaping of society. In this regard Symbolic Interactionism offers a different perspective¹⁹ by arguing that society is constituted (not just reflected) by the subjective interpretations and experiences of individuals rather than by underlying macro-level structures (Baert 1998). And contrary to claims that Symbolic Interactionism addresses only the interpersonal level of human behavior, it has been shown that the approach does offer explanatory value where societies or groups are concerned (Hall 1972).

5.2.2 The basic premises of Symbolic Interactionism

The history of the development of Symbolic Interactionism is contested and therefore the exact formulation of the theory as well (Plummer 2000). Various suggestions have been made regarding the origins of the theory (see Plummer (2000) for an overview of the different positions as well as Reynolds (2003a) and Reynolds (2003b) for comprehensive descriptions of precursors and early proponents of the theory) with some even tracing symbolic interactionist thinking back to classical times (Prus 2003). It is fair to say that

¹⁹ Of course much of social theory is characterised by the ongoing debates about the nature of society and action. The brief distinction between the contributions of Symbolic Interactionism and other sociological theories is not a sufficient elaboration of these debates and is not intended to be such. For further investigation of these debates a large body of literature exists, eg Elliot (2009), Joas and Knöbl (2009), Ritzer (2008), Baert (1998).

Symbolic Interactionism was a particular approach to the study of society before it was a systematic theory. Herein lies some of the difficulties associated with it. Baert (1998) has shown how there are differences within Symbolic Interactionism even among the central contributors Mead (1934) and Blumer (1969)²⁰. These differences can in part be explained by the fact that Mead and Blumer were both responding to approaches that were prevalent in the study of social sciences in their days. Mead struggled against the external determinism of behaviorism as posited by Watson (Baert 1998:69) while Blumer opposed the structural-functionalist explanations of the 1950s and 1960s (Baert 1998:71) as mostly espoused by Parsons (Joas and Knöbl 2009). Despite the contestation, the constituent elements or basic premises of the theory remain. Briefly stated these constituent elements suggest 1) that actions towards objects (including other people) are based on the meanings those objects have for the actor, 2) that this meaning is created through interaction with others and 3) that meaning comes about through a process of interpretation (Blumer 1969).

Regarding the first of these Blumer (1969:3) argues that the social sciences are often more concerned with cause and effect variables and less with the meaning of the object towards which is being acted. In a simple cause-effect framework meaning is disregarded because, so the argument goes, identification of an independent variable explains the effect on the dependent variable thus leaving meaning superfluous. Blumer summarized his argument regarding this oversight in the social sciences thus “To ignore the meaning of the things toward which people act is seen as falsifying the behavior under study. To bypass the meaning in favor of factors alleged to produce the behavior is seen as a grievous neglect of the role of meaning in the formation of behavior” (1969:3). Meaning, Hewitt (1997) argues, is thus not some byproduct or irrelevant element of human consciousness, hidden in cause and effect relationships but rather the basis of cognitions and behavior. The implication of this premise, Joas and Knöbl (2009:132) argue, is that behavior is not determined by objective influences with fixed meaning as meaning is attributed. This is why national flags can be both symbols around which people rally (eg the display of flags at international sporting events) as well as objects of hatred (eg when

²⁰ Differences later also extended to the work of Manford Kuhn and Ervin Goffman (Manning and Smith 2010).

protesters burn a flag). The cloth and its different patterns and colors have no objective meaning. But people act towards the flag based on the meaning they attribute to it.

While the argument that man acts toward an object based on the meaning of the object is not unique to Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer 1969:3), the approach sets itself apart in terms of its understanding of the origin of meaning. In terms of the second of the constituent elements then, Blumer (1969:4) distinguishes between the dominant views on the origins of meaning and that posed by Symbolic Interactionism. I shall refer to the dominant views as the 'intrinsic' and the 'psychological' notions. On the one hand there exists a view that holds meaning to be intrinsic to an object. Thus meaning can be discovered simply by observing the object. Meaning is therefore fixed and only accessible if the object is observable. Contrasted with this view, is the idea that meaning is a reflection of the cognitions, such as feelings, attitudes, memories and ideas of the person observing the object. Meaning thus emanates not from the object but from the mind of the person observing the object. Symbolic Interactionism takes a different position on the origins of meaning. It sees meaning as developing from the "ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing" (Blumer 1969:4). Elsewhere Thoits and Virshup (1997:108) state that "meaning of a word or gesture lies in the response of the audience" thus implying that interaction is the site of the origin of meaning. Meaning is thus neither objective nor individually subjective but rather socially derived. It cannot be established without interaction between people. As Charon (2004) argues, in order to understand why things are happening we need to focus on interaction. This proposition clearly reflects the pragmatic roots of Symbolic Interactionism. In Symbolic Interactionism meaning is thus not limited by the structures of society but is variable and amenable to change. It is not necessarily passed on to next generations through culture or other societal structures but can be constructed as people act in different situations (Franzoi 2007). For this reason Hall (1972) has argued that Symbolic Interactionism represents reality as emergent (as opposed to fixed and invariable) and man as an action oriented actor (rather than a structurally driven reactor).

Finally Blumer (1969:5) argues that when individuals turn to specific meanings to respond to their environment, they have to interpret the meanings derived from their interactions.

Meaning is not simply derived from social interaction and then applied. If it were, the implication would be that behavior towards objects would exhibit far less diversity. But Blumer (1969:5) suggests that meaning is first interpreted before it is applied stating that “interpretation should not be regarded as a mere automatic application of established meanings but as a formative process in which meanings are used and revised as instruments for the guidance and formation of action” (1969:5). This interpretive process is associated with the constant development of the self through role taking, which in turn involves the individual considering interaction from the other’s point of view and ultimately ascribing meaning that is appropriate to the context. In a classroom, for example, the raising of a hand by itself means nothing unless the teacher considers it from the point of view of the one raising his or her hand. This allows the teacher to construct a meaning appropriate to the context and respond accordingly. Similarly the raising of the hand means nothing to the students unless he/she has an awareness of the roles that are appropriate in the particular context.

The implications of these seemingly self-evident premises are far reaching, especially when contrasted with the views presented by other sociological approaches. Briefly Joas and Knöbl (2009) suggest that these premises sets Symbolic Interactionism apart in terms of the foundations of a theory of action, the form of the self, the nature of social relations and the nature of social change. In terms of the first, *the foundation of a theory of action*, it is different in that it conceives of action as resulting from interaction and not from the individual actor or act. Interaction is not just the expression of conduct formed elsewhere, it is what shapes and determines conduct. Extending this to the *nature of the self* means that Symbolic Interactionism does not view the self as a medium that realizes fixed expectations. For some other sociological perspectives the self internalizes fixed norms and values of a society and then, in a linear way, executes these. For the Symbolic interactionists the self is a process rather than a repository for societal structures because of humans’ ability to objectify the self and interact with it. This renders the idea of inevitable goals or fixed norms and values untenable. As Joas and Knöbl (2009:135) puts it “One’s original goals and intentions may change very quickly, because objects constantly produce new meanings within the ceaseless process of interpretation so typical of human beings”. For this same reason interactionists also question the idea of

fixed *social relations*. They argue that all relationships are negotiated processes rather than predetermined ones. Finally, regarding *social change*, Blumer's three basic premises of Symbolic Interactionism would suggest that social change is contingent and highly unpredictable. The introduction of a variable in one context will not necessarily lead to the same outcome when introduced in another context. So, for example, elections in one country do not necessarily have the same result as in others. In one instance it may lead to political stability, in another it can result in political schism.

These three basic and general premises underpin the further extension of Symbolic Interactionism as summarized by Manning and Smith (2010). These extended ideas are that 1) social life exists in action (and must therefore be studied in specific situations), 2) reality is created through social interaction and not just represented by it, 3) the social world consists of objects, 4) the self is an object, 5) people continuously interpret and re-interpret situations as they develop and 6) actions are interlinked co-joint productions.

An exploration of the conceptual essentials of Symbolic Interactionism sheds light on these ideas.

5.3.3 The nature of symbols and symbol use

Symbolic Interactionism suggests that people respond to each other (or to objects) based on the meaning they ascribe to symbols used to interact (mostly linguistic symbols). While this seems intuitively simple it is a counter position to behaviorist arguments that human responses are conditioned (Hewitt 1997:29). Hewitt (1997:32) describes symbols as

“a thing or event associated with some other thing or event, but it is one produced and controlled by the very animals that have learned to respond to it. The symbol has no natural connection with that for which it stands – it does not occur “in nature”, nor is it a fixed part of the environment over which the animal has control. Rather, it has an entirely arbitrary relationship to what it represents, a relationship that has been created by and is shared among a group of animals”.

This description of the nature of symbols suggests a number of characteristics of symbol use. Hewitt (1997:34) discusses at least three such characteristics. First, symbols

transform the environment people live in. This is possible because the use of symbols allow people to imagine what is not present, both spatially and temporally. This imagination also allows the external world to be internalized which in turn allows for the manipulation of the world. By symbolizing the external world through linguistic signs (words), people also create categories in which the world can be divided. Thus by calling a specific act or attitude 'racism' more is done than just naming one specific instance. An entire category is created that renders the external world more general and abstract. From this Hewitt (1997:35) concludes that symbolizing is also a creative act as it allows people to name things that aren't concrete, giving them an existence. Concepts like 'justice' or 'fairness' are not concrete objects yet naming them turns them into a subjective reality. Creating things by naming them also implies that the same object can be attached to different symbols. The incarceration of a political activist can mean justice to some while the same object can mean oppression to others. Naming something, attaching a symbol to it, then has implications for how that object is used. When 'missile' is used to refer to a brick it suggests a different use of the object than when the same object is referred to as 'building material'. The converse is also true. An object can have a single signification (symbol) but its meaning can be very different based on its intended use. When a violent protester asks for a brick the object has a different meaning to him/her than what it has when a builder asks for a brick.

A second characteristic of symbol use is the fact that symbols have the ability to reproduce the attitudes or behavior of one in others (Hewitt 1997:36). If, for example, a political leader speaks of an injustice he/she has witnessed, it is possible that others hearing this reference can exhibit similar feelings or behavior to that of the leader, even though they have not witnessed the act referred to. This does not suggest that the use of a particular symbol will necessarily lead to specific attitudes or behaviors in others. Symbols used have to be interpreted before they can possibly evoke similar attitudes or behaviors (Hewitt 1997:37). If all interaction in terms of a specific symbol was similar people would tend to respond in exactly the same way to objects as they would have the same meaning for everyone. However, it is clear that people do not always exhibit shared responses to symbols. As Hewitt (1997:37) states, "symbols make shared responses possible but do not guarantee them".

Finally, through the use of symbols people become part of the external world to which they respond. Hewitt (1997:38) argues that because people can designate objects in their environment, they can also designate themselves. In practical terms this means that humans can use the symbols that others use to designate them, to designate themselves. If, for example, others designate a group as “white”, “Afrikaner”, “farmer” etc, members of that group can also designate themselves as such. They have, in other words, a ‘self’. Important for understanding identity from a symbolic interactionist perspective, is the idea that once an individual objectifies him or herself by using the name of a group to which he or she belongs, “the individual can represent self as implicated in their acts, and thus imagine and depict the activities of the group as a whole” (Hewitt 1997:49). Symbolic capacity is thus what allows coordinated group activity that is more than conditioned response to events. The ability to objectify the self as being part of the group can result in assimilation or transformation of group values and behaviors.

5.3.4 Objects

Objects, just like symbols, take different forms. Blumer (1969:10) has suggested three classes of objects, namely physical objects, social objects and abstract objects. The first is self-explanatory. The second refers to social institutions and roles (eg the president, a father) while the third covers objects from the realm of ideas (eg principles or philosophies). While the most common set of symbols investigated in Symbolic Interactionism research is linguistic symbols (written or spoken words), other objects such as flags, anthems etc have also been considered (see for example Schatz and Levine 2007).

Of themselves objects have no meaning or characteristics that result in inevitable action. Rather they are attributed specific meaning within specific contexts (Joas and Knöbl 2009:132). A built structure does not have some sort of innate ability that compels people to live in it. Only when it has been attributed a certain meaning (perhaps designated through the symbol “house”) does it result in certain actions on the part of people. This reflects a simple yet defining aspect of objects in Symbolic Interactionism, namely that objects can be symbolically designated.

In Symbolic Interactionism 'object' refers to the intricate fabric of the worlds people occupy, not just to the material objects that can be observed in those worlds. Although "house", for example, can refer to a material thing, it suggests different things to different people depending on where they live and their socio-economic circumstances. And this is what makes it an object in the Symbolic Interactionism framework – it is something more than a material thing that can be symbolically designated. The argument that objects are such that they can be designated and acted towards should not lead us to believe that there is a set sequential relationship between objects and symbols. It is true that in many instances a tangible thing exists that can be designated by a symbol, turning it into an object. However, it is also possible that an object be created (even though it doesn't exist) through designation. This is a particularly important observation for the present study as it suggests that people can, for whatever reason, designate things that are not in an ontological sense real and still act towards these objects. So, for example, perceptions can become 'real' objects towards which can be acted. It is the symbolic designation that allows people to act towards it, even though it might not be material. "Relationship", for example, is not a material thing but by designating it symbolically, people can act towards it.

The idea that objects can be symbolically designated leads to an obvious next aspect of the definition of the concept, namely that objects can mean different things to different people (Blumer 1969:11). The meaning of objects is thus not fixed and can differ from person to person, depending on the context in which they ascribe meaning to the object. For example, the idea/s that are designated by the word 'democracy' can have very different meanings for the religious conservative, the political candidate or the communist. And of course these different meanings are then also evoked by the symbol designating the object. These meanings, Blumer (1969:11) argues, originates from interaction with others.

Traditional or non-technical uses of the concepts 'object' and 'symbol' could result in confusion of the two. Symbolic Interactionism, however, maintains a clear distinction between these concepts. In Symbolic Interactionism, symbols are abstractions of objects. They are ways of designating something in reality. It is easy to understand this notion

when symbols are used to designate tangible objects. The word 'chair', for example, is a symbol of a specific object in reality. What makes the word symbolic though is that it does not rely on the presence of the object to convey meaning. When symbols refer to less tangible objects, maintaining the above mentioned distinction becomes challenging. As was seen earlier objects can also come in the form of ideas. If the word "communism" is used to refer to a certain idea, the word itself is a symbol or designation of the idea. However, this idea is not 'out there' in the sense that the chair is which renders thinking about it as an object in the environment, less obvious. As it is something that can be designated, acted towards and something that can be the goal of actions – three defining characteristics of an object according to Blumer (1969:10) and Hewitt (1997:39) – it is still considered an object.

5.3.5 Acting and Interaction

One of the most basic assumptions of Symbolic Interactionism is that society is based on people acting. In other words society exists because of and for action. Other dominant sociological approaches such as cultural or structural approaches, Blumer (1969:6) argues, are all derived from what people do in response to societal factors such as cultural norms and values. These approaches often deal with interaction simply as a reflection of other factors. Such thinking, Blumer says, results in us jumping from "causative factors to the behavior they are supposed to produce" (1969:7) without considering the role of interaction. In fact, if the relation between these causative factors and behavior was this direct it would mean that in theory the factors would result in the same behavior regardless of the way in which they are mediated. This ascribes human conduct deterministic characteristics that cannot be reconciled with Symbolic Interactionism.

For Symbolic interaction, however, social action is "built up by people through their interpretation of the situations in which they are placed" (Blumer 2005:95). So interaction does not only reflect behavior but actually shapes it (Joas and Knöbl 2009:133). Thus, when interaction is understood as a creative (as opposed to a reflective) part of the process of human conduct it offers a more comprehensive explanation of the complexities of human behavior.

At the time when he was systematizing these arguments, Blumer (1969) stated that any approach to human behavior that connects action in a simple way to some initiating factor (eg needs, rules, expectations, attitudes, preferences etc) generally tends to disregard the role of self-interaction and the process through which humans interpret the world and construct their actions (1969:13). In Symbolic Interactionism the suggestion is that the connection between these initiating factors and action is not as direct. These factors are rather noted and become part of an interpretive process that eventually results in action. In order to understand human behavior then, Blumer (1969:16) argues that one has to “get inside the defining process of the actor”.

The distinction Blumer (1969) proposes between symbolic and non-symbolic interaction relies on the interpretation (or lack thereof) of meanings in interaction. When responses to acts are given without interpretation, Blumer (1969:8) considers them to be non-symbolic. The most obvious example of this would be reflex acts. If, however, there is interpretation involved before a response act, it can be considered symbolic-interaction. Importantly a symbol employed in interaction can have a shared meaning allowing people to reach the same conclusions based on its use.

5.4 Developing Symbolic Interactionism concepts for the analyses of political activities: Murray Edelman and Symbolic Politics

Although Edelman published his ideas over a period of almost forty years the core of his thinking regarding Symbolic Politics is found in the first of his four major publications, *The Symbolic uses of Politics* (1964). In this work his focus is on the symbolic nature and mechanisms of political leadership, the administrative system and political language. While his argument is varied and at times abstract and complex, his primary intention is to indicate how a political system characterized by inequality remains stable. His propositions amount to a claim that quiescence (or arousal) is brought about through symbolic rather than substantive means.

A careful reading of Edelman does indicate that while his concerns remained relatively stable (Chadwick 2001:436), there was development²¹ in his thinking over the course of his career but, as Ewick and Sarat (2004:447) argues, this development was not linear in the sense that later ideas supplanted or corrected earlier ideas. Rather they suggest that his later ideas were “immanent” in his earlier understandings. Probably the most drastic changes observed in Edelman’s thinking have been changes in his epistemology. This, Arnhart (1985) argued, changed over the course of his career from positivist objectivism to interpretive realism to nihilism.

The examination of Edelman’s thinking here focuses on the descriptions, hypotheses and concepts formulated in *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* with reference made to his other major works where necessary. In particular his arguments about the symbolic nature of politics and what this implies for participation in politics, the function of symbols in politics and the mechanisms involved in Symbolic Politics are considered. This section on Edelman’s Symbolic Politics framework is concluded with a consideration of some of the criticisms that has been leveled at his work as well as the valuable contributions it has made to political analyses. First though, in order to indicate conceptual continuity, Edelman’s connection to Symbolic Interactionism is explored.

5.4.1 Symbolic Interactionism as the root of Edelman’s Symbolic Politics framework

Conceptually (and possibly methodologically) Edelman’s work has been acknowledged as situated in the Symbolic Interactionist tradition (Hall 1972). While he might not be called a Symbolic Interactionist himself, his understanding of the world (and specifically the political world) as a place constructed in terms of symbolic meaning connects him to the same interpretive tradition as Symbolic Interactionism although other influences on his thinking, such as elite theory, neo-Marxism and post-structuralism, have also been acknowledged (Dittmer 1977; Chadwick 2001). His indebtedness to Symbolic Interactionism is implied in his suggestions that (political) meaning is not fixed or objective but rather created (Edelman 1964:185). Chadwick (2001:438) in fact argues that Edelman

²¹ One of the most obvious developments is the change in the way he described political engagement. In his earlier works he distinguished between elites and the mass public while in *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (1988) he opts for a more nuanced description of engagement focussing on race, religion, class and other social divisions.

applied the abstractions of Symbolic Interactionism directly to the realm of politics in order to “understand how meaning and identity is socially embedded through mutually reinforcing acts of communication”. Edelman’s (1971:2) connection to Symbolic Interactionism is perhaps best illustrated in his own words.

“This emphasis places at the center of attention the symbolizing ability with which man adapts his world to his behavior and his behavior to his world. Only man among living things reconstructs his past, perceives his present condition, and anticipates his future through symbols that abstract, screen, condense, distort, displace, and even create what the senses bring to his attention. The ability to manipulate sense perceptions symbolically permits complex reasoning and planning and consequent efficacious action.”

Two concepts that are central to Symbolic Interactionism, namely mutual role-taking and meaning, are of equal importance to Edelman. In short he considers role-taking to be one of the mechanisms that drive symbolic political activity as without it political actors would not be able to evoke common meanings (1964:188) making interaction and the garnering of support almost impossible. By being able to view himself and his actions through the eyes of others, man discovers the ability to adapt identity and behavior in a way that associates or disassociates him with others thus creating the space for meaning to be confirmed or new shared meaning to be formed. Meaning is, in a specific sense, a function of role-taking and indicates not only what things are but also how they should be responded to.

5.4.2 Explaining political behavior: The symbolic nature of politics

In Edelman’s first major publication, *Pouncy* (1988) argues, he found himself at odds with the pluralist paradigm dominating the study of politics at the time. In *The Symbolic uses of Politics* (1964), Edelman questioned the pluralist research programme that dominated the American political science in the 1950s and 1960s (Chadwick 2001) while still struggling with questions about why the public seem to accept the political status quo despite it often resulting in inequalities and how the political elites manage this state of affairs to ensure that it will continue (Chadwick 2001; Ewick and Sarat 2004:442). The pluralist programme had as its core assumptions the ideas that groups are only defined

by their behavior, that all groups affected by an issue will be involved in its eventual resolution and that there exists no hierarchy among interest groups (Pouncy 1988:783). Edelman in turn argued that cases that exhibit trends or patterns that are at odds with these assumptions should not be treated as exceptions but rather as common or predictable forms of political activity (1971:1). Essential to his argument is a conception of politics that is different to that propagated by rational actor models. This conception is considered here in terms of the function of politics, the symbolic forms that characterize it and the relationship between political goals and behavior.

The function of politics

In terms of the function of politics, Edelman argued that a divergence exists between what political institutions are said to do and what they actually do. As an example he states that elections, despite claims by activists to the contrary, in actual fact give voters very little control over their own lot. This difference between what politics is said to do and what it actually does, does not mean that it is without function. "It is rather that the functions they serve are different and more varied than the ones we conventionally assume and teach", argued Edelman (1964:3). After this initial formulation he extended the argument to explain how politics function. He stated that "Political actions chiefly arouse or satisfy people not by granting or withholding their stable substantive demands, but rather by changing the demands and expectations" (1971:7) (as will be shown shortly this corresponds with Edelman's view that political desires are not stable and that they can be changed by political cues). This reflects Edelman's dual understanding of politics as both expressive and instrumental (1964:12). As an expressive form, politics is symbolic in that it conveys certain beliefs, perceptions and emotions rather than being a tool or mechanism for instituting objective change in the political reality.

Symbolic forms of politics: Rituals and myths

Edelman identifies two particular symbolic forms of politics in his discussion on the nature of politics, namely ritual and myth (1964:16). He states that many political institutions (eg elections, public consultations etc) are ritualistic in that they are often repeated in formulaic fashion with the intent of reassuring those participating that their individual concerns are actually noted in the political activity from which they feel separated. These rituals are also important to society as they create the impression that the concerns

people have are shared and that there is in fact a collective that brings order to otherwise chaotic societies. In other words, the ritual contributes to the establishment and maintenance of collective identities and stabilizes conflicts of interest to prevent them from escalating. Edelman describes this process as “...procedures ostensibly established to make policy in fact produce(d) predictable results in line with relative bargaining power; and policymaking procedures whose outcomes are known in advance amount to ritual and not decision making. They constitute an acting out of the underlying conflict and legitimation of the terms on which it is currently resolved” (1971:22).

Myth is said to perform similar functions. Edelman argues that political myths are the instruments that explain what would otherwise be considered anomalies in society in such a way that these issues do not result in restiveness (1964:18). Importantly he argues that these have their origins in social cues rather than empirical observations (1971:14). He attempts to reduce the descriptive complexity of myths by identifying two basic categories that covers most myths. The first identifies an enemy that has to be opposed while the second establishes a leader/principle that has to be followed (1971:15). When political acts are interpreted in one of these ways it tends to reduce intra-group differences and increase intergroup differences (this will be explored in a later chapter as it is an obvious link to the Social Identity perspective) as the myths generally present policies as unambiguous and denies division and differences among their proponents.

Political goals and behavior

Edelman’s ideas about political goals and how they relate to political behavior also differs from that proposed by rational actor models. He states that these models assume that people act in ways that are meant to satisfy political goals or interests and that once these goals are met the attitudes that motivate the behavior will cease to be and so too will the concurrent behavior (1964:152). His own hypothesis regarding the relation between goals and behavior is very different. First, he suggests that once a political goal has been met demands for more similar benefits or different benefits that are “different in manifest content but like the old ones in respect to a latent dimension” (1964:153) increases. Second, if a political objective is not achieved it eventually leads to the abandonment or modification of the objective to something more modest. Next he states that the terms

used to denote objectives are formal categories rather than empirical ones (1964:158). In other words they are abstractions rather than actualities. They tend to be abstracted from complex empirical situations resulting in the highlighting of some properties of the situations at the expense of other properties. Their intention is to evoke responses in terms of expectations groups have regarding this specific property of the situation. Naming a political objective then serves primarily to reassure groups rather than to actually achieve the objective. Political objectives are achieved through processes other than naming but the naming of the objective creates the myth for a group of tangible achievement.

This is an important observation for Edelman as it leads to the next proposition of his argument regarding the relation between political goals and behavior, which is that quiescence regarding political objectives relies on symbolic reassurances. The converse then is of course also true, namely that restiveness regarding political objectives is the result of inadequate symbolic reassurance. Indeed Edelman (1964:165) argues that only symbolic reassurance can satisfy symbolic objectives. This does not suggest that administrative political processes only provide symbolic benefit. Edelman (1960) concedes that these processes often produce tangible benefits but he also argues that the benefits are often a mix of the tangible and the symbolic. Clearly then political objectives can be both tangible and symbolic. But, as Edelman (1964) argues, it is easier to satiate symbolic needs than tangible ones. This again leads to a next aspect of Edelman's hypothesis, namely that when certain types of political needs are not symbolically satisfied (even though they may tangibly be satisfied) they are likely to result in direct action from the public. In South Africa, for example, the dismantling of the racially based legislation after 1994 (a tangible political outcome) has not resulted in quiescence from the South African public although the manner in which these needs are expressed has become ritualized, resulting in a conflict that has thus far not seriously escalated. Continued calls are heard for equity, fairness and social justice despite the removal of legislative obstacles. This, Edelman (1964:165) says, is because these objectives are formal categories (as opposed to empirical categories) that represent values, rendering them inherently insatiable provided that they continue to perform the functions of object appraisal, social adjustment and externalization. Finally, Edelman (1964:153) argues that

the hypothesis described above is mostly dependent on the continued existence of a particular reference group from which the values underlying the political objectives originate.

In summary then, for Edelman politics is not only an institution that confers tangible benefits, as Laswell suggested. It also has a significant symbolic dimension that “condenses and expresses the fears, hopes, and desires of men and women” (Ewick and Sarat 2004:443). Politics is always characterized by group conflict (Edelman 1964:51), a characteristic that renders it ambiguous to those observing or experiencing it. As such it truly is the passing drama that Edelman suggested it is as the ambiguity creates the conditions for role-taking and imagining. Politics is also not conceived as a process through which people find expression for their needs and desires (in the form of policies or institutions) but rather a tireless attempt to collect support or instigate opposition, not by giving people what they want but rather by changing their views about what they need and desire and about what and whom to fear. These cognitions (beliefs, fears desires etc) are created and affirmed through symbolic cues and are not, as Sears (1995) would argue, stable and enduring. As Edelman states “It is central to the explanation of political quiescence, arousal and violence both that attitudes potentially or actually have these unstable characteristics and that public policies and processes themselves serve as cues that evoke particular changes in the direction and intensity of political cognitions” (1971:4).

5.4.3 Explaining political behavior: Participating in politics

In the previous section Edelman’s idea that politics can either confer tangible benefits for some and symbolic reassurance for others, was introduced. This distinction between expressive and instrumental politics is related to another important distinction in Edelman’s framework explaining the differences between the way different actors in society experience politics. On the one hand there are those that view and experience politics at a distance. In such cases politics is set apart yet still perceived to have influence over man’s life. Edelman (1964:5) sums it up saying that “It is central to its (politics) potency as a symbol that it is remote, set apart, omnipresent as the ultimate threat or means of succor, yet not susceptible to effective influence through any act we as

individuals can perform". When politics is experienced in this way it invokes condensation symbols, that is symbols that do not necessarily represent objective realities but rather beliefs, hopes, desires, fears and other psychological realities. This is particularly obvious when it comes to controversial political acts as these symbolize either threats or reassurances (1964:7). The meaning of the condensation symbols can only come from the psychological realities of those experiencing it and not from any objective reality as these are not known by those viewing politics at a distance. Because of this distance Edelman (1964:6) argues that man does not have the opportunity to check his beliefs about the politics of the day against realities. For example, where impoverished communities experience government decisions as disregarding their needs, their lack of access to cabinet meetings or other government discussions results in them never being able to discern whether their case is actually considered in government or how government tries to balance their needs with many others. Importantly, Edelman would argue, their desire might be a psychological one (at least in part), one in need of reassurance of their status, rather than only an instrumental need. Ultimately this means that because they experience political decision making as remote, acquiescence comes through acts that are in a sense remote rather than immediate (as instrumental acts would be) - that is symbolic acts of reassurance. Because they have no objective cues to rely on, people turn to symbolic cues to inform their cognitions in such circumstances.

Politics can, however, be viewed and experienced in another way that is more immediate and objective. This is generally more the way in which organized groups or elites practice politics in an attempt to acquire tangible or instrumental benefits. Those that relate to political acts in this way can often check their behavior against objective reality (Edelman 1964:5). For example, when leaders formulate policies that are meant to garner continued political support from their constituencies, they can check whether they are actually maintaining the support they need to obtain the political power they desire and correct their acts if their initial attempts did not result in the desired outcome.

Arnhart (1985) has called this distinction one between the mythical and utilitarian experience of politics. In short the public experiences politics as the representation of reassurance of order and meaning while elites experience it as an instrument to

manipulate the objective world in order to obtain specific benefits. Politics is thus both about the allocation of resources (objective function) and the legitimization of power that makes resource allocation possible (symbolic function). Given Edelman's ideological bias (DeCaino 2005) politics is then represented as maintaining inequalities, ironically based on the support of the powerless, through the deployment of symbolic resources (Chadwick 2001:439). Importantly though, and despite arguments to the contrary, Edelman does not seem intent on portraying politics only as smokescreen employed by elites at the cost of the masses. Instead he suggests that Symbolic Politics plays a very important role in society in that it supports "social stability and thereby furnish a base upon which men can pursue their interests as political animals" (1964:20). Here Edelman opens his understanding of symbols to criticism as he does not account for other functions of politics that rely on symbolism (such as the mobilization of the political community) (Dittmer 1977:562). Inadvertently, Dittmer (1977:562) argues, Edelman then actually degrades symbols to substitutes for material goods, detracting from its potential contribution to political analysis. Importantly though, Edelman (1964:20) does not suggest that elites form and employ symbols for purposeful deception. He rather contends that elites themselves engage in role-taking when they employ symbols. They in other words believe in the symbols rather than just creating them for manipulative purposes (Fenster 2005:370).

Of course such a description of political participation begs the question whether man, in some deterministic way, responds in a conditioned manner to symbolic cues, a position that would seem to be contradictory to the Symbolic interaction heritage of Edelman's work. Some have argued that Edelman's suggestions lead to such a conclusion (Fenster 2005). A close reading of Edelman however challenges such claims. For Edelman political behavior is not directly linked to stimuli. Rather he argues that stimuli have an influence on cognitions and they in turn determine to which cues people respond and which they ignore. He can thus argue that some variables in a sense do result in certain acts but only as "myth influencing attitudes and opposition, not as behavior influencing events" (1971:29). So man is not a being that responds in a conditioned way because the decision to act is not based on some form of external input and pre-existing and

unconsidered reactions but rather on an interpretation of that input in terms existing or cued cognitions.

Continuing his argument that some experience politics at a distance while for others it is a much more immediate and instrumental experience, Edelman suggests in *Politics as Symbolic Action* (1971) that man's "political beliefs, demands, and attitudes" (1971:3) are not fixed and stable but rather ambivalent and susceptible to certain cues. This flexible nature of man's political structure is what makes him mobilizable and responsive to particular political symbols. If political cognitions were stable people would respond politically to these rather than to political institutions of symbolic value, such as legislation and the legislative process. The cognitions that dominate political life are related to "status in society and...security from perceived threats" (1971:8). Symbolic cues do not only satisfy or arouse expectations about status and security but also indicate potential adversaries (Edelman 1971:10).

5.4.4 Explaining political behavior: The function of symbols in politics

At the heart of Edelman's (1964) argument in *Symbolic uses of Politics* is the nature of symbols. Here, following Sapir (1934), he distinguished between referential and condensational symbols. Referential symbols are the "economical ways" (Edelman 1964:6) of referring to objects. Their function is reduce the complexity of the world by developing shorthand references to objects so that when these objects are employed in our thinking or interaction they do not have to be rediscovered or reinvented. By using symbols for these objects it becomes easier to manipulate the objects. Referential symbols mean nothing more than objects they denote (Elder and Cobb 1983:29). As a referential symbol "Polokwane 2007" is no more than a chronological and geographical designation. As a condensational symbol, however, it takes on much wider meaning. Condensational symbols are references not only to objects but also to the emotions and beliefs associated with them. In this sense "Polokwane 2007" is a symbol of political changes within the ruling ANC. It encompasses a variety of beliefs about the future of South African society in general and South African politics in particular. It evokes different emotions for different people, depending on where they find themselves on the political spectrum. In short "Polokwane 2007" condenses a whole range of diverse meanings and

feelings in a single symbol that is in no way directly connected to the objective referent of the symbol. The function of condensational symbols is thus to “evoke emotional and subjective reactions to a situation” (Arnhart 1985:188) allowing people to imagine their worlds (rather than simply observing it).

Importantly though, Arnhart (1985) points out that Edelman later rejected this distinction. In writing a new afterword to *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* Edelman stated that this distinction is probably superfluous as all symbols can “condense a range of ideas, feelings, and sentiments” (Edelman 1985:198). There are thus no referential symbols even though they may be employed in a way that corresponds with the description of referential symbols in Edelman’s early works. The rejection of this distinction, though important to any review of developments in Edelman’s work, does not necessarily change his overall arguments about the mediation of politics through symbols. What is important, as we will see later, is the reason for the change in Edelman’s conviction. As mentioned earlier, Edelman seems to have rejected his initial epistemology and this resulted in him rejecting some of his earlier premises, although not his overall propositions. Whether this is an indication of development in his thought, as Ewick and Sarat (2004) suggest or whether it represents a major departure from his argument, as Arnhart (1985) argues, is unclear and probably warrants further investigation.

Symbols cannot be discussed in Edelman’s framework without considering meaning. Understanding his conceptualization of meaning requires an investigation of the distinction he maintains between meaning and information. Meaning, Edelman (1971:31) argues, is a cognition that is predictable because it is not based on complex empirical observations. In other words it is not based on observations of reality and therefore requires no critical engagement. Because it is not empirical in nature it is also highly resistant to change based on empirical observations. Instead of being transformed by empirical observation, non-empirical cognitions are more likely to influence which observations will be selected for interpretation and which ones will simply be ignored. Meaning thus perpetuates certain cognitions rather than challenge them. Information, on the other hand, is empirical by nature and therefore often challenges pre-existing

cognitions. In Edelman's framework meaning and information are mutually exclusive. In fact he argues that "information destroys meaning" (1971:31).

Because symbols represent certain meanings (not information) they reduce the complexity of experiences as they provide meaning rather than construct it. Someone who experiences political acts or language will already 'know' what these mean based on the meanings he/she attaches to those symbols. Of course not all political acts or language is imbued with meaning for the observer. While some symbols do confirm meaning, others challenge meaning and still others are simply ignored (Edelman 1971:32). In collectives meaning is created through consensus. Importantly this means that certain symbols will only have meaning in terms of collective identities or Social Identity.

After his initial work Edelman was also criticized for his argument that condensational symbols are only relevant when it comes to the political objectives and quiescence of masses while referential symbols become more important as material interests become more salient (Zald 1966:89). The implication of such a suggestion is that the public processes their needs at a distance through condensational symbols leaving the satisfaction of these needs susceptible to symbolic manipulation (Zald 1966:87). The public is in essence portrayed as ignorant and incapable of making substantive contributions to formal political processes (Sears 1995). While a separate scholarly debate regarding the role of public ignorance has sprung from Edelman's assertions (see Fenster 2005, 2007; Wisniewski 2007, 2010 and Chandler 2010) it is sufficient for our purposes to point out that in a later edition of *Symbolic uses of Politics*, Edelman (1985) questioned his initial use of the distinction between referential and condensational symbols. He conceded that the distinction, while theoretically possible, was practically almost impossible (Arnhart 1985). The implications of this concession were largely epistemological for Edelman as it led him to reject positivist objectivity and reconnect to, what Arnhart (1985:192) calls, interpretive relativism.

Edelman's work has been interpreted as the search for explanations of how people's beliefs are formed and impacted by the symbolic influences that surround them rather than as an attempt to offer descriptions of what people believe (Fenster 2005:371). This

is because symbols have no intrinsic meaning but are rather dependent on the audience and context of political communication for meaning (Elder and Cobb 1983:10). The focus then, Elder and Cobb (1983:10) argues, should not be on what symbols mean but how they mean. The assumption is that at the level of micro analyses the substance of symbolic meaning will be apparent once the processes that determine the meaning is described. This is an important observation for the present study as it encourages us to understand how certain emotions and beliefs regarding land reform are developed rather than what these emotions and attitudes are. While it is probably not possible to understand how these come about without having some sort of descriptions of what they are, the primary focus is not on the content of beliefs (which can be determined using a positivist approach eschewed by Edelman) but rather on the dynamics that shape the beliefs.

5.4.5 Explaining political behavior: The mechanisms of Symbolic Politics

In Edelman's thinking different mechanisms are at work to produce the interaction that characterizes political activity. I briefly explore role-taking, self-conception, emotions and the productive tension between threat and reassurance (Edelman 1964:188) as four variables that either directly influences symbolic political activity or at least mediates it.

From Symbolic Interactionism Edelman borrowed the idea of '*mutual role-taking*' to explain how leaders and officials manage to maintain their power and status despite often failing to address the substantive need of their constituencies. Through role-taking, Edelman (1964:188) argued, leaders are able to discover how the public will respond to their behavior and by knowing this they (leaders) are able to turn behaviors into symbols that have shared meaning for them and the public. The behavior of leaders thus come to represent that of the people (because it is based on a shared meaning) and ultimately reassures people that are constantly caught in the tension between threat and reassurance.

The symbolic form of myth creates different roles for people to either accept or reject. Accepting a certain myth-based role, results in the formation of a specific *self-conception* or identity (Edelman 1971:19). Once a self-conception has been established Edelman (1971:43) suggests that cognitions about external/contextual matters that can be

harmonized with the self-conception are created psychologically in order to confirm the identity generated by the self-conception. Not all myths have the same impact though. The extent to which people accept myths and their impact on the generation of roles from which self-conceptions are formed is determined by the “degree of anxiety the myth rationalizes” and “the intensity with which the particular expectation that forms the central premise of the myth is held” (Edelman 1971:55). Ultimately the identities or self-conceptions generated by the myths become the objects around which much political contestation centers.

Edelman, like Blumer (1969) argued strongly that suggesting direct or causal links between *emotions* and political behavior is at best “dubious social science” (1971:57) because using an unobservable state of mind as an explanatory variable only allows for tautological statements. However, this does not deny some function for emotions in political behavior. Exploring these functions Edelman (1971:59) argued that emotion contributes to or enhances understanding. As role-taking facilitates interaction, the emotions ascribed to the ‘other’ contributes to this interaction as it becomes an aspect of the ‘other’ that can be imagined. By being able to take the role of the ‘other’ the emotions of the ‘other’ also become accessible. In this case emotion and belief about the ‘other’ go together to complete an imagining of what is possible through interaction. When the belief that combines with emotion perceives the ‘other’ to be a threat, the emotion makes mythical explanations accessible, reducing the ability to imagine interaction and limiting individuals to particular self-conceptions that coincide with the prescriptions of the myth. Emotions, especially fear, serve to “impede the feelings associated with mutual role taking and acceptance” (Edelman 1971:62).

The previous paragraphs indicated how meaningful interaction is made possible (through role-taking) and how meaning is shaped (through myth-based self-conceptions). Not all cognitions are, however, entertained in the same way. With this in mind Edelman (1971:42) argued that there is an identifiable hierarchy in political cognitions. If a cognition addresses predictions and explanations of future events, it receives primacy in the cognitive hierarchy because it is less open to verification than other cognitions. These kinds of cognitions more overtly connected to emotions that characterize threat and

reassurance and as such have more influence on meaning making in the present. This is then a fourth important mechanism of Symbolic Politics – the *threat-reassurance tension*. Reading Edelman's arguments it is possible to identify at least three reasons people need reassurance. First, as explained earlier, people are often disconnected from politics in the sense that they feel powerless to change whatever outcomes political processes produce. Second, because of this distance from the centers of power people are often left without bargaining power. And finally the ambiguous nature of politics and the impossibility of empirical verification of a number of political acts create uncertainty. For these reasons people are able to imagine a hostile world and therefore require reassurance to counter the psychological impact of threats.

Three important final observations regarding threat and reassurance in Edelman's work is necessary. First, Edelman (1964:190) argues that because political goals are by nature insatiable they constantly contribute to the tension between threat and reassurance. In short this means, as argued earlier, that tangible benefits cannot reassure people in the face of threats and that reassurance only comes about when symbolic acts suggest support by more powerful actors (often the state or government). Second, another source of tension requiring reassurance is differences between groups regarding policies. The more obvious and wide spread these differences are, the more likely they are to influence impact of political symbols and people's acceptance of these symbols (1964:191). In terms of intergroup relations the implication of this is that "Where people's jobs or church activities underline their alienation rather than promoting satisfying ties to others, the need for symbolic reassurance through politics becomes all the greater" (Edelman 1964:191). Finally, people often experience the language of politics rather than the actual events themselves (1977:143). People thus often respond to language as the threat or reassurance.

Edelman (1964:193) concludes his theorizing about the way governments work by proposing a series of propositions that, in his words "explain what observably happen rather than what we wish would happen" (1964:193). First he argues that state and government officials act according to the roles that they perceive as viable. This results in people not getting what they are promised but what states and governments give in

terms of the roles they take. Second he suggests that the belief that democratically elected governments are carrying out the 'will of the people' legitimizes their actions. Third, in order to assuage their fears, people ascribe abilities to leaders that are possibly more than what they are capable of. In the tension between threat and reassurance people prefer to follow those they believe have the ability to protect them against the unknown. Fourth, once a political goal is achieved, the relevant group, contrary to expectation, calls for more of the same benefit rather than being satisfied. Satisfaction only comes about through symbolic reassurance. Finally, symbolic reassurances control the public's needs and therefore order becomes a function of symbolic reassurance.

5.4.6 Explaining political behavior: Communication as Symbolic Politics

The role of language in politics is probably just as much emphasized by Edelman as is the role of symbols. In some of his publications subsequent to *The Symbolic uses of Politics*, Edelman (1971; 1975; 1977; 1985) made this abundantly clear. For Edelman the connection between language and symbolism can be traced to ideas from Symbolic Interactionism. Language labels objects or events, imbuing these with meaning. But, according to Chadwick (2001:440), Edelman thought of the relationship between language and reality as a dialectical one, with language being shaped by the structures of reality but at the same time being able to shape that reality. The connection between language and politics is, for Edelman, to be found in the meaning created by language. He states that "It is language about political events and developments that people experience; even events that are close by take their meaning from the language used to depict them. So political language is political reality; there is no other so far as the meaning of events to actor and spectators is concerned" (1985:10). Meaning then reflects reality as perceived by the speaker but also by those interpreting political utterances. Such an understanding of how language and politics are connected requires that politics be investigated by considering how language constructs a specific political reality (Chadwick 2001:442). Because of the ambiguous nature of meaning it is possible for observers to draw very different conclusions from the same event. Giliomee (2003:xiii) describes one such example when he argues that the representation of the history of the 'Afrikaner' is characterized by the ideology of those presenting the history. Thus, he argues, this history is presented as heroic and inventive by the nationalist historians of

the early twentieth century while the very same history is presented as one of oppression and exploitation by the liberation movement. Which representation of history is more appropriate is of course not the issue here. The example is simply used to confirm Edelman's (1985:10) suggestion that "Even when there is a reasonable consensus about what observably happened or was said, there are conflicting assumptions about the causes of events, the motives of officials and interest groups, and the consequences of courses of action".

5.4.7 What is useful about Edelman's conceptualization?

Edelman highlights the complexity of political behavior by arguing that political behavior is not simply a response to fixed individual needs but rather a more complex phenomenon that considers the interaction between context and ever changing cognitions (1971:3). So, are changes in political cognitions arbitrary? Edelman argues that there is some sort of structure or logic to them in that they are influenced by political cues. So symbolic cues determine, to a large extent, what the cognitions will be. Symbols evoke or represent expectations. Thus, in Edelman's symbolic approach cognitions are formed in terms of threats and reassurances.

Myths are a symbolic form and as such offer explanations of certain events. They define enemies and saviors. Myths in a sense reduce complexity by offering descriptions of reality that makes a clear distinction between leaders (both enemy and savior leaders), that portrays views held by friends and enemies in a situation as monolithic and unambiguous and that connects with emotions in a way that prevents the acknowledgment of frustrations and fears in adversaries (1971:15). Edelman conceives of myths as cognitive schemata (Flood 1996:81). They provide an interconnected cognitive structure tells us how to interpret the world. Once one aspect of the structure has been engaged, the others, even though they may not be explicit, are also employed in our interpretations (Edelman 1998).

Edelman's framework also describes politics as contestation that can escalate/de-escalate through myths or become ritualized. Ritualization stabilizes political interaction making mutual role taking possible. When contests are ritualized they produce less arousal but when they deviate from ritualized form it leads to arousal. Both these forms

of contestation have the same function – to appease large collectives who are expected to use their bargaining power to attain instrumental objectives.

5.5 Developing Edelman's heritage

A number of works that are either a direct continuation of Edelman's thinking or that are conceptually associated with him, have developed since his initial formulations in 1964. The developments that resulted from his work can be related to two different but sometimes overlapping categories, namely applications of his framework and further conceptual development of his framework. I have already referred to the work of Hall (1972), Manning (2001), Chadwick (2001), Kaufman (2001) and Ewick and Sarat (2004) as examples of the application of Edelman's framework. Others like Firth (1973) and Elder and Cobb (1983) have focused more on extending the conceptual reach of Edelman's work.

In this particular section I will consider contributions from two of these works that represent, in our opinion, the most significant and extensive development of Edelman's Symbolic Politics framework. The first, Elder and Cobb's (1983) *The Political uses of Symbols*, is an attempt to apply more empirical rigor to the categories of Edelman's thinking. The second, Kaufman's (2001; 2006) theory of the Symbolic Politics of ethnic war is probably the most extensive and coherent application of Edelman's thinking. While Kaufman does acknowledge other influences, his theory attempts to synthesize these different approaches in the Symbolic Politics framework initially explored by Edelman. Both the work of Elder and Cobb (1983) and Kaufman (2001; 2006) warrants extensive investigations of their own. Such investigation will have to be done elsewhere though. Here I focus on the core ideas of the thinking in these works, the extent to which they are a continuation or development of Edelman's work and their value for this particular study.

5.5.1 *Elder and Cobb: a systematic framework for reading Edelman* *The nature of politics and political involvement*

Much of what Elder and Cobb (1983) state is a recount of Edelman's arguments about the symbolic nature of politics and how the manipulation of symbols results in fear or reassurance for the polity. Like Edelman they argue that the connection between the individual and the political order is symbolic and that symbols, by indexing diverse

meanings and motivations in shared interpretations of objects, make collective (and thus political) action possible (1983:1). Also like Edelman they argue against the idea that politics is purely instrumental in the sense that it should be understood as a process through which only tangible benefits are bestowed. Their reformulation of Lasswell's definition of politics (who gets what, when, why and how) suggests that politics is a question of "who communicates what to whom, how, and with what effect" (1983:9). So for them politics is communication. And it is not the transfer of a message that is defined by the intent or content of the sender but rather the interpretation of the message by the receiver in order to give it meaning (1983:10).

In keeping with Edelman they also take the view that people generally do not experience politics directly but rather as spectators that have to interpret the "flow of symbolic stimuli from the political arena" (1983:10). Various psychological principles influence their interpretation which generally seeks to align with their preexisting views. While they agree with Edelman that the stimuli received from the political order results in either acquiescence (when there is symbolic reassurance) or arousal (when symbolic needs are not satiated) they also state that political symbols can perform positive functions, the potential for abuse and manipulation notwithstanding (1983:xiii). Where it does result in arousal it is normally based on comparisons that cause feelings of deprivation or anxiety (1983:17).

What sets their account apart is the attempt to create a clearly systematized framework for understanding and studying Symbolic Politics, an omission Edelman is often criticized for. Here I will only focus on their development of this framework.

The origins of symbols

Like Edelman, Elder and Cobb (1983:29) adopt a view of symbols that Symbolic Interactionism must be credited for. They argue that symbols are social creations, that their meaning is attributed, not inherent and that the meaning the symbol has for an individual or group will determine how they act towards it. This conceptualization of symbols results in Elder and Cobb (1983:30) arguing that scholars should be less concerned with where symbols come from and should focus more on why symbols are

created. First they suggest that there are certain circumstances under which the creation of symbols can be predicted. One such is a condition under which existing symbols fail to adequately express “experiences, feelings, or beliefs” (1983:30). Another is when leaders, political elites or others concerned with specific issues and advocate support for their cause. From a social-psychological perspective these on their own are not adequate explanations of the reasons for the creation of symbols though. Elder and Cobb (1983:31) offer three further explanations from the social-psychology perspective. First they suggest that the need to “summarize, capsule, and index knowledge and experience” (1983:31) necessarily results in the creation of symbols. Second they point to the fact that effective communication and social interaction requires symbols. Without symbols the diversity of possible meanings would make communication and interaction difficult. Finally symbols are created to address the basic human needs of inclusion and distinctiveness. Symbols allow people to associate with or distinguish themselves from others. In other words, they facilitate social identities (Elder and Cobb 1983:32).

The meaning of symbols

As suggested earlier the meaning of symbols is ascribed, either in terms of its referent (referential symbol) or in terms of the emotive dimension of that referent (condensational symbol). Whether a symbol is simply denotative or whether it indexes a complex array feelings and beliefs is not determined by anything that is intrinsic to the symbol but rather by the nature of the processes that give meaning to them (Elder and Cobb 1983:33).

Part of Elder and Cobb’s (1983) framework to analyze political symbolism includes classifying objects as political symbols. They suggest a typology using the “inclusion-exclusion” and the “durable-transient” continua. From this typology they classify political symbols in a hierarchical but flexible structure (1983:37) that suggests that symbols can be classified as symbols of the political community, symbols that reflect regime norms, structures and roles and situational symbols. Typically symbols of the political community are higher order ones that serve as identifying markers for a larger community. A national flag is a good example of this class of symbols. Those objects that are classified as symbols of the regime norms, structures and roles are specifically related to the current political order. ‘Parliament’ or ‘monarchy’ are examples of such symbols. Finally

situational symbols reference specific actors, issues or policies. In the South African context 'Jacob Zuma', the current president, has for some recently become a situational symbol that indexes specific meanings for some (eg a representation of self-interest and corruption in general). Symbols at the top of this hierarchy tend to be the most inclusive and durable while those at the bottom tend to be the most exclusive and transient.

Once a political symbol is classified, Elder and Cobb suggest a next analytical mechanism to explore how people relate to the symbol. They argue that people orientate themselves to symbols along two dimensions – the affective and the cognitive dimensions. The former indicates whether a person has positive or negative feelings about the symbol as well as the extent to which these feelings are prevalent. The latter refers to all that a person knows or believes about the symbol (and its referent), regardless of whether what is known is true in some objective sense or not (1983:37).

The *affective orientation* refers to the extent to which a symbol evokes emotive responses. This is determined by the context in which it is used (Elder and Cobb 1983:38). If the symbol is used in a context that is not associated with the meaning attached to that symbol, it is unlikely that its use will activate the emotions condensed in the symbol. Say, for example, 'restitution' in the context of land reform evokes strong emotions among land owners. The same emotions will not necessarily be evoked when the word is used in a legal context to suggest that a fraudster should compensate victims for his/her wrongdoing.

Affect will vary depending on the type of political symbol in question. In terms of the classification discussed earlier, Elder and Cobb (1983:39) conclude that symbols at the top of the hierarchy (that is the more inclusive and durable symbols) evoke more intense emotions. As these higher-order symbols are more enduring than others, the affective orientation towards them also seems to be more entrenched (Elder and Cobb 1983:39) and more uniform across larger populations of people. The lower-order symbols, on the other hand, exhibit affective orientations that are less stable and easier to transform. As they are more exclusive they also tend to be less uniform across large populations and exhibit great social differentiation. Importantly Elder and Cobb (1983:40) state that where higher and lower-order symbols seem to require contradictory orientations, the

orientations toward the higher-order ones tend to dominate with people exhibiting a tendency to adapt their feelings to a lower-order symbol in order to align it with the orientation to the higher-order one.

Apart from the emotions symbols evoke and are imbued with, *cognitive orientation* refers to responses that can also be oriented in terms of the cognitive meanings available to the perceiver of the symbol. Elder and Cobb (1983:43) argue that two sources are available to determine cognitive orientation to an object – substantive meaning and associational meaning. The former refers to the individual's values and beliefs about the world and how it works. These beliefs are generally socialized or based on life experiences but not invariant. Associational meaning in turn stems from the perceiver's self-conception based on association with groups or other people (this includes those with whom the person identifies as well as those the person distinguishes himself/herself from). When relying on association to give meaning to a symbol people suspend their own judgement and rely on those of they perceive others to hold. These others can be both those with whom people identify in a positive way (in other words those they believe they are similar to) or a in negative way (those they believe themselves to be distinct from).

Substantive meaning emanates from the sum of an individual's knowledge and experience. Elder and Cobb (1983:43-46) distinguishes between three kinds of premises that form the total of this kind of knowledge available to the individual. These premises constitute, what Elder and Cobb (1983:43) call, the dispositional structure. The first, empirical knowledge, refers to beliefs about the empirical world and is mostly the product of socialization. This premise can be summed up as a series of questions regarding opposing beliefs that pertain to the nature of the world, human nature and the nature of society. In terms of the first (the nature of the world) the opposing positions represented are whether the world is benign or hostile, whether it is predictable or uncertain; and whether it is malleable or immutable. The second subset (human nature) describes opposing positions as that between the belief that humans are self-interested or compassionate; irrational or dependable; trustworthy or deceitful; and unchangeable or improvable. Finally, the subset concerned the nature of society considers whether society is precedes the individual or *vice versa*; whether social borders are fixed or subject tot

change and whether society is vulnerable or resilient. While most of this 'knowledge' is not open to verification, what the individual believes or knows is accepted as true.

The second set of premises that inform substantive meaning ascribed to a symbol, normative knowledge, refers to what is believed about what ought to be. While Elder and Cobb (1983:45) acknowledge potentially endless variations in normative knowledge, they highlight five categories that seem to represent the most basic normative foci that are related to political symbolism. These focus on assumptions about social responsibility (eg what is the individual's responsibility towards society), conceptions of authority (eg what is the basis of authority), distributive justice (eg what is equitable and fair), personal virtue (which personal characteristics should be admired and encouraged) and life values (eg what are worthwhile goals to pursue by individuals and society). Normative premises, like empirical ones, tend to be enduring and generally accepted as having wider application than purely personal preferences.

The final set of premises, political prescriptions, tends to be less entrenched than empirical and normative premises although they are often associated with the latter (but not necessarily a logical conclusion). This premise is concerned with political values (e.g. which values should political processes promote), the scope of politics (e.g. what is the range of issues politics should be concerned with), decision-making and operational principles (e.g. what principles should govern the management of conflict and decision-making), the standards of political conduct (e.g. how should the conduct and performance of leaders and institutions be judged) and the political role of the polity (e.g. what should the politically responsible citizen be doing).

It is important to note that the meaning of symbols can vary due to differences in the dispositional structure of individuals and because the particular symbols can engage different domains in the structure. So, for example, 'land reform' might be linked to political prescriptions for one individual but for another it could engage the normative content of the dispositional structure. Symbols can also engage more than one domain at any one stage (Elder and Cobb 1983:47), none of which are necessarily mutually exclusive. For example, 'land reform' might at the same time engage for an individual all three the content domains of the dispositional structure. The individual might ascribe meaning to it

in terms of his/her assumptions about human nature - whether humans are inherently self-serving – (an empirical premise), about the individual's responsibility to society – whether sacrifices ought to be made by the individual for the good of society – (a normative premise) and about the role of institutions in the process – whether government should/should not be involved in land reform – (a political prescription). A logical conclusion seems to be that the more domains a symbol engages, the more likely that symbols is to arouse an individual. Similarly, if a symbol engages the more entrenched domains (empirical and normative premises) it will result in greater arousal (Elder and Cobb 1983:47). In terms of land reform this simply means that where the symbol engages deep-rooted beliefs about how the world works, what the nature of man is (empirical premises) and what people believe to be right, wrong, just and equitable (normative premises) the symbol will provoke greater arousal than if the symbol engaged only political prescriptions.

Associational meaning is based on an individual's social identifications. The social identifications in turn are a function of self-conception and, in some cases, the substantive cognitive domain referred to above (that is the individual's beliefs about the external world). These meanings are then those that are associated with the individual's reference groups (both the ones a person identifies with or distinguishes himself/herself from) or significant figures considered to be prototypical of the group. Although Elder and Cobb's framework distinguishes between associational meaning as part of the cognitive dimension of orientation towards a symbol and the affective dimension of orientation, they also acknowledge an active dynamic between meanings based on social identifications and affect. In terms of the present study this dynamic represents the interface between Social Identity and symbolic meaning.

How are affective and cognitive orientations to symbols established?

Elder and Cobb (1983:48) distinguish between at least two different modes of establishing links between orientations and symbols – an active and a passive mode. The active formation of cognitive and affective links to symbols is the result of a number of psychological needs people have in relating to the world. These needs are implied in Smith, Bruner and White's (1964) claim that people orient themselves toward an object

for three reasons, namely object appraisal, social adjustment and externalization. The psychological drive behind object appraisal is the need to rank and order the world or, as Elder and Cobb (1983:49) puts it, to give “an accurate reckoning of reality”. Social adjustment satisfies the individual’s need to both belong and be distinctive. By adjusting orientation to symbol to align it with that of the individual’s social identifications, belonging to valued groups and separation from outgroups is confirmed. Importantly the mechanisms of social adjustment can be described on a continuum ranging from adjustment made based on substantive meaning to adjustment made based purely on association. As is often the case with such continua the two extremes represent analytic categories rather than empirical ones. Social adjustment is thus likely to be based on a combination of substantive and associational meanings. Finally, externalization – the “displacement of personal concerns onto public objects and ... the rationalization of private motives in terms of the public interest” (Elder and Cobb 1983:51) – is a form of psychological defense intended to deal with risks and anxieties.

These active modes of linking affective and cognitive orientations to symbols are different to the passive mode in that they are ultimately based on the individual’s cognitive processes and decisions. The passive mode – socialization – is primarily the result of external influences. As noted earlier though, the reality is likely to be more integrated with socialization, substantive meaning and associational meaning interacting to ascribe meaning to a symbol. Socialization as a mechanism of learning is based on the assumptions that orientations formed early in life tend to be enduring and that these early orientations tend to provide the structure for acquiring cognitive and affective orientations to new objects later in life (Elder and Cobb 1983:51).

5.5.2 Kaufman’s Symbolic Politics theory of ethnic war

Kaufman is another scholar that explicitly develops Edelman’s heritage. While he credits a number of influences he also explicitly links his theory of Symbolic Politics to Edelman’s work (Kaufman 2001:16; 27). His work is different though in that it is more specific than Edelman’s. Edelman’s thinking focused on political behavior in general (so it could be applied to administrative processes, security situations, voting behavior and numerous other instances of political activities) while Kaufman’s is dedicated to understanding a

specific manifestation of political behavior, namely ethnic conflict. The specificity of Kaufman's work, however, does not preclude it from making a contribution to the understanding of non-violent rivalries, as will be shown below.

His work is also different to that of Elder and Cobb in that while they offer an extensive analytic instrument for the investigation of political activity, he offers a theory that is more explanatory with fewer analytical guidelines and instruments. As such he offers few novel concepts with which to conduct investigation. The concepts that Kaufman employs have clear links to Edelman (and others). I will therefore not explore all the concepts he employs as many have already been covered in what precedes.

Kaufman's theory needs to be understood for what it is. He does not purport to offer an explanation of why disputes or social conflicts (specifically ethnic conflicts) arise but seeks to explain the escalation of these disputes to violence. His theory is in essence a political decision making theory explaining how decisions that lead to violent conflict are made. As such he refers to his work as a "theory of ethnic war" (Kaufman 2001:2). His theory should be employed with circumspection when applied for explanatory purposes in cases of dispute and non-violent social conflict. It is true, however, that the concepts important to his theory refer to perceptions that develop throughout the conflict spiral. They are, in other words, not only of explanatory value once the conflict has turned violent but also offer a broader view on social conflict regardless of whether it is violent conflict or not. He has in fact suggested that his theory can be applied to non-violent situations by negating some of the variables that are necessary for conflicts to escalate to violence (Kaufman 2011²²). And as his theory also proposes some ways of preventing violent ethnic conflicts, the implication is also that it suggests ways of ameliorating disputes that have not (yet) turned violent²³.

²² Personal communication.

²³ Such an understanding of Kaufman's work should not be construed to suggest that ethnic violence develops in a linear way and that the necessary outcome of all rivalries is violent confrontation. In *Modern Hatreds* he shows that only a few of the former Soviet republics spiralled into violent conflict after the collapse of the Soviet Union, even though many were multi-ethnic (2001:12).

The necessary conditions for ethnic confrontation

Kaufman does not summarily dismiss the alternative explanations of ethnic conflict. He rather suggests that on their own they are insufficient explanations but when synthesized in a new interpretive framework, they continue to contribute to our understanding of ethnic conflict (2001:10). Kaufman (2001; 2006) brings these different explanations together in such a framework, that of Symbolic Politics. The focus of this approach is to show how myths about outgroups, through the manipulation of symbols, can evoke emotions that influence the decisions made by people. The theory relies on the argument that decisions, and especially decisions to act, are often likely to be influenced by emotions rather than rational choice. Decisions are then made by “responding to the most emotionally potent symbol evoked” (Kaufman 2001:28).

Kaufman (2001) argues that regardless of whether a conflict is elite-led or mass-led, the necessary conditions for the conflict to exist are the myths justifying hostility, ethnic fears and opportunities to mobilize and fight. If these are present and lead to increased mass hostility, mobilization of groups by leaders based on symbolic appeals and a security dilemma between groups, ethnic war is likely to follow (Kaufman 2001:34). The opposite is of course also true. If the necessary conditions are present but do not result in mass hostility, mobilization based on symbolic appeal or a security dilemma, violent conflict can be avoided. In what follows I briefly examine the symbolic concepts that are the building blocks of Kaufman’s theory.

Myths justifying hostility

Resorting to violence requires the existence of a myth-symbol complex that justifies hostile behavior towards members of the outgroup. Kaufman (2001) adopts Edelman’s definition of myth as “a belief held in common by a large group of people that gives events and actions a particular meaning” (Edelman 1971:14). ‘Myth’, in this sense, is thus defined not in terms of ontology but rather in terms of functions. So the truth or falsity of the belief is not what defines it as myth but rather the fact that the belief contributes to peoples’ understanding of an event or object. A symbol is understood to be a reference to a myth. This is what makes a symbol so powerful. It can contain the emotions (and thus ability to

influence decisions and actions) of a myth in a form that makes it cognitively easy to access.

The collective ethnic myths and symbols of a group form their myth-symbol complex. Kaufman borrows the concept of the myth-symbol complex from Smith (1986) who defined it as the collection of myths, symbols, values and memories that form the core of ethnic identity (1986:15). The myth-symbol complex is then a repository for the characteristics of ethnic identity. These characteristics are a name for the group, a belief that the group shares a common descent, shared historical memories, shared culture (or at least elements of a culture like language) and attachment to a specific territory (Kaufman 2001:16). This myth-symbol complex is operational at the collective level allowing for group solidarity and group identity. From this it follows that the causes of ethnic conflict are related to the myth-symbol complex. Kaufman (2001:25) states that “The existence, status, and security of the group thus come to be seen to depend on the status of group symbols, which is why people are willing to fight and die for them – and why they are willing to follow leaders who manipulate those symbols for dubious or selfish purposes”. What is useful about the ‘myth-symbol complex’ concept is that it gives credence to the suggestion that ethnic conflict is highly complex and requires multivariate explanations. It does not simplistically propose that ethnicity explains conflict but rather that there are dimensions to ethnicity, the emotional values of the myths that define ethnicities, that can be evoked around perceived threats to group identity or conflicts of interest.

Although myths defining a group and its relations with other groups are relatively common, they do not necessarily result in feelings of hostility to other groups. Hostility, Kaufman (2001:30) argues, comes from the mythical identification of a territory as one with which the group has a particular connection and one that has to be defended against an enemy constructed by the myth.

Kaufman (2001:30) then summarizes his version of Symbolic Politics theory with some pertinent suppositions. First, manipulation of symbols carrying the emotional value of the myths they refer to, is necessary to motivate people to be involved in ethnic movements. Second, myths scapegoating others are necessary to generate the feelings of hate and

aggression required to turn to conflict. Third, at a group level the processes of manipulating symbols and resorting to myths to blame others for hardships leads to members seeking dominant status relative to outgroups. Finally, the solidarity created by the myth-symbol complex allows people to resort to violence on behalf of the group. As Kaufman (2001:30) concludes “understanding whether people will engage in ethnic violence requires that we examine the myths and prejudices that determine which symbols are likely to move them, and what evokes their greatest collective fear”.

Ethnic fears

Where fears of group extinction exist, ethnic fears often justify hostility towards the perceived enemy (Kaufman 2001:31). Such fear is generally related to the group’s myth-symbol complex. If the myth-symbol complex contains references to past victimization, it is likely that emphasis of these past mythical occurrences will result in emotional responses for vengeance. Another contributor to ethnic fears is demographic and political realities. These realities can result in a group considering itself to be a minority that faces all the regular challenges faced by minorities. Groups do not only consider themselves to be minorities based on actual demographic data. There could be instances where political marginalization also creates the concerns associated with minority status.

The Symbolic Politics of ethnic war: a summary

The preceding discussion introduced all the necessary components of Kaufman’s theory. First, by rejecting some elements of the rationalist approaches to ethnic conflict, Kaufman aligns himself with Edelman’s view that political preferences are not stable and that political behavior is more often than not based on emotional rather than rational processes (2001:27, 28). As far as decision making is concerned, Kaufman (2001:28) concludes that “people choose by responding to the most emotionally potent symbol evoked”. This leads to the second important part of Kaufman’s theory, namely the importance of the myth-symbol complex. This dynamic marker of identity influences cognitions which in turn has an influence on behavior. From the idea of the myth-symbol complex the theory moves to its final important element, namely the necessary conditions for ethnic violence. Kaufman highlights three such variables, two of which are intimately connected to a group’s myth-symbol complex. The first variable is the presence of myths

justifying hostility to other ethnic groups. Of course for such myths to exist the group's own identity has to be clearly marked to distinguish it from others and it must define existing groups as the enemies that feature in the myths. The myths justifying hostility must also be widely known and accepted in order for them to influence behavior. A second variable is the presence of ethnic fears. This is again a function of the group's myth-symbol complex. The myth-symbol complex provides a framework for interpreting political events in a way that suggests victimization or extinction (Kaufman 2001:32). Where there is a (perceived) history of domination or victimization by one group, the probability of fear for a return to domination or extinction is likely. In turn, those that were in the dominant position are also confronted by fears, but these are based on the possibility of revenge by the previously dominated group. Finally, the opportunity to mobilize represents the third necessary condition in Kaufman's Symbolic Politics theory of ethnic war.

5.6 Summary

Symbolic Politics offer us an understanding of political behavior that rational actor models cannot by extracting it from the context of economics, self-interest and rationality and highlighting the fact that it is also characterized by contestation over meaning (Brysk 1995). In fact, Symbolic Politics is probably best understood in terms of its differences from rational choice approaches to politics. The latter suggests that people have stable preferences and that pursue maximum utility through cost-benefit analyses based on these preferences (Kaufman 2001:27). Symbolic Politics attempts to account for behavior or evaluations in a different way. Instead of exploring stable preferences it argues that political behavior stems from a "process of interpreting fragmentary information and ambiguous cues in the light of prior expectations and changing, uncertain, or conflicting personal preferences" (Elder and Cobb 1983:2). In other words, people make political choices based on their interpretation of the meaning of political events and the emotions accompanying these meanings. How political events are framed is thus of vital importance to the explanation of political choices. From this review I infer two different kinds of symbolization that could each frame political events in very different ways. Klatch (1988) described this distinction as one between "masters" and "meaning". Put simply this distinction suggests different understandings of the roles of political symbols. On the one

hand there are approaches that focus on the distribution of power and the subsequent manipulation of symbols in order to elicit quiescent behavior from the political mass. This approach is most prominent in the work of Edelman as he portrays political elites as manipulators seeking to maintain the *status quo* or calm aroused emotions in order to pursue gains (Sander 1997:73). Symbols in this instance are seen as instrumental. The other model of symbolization focuses more on the process of meaning making in society and is concerned with the creation of solidarity for groups or orientation for individuals (Klatch 1988:139).

The review of the Symbolic Politics tradition in this chapter will also have suggested some, perhaps unintended, conceptual connections to the Social Identity perspective. These traditions have very different origins and methodologies but, depending on the reader's ontological and epistemological convictions, it is not inconceivable that such connections can be described.

With reference to the land reform debate I suggest that this chapter highlights that the contestation that accompanies the debate is as at least as much a struggle over legitimacy and legitimate right to make meaning as over material goods. This is an important observation as it implies that dealing with perceptions of belonging or alienation in the land reform debate should not be an optional or coincidental outcome of the process of redistribution of material goods but rather that it should receive the same systematic and dedicated attention as the tangible processes. In the review of peacebuilding (Chapter 3) I suggested that as symbolic issues contribute to social conflicts they should also receive attention in the pursuit of peace. The review of the Symbolic Politics perspective offers us some tools for this pursuit.

I now suggest some integrated propositions according to which land owner experiences can be investigated.

- Starting with Symbolic Interaction and the fact that it underpins, either explicitly or implicitly, much of the thinking about the symbolic mediation of politics, it is essential to acknowledge that people create meanings and act in terms of these meanings. The first proposition is thus that land owners act toward land reform in

terms of the meaning ascribed to the various concepts or events that form the political schema of land reform. Without developing this understanding it would not be possible to understand how land owners construct reality (Elder and Cobb 1983:10; Herman and Reynolds 1995:2). Exploring meaning in land reform thus requires an investigation of the referential and condensational nature of the invoked symbols (Edelman 1964), including explanations for why symbols are created. The orientation (affective and cognitive) towards symbols supplies useful perspectives on their meaning. In particular I will also consider the extent to which these symbolic representations have meaning only in terms of collective identities (as some symbols only exist through shared meaning and consensus) (Elder and Cobb 1983:29).

- Next, the Symbolic Interaction premise that meaning is based on interpretation and derived from interaction, also finds expression in Edelman. He (Edelman) holds a view that suggests politics is a process of manipulating meaning through interaction between various actors and institutions. The fact that meaning is continually made through interaction is expressed in his belief that political cognitions are not stable and that variables only explain attitudes and not behaviors (1971:29). Behaviors can only be explained once interaction and interpretation has been taken into account. In terms of the analysis of land owner perspectives to follow, the proposition then is that interaction with different actors result in different interpretations of land reform. In particular it is useful to consider the various groups or institutions with whom land owners interact (directly or indirectly) in order to create meaning.
- A next proposition is that opposition to or acceptance of political goals is determined by symbolic reassurance or threat. In terms of land reform this suggests that land owners will support or oppose the process depending on the symbolic threats or reassurances that are interpreted from the political engagements that surround it. Indeed, should the land owners' objectives for land reform be symbolic, Edelman (1964) argues they can only be symbolically satiated.
- Next I propose that land reform, as a symbolic representation, requires mythical beliefs which in turn provide understanding of the nature of land owner's perceived

reality. As symbols acquire their meaning from emotionally laden myths (Kaufman 2001) an exploration of the myths that play a role in the meaning making process of land reform is required. Myths, as Edelman (1971) states, serve the dual purpose of organizing society in “in” or “out” groups as a way of identifying potential opponents and indicating the principle/principles to be followed for the ingroup. In his theory on ethnic conflict, Kaufman (2001) further elaborates on the role of myths as a symbolic form that facilitates political attitudes and behavior. While Kaufman’s focus is on ethnic myths some of the principles that define myths for him can be generalized to other myths in service of groups that are not based on ethnic similarity.

Chapter 6: Social identities and intergroup relations in land reform

Land reform: emotion and the challenge to identity

6. Introduction

The analysis of Social Identity processes in the context of land reform occupies this chapter. It will start with a description of land owner experiences and perceptions of land reform in terms of the propositions formulated in Chapter four. In this sense the study is phenomenographic. Once the description is concluded the chapter will explore explanations for these experiences as provided by the Social Identity approach. A brief reminder of the three conceptual legs that underpin the Social Identity perspective is appropriate. As discussed earlier the first part of Tajfel's (1979) conceptual tripod consists of a causal psychological sequence that explains how and why people act in terms of a collective they associate with rather than in terms of personal idiosyncrasies. The second part is concerned with the social and psychological processes that determine how behavior moves between interpersonal and intergroup. Finally, the theory takes up the integration of the social context and psychological processes. The analysis in this Chapter take these as *a priori* theoretical points of departure. The purpose is thus not to determine the validity of the Social Identity perspective's claims but rather to show how these theoretical positions inform the understanding of perspectives, attitudes and behaviors regarding land reform.

Before presenting the analysis of experiences and perceptions of land reform, I offer a vignette from one participant interviewed for the study. It captures in a more real sense the experiences of land owners. For analytic purposes the unpacking and categorizing of these experiences is necessary but the vignette provides us with an overall sense that is closer in reality to any that the analysis can provide.

Hank²⁴ is farmer that is active on a farm that has been in his family for at least three generations. He has been farming on this particular piece of land since the early 1980's and has invested heavily in forestry (including erecting a sawmill) and expanding their orchards. Hank is one of the leading agricultural figures in his community and acts as a

²⁴ All personal names are pseudonyms while all place names and other identifying characteristics have been removed to protect the identity of individuals.

representative on various agricultural forums. In this capacity he was involved in negotiations with both government officials and land claimants in the land reform process in his area. In his interview he tended to refer more to the emotions experienced by himself and other land owners in response to land reform than to the technical, legal or agricultural issues.

After a while you experience an increase in emotions. Look, if the restitution process was applied as it was meant to be, it would have helped. We knew that to normalize the country sacrifices would have to be made. But greed hijacked restitution. And once this happened race began to figure in the process. Initially there were four legitimate claims in our area. And we were willing to agree to these. But not the more than 600 eventual title deeds that we were asked to give up. The land claims officials added these others.

We experienced that we were not wanted, as if we were told “Your time is over”...If the officials wanted to work with us on the legitimate claims we would have worked with them. But they didn’t want to talk to us. Their conversation was basically “F... you” (expletive). We tried to talk to the claimants but we felt they were being poisoned by the officials. We farmers weren’t seen as partners. The attitude was basically “You will give!”.

Look, I can compare it to a guy going to the doctor and finding out he has a terminal disease. You never recover from that. Your future ceases to exist. The next generation will probably find it easier because you younger people (referring to the interviewer) live in a more integrated way. But we, we are the hated generation. For us I think it too late to reduce the emotion.

I would love to leave the farm to my children when I retire because so many years of developing have gone into it. But what I experienced since 2004 when this farm was gazetted I do not wish for my children. So I don’t know. I wanted to sell initially but the money alone could not compensate for everything I put in. But now I have doubts about not selling.

I have just as much sentiment and love for this land as any black person can have. Of course the value it has is determined by different things. If it is cultural it has a specific kind of value. But for me economic gain is woven into the meaning of the land for me. There is meaning in all the time and energy I put into the development. My history with this land is worth just as much as a black person's history with land would be. Ultimately you feel threatened because nothing you built up is recognized as having any meaning. (I2)²⁵

6.1 Land owner experiences of land reform

6.1.1 Social Identity and land reform: the cognitive process Categorization and social identities

The interviews conducted for this research suggests a variety of categorizations in operations among land owners. Generally speaking Social Identity research with its experimental methodology does not consider fluid variations in categorization in particular contexts (Jackson and Sherriff 2013). The experimental research has more often than not controlled for variation in the context of the experiment, generally reducing categorization to a limited number of possibilities. Furthermore, under minimal conditions categories are often pre-defined and conditions are set up in a ways that make the comparative context apparent. Here, however, we see that real life situations are more fluid and present greater complexity. Thus interviewees fluidly move between different self-categorizations and the comparative contexts are often subtle rather than explicit. The proposal of a hierarchical structure of Social Identity is particularly useful to our attempts to understand this feature of the land reform context. According to this suggestion groups not only relate to other groups at the same level of categorization but also to the superordinate group that includes both comparative groups (Sindic and Conder 2014). Thus one explanation for the variety of categorizations apparent in the interviews is that land owners in an interchangeable way refer to themselves and other relevant comparative groups in terms of both their particular groups and the superordinate groups they belong to. The key to this puzzle is the comparative context for it determines what a relevant comparison would

²⁵ All interviews are categorized in the order of the interview conducted. I2, for example, simply means Interviewee 2, the second person interviewed.

be. Confirming the complexity of this intergroup reality Reicher, Spears and Haslam (2010:21) refer to the advances research has made to show that there are “no inherent, stable differences between ingroup and outgroup, there is no pre-defined, universal identity in terms of which a person will define themselves... (A)s the ‘other’ with whom we compare ourself changes so does our ‘self’”.

Among the categories used by land owners to organize their experiences of land reform seems to be at least three sets or types of categorizations distinguished by purpose. These are 1) those that are directly related to land reform as an administrative process (eg “claimants”, “land owners” and “government”), 2) those that are offered in legislation and popular discourse on land reform (eg “black” and “white”) and 3) those that land owners seem to turn to in order to explain their perspective on the failure of land reform (eg “farmer” and all other categories that have an influence on farming practices but are not farmers such as government officials). This suggests that different categorizations are associated with different understandings of the purpose and outcome of land reform. For example, in very few of the interviews conducted did participants employ race-based categorizations to express their understanding of land reform as a transformative agricultural process. Where, however, land reform was understood as a political instrument that was intended to be a site of contestation over power and legitimacy, race-based categorizations were common.

More often than not, when it comes to reducing real life situations to analytic categories, these categories overlap and do not represent unequivocal empiric distinctions. However, understanding the categorization context is important to improving understanding of perceptions of land reform as it provides clues to not only how land owners conceive themselves but how they compare and contrast themselves to various ‘others’.

The first of these sets of categories – “owners” and “claimants” – is somewhat ambiguous in that interviewees sometimes use it only as a way of organizing the stimuli of their experiences with little apparent emotional significance attached to it. At other times though they use it to comment on the moral need for land reform. And then there are also the instances in which it carries negative comparative tones. In both the latter two cases their use of the categories easily overlaps with other categories that carry the kinds of

meaning they wish to express although these other categories are not always clear. In some instances the category overlaps with race categories, in others it seems as if “claimant” includes more than the actual claimants and extends to all that are non-farmers. The overlap of the category with the race category is clear from statements like

“Look I think there are genuine claimants in the ambit of how the law was couched. I think there were massive wrongs done to blacks in Apartheid. And maybe one of the horrific things from a white perspective is the dispossession of land. I’m sure if you are black you’ve got a whole lot of other things.”(14)

Here the participant easily moves between racial categories and the category “claimant”. While there is certainly overlap between the categories it would be an oversimplification to state that the categories are always interchangeable. In the same interview the interviewee in his organization of his perceptions reverts to a more abstract category – “land-owners” - when he explains the shared fate of land owners in land reform. This particular use seems to transcend simple race-based categorizations.

“It amuses me because of cross overs. I mean there are some black owned farms. There are black owners who like any commercial deal came and bought farms on the mountain. And they find themselves in exactly the same position as we find ourselves”. (15)

This suggests that common fate transcends the boundaries of race and that while race is still apparent a different categorization and comparative dimension is developing at the same time. In terms of the Social Identity perspective the argument would be that race in this case is not salient because it is not the categorization that is normatively indicative of the judgment of land reform.

Another interviewee describes a similar situation about a black land owner that had to deal with bureaucratic obstacles. His description of this situation was the result of a conversation in which he sought to qualify statements that land reform is primarily a competition for scarce resources between racial groups.

“There was a black farmer up here. He bought his land from another farmer. Then claims were registered on his land. He went to see the (land claims) commissioner with me. That black farmer had just as many problems as we had. One claim he was paid for, the other not. The claimants simply showed up in vehicles, cut down the trees and took away all the wood. They didn’t care about who owned the land”. (I4)

Instead of claiming that the overlap between the categories “claimant” and race categories suggest an interchangeable use of the concepts, it is probably more appropriate to say that “claimant” represents a subgroup categorization in the larger race category. This would explain why it is possible for land owners to distinguish between black claimants and black landowners.

While racial categories remain intact in the organization of perceptions, these appear by no means to be the ones used exclusively. The land owners, especially when considering the (negative) agricultural outcomes of land reform revert to the more abstract categories such as “land owner” or “farmer” in order to make a judgment about land reform. Elsewhere others found similar tendencies in how race relates to other categories in the assessment of land reform. A research report by the CDE (2008) pointed out how black land owners shared categorizations with white land owners based on their perceived shared fate also suggesting the use of higher level abstract categories.

It seems that while categorization according to race persists at a specific level (see Hewstone, Hantzi and Johnston (1991) on the pervasiveness of race as a categorizing principle), in the context of land reform and more particular in the evaluation of land reform, this categorization is mediated by the availability of the categories “land owners” and “claimants”. If we keep in mind the purpose of categorization as “understanding what some thing is by knowing what other things it is equivalent to and what other things it is different from” (McGarty 1999:1), it becomes possible to argue that in the context of land reform the (potentially) similar fate of land owners renders them more similar than the racial differences render them separate. Again, keeping in mind the meta-contrast principle, this means that in the context of land reform (and in particular the possibility of losing land to claims) the perception of differences among land owners is smaller than

the perception of the differences between land owners and claimants (or other relevant groups). Whether this is only a function of context is not clear (see Hewstone, Hantzi and Johnson 1991) although there have been experimental studies that suggest that contextual manipulation can have an effect on categorization (Arcuri 1982).

Other examples of categorization that extends beyond racial categories to ones at higher levels of abstraction were also found. In some instances categories that subsume racial categories are employed. In these cases a different comparative context would apply and therefore it would require a different comparative groups. An example of this higher level of abstraction is clear from the following statement

“I don’t know what it is with Africans, black and white. Africans have an affinity with the land. Like nowhere else in the world. I’ve travelled the world. Europe, the Americas, I know a lot of South Americans, Kiwis, Aussies. And nowhere is it as prevalent as here. Where black and white Africans have this connection to the land. Why it is, is it cultural, historical – I don’t know. They have a love for land.” (14)

While this participant does not disconnect from race based categories, he does subordinate them to a higher level of abstraction (African). The comparative context in which this statement operates allows for this. Later in the same interview he self-categorizes using a similar comparative context, only now it is applied in very specific terms based on his personal experiences.

“The white keeps referring to himself as European. I’m so far from European it is not funny. Twenty years ago we travelled, my wife and I, and we met on my mother’s side her British family. And they were my family. And I promise you, I worked in the cheese factory for two weeks or whatever, with these people and I came out there and said “Listen, we have absolutely nothing in common”. I said, I promise you, I promise you, the labour, the people on the farm, we have more in common, more connection with them than with my cousins and aunts and whatever. Nothing, nothing, nothing. We aren’t on the same planet, we don’t think the same way, we’re just different.” (14)

In both cases the participant acknowledges the lower level of categorization (black/white South African) but indicates a preference for categorization at a superordinate level. The superordinate level is then where comparison takes place in order to define distinctiveness.

Apart from racial (black/white) or political (landowner/claimant) categories, role categories are also obvious in how land owners organize their perception of land reform. When musing about possible ways to implement land reform that would result in outcomes that benefit the entire South African population one participant says

“Look at that woman, Ramphele. She has two PhD’s in whatever, and she said the other day, “Give me a farm in the Free State and I’ll be bankrupt by the end of the year. Because I know nothing (about farming)”. Farmers know about farming. They are the people that should work in that industry and know who should work and that industry. They are the people who should be training people in that industry. They should have handed it over to organised agriculture and said, “Guys you are the farmers, you do it. You tell us what you need to achieve this and how you are going to do it”. (I13)

The self-categorization that becomes evident in this statement is found across all the interviews conducted for this research. The participants are more explicit in their categorization of themselves as farmers than they are about their racial categorization (or association with any other category available to them) especially when considering land reform in terms of agricultural outcomes. In the framework of the Social Identity perspective it should be remembered that this does not mean that racial categories are not salient to participants. Rather it means that in the context of land reform other categories (in this case “farmer”) are more accessible and potentially offer a better fit to their experiences.

One category used in the context of land reform that is noticeable for the fact that it is almost universally employed in a negative way is that of “officials/government officials”. This category is rarely used for comparative purposes (in other words it does not offer a relevant comparative group) but when interviewees use it, it is to distinguish themselves

from the 'other' in terms of the pursuit of land reform outcomes. They evaluate themselves positively in comparison to the category "officials/government officials" in that they believe they are better suited to devising a plan for land reform that is sustainable and just and that they are more concerned with the impact of land reform in its current form on claimants/recipients. This particular comparative context thus has an overtly moral dimension to it. The ingroup is distinguished from the outgroup on a perceived moral dimension, something that is rather uncommon when the categorizations changes to redefine the ingroup/outgroup.

From the brief description of the variety of categorizations apparent in the land reform process a few inferences can be made. At the same time certain inferences should be avoided. While it is clear that different social identities are in operation for land owners in land reform, we should not assume that they necessarily in any conscious way consistently maintain distinctions between these identities in their communications. Certainly it is possible to argue that when they say "farmer" they mean "white" and when they say "claimant" they mean "black". However, from these interviews it is at least clear that at times different social identities serve very different functions. And there are also instances in which reference to certain social identities are conscious choices and not just the result of haphazard communication. The most obvious identities reverted to (and possibly the most useful ones to understand land owner perspectives) are "farmer" and "white". As will be shown below, there are times when these two social identities are very distinct in terms of their content and function. So, at a minimum I conclude that developing a comprehensive perspective of land owner perceptions of land reform should inquire about their engagement with the process in terms of their racial identities as well as their identities as farmers. To simply conflate "white" with "farmer" in terms of the social identities of land owners is to disregard the possibilities proposed by the Social Identity perspective. While such conflation would in some cases represent empirical reality it does not account for the different comparative outcomes that apply when these different categories are employed.

Salience

We should remember that in the Social Identity perspective fit and accessibility interact to produce categorization. While history suggests that race categories are easily accessed we must not assume that the interviewees necessarily selected these to categorize in the context of land reform. The partner of accessibility - fit - suggests that the interviewees would look to what is offered by context as appropriate before categorization happens. In the case of land reform the context is to a large extent structured along racial lines. Legislation makes explicit references to race, the formal political discourse is framed in terms of race and popular expressions also paint land reform mostly in terms of race. Thus, explanations of the intergroup context of land reform in racial terms is just as much an acknowledgment of the context as it is of pre-disposed preferences.

The description of categorization in the context of land reform leads to an obvious next question, – what determines the categorization outcomes of land owners, or, put differently, what determines salience? As pointed out in the earlier description of the Social Identity perspective, category use is determined by two factors – fit and accessibility. The former refers to the extent to which the reality of a situation in which stimuli has to be categorized, corresponds with the categories available to the individual. The choice of categories employed will be determined by the extent to which particular categories render differences within a class smaller than differences between classes. In other words, although different categories may apply to the same situation, the ones ultimately employed are the ones that best encapsulate the similarities between members of the ingroup and the differences between members of the ingroup and outgroup. For example, as seen in the descriptions above, it is possible in land reform to apply race-based categories as well as those based on vocation (eg ‘farmer’). Where race-based categorization is preferred it suggests that the context is such that this categorization better captures the similarities between members of the ingroup and differences between the ingroup and outgroup than the categorization of land owners as farmers. Choice of category thus offers an indication of the interpretation of context. Comparative fit probably explains why land owners argue that government should be less involved and that they (farmers) should, along with all organized agriculture bodies, find the solution. In a context where all participants are seen to at least minimally have an interest in agricultural

activities, categorization is less complex. But when government becomes involved, in other words, when the comparative context change, categorization also changes (Reicher, Spears and Haslam 2010). In terms of normative fit land owners consider the content of categories to categorize themselves and others. This is clear when land owners categorize themselves as farmers and black farmers together in a context where both have a shared fate. In that particular context the content of the categories, along with the dictates of the context make it the most appropriate categorization. One participant explained a situation where context dictated an unsuspected categorization.

“There was a court case up here. I don’t remember all the details. But everyone was suffering. The farmer, his workers, everyone. And Cosatu and Nersa joined us outside the court as we protested. You wouldn’t believe it. We were together against a common enemy. And what makes it even more striking is that just 2 weeks earlier Tony Ehrenreich was talking about how bad farmers are”. (117)

Accessibility in turn is dictated by the needs, goals and socialization of the individual. In other words, the individual’s purpose in a particular situation as well as the categories available to him/her through socialization (or some other process that highlights a particular category as useful) will dictate which categories he/she has available to resort to. Given the prevalence of race-based thinking and attitudes in South African society, it is hardly surprising that race is an accessible category to land owners. Brown (2000:273) has pointed to three factors influencing what is accessible to individuals, namely the immediately preceding events, the personal disposition of the individual and the current task or goal of the individual. The extent to which race-based thinking and attitudes feature in the frame of reference of the participants in this study cannot, in my opinion, be reliably measured using the methods employed to collect data. In other words, we cannot in any quantitative way say that land owners predominantly approach land reform with race-based thinking. To be sure this dimension is clear but to quantify it in order make some absolute statement about land owners’ predisposition in terms of race would be a misrepresentation of the methodology employed here. Furthermore, as the land reform process is described and manifests mostly in racial terms it is also to be expected that

race offers categories that are easily accessible and that comfortably fit the experiences of land owners. In short, land owners turn to these categories because they are available to them through socialization and experiential knowledge. And because they fit the context in terms of comparative dimensions and content (Oakes 1996).

However, despite the dictates of context and the accessibility of race categories, interviewees also use categories that transcend racial boundaries. There are numerous instances in the data where interviewees resort to categories that are not based primarily on race but rather on profession and shared fate (eg when the category 'farmer' is used because the interviewees are of the belief that what affects one member affects all, regardless of race). These categories represent abstractions that cannot be equated to race in any simple way as they, in the way used by interviewees, include various different races. Put differently it means that the interviewees compare themselves to an 'other' that is not primarily defined in terms of race. As Reicher, Spears and Haslam (2010) notes "As the 'other' with whom we compare ourself changes so does our 'self'".

It is the accessibility of categories in terms of goals that offers the most interesting potential in this analysis. As pointed out earlier, land owners rely heavily on the category "farmer" as part of their self-categorization. This category represents the preferred categorization for land owners in their thinking about land reform. However, in perceiving the discourses about land reform they are regularly confronted with categorizations that are not necessarily their preference in the context of land reform. This represents a form of categorization threat (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears and Doosje 1999) meaning that they perceive a categorization other than the one they prefer because they view the given categorization as not appropriate for the particular context, in other words they do not see it as a categorization that fits the context. The following is a typical description of thinking about land reform. From this it is seen that the preference is to think about land reform largely as an agricultural rather than a political (or racial) issue.

"I don't see land reform as a black/white thing. We all know land is a thorny issue. And when you talk about land it is going to create problems. But I think the situation has been politicized completely. My problem is that the process was tackled politically. If it was done properly it could have been a success. If

you look at the two farms we were involved with in the old Venda. Those were taken over by the Limpopo government and we remained involved to provide agricultural expertise. But later we withdrew because it was no longer viable operations. But they continued. It wasn't an agri-business decision. It was a political one. Today it costs them about R35 per kg to produce tea where as they can sell it for no more than R22 per kg. This thing can only work if you do a proper investigation to determine who the people are that want to farm. These are the people that should be getting land. And the start-up capital.”
(115)

From this it is apparent that the interviewee does not evaluate land reform primarily in terms of political outcomes. He rather judges the success/failure in terms of agricultural ones. He thus sees categories that are appropriate to agriculture as offering a better fit to reality than he does pure racial categories.

Of course it could be argued that all the categories employed are simply proxies for racial categories. This would fit Gibson's (2009) argument about symbolic racism in South Africa's quest to right the land injustices of the past. Given the fact that accessibility of categories is one process important in categorization, it is reasonable to expect that the participants of this study will revert to race as an organizing principle in categorization in the context of land reform as this has been a major fault line in South African history. Certainly there are instances in the data where interviewees resort to racial differences to self-categorize. But there are at least two matters that should be taken into account before simply suggesting that interviewees' response to land reform is a reflection of racism or symbolic racism.

Comparison and distinctiveness

Positive Social Identity is pursued through comparisons between in and outgroups (Tajfel and Turner 1986). The comparisons are intended to confirm the positively distinct nature of the ingroup through an evaluation on some valued dimension. Differentiation requires that identification with the ingroup be part of the self-concept of the individual, that the specific situation allow for evaluative comparisons according to relevant attributes and

that the outgroup be a relevant comparative group (Tajfel and Turner 1986:16). The comparisons and bases on which participants differentiate themselves from relevant other groups are connected to the perceived values of their particular self-categorizations. Reicher, Spears and Haslam (2012) specifically argue that while comparison and differentiation are necessary conditions for intergroup processes, these do not make discriminatory behavior inevitable. In order to understand the intergroup processes it is important to examine belief systems and thus the valued dimensions of comparison in context. Only from such an examination can conclusions about specific behaviors be reached. That is then the purpose of this section of analyses – to develop the understanding of differentiation and comparison among land owners in the context of land reform.

Earlier I indicated that while there are numerous potential categorizations in the context of land reform, there are some that are more common than others. One such categorization is ‘farmer’. When categorizing themselves as such, land owners compare themselves to other groups in terms of their knowledge, skills, goals and a specific value system (mostly highlighting a certain work ethic). The earlier reference to one participant’s interpretation of statements made by Mamphele Ramphela is again pertinent to illustrate this.

“Look at that woman, Ramphela. She has two PhD’s in whatever, and she said the other day, “Give me a farm in the Free State and I’ll be bankrupt by the end of the year. Because I know nothing (about farming)”. Farmers know about farming. They are the people that should work in that industry and know who should work and that industry. They are the people who should be training people in that industry. They should have handed it over to organised agriculture and said, “Guys you are the farmers, you do it. You tell us what you need to achieve this and how you are going to do it”. (I13)

Another participant was clear about what it is that sets him, as farmer, apart from relevant ‘others’.

“The risk of running a farm in our area is just too great. You need individuals who understand the risks. We make mistakes every day, we don’t have all the answers. But it is knowledge that was handed down. And if you don’t understand the nature of the business you don’t have a snowball’s chance. I understand what government is trying to do but unfortunately there is no quick fix.” (118)

Those that ‘understand the risks’ are farmers because of their farming knowledge and experience. The implications is that those who do not understand the risks, because of a lack of knowledge, are the claimants.

In other instances, where the salient identity is racial, the comparative dimensions move from specific knowledge to rights of belonging. The following is indicative of the nature of comparison under these circumstances

“I mean I look at it from a white perspective. And what is the perception of the black person about how I came to be here. I mean where did he come from? The San people lived here. Their purpose is to take from me what they feel I own illegitimately. Even if I paid for it. It is irrelevant to them. What is the intention? That whites should not own anything?” (123)

For this participant skills as a farmer do not feature in his comparison with the relevant outgroup. Rather he makes a case to at least equalize the position of status derived from comparison by suggesting that the ingroup and outgroup both have equal right based on a particular interpretation of history. The tendency in the Social Identity perspective is to compare in order to establish a positive distinctiveness. But in terms of their race based categorization they seem unwilling to make comparisons that render them ‘superior’. This coincides with Korf and Malan’s (2002) finding that some white South Africans do not see their racial identity as being able to provide positive distinctiveness.

6.1.2 Land owner perceptions of land reform: interpersonal or intergroup behavior?

In general land the land reform narrative is an intergroup narrative. Legislation is formulated in terms of societal categories (eg black, white etc). Popular public expressions are also expressed in these terms. Politicians often speak about

“whites/white farmers”, “colonizers”, “Europeans”, “black” etc in their public addresses. It is then to be expected that land owners gravitate towards the “intergroup” extreme of the social interaction continuum. Following Tajfel and Turner’s (1979) arguments this would suggest that they hold beliefs about the immutability of social boundaries (the ‘social mobility’ ‘social change’ continuum), adopt uniform behavior (and attitudes) toward the in and outgroups and depersonalize the members of the in and outgroups in order to facilitate such uniform behavior.

Some of this is certainly evidenced in the interviews conducted especially when the racial categorization is salient. The depersonalization of the outgroup is mostly apparent in the reduction of land reform as a contest between black and white. One land owner reflects this depersonalization when lumping all white South Africans and all black South Africans together in his view on the history of land settlement in South Africa.

“I mean how did we whites acquire the land and what is the black perspective on this. But then, where did the black come from? He wasn’t in South Africa? He migrated here as well”.(123)

Whether this is a historically accurate depiction or not is not relevant to this study. What it does illustrate is how large and diverse groups of individuals are depersonalized as identity gravitates toward the intergroup extreme.

6.1.3 Land reform and status differences

Ellemers (1993) has identified at least four socio-structural variables that require consideration in order to understand intergroup relations. These are the relative status position of a group, the permeability of group boundaries, the stability of group status and the legitimacy of status positions (1993:27). Briefly, in terms of status position the argument goes that when groups show awareness of their position (i.e high or low status) relative to a relevant comparative group there will be an attempt to either maintain or enhance their status position in the search for a positive Social Identity. Where a group perceives high status it is more likely to work to maintain this status position while in the case of a perceived low status individuals will either resort to individual mobility in order

to associate with a group of higher status or actively work to enhance the status of their group (if individual mobility is not an option).

In terms of the permeability of boundaries Ellemers (1993; see also Tajfel and Turner 1979) argues that transcendence of group boundaries may either be an objective or subjective possibility/impossibility. In other words, there are some groups that have impermeable boundaries because of the nature of the defining characteristics of these groups and others that are not easily transcended because of the “values that are central to their self-concept” (Ellemers 1993:32). Importantly, research has shown that permeability alone is not sufficient to encourage mobility. It is only when realistic alternative memberships exist that permeability and mobility influence the search for a positively distinct Social Identity (Ellemers, van Knippenberg, de Vries and Wilke 1988).

Stability of group status structures refers to the extent that different status structures are possible in a given context. In other words, when it is (conceivably) possible for either elevation or decline in relative status position of a group, groups are likely to pursue strategies that enhance their status (group mobility). If, on the other hand, the status structure is such that changes in status position is unthinkable, members will resort to individual mobility to enhance status. The findings of Ellemers’s (1993) research suggest that permeability of group boundaries influence *individual* mobility attempts to improve status while unstable status conditions influence *collective* attempts to improve status.

Finally, in terms of the legitimacy of status positions the Social Identity argument suggests that if intergroup status differences are deemed to be legitimate, low status groups will likely not resort to comparisons with high status groups in order to establish a positive Social Identity. If, however, status positions are deemed to be illegitimate, comparison with both relevant and (seemingly) irrelevant groups to establish a positively distinct Social Identity becomes possible (Ellemers 1993:45).

In terms of race categories the expression of status differences are not explicit, or at least not as explicit as they are in terms of the other categories. In other words, participants did not seem to create any Social Identity benefits by categorizing themselves as “white”. One possible explanation for this is the fact that in this context this category does not offer any

relevant dimensions of comparison. Nowhere in the interviews did participants perceive themselves to be superior to comparative groups in the context of land reform. The one area in which they are clearly different to the comparative groups is ownership of land. Yet this does not seem to provide grounds for superior status position as the participants often refer to the disparities in land ownership along racial lines and argue that these should be addressed.

From the interviews it seems that the participants are acutely aware of how they are categorized by others and how this categorization puts them at a moral disadvantage (given South Africa's history of racial prejudice). Or, put differently, how their status position is influenced by the comparison of 'others'. While not rejecting the categorization as "whites" (as this is a group with relatively impermeable boundaries) they appear to actively avoid or discourage such categorization as it could actually be detrimental to their status position. Similar findings have been demonstrated by Korf and Malan (2002). This perception of derogation is very strongly worded by the participant that perceives the general view of the race category he associates with as the "hated generation". Resistance to a particular comparison of racial groups also feature in their opposition to suggestions that in essence criminalizes their ownership of land (ie the suggestion that white-owned land was stolen). Their response to this suggestion (whether it be implicit or explicit) is thus either to reject the notion (in other words change the comparative dimension) or to discourage the use of racial categories in land reform categorization.

It is from the category "farmer" that participants seem to derive the most status. At no point in any of the interviews conducted did participants reject the use of this category. In fact, it is the one that exhibits the clearest sense of positive distinctiveness from other groups. Comparisons of this category to others are numerous. For example, some participants use dedication to and knowledge of the farming profession to set themselves apart.

"The risk of running a farm in our area of the world is just too great. You need individuals, entrepreneurs who understand the risks. I mean, I'm 3rd generation. We make mistakes every day, we don't have all the answers. But ... we're definitely one step ahead. You know it is knowledge that was handed down. If

you don't understand the nature of the business, you don't have a snowball's chance". (118)

Another participant recounted how land claimants negotiated with them when there was a claim on their land. The recollection represents the participant's interpretation of the conversation. Note the category used ("farmers") and how this category is set apart from others.

"They said to us "listen we are not farmers, you are farmers, stay on the land, lease the land and if your neighbour don't want to lease it, lease his well. Because we are not farmers, we don't want to stay on the farms we just want to own the title deeds".(123)

Others point to a particular work ethic that farmers are perceived to have. Interestingly, even though individual mobility is a possible strategy concerning this particular categorization, participants, even the ones interviewed that have left the farming profession (either temporarily or permanently), prefer to maintain their self-categorization as farmers as they seem to derive significant positive distinctiveness from it.

Unlike race-based categories this one (farmer) is more permeable than others. In describing themselves as farmers participants indicate that this group as accessible if entrants comply with the defining characteristics of the group. These in turn are related to a common purpose (commercial farming), shared risk (exposure to market forces and the elements) and certain values (willingness to take risks and work hard).

From the preceding it is clear that land owners' perception of their status position varies because status is an outcome of comparison, not some objective variable available in the social structure. I have touched on the permeability of the groups land owners identify with.

6.1.4 Land reform and identity threat

From the interviews it was clear that land owners face extensive identity threats. In terms of categorization threat (the threat of being categorized in a way not preferred) some prefer not to be categorized according to race. This could be because of the perceived

invidious moral status of whites or because they feel that this categorization is not appropriate in the context of land reform. If they are treated as whites they are more likely to have to deal with the negative sentiments regarding land ownership by white South Africans. If they are categorized as farmers they can engage with land reform in terms of what is important to them - agricultural outcomes. The land owners interviewed for this study almost without fail preferred to think about land reform in agricultural rather than, what they call, political terms. Consequently their self-categorization is largely aligned with their profession – farmer. Any categorization imposed on them other than this results in categorization threat.

In terms of distinctiveness threat the avoidance by some of race-based identities reduces the number of social identities available to them thus reducing their chances of maintaining or achieving a positively distinct Social Identity. Generally the expectation would be that if land owners identified with a group of low status they would employ individual mobility strategies to move to a higher status group (Tajfel and Turner 1979). However, in a group with impermeable boundaries (like race groups) these strategies are not possible. So they are stuck in a position of low status (as they perceive it). Ellemers, van Knippenberg and Wilke (1993) argued that under such status conditions people would tend to show stronger identification with the group, despite the lack of positive distinctiveness. However, this does not appear to be the case for many land owners which Ellemers, van Knippenberg and Wilke (1993) would explain by saying they perceive their status position to be stable (in other words there is little opportunity for change).

Threats in terms of the value of their social identities also abound. Land owners are keenly aware of how others judge them and in particular of how they are denigrated by relevant others as well as third parties that seem removed from their context. One described his experience like this

“If you look around it is everywhere. The media is negative about us, politicians are negative about us. Even some other white South Africans are negative about us. In the end it is about whether we have any rights. Sometimes I want to ask people if we are allowed to have rights.” (135)

Ellemers, Spears and Doosje (2002) argued that when a group has low status because of low moral standing its members that are least committed to the group tend to suffer most from negative affect. In the case of land owners there is definitely an argument to be made for a moral challenge to their status position (given the history of South Africa). However, they do not seem to exhibit low commitment to their group as they do not generally engage in behavior that is compensatory. Some participants spoke about voluntary initiatives they were involved in to the benefit of land claimants but these seem more a response to their immediate context rather than prosocial behavior normally associated with low commitment to the group. Rather, the description of high identifiers' response to moral value threat given by Ellemers, Spears and Doosje (2002:177) seems a good fit for most of those interviewed. "When the moral value of a group is threatened, in contrast to less committed group members those who feel highly committed to their group are unlikely to express high levels of guilt. Instead, they are more inclined to display defensive reactions when their group's moral value is challenged".

6.1.5 The role of identity norms and values in land reform

Participants did not indicate any values that suggest that the content of their social identities require conflictual intergroup relations. Reicher, Spears and Haslam (2010) as well as Oakes (2001) have argued that categorization alone may be sufficient but is not necessary in the development of conflict. Rather, for conflict to develop from the fact of categorization a series of values are required that both justify and prescribe conflict. When considering land owners experiences of land reform the question then is whether group norms such as fairness or discrimination enhance ingroup bias or whether they moderate it (Jetten, Spears and Manstead 1997). Because compliance with group norms generally serve to increase identifications with the group from which a positive Social Identity is sought the expectation is that members will align their cognitions and behaviors with those norms.

From the interviews suggestions of norms that promote discrimination were not obvious. Instead the norms of fairness seem much more persistent, both in terms of how land owners apply it to themselves and how they interpret the application of it to them and in terms of how they apply it to others. Of course this does not mean that they hold no values

that will promote discriminatory behavior on the basis of group identification. But these behaviors might find expression in terms of their understanding of fairness rather than an explicit value of discrimination. The expression of fairness is closely connected to the role of legal entities. Land owners consistently refer to the need for land reform to be fair and judge the fairness in terms of the outcomes of legal proceedings. The following statement is indicative of a common view among them.

“Okay, I know people were wronged. But the situation has to be dealt with fairly. If the court finds there was a wrong then so be it. Those rights should be restored.” (17)

“What the law provided for was people that lost their land because of political reasons. They were removed from their birth land to make room for white settlement. That is how I understand it. In that case, fair enough, it has to be corrected.” (122)

When understood in terms of what legislation provides for land owners judge land reform as fair or unfair in terms of procedural matters. We have seen how they regard the courts as authoritative on land matters. But procedural concerns also extend to other matters. One participant explained how an offer was made to him that was reasonable. But then the matter took five years to be concluded at which point he considered the deal to no longer be fair.

The importance given to the role of the courts and legal processes should not be interpreted as “fairness as compliance”. There are also instances where land owners argue that land should be restored on principled grounds. Two examples of this should suffice.

“On the symbolic side it is a totally different issue. Fact of the matter is that if a handful of people own all the land in a country and they happen to be white people, irrespective of whether those farms were forcibly taken away, not taken away – it’s just unsustainable, totally and utterly unsustainable.” (14)

“I think there was massive wrongs done to blacks in Apartheid. And maybe one of the horrific things from a white perspective is the dispossession of land. I’m sure if you are black you’ve got a whole lot of other things.” (17)

Also in terms of outcomes they express concerns about fairness, not just for themselves but also for the recipients of land reform benefits. In one case an owner described how they sold land to a restitution claim but were then appalled to see how the recipients were first left to their own devices by government and then exploited by people that saw business opportunities.

“So we left the farm early that year. The crop was almost ready. It was one of the best I had ever seen. And then later I heard the stories. The claimants had huge losses because we used to export the crop. But these people (referring to an agricultural management company from the area) came and offered them money to pick the crop early for juicing. So most of the citrus went for juicing. The difference is sort of R3000 per ton to R200 per ton. And now I hear they are bulldozing the citrus. This is not the fault of the communities. It is not all their fault. They were set up for failure by government. And the greed of others overcame them.” (126)

Category prototypes also represent norms (Smith and Hogg 2008). As a member of a category is seen to be prototypical of the category, perhaps through the elevation of that member in the broader social context, ingroup members tend to align their attitudes and behaviors with what they perceive to be the norms of this prototypical member. Land owners did not appear to align with a prototypical member of their ingroup. However, they hold views of certain individuals as prototypical of outgroups. Outspoken public figures, are often seen by land owners as representing the values of outgroups. These are then interpreted, in a stereotypical way, as the values of the outgroup. One participant stated the following with reference to a firebrand political leader that advocates land expropriation without compensation.

“But it is not part of his thinking. His purpose is to get the land. Because land belongs to blacks. In his thinking whites are not supposed to own land in South Africa.” (115)

If indeed this is a view of a perceived prototypical outgroup norm and if it is held at ingroup level, then Oakes, Haslam and Turner (1994) would argue that it is not just some idiosyncratic belief but a social reality to the ingroup.

6.2 Summary and conclusion

I now summarize the findings of this chapter in terms of each of the propositions formulated in Chapter four.

Variation within the causal sequence of the Social Identity process results in land owners adopting a variety of social identities in the context of land reform.

Jackson and Sheriff (2013) have argued that much of Social Identity research tends to focus on obvious categories, such as race, and often simply accept that these are the most important in a particular context. Instead they argue that by using qualitative methods we can discern which categories are important from the perspective of the participants and how these interact with other salient categories. In the literature review we saw that land reform literature rarely consider the perspectives of land owners and when it does, it pre-orders the context in terms of race-based categorizations. In other words land owner perspectives are not investigated in terms of categories that are important to them.

From the analysis we saw that while a range of categorizations were employed at different times, the two most prominent and emotionally significant ones (Reicher, Spears and Haslam 2010) were ‘white’ and ‘farmer’. And while it could be argued that these two are interrelated or even interchangeable, the data showed that at times they are adopted as response to different contexts and with different content. Thus, to disregard land owners categorization of themselves as ‘farmers’ in favour of consistently portraying them in terms of their racial identity, is to discount the variety of explanatory possibilities. For example, if the salient identity is ‘farmer’ then the Social Identity perspective suggests that positive distinctiveness will be sought in terms of this identity through comparison

with relevant others. The question then becomes who the relevant others are. In terms of race based identities the most obvious relevant comparative group would be other race groups. But in terms of 'farmer' the answer is less obvious. While the data presented here cannot definitively answer this question (if indeed there is a single, definitive answer), it does show that when land owners think of themselves primarily as 'farmers' they resort to comparisons that distinguish them in terms of their abilities and values as farmers and not on the basis of race based superiority ideologies. As said already mentioned, symbolic racism theory (Sears 1988) might contest this claim by arguing that it represents a different form of racism. While I acknowledge that this theory provides valuable insights under certain circumstances, it is my contention that the symbolic racism explanation at times over-generalizes to the extent that it loses explanatory value. In light of the contestation around symbolic racism (see Wood 1994; Bobo 1983; Sniderman and Tetlock 1986) we should be encouraged to also pursue alternative explanations.

As Reicher, Spears and Haslam (2012) point out, differentiation alone does not result in negative behaviors or attitudes. Negative social relations can either be a function of attempts to create a positive distinctiveness or a function of the operant beliefs regarding the in and out groups. Where land owners then oppose land reform we should also consider these explanations.

Land owners engage in land reform for the most part in terms of social identities. Their behavior in land reform can thus be described as intergroup rather than interpersonal.

Tajfel and Turner (1979:34) suggested that in real life situations behavior can rarely be described as purely intergroup or purely interpersonal. This reality, however, does not render the distinction between interpersonal and intergroup invalid. Instead of describing social behavior as entirely intergroup or interpersonal, we should rather think of it as more intergroup than interpersonal or more interpersonal than intergroup (Brown 2000:9). This line of reasoning is consistent with the Social Identity perspective's conceptualization of an interpersonal-intergroup continuum along which people shift as a function of various influences.

Claiming that for land owners land reform gravitates toward the intergroup end has particular implications. First it suggests that their response to land reform can best be understood in terms of their membership of particular groups and their distinction from other groups. Second the claim implies that as they gravitate towards the intergroup extreme their cognitions and behaviors towards those they regard as similar and those they regard as different becomes more homogenized. Thus, when they respond to members of outgroups (eg claimants, blacks, government etc) it is done in terms of those individuals' group memberships rather than their individual characteristics. Third, they are likely to exhibit ingroup bias in land reform. Ingroup bias, however, should be distinguished from outgroup discrimination. Comprehending in terms of which categorizations they are engaging (eg 'white' or 'farmer') is important to understanding what ingroups bias and outgroup discrimination means in practical terms. Finally, if their land reform engagement gravitates toward the intergroup it means they strive for distinctiveness in terms of comparisons that are relevant to the intergroup context rather than the interpersonal context.

Contextual structures are meaningful influences on the intergroup nature of land reform.

We saw that land owners, depending on their categorizations, were influenced by specific socio-psychological structures. In particular the data showed that status position was a lot more precarious when they were aware of their categorization as 'white' than when they self-categorized as 'farmer'. Yet there was little suggestion that they sought to pursue positive distinctiveness in terms of their racial identity. One explanation for this could be that land owners are uncertain about the appropriateness of challenging the status structure. If status structures are deemed to be unstable and illegitimate, they are likely to be challenged (Ellemers 1993). However it is unclear whether land owners, when self-categorizing as white, perceive a low status standing, to be illegitimate. This low standing would be the result of their perception of their moral position. Leidner, Castano, Zaiser and Giner-Sorolla (2011) has argued that under such circumstances moral disengagement is a common identity management strategy.

Most of the explicit comparisons were made when land owners categorized themselves as farmers. They sought to distinguish themselves from other in terms of their specialized

knowledge and their connectedness to the land. As farmers they do not perceive a low status position for themselves.

Identity threat, perceived as a contextual factor, shapes land owners' land reform cognitions and behaviors.

Identity threat was probably the most significant finding in the analysis. In particular land owners are confronted by categorization threats, distinctiveness threats and threats to the value of their identity. None of these threats to identity are of course objective. They are rather interpreted from context. Yet, their effects are real. They influence cognition, affect and, in some cases, even behavior. There were suggestions of categorization threat, distinctiveness threat and threat to the value of their identity. The first refers to the preference of land owners not to be categorized in a certain way. One category association at least some seek to avoid is 'white'. This does not mean that they do not identify as white. Rather it suggests that they consider it an inappropriate categorization for the context of land reform (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears and Doosje 1999).

Then there were also suggestions of distinctiveness threat, although these were less apparent. This refers to land owners seeking to avoid a certain categorization because it does not offer any advantages in terms of positive distinctiveness. Perceived threats to the value of their identity was much more common.

Group norms and values, especially fairness, are interpreted in a way that they support formal legal descriptions of land over common understandings of social justice.

Given the prominent authority position that legislation and the courts hold in land owner perception, it is hardly surprising that they tend to consider land reform activities as fair if the procedures followed are considered fair. Outcomes that may seem less fair become tolerable in the face of a processes deemed fair (Tyler 2000). Land owners also look to outgroup prototypes to inform their views of negative outgroup values. This in turn informs their views of outgroups' appraisal of them.

Chapter 7: Land reform and meaning: the Symbolic Politics perspective

7. Introduction

The previous chapter accounted for land owner experiences of land reform in terms of the concepts of the Social Identity perspective and the explanations for intergroup behavior offered by this perspective. It demonstrated how this perspective can offer alternative insights to the rational actor explanations generally prevailing in research on land owner attitudes and behaviors. In this chapter land reform as experienced by land owners is described as a form of Symbolic Politics. As Chapter five showed, Symbolic Politics is a collective term for a diverse body of knowledge. The review presented a conceptualization of Symbolic Politics along one line of development, namely one that translated Symbolic Interaction into an approach for the analysis of political phenomena. I summarized this particular approach in a set of propositions that will be employed in this chapter to analyze land owner experiences of land reform.

The general definition of symbols adopted by Symbolic Interactionists apply here. This definition alone is probably not sufficient to distinguish between a symbolic and non-symbolic perspective on land owners' experiences of land reform.

It is important to understand that interpreting phenomena from a Symbolic Politics perspective does not suggest that the actors in the activity being analyzed intend for the process to be symbolic. Rather, the intention is to suggest that there is a certain way of looking at particular political phenomena that uncovers aspects of the phenomena that other approaches do not. Edelman's (1964) reference to societal anomalies offers a good example. He states that certain societal anomalies, such as citizens accepting outcomes of political decisions that have negative material impact on them, are not the result of an informed acceptance of the status quo. It is rather because citizens are relatively uninformed and therefore susceptible to manipulation that these anomalies persist. And precisely because citizens are uninformed these truths cannot be uncovered by relying on their reasoned inputs. For this a theoretical account of how politics works is needed. And that is what Symbolic Politics offers.

7.1 Accounting for land owner experiences of land reform

7.1.1 *Land reform as symbolic experience*

Suggesting that land owners have a symbolic experience of land reform implies that for them there is more to the matter than simple cost-benefit analysis and utility. Their reasons for making certain behavioral choices are not determined by ordered and stable preferences but rather by the meanings they attach to symbols and the emotions invoked through the use of symbols. The implication of this line of reasoning is that responses to land reform will vary according to meaning rather than utility. In some interviews conducted for this study there were clear indications that land owners could make choices that would offer them significant financial benefits. Yet they chose not to accept these benefits. One clearly indicated this saying

“Economically it makes more sense to sell and then rent land than to own it. But sentiment dictates that you own it. For me it gives a kind of status that allows me to face up to others surrounding me.” (I37)

Of course it could be argued that this decision still represents a rational choice and that the outcome is simply reflective of the fact that utility is more than economic outcome. However, the emotional connection to land was apparent in interviews with owners that had been required to sell land due to restitution claims. Of course, in reality, it is also possible to argue that choices can be both utilitarian and expressive at the same time. This is what Wilson (1999) argues when he rather contends that a flexible approach that allows us to interpret behaviors as potentially both self-interested and symbolic is necessary. Following this line of reasoning allows us to state that the above, while it may be an example of the pursuit of (non-economic) self-interest, also represents a symbolic position in that it suggests a meaning of land that is beyond the utilitarian.

The following participant indicates a choice to oppose land claims as his default position. His reasons also point to the significant symbolic dimension of land reform.

“Our point of departure was that we don’t acknowledge the legality of any claim. Especially because we know the history of this area. I have a problem with rewriting history as it didn’t happen. If we just accept any claim we are acknowledging that there were injustices in that case. And there certainly

were injustices. But not in all cases. Look according to law all claims must meet three criteria. First, there had to have been an event of removal. Second, it had to have been race based. And third, it had to have happened without compensation. But this is not true for all claims. So, if the claims end up in court and it is found that the claim meets these criteria, we'll certainly acknowledge the claim and act accordingly. But we are not going to rewrite history in an irresponsible way.” (I15)

For this participant land reform represents various meanings, supporting the contention that he experiences land reform symbolically. On the one hand he acknowledges land reform as a process that speaks to some form of objective history that resulted in injustices. But he also ascribes a meaning to land reform that suggests it is potentially a manipulative tool.

Even among those that chose to sell land as part of the land reform programme, symbolic reasons were offered for their decisions. Compare the following two explanations of the choice to sell.

“At the start we were totally against the claims because we felt they were illegal. And if you go into history a bit you'll see that they are illegal. If you look at the framework of the law. On the symbolic side it is a totally different issue. Fact of the matter is that if a handful of people own all the land in a country and they happen to be white people, irrespective of whether those farms were forcibly taken away, not taken away – it's just unsustainable.” (I4)

“It fell outside the spectrum of what legislation provided for. But despite this there was a claim. I guess we could have challenged the legality of the claim but we were in a situation where there were so many claims around us that we decided to sell.” (I28)

The first made the decision to sell based on a response to notions of fairness and equality. The second participant's decision can be seen as based on an interpretation of their situation as a threat to their distinctiveness. If they did not sell they would have been the

outsiders in a new community where previously they were very much part of the community.

A final reference to indicate the symbolic nature of land and land reform comes from a participant that had already lost two pieces of land due to the restitution process. While he expressed support for land reform he also described the land claimed as 'lost' rather than given up or sold. From this it is clear that even though there may be financial compensation for land lost, owners do not experience the financial gains as compensation that, in Edelman's (1964) words satiate their symbolic needs.

"After the claims someone asked me if I would ever consider moving to the Free State. I said I'll never be able to be a farmer there. You have to love the land you farm. If I have a farm that I don't like I won't be able to live there". (I31)

This example introduces an important distinction in the analysis of land owner perspectives of land reform. We have seen (and will continue to see) that land owners have particular feelings and beliefs about land reform and land in general. But they also have feelings and beliefs about a particular piece of land. So, while they may support land reform in principle and even get involved in land reform initiatives (as the participant quoted above did), some place a high premium on very specific pieces of land.

From these few examples it is evident that only considering behavior is not sufficient to explain motivations. This approach would not be able to account for variation in behavior and attitudes. In these cases developing an understanding of what land and land reform means, what it symbolizes for land owners, and which emotions it indexes will better help us explain certain behavioral choices.

7.1.2 Relevant symbols

As symbols are created and can, potentially, differ in meaning across individuals and groups, any object, idea or event can be a symbol. It is thus important to identify which are the prevailing symbols in land reform before their meaning can be investigated. In all the interviews conducted for this study it is obvious that various events, narratives or ideas are related in the symbolic mediation of land reform. Oleson (2015) refers to such

collections of related symbols as symbolical families and argues that these collectives form the “symbolic infrastructure of a grievance community” (2015:2).

While symbols have different values at different times, Sander argues that certain symbols or symbolic representations are of such key importance that they can provide “orientation and explanation about a political system and its functioning” (1997:20). These, Sander says, can be identified by finding the objects that have particular prominence in a political culture. Once they have been identified they ought to be studied to determine their meaning for different actors and to indicate why these are important to the actors.

Analyzing land owners’ meaning making process includes categorizing the symbols that are relevant to their perceptions of land reform. The typology suggested by Elder and Cobb (1983) is useful in this regards. As a brief reminder I state that symbols can, according to this typology, be sorted in three broad categories, namely symbols of the political community, symbols associated with norms, structures and roles and situational symbols that relate to current authorities, nongovernment actors and policies (Elder and Cobb 1983:36). The first two of these are more inclusive and enduring (in other words meaning is generalized and shared across a broader range in society) while the last is more exclusive and transient.

Given the fact that land and land reform as important political objects predates South Africa’s transition to democracy and has continued to feature as part of political and social tension it should not be surprising that they are both key symbols in South Africa’s current political climate. They are symbols in the sense that they reference more than actual land and a political process with specified outcomes. They give expression to “(E)xperiences, feelings, or beliefs” (Elder and Cobb 1983:30) in the absence of other symbols to supply these expressions. The contributions of participants in this study confirm the identification of these as key symbols. From the interviews conducted other related symbols also emerge. One such related symbol is ‘claims/claimant’. Even though these symbols have separate empirical referents, they are related in a cluster that has particular significance for the participants in this study. While they index different meanings and emotions, they are related to perceptions about grievance and belonging.

Below are three brief excerpts from interviews that indicate that 'land', 'land reform' and 'claims' index more to land owners than just the common sense and obvious content that others ascribe to them.

*“There is a lot of sentimental value to **land** that he (the farmer) owns. That is why for those that remain after so many properties have been sold, for them it is not just a piece of agricultural land. They are there... it is a piece of land that has a history. Where else is he going to go?” (I31)*

*“Initially I didn't see **land reform** as competition. But the whole process has been politicized. There is now a different agenda”. (I27)*

*“I mean they came and **claimed** land that, according legislation, they did not qualify to claim. And then it says to me that there is another agenda. They don't want me to own anything. I paid for it. It tells me that the motivation behind the claim was false. There was another agenda”. (I23)*

In terms of the Elder and Cobb typology the next question is how to classify these symbols. Higher order symbols (those of political community and norms) tend to evoke stronger affect and are more enduring while lower order symbols exhibit greater social differentiation (Elder and Cobb 1983:39). Without exploring affective and cognitive orientations to symbols here (this follows in the next section), it is useful to point out that these symbols exhibit strong affect across a variety of South African groups. How enduring these affects are, however, is harder to indicate because affective changes can only really become visible once there is a change in context. And the South African land reform context has changed relatively little over the last two decades. There is still, as there has been for a number of years, an acknowledged need for land reform, contestation over how it can and should be done and a lack of clarity on what the actual outcomes of the process ought to be.

Land reform symbols exhibit both the strong affective orientations expected of higher order symbols as well as the differentiation expected of situational symbols. As higher order symbols they are related to stable and enduring meanings. As situational symbols they are less enduring and exhibit differentiation across various groups.

However, given the hierarchical nature of the typology, it also has to be acknowledged that these symbols are very likely subordinate to certain higher order symbols that have much more enduring meaning. These higher order symbols seem to have a connection to the situational symbols in the sense that the latter are a few of many sites for the expression of the higher order symbols. In the analysis conducted here these higher order symbols were rarely made explicit. Where mentioned they were mostly inferred from the contributions of participants. In short they represent meanings of belonging, citizenship and equality.

7.1.3 Orientations toward land reform symbols

Affective orientations

In the review of the Symbolic Politics perspective it was pointed out that people orient toward symbols in affective and cognitive ways. These orientations and a clear understanding of them are important as they “contribute to the way he or she reacts to that symbol” (Elder and Cobb 1983:37).

Affective orientations toward symbols are dependent on where these feature in the respondent’s hierarchical structure. Higher order symbols tend to evoke more emotive responses while lower order ones are less enduring and more amenable to transformation. In the interviews conducted land owners exhibited, under certain circumstances, instances of strong negative emotions towards land reform. This of course applies mostly when it functions as a condensational symbol and less so when the symbol is only denotive of a specific administrative or political process. One emotion that was consistently referenced was trepidation that accompanies uncertainty. The following is an example of the extent of these feelings.

“Sellers and owners have different fears. But they all have fears about land reform. The seller is worried about things like price and what they will do after selling. The owner is worried about whether the community he lives in will fragment and if he will still find security in the group that always surrounded him. And of course there are fears about physical security and expropriation.” (I23)

One particular interview indicated the strength of the feelings associated with land reform. This participant did not only speak about it in terms of loss of material goods. For him land reform has the potential to develop into an existential crises.

“After a while you experience an increase in emotions. Look, if the restitution process was applied as it was meant to be, it would have helped. We knew that to normalize the country sacrifices would have to be made. But greed hi-jacked restitution. And once this happened race began to figure in the process. The message was “We don’t want you. Your time is over” Initially there were four legitimate claims in our area. And we were willing to agree to these. But not the more than 600 eventual title deeds that we were asked to give up. The land claims officials added these others. Look, I can compare it to a guy going to the doctor and finding out he has a terminal disease. You never recover from that. Your future ceases to exist. The next generation will probably find it easier because you younger people (referring to the interviewer) live in a more integrated way. But we, we are the hated generation. For us I think it too late to reduce the emotion.” (I2)

In this case the negative feelings stem from an understanding of land reform that reflects a larger existential threat to the land owner. His claim that “your future ceases to exist” is particularly telling. It points to feelings of being rejected as an individual with the equal rights to existence in his particular context. This theme repeated itself in many interviews – land owners reporting feelings of alienation because of the perceived hostility directed at them. Two more examples bear these feelings out

“Land provides a kind of psychological protection. If you lose it, you lose your right to existence.” (I9)

“Why are we viewed the way we are in this process? We want to be part of land reform but we are called the enemy any time we dispute specific claims. Many claims have been found to be baseless. So what must we do?” (I12)

These participants express feelings about land reform that speak to more than just the transformation of land ownership patterns. They express feelings of alienation and a

challenge to their sense of belonging because of (perceived) antagonism directed from others. The strong affective orientation originates in the existential nature of the symbols in question. Precisely because land reform represents more than just the change in land ownership patterns does it evoke strong feelings. The land owner has certain feelings about the symbols because they are irrevocably tied to how and with which identity he exists. The affective orientation exhibited here is of the valence that is expected of orientation towards higher order symbols.

Interestingly the sense of belonging as indicated by an expected future is repeated by many land owners in reference to the effects of land reform on their children. Where positive outcomes are seen for land reform land owners have positive expectations of the future. One participant argued that if the land reform process is conducted fairly and in terms of legislation he would put great value on it as it would mean that his children can “stand up and say that they don’t owe anybody anything”.

Apart from negative feelings that are associated with a sense of alienation land owners also referenced other reasons for these feelings. The most common was frustration with the administrative processes required to conclude land claims. Statements like the one below were common

“Poor administration frustrates the process and turns this whole land reform thing into a conflict.” (I31)

“In principle we support restitution. The issue is not with restitution itself but rather with how it is done.” (I22)

In all the cases where such statements were made participants were clear that they did not experience the legislation as deficient. They were, in fact, supportive of the legislation and in many instances expressed strong positive feelings toward the relevant acts saying that the South Africa restitution legislation probably had no equal. From a Symbolic Politics perspective this can be interpreted as an instance where symbols that are related (eg land reform legislation and land reform process) have come to acquire different meanings resulting in different affective orientations. It also suggests that for land owners these symbols overlap with different other symbols that evoke different feelings. In terms of the legislation land owners do not associate it strongly with the actors that are meant

to enact while when it comes to the process itself much of the strong feelings are the result of negative feelings towards administrators or other government officials. The following kinds of claims are very common

“And if you bring politicians and department officials in it is ten times, no one hundred times, no one thousand times as bad.” (I31)

“The incompetence and corruption leaves a bitter taste. It’s not that all the officials are corrupt. But sometimes they are just not well enough trained or prepared to deal with this”. (21)

“The farmer’s experience of government officials is very negative. Government is seen as inapproachable and unfriendly towards agriculture. But farmer do not have the same feelings about claimants because claimants are seen as having different motivations to government.” (I23)

If the Symbolic Politics perspective holds true, strong emotions are related to the fact that they are evoked by higher order symbols. I have already stated that land reform is best situated as a situational (lower order) symbol. But how then to explain the valence of the affect exhibited by some participants? One suggestion is to argue that when participants are responding to land reform they are in some cases actually responding to some higher order symbols indexed in the meaning of land reform.

It is clear that land owners regard *land* as a *symbol* in the sense that it represents an “object used by human beings to index meanings that are not inherent in, nor discernible from, the object itself” (Elder and Cobb 1983:28). One of the most common expressions of the meaning of land is that it indicates separateness and belonging. As one participant stated

“I don’t know what it is with Africans, black and white. Africans have an affinity with the land. Like nowhere else in the world. I’ve travelled the world. Europe, the Americas, I know a lot of South Americans, Kiwis, Aussies. And nowhere is it as prevalent as here. Where black and white Africans have this connection to the land”. (I4)

For this participant land represents something that separates him from other nationalities and confirms a belief about where he belongs. It clearly indicates what the potential parameters of his thinking about certain identity categories are (African, European, American etc) as well as what other categories are subject to this super ordinate categorization (black African, white African).

However, if the context changes from international to national and local the more expected distinctions between different race groups start to feature in the way participants construct meaning. One participant was asked to respond to the statement “Memories of dispossession run deep and give a significance to land that most whites brought up to regard land as just another production unit find hard to appreciate” (Claassens 1991:43). He disputed this statement vehemently even suggesting that in some instances whites are more sentimental about land. For him the particular meaning of land is tied irrevocably to the history of his family in South Africa.

“Our family moved here in 1888. They incurred debts and could not repay these after the (Anglo-Boer) war. So they had to live with other people and eventually settled on this farm in 1905. This was an unpopular place to stay because of malaria. But they were desperate...In 2005 I started researching the history of my family. I looked for and found the place my grandfather was buried and put up a marble monument stating that this was where our family started here in the north. Today that land does not belong to us. I negotiated with the owner to protect the original graves. The graves were neglected and symbolized a very poor existence. And it is valuable to keep it like that. I suggested to the XXX tribe that they do the same with the burial sites of their ancestors because we both in the same way got back our historic sense of belonging”. (I15)

Thinking about belonging is also facilitated by the abilities to objectify the self and take the role of others. This ability to think as others, Edelman (1971) argues, generally distorts reality because of our limited views of others. Whether or not thinking about the meaning of land and belonging from the perspective of others is distorted here, is not important for

the purpose of this study. What the following does indicate is that land owners do in fact express meaning in terms of how they perceive the responses of others.

“If you look at XXX (public political figure), he does not consider a thriving agricultural sector part of his thinking about land reform. I’m sure the health of the sector is important to him. But it is not part of his thinking. His purpose is to get the land. Because land belongs to blacks. In his thinking whites are not supposed to own land in South Africa”. (115)

If land owners think about belonging in these (perceived) views of others, it makes sense that land also becomes a symbol indexing the beliefs and emotions about belonging.

As a symbol indicating belonging land also indexes various emotions related to secure and predictable living. One participant explained the role of land in providing them with the security need to pursue self-actualization.

“We were always brought up with the idea that there is a family farm. If you want to come back you can come back. And if you want to go into the big world, you can. You know we were always brought up with the idea that the farm is the base, the capital base from which we can grow as individuals. I wanted to be a merchant banker. And when I was qualified I realized I don’t want to do it. I’d rather farm. And it comes back to your affinity for the land”.(14)

Included in this understanding of land as a confirmation of identity, is a definite commercial dimension. As economics are often thought of as belonging to self-interest approaches references to it tend to result in a disregard for identity issues. However, land owners made it clear that for them commercial ability is related to their identities. Reflecting on a SADC tribunal finding confirming private property ownership as a basic human right, one participant asked if land can ever be truly owned by an individual. His reflection continued as follows

“Can you ever own land? I don’t know. But it is an economic reality. I will never overcapitalize on land that I don’t own. But I will on land that is mine.

That land is not just about production. It is about belonging and legitimacy.”

(142)

Throughout the interview it is clear that this participant does not hold these views in relation to land in general but specifically in terms of agricultural land and land that was claimed as part of the restitution process beliefs about a necessary process but one that is undermined by inefficiency and ulterior motives. In all 42 interviews except one participants at least implied that land reform means the pursuit of historic justice. Statements like the following are common

“I understand what government is doing. Because they are trying to redress a wrong that happened”. (126)

“What the law provides for is for people who were removed from their land for political reasons. To allow for the settlement of whites. Where this is the case, fair enough. It has to be corrected”.(17)

From the preceding it should be clear that affective orientation towards land reform is varied. Brewer and Alexander (2002) argues that emotional appraisal depends on the configuration of intergroup relations. If intergroup relations are characterized by incompatible goals and groups perceive equal power and status, the emotional orientation tends to be anger. Under the condition of incompatible goals a group that perceives itself of lower status will experience fear and look toward protective behaviors. When the intergroup configuration is based on independent goals (in other words groups pursue different goals) and one group perceives itself to be of lower status the characteristic emotion is contempt. And if under these same conditions a group perceives for itself higher status it tends to feel resentment towards the outgroup. Of particular importance to this study then is the argument anger is more readily associated with intentions to act out against the outgroup while feelings of exclusion lead to the ingroup distancing itself from the outgroup (Mackie, DeVos and Smith 2000).

From the analysis above it is also clear that different participants interpret the intergroup context differently and therefore experience different emotions. The most prevalent

emotional expressions though are fear and anger. Both these are associated with incompatible goals with perceived status being the variable that explains the difference. It has already been argued that land owners consider both the objective and symbolic goals they pursue in land reform to be different from those pursued by government and, to a lesser extent, land claimants. This incompatibility of goals is probably best expressed by the following

“Land reform is a political plan, not an agricultural plan. In other words the outcomes are meant to be political and not agricultural oriented. This is why it seems farmers and government miss each other. One is looking for agricultural outcomes and the other political outcomes.” (142)

It could be argued that these emotions are not collective but Smith, Seger and Mackie (2007) have shown that group-level emotions are a reality and that they make significant contributions to connecting the individual to a social group and the group to society.

Cognitive orientations

Of course affective and cognitive orientations, while they are distinguished at theoretical level, are empirically more fluid. In the next part of this discussion the focus is on cognitive orientations. But it is presented with an understanding that in reality participants could reflect affective and cognitive orientations at the same time.

Referring back to Elder and Cobb (1983) I consider land owner orientations in terms of substantive meaning (empirical knowledge, normative knowledge and political prescriptions) and associational meaning. Looking at empirical knowledge we see expressions of belief about the nature of the physical world, human nature and the nature of society.

Although the interviews did not explicitly explore land owner *beliefs about the nature of the world*, their responses suggest that while there are individual differences, they for the most part see the world as limited and challenging (in terms of resources), unpredictable but also subject to human influence. Given that these views develop from life experiences

it makes sense that land owners hold these views as most of them have extensive experience in the agricultural sector where natural resources are constrained, nature is unpredictable and human influence is pervasive.

Beliefs about human nature vary among land owners according to who they reference. Participants described, in great lengths, their involvement in land reform initiatives that they regarded as voluntary. One participant described how they were involved in a non-compulsory initiative because they believed that it was 'the right thing to do'.

"We had a claim that was found not to be legitimate in terms of legislation. Yet we decided to go ahead and negotiate a transfer of land to the community because it is necessary to take us forward in South Africa. We negotiated with the representatives to remain involved with 49% shareholding for ten years to ensure transfer of skills. After ten years we would sell our concern to them. We also negotiated the right to fell trees in one block within the next two years. We paid them millions for this right. I can show you the signed agreements." (I32)

There are numerous similar examples in which participants portray themselves as having an awareness of the interests of others and how, for the sake of these interests, they are willing to sacrifice. However, a common theme in this construction is how they describe negative experiences of these initiatives. This same participant continued his description of the initiative thus

"But you must remember there is a distinction between the land and the business set up on the land. So we put a plan on the table for the transfer of the business. But we never got an answer from the community representative. So we contacted the Department to facilitate the negotiations. And they were silent as well. And then, almost two years after we started the process we got a letter from the community saying we illegally felled trees on their land. Now remember, the land had not been transferred at that stage and we had a signed agreement from them to fell

those trees. And then they said we have a few weeks and then we must be off their land. Eventually we discovered that their representative was also the sole share-holder of the business arm of the community and he was also in the provincial treasury. So in the end he would have been the only beneficiary of this deal. But when the letters came we decided that if this is the attitude, we'll take this deal off the table.” (I32)

This example, like many other, suggests an understanding of human nature as more than just self-interested. Interestingly though, the kind of constructions referenced above ascribe compassion to the ingroup but self-interest to the outgroup. While the participant acknowledged that the problems he experienced all relate to a single individual, he extrapolated this behavior to the group that this individual represented. Considering the Social Identity perspective explored in the previous chapter this makes sense in terms of the meta contrast principles. According to this principle people tend to homogenize at intragroup level (in other words, people of the same group are all very similar) and differentiate at intergroup level (in other words, groups are very different from each other).

When referencing government officials land owners generally exhibit distrust based on beliefs and experiences that render these officials untrustworthy to them. It is worth pointing to a more extensive example quoted earlier.

“I mean generally speaking you work with people and people are not trustworthy. And if you bring politicians and department officials in it is ten times, no one hundred times, no one thousand times as bad.” (I31)

Finally, in terms of the nature of society beliefs again vary among participants. Generally speaking and as seen in the previous chapter participants hold the view that not all social borders are fixed and that under certain circumstances societal change is possible and even desirable. One exception to this general description is a land owner who holds very particular political views. This particular owner willingly described himself as ‘right wing’ and explained his associations with right wing organizations. He holds to an explicit nationalist ideology and sees the world and people in fixed and immutable terms. For him

there is little difference between an 'Afrikaner' and a farmer. As the one higher order category is exclusive, other categories associated with it also become bounded by these social boundaries²⁶.

In terms of *normative knowledge* land owners have strong views of justice and what it means in the context of land reform. They express beliefs of their own social obligations especially in referencing their participation in land reform initiatives like the one mentioned earlier. They report acting as mentors, providing capital or even selling land to communities as this is what is required to take South Africa forward. One example is described thus

"Take that piece of land. I had 1300 hectares. I told the land claims commissioner that there is 500 hectares for grazing. I'm not using it I told him. Take it. Because there are others that can use it more productively than I can. I told him there would be no money involved. On the rest there was 300 hectares of nuts. My plan was to continue with that. The money involved was about three million. I even told him I would help with water."
(123)

The unfortunate end to this particular case was that the land claims commissioner refused the offer and instead demanded that the owner give up the entire piece of land. The owner reported that after taking the case to the land claims court the case was ruled in his favour. Regardless of the outcome though, the dispositional structure of land owners generally reflects a sense of social obligation betterment, contrary to what has been claimed by some (see Cousins 2002; Gibson 2010).

While land owners exhibit a sense of social obligation their beliefs about distributive justices focuses on what a just dispensation implies for them. Put differently, in the context of land reform normative knowledge is not primarily about what they should and should not do but rather about what others should do in relation to them. Their expectation of a

²⁶ This particular participant represents an outlier in the data. As such I make explicit reference to his contributions when they are quoted.

just dispensation is one in which agricultural outcomes are pursued in a structured and predictable way. Whether these outcomes are achieved for others appear less important to them (as there are very few references to it in the interviews) than whether it is achieved for them.

The sense of justice land owners exhibit is strongly connected to the existing legal framework. They do not judge land reform as just or unjust but rather accept that if it is operationalized in the existing legal framework it is just. Coinciding with their view of justice as enshrined in law is the belief that there is authority vested in the law and the servants of the law (in particular the courts). Participants reported both accepting and rejecting particular claims based on the judgements made by courts. An exception to this is the participant referred to earlier that holds an explicit right wing ideology. His sense of authority was found not to be vested in the law and the courts but rather in a nationalist ideology because it is considered a trustworthy position in terms of facilitating his preferences.

Finally, in terms of *political prescriptions* land owners' beliefs again show variation and similarity. Probably the most explicit belief relates to the scope of political engagement. Numerous participants indicated that they do not believe government should directly be involved in land reform. Land owners do envision a role for government but this is limited to policy making and capacity development. Whether this is because of a lack of trust or simply because they believe there are other parties with more important vested interests is not clear. The following sentiments are common though.

“Farmers know about farming. They are the people that should work in that industry and know who should work and that industry. They are the people who should be training people in that industry. They should have left it with agriculture to do this. This redistribution, restitution, government should have turned around and said, guys these are our objectives – we need 20%, 30% of agricultural land transferred to black entrepreneurial hands in 20 years or 30 years or whatever. They should have handed it over to

organised agriculture and said, guys you are the farmers, you do it. You tell us what you need to achieve this and how you are going to do it.” (I13)

Elder and Cobb (1983) also argue that associations with groups of people provide information on the meaning of symbols. When relying on associational meaning people tend to suspend existing beliefs and turn to the beliefs associated with those they use as reference to define themselves. Importantly this definition of self can be done both in terms of those similar to them and those different from them. Throughout the interviews there were very few indications of extensive self-definition in terms of those similar to them. For the most part land owners related their beliefs about the appropriate intention and outcome of land reform to beliefs shared by other farmers – a healthy and supportive agricultural environment in which market forces, to varying degrees, determine success and failure. In terms of beliefs about ethnicity they made few expressions about those similar to them except in terms of some understanding of shared fate. Whether these orientations are based on association (in other words they adopt them because other similar people adopt them) or whether they are based on individual beliefs (in other words they adopt them because of their own dispositional knowledge) is difficult to determine.

However, land owners often ascribed meanings to symbols in terms of the (perceived) beliefs of those they identify themselves from as different. In other words, they do not give meaning based on the meanings they believe those similar to them hold but rather based on the meanings they believe those hold that belong to relevant comparative groups. Of course, in order to do this they need to interpret the actions of these ‘others’. This interpretation or symbolic action, says Blumer (1969) is “the individual designating different objects to himself, giving them meaning, judging their suitability to his action, and making decisions on the basis of the judgment”. As can be expected when giving meaning to something based on the interpretation of outgroups’ orientation to the object, especially if the object is situationally relevant, the process results mostly in negative meanings. For example, in the interviews land owners often reference public figures that promote land reform not in terms of outcomes but rather in terms of punitive justice. As these figures frame the land reform question as one that implicates two sets of actors, mostly white and black South Africans, land owners have few options in terms of aligning themselves with

particular positions and resort to relying on these figures interpretations to position themselves. Their interpretation of such public expression are illustrated descriptions like the following

“Just the other day we attended a ceremony in which land was handed to claimants. The official used that opportunity to say “We are giving you these farms. But look around you. All these others will be yours”. She doesn’t know anything about the process or the validity of the claim”. (I27)

In this case the land owner does not have the luxury of constructing meaning in a way that coincides with his dispositional structure. As the stakes are high he needs to take note of the meanings the significant ‘other’ gives to land reform. His interpretation of the message from the ‘other’ is that for those in power ultimately the outcome is fixed regardless of the legal process. What provides him with reassurance (a legal process) is disregarded for a specific outcome.

“I mean the public message is that land was stolen. It’s everywhere. They say I stole it. But who did I steal it from? I paid for it. I’m still paying for it. Then I cannot but think that their intention is to take it from me.” (I6)

This owner had already sold land to a claim of which the legitimacy was challenged. Apart from his lived experience, he also constructs meaning in terms of how he understands others to interpret land reform. In his interpretation of their message the relevant ‘other’ is framing a moral argument that results in him being placed on the wrong side of the moral spectrum. Generally speaking land owners seek to avoid being classified as in the wrong. And because he does not see himself morally where the ‘other’ sees him, he comes to the conclusion that land reform means an attempt to take from him for some or other nebulous reason.

In short, the symbolic orientation of land owners towards land reform is characterized by both positive and negative affect (no examples of neutral affect were found). The feelings they have, Elder and Cobb (1983:38) would argue, come from the way the object being used as a symbol is employed. In legislative terms land reform is framed as loss and gain

while in popular discourses it is often constructed in moral terms with land owners often being characterized in terms of negative moral positions. Because land reform is used in these ways it is hardly surprising that land owners exhibit strong feelings towards it as they seek to avoid characterizations that are incongruent with their values.

Of course the affective follows on the substantive. In this section we saw a varied disposition to land reform and related symbols as different sets of knowledge influence the construction of meaning (Elder and Cobb 1983:46). In terms of the construction of the meaning of land reform, possibly the two most important aspects of land owners' dispositional structure, considering the way in which they were presented in the interviews, were their beliefs about justice (substantive meaning) and the way in which they interpret the meanings ascribed to land reform by relevant 'others' (associational meaning). Elder and Cobb (1983:47) argue that when a symbol engages multiple domains of the dispositional structure, it is likely that the symbol will lead to greater provocation.

Orientation towards land reform (and related symbols) should then serve three potential functions. These are object appraisal, social adjustment and externalization (Elder and Cobb 1983:48). The first, object appraisal, generally allows a person the opportunity to simply make sense of an object and to organize it among various others. The process involves appraising the object or event in terms of the knowledge of the dispositional structure. The second, social adjustment, becomes important when uncertainty about the content of a symbol abounds. Under these conditions people will rely on the meanings created by other as the risks of appraising the object is too high. Finally, externalization, becomes the dominant mode of relating to a symbol when people seek to avoid uncomfortable issues.

7.1.4 Land reform meanings: individual or collective?

The one question that challenges the analysis of the data presented here, both in this chapter and the previous, is whether the perceptions and behaviors exhibited by land owners should be explained as individual responses or collective responses. Certainly the interviews give little indication of active collective pursuits. But the Social Identity

perspective has shown that even if people do not directly engage with each other, it is still possible for them to form a group in the psychological sense and engage with other groups, real or imagined (Sindic and Condor 2014). Elder and Cobb (1983:57) also argued that although orientations toward symbols vary from individual to individual, general patterns of symbol use can be found which has the potential to connect people in collectives.

In keeping with the findings of the previous chapter, namely that the primary groups in terms of which land owners construct their self-concept is 'white' and 'farmer', the meaning of land reform varies according to these categorizations. When the collective in terms of which the meaning of land reform is expressed is based on racial categorizations, land owners tend to construct meaning in terms of threat. They typically argue that land reform targets them for retributive purposes because they are white. However, when meaning is constructed in terms of their categorization as farmers the notion of threat is less important. Under these circumstances they ascribe meaning to land reform in terms of policy or implementation inefficiency. This difference is reflected in the following two expressions

"I realized why government don't want to negotiate. They want to take from whites and want to be seen to be taking away from whites. This will satisfy their constituents." (142)

"I went to them...as a farmer I said to them 'Let's make this work'. Because farmers aren't like that. They want to see things work. But the process was flawed. The policy does not encourage donors to stay involved or claimants to take responsibility." (117)

This is a pattern that is repeated in the interviews. The collective nature of these meanings become apparent when you realize that they are not possible in the absence of the collective identities. Individuals may associate land reform with threat but they can only perceive race based threat as part of a collective. Similarly, individuals may perceive land reform as holding a threat to them as farmers. But this is only possible once they conceive of themselves as members of the category 'farmers'.

7.1.5 Interaction and meaning in land reform

As indicated earlier according to the Symbolic Politics perspective (at least as used here) meaning is the result of interaction. Referring to Blumer's contribution to social psychology Becker (1988) argues that any social event can be understood as people "adjusting what they do in light of what others do" (1988:18). Interaction takes various forms including engagement between particular actors, both real and perceived (in the form of role-taking) as well as engagement with institutions (this includes media reports, societal narratives and political messaging). From the interviews it is clear that various interactions shape meaning in land reform. Participants spoke of interactions with government officials, claimants and the general public narrative (as reported in the media) as events that influenced their reference of meaning in land reform. In general different interactions resulted in the ascription of different meanings.

I have already mentioned land owners interaction with land reform and government officials. From the interactions generally stem a negative interpretation of land reform, either as threat or as policy and implementation failure. Generally they interpret the meanings evident in the interactions as conflictual.

Another set of interactions that are commonly mentioned in the interviews are those with land claimants. These tend to be varied with some resulting in more positive experiences and interpretations of land reform. One participant described his interpretation of land claimants' engagement with him in the following manner

"The commissioner tried to prevent us from talking to the claimants. But eventually we got together. We signed an agreement according to which they would for the next five years identify young people for training. I would act as their mentor. It was clear that the claimants wanted this agreement to work. They wanted to cooperate because by their own admission they had no farming knowledge." (I29)

Another, however, reported a negative experience.

“We went to negotiate with the claimants. The claim hadn’t been tested in court. But we said we were willing to sell about 40% of the concern even though the claim legally had to be proven. We said we would put up mentorships to ensure empowerment and continue productivity. You know what they said? Their representative hit the mic out of the way and said ‘We don’t want 40%. We want everything!’. Now how do you deal with that? What am I supposed to make of it?” (I20)

A final set of interactions that are pertinently discussed in the interviews is one of more abstract nature – that with, what Blumer (1969) calls, the generalized other. This generalized other represents social groupings the land owners perceive in the larger society and is often expressed in popular public narratives. Land owners regularly refer to unspecified ‘them’ and ‘they’ when discussing their interpretations of these narratives. In a sense these narratives, because they are of unspecified origins, take on the characteristics of an ‘other’ and as a result are interacted with by the land owners. In Symbolic Politics terms this interaction that is more mental than real is possible because of man’s ability to act towards himself (Blumer 1969) and to take the role of others (Edelman 1964). Of course the impact of the language through which land reform is mediated for land owners cannot be overstated. Edelman (1985) argued that for people language is reality because it is the medium from which meaning is constructed.

“If you look at the news. They blame us for the land reform problems. But there is no political will to conclude this.” (I35)

“There is a lot of pro-farmer sentiment out there. And you find it across race groups. But there is also a lot of negative sentiment. Just the other day I heard a story about woman...I think she was an academic or something...She apparently told farmers at a conference how which practices they should follow in order to accommodate small hold farmers. And I thought to myself, how is this possible? Where is the forum where I can tell people out there how to do their job? But they can come to a conference and tell me how to do mine?” (I27)

7.1.6 Threat and reassurance in land reform

By now it should be clear that threat and the need for reassurance forms a significant part of land owners' interpretation of land reform. Threat, I have shown, is related to particular identities land owners take. Threat also varies according to different identities. While some land owners are concerned about material threats (eg the loss of land) most actually refer to the symbolic nature of threats as they are related to the meanings ascribed to land reform and not land reform as an objective process. Edelman (1964) has argued that under such conditions of symbolic threat material reassurances will not calm the uncertainty of people as only symbolic reassurances can satiate symbolic needs. As symbolic threats also tend to create separation between people, reassurances that "create satisfying ties to others" (Edelman 1964:191) are also needed.

Various expressions of perception of threat are evident in the interviews. Apart from the threat of material loss, land owners also perceive a threat of loss in terms of their emotional investment in land. The following is illustrative of this perception of threat.

"It was easier for me to leave than for my wife. Because she was born and raised there. But I was worried about everything I put in. I mean it is something, an opportunity you had to build something up out of nothing."

(I31)

Then there is the threat of perceived injustice. Land owners are greatly concerned about this threat, as it stands in opposition to specific values they have. One kind of injustice threat relates to the important position legal mechanisms have in their dispositional structure. While they rely on these legal mechanisms to afford them some protection, they experience any actions that are seen to disregard or devalue this mechanism as a threat.

"The law is there. That's what it's for. I would support any claim that is found to be legitimate in terms of the law. But then you are confronted with people that disregard the law. They have an agenda and they are not going to let a law stand in their way." (I24)

“I spoke to one guy. I said to him how is it that he is claiming here? Neither he nor his family ever lived here. And he told me that he knows this but he thought he’ll try and see what happens. If he can play the law in his favour, why shouldn’t he? So obviously the law is not here to protect me.” (I9)

But then they are also wary of injustice threats in terms of a moral dimension. Their expectation is that under such conditions they will be threatened by association with a moral position that they reject. But they are left feeling powerless to oppose this kind of injustice.

“What can I do? They keep on telling people we are thieves, we are bad. People start seeing us as these terrible people that mistreat our workers and refuse to participate in righting a wrong. But that’s not us. But who’ll believe us?” (I34)

Another category of threats land owners deal with is the threat to community. Despite the differentials in power in most agricultural communities land owners acknowledge their connection to these communities. Land reform, in their experience has damaged these communities.

“And that is what is going to happen. The whole network is going to collapse. The community won’t exist anymore. But we need the community. You know, they are entire entrepreneurial networks on their own. The community provides us security. We’ve known each other in many cases since we were kids”. (I12)

Political agency or freedom, despite it being a contested theoretical notion, is of importance to land owners. Its general association with liberal values probably explains this importance, at least in part. In their experiences of land reform they report perceptions of threat to their ability to act without coercion. The two statements below indicate how land owners are concerned about the possibility that the land reform context is stripping them of this ability.

“Where it is going to go wrong is if they start telling me I have to go into partnership with people. They don’t even want me, they just want my land. But the process might leave me no choice.” (I31)

“But as I say, at the moment I’m happy. But if I want to sell my house and the bank says they are not going to fund the buyer because there is a claim, then I’m a very unhappy chappy. And it’s happened you know. Where people want to leave but they can’t because of this. It is beyond their control.” (I7)

A last threat evident among land owners is the threat posed to their sense of legitimacy and ability to contribute meaningfully in a context important to them. When land owners are confronted with narratives that shut them on group based considerations (eg race), they respond in different ways. Some reported getting upset and, in their words, tried to fight back. Others feel overwhelmed by this threat even though it has not necessarily happened. Just the thought of it is sufficient to push them onto the defensive.

“I decided I’m not going to meet with them. Because I know what’s going to happen. They don’t want to involve me. They are simply going to tell me keep out of everything. Because what do you know about how we do things?” (I12)

Just as the perceived threats are obvious in the interviews conducted, so too are land owners aware of what provides them with reassurances. Considering Edelman’s (1971) argument that symbolic needs can only be satiated with symbolic reassurances allows us to start seeing possibilities to transform the meaning land owners ascribe to land reform. Probably the greatest reassurance land owners report is the perceived impartiality and power of the legal mechanisms that apply to land reform. When talking about what needs to be done to get land reform on a more constructive path, they almost without exceptions express satisfaction with existing legislation and execution of the dictates of these. In reality this same instrument can leave them without their land. But it is impartiality and

security in a context of ambiguity and separation from politics that provides this reassurance (Edelman 1964). The following describes this

“The framework of the law is very important. We will rely on it to protect us and to facilitate proper land reform”. (I17)

Another source of reassurance for land owners comes from being drawn into the land reform process. For them such involvement is a legitimization of both their distinctiveness (in terms of their specialized knowledge) and their equal position as a citizen. Such legitimization is in stark contrast to their interpretation of the use of concepts like “European” or “settler” to describe them. Where these terms came up in the interviews land owners spoke about how they relegate them to qualitatively different position in terms of legitimate status in South Africa. Back to the reassurance of involvement though. Many of the participants made statements like these

“Government has to find a way to involve us farmers in the land reform process. It’s the only way”. (I19)

“They must leave it to us. Because we know farming. They can make the policies and set the targets. But we are the ones with the knowledge to make this work”. (I22)

7.1.7 Myths and land reform: accounting for reality

Starting from Edelman and finding its most explicit expression in Kaufman, the Symbolic Politics perspective argues that myths informs our worldview and dictates how we should order and evaluate the world. This is clearly expressed by Bennet (1980:17) stating that myths “are like the lenses in a pair of glasses in the sense that they are not the things people see when they look at the world, they are things they see with. Myths are the truths about society that are taken for granted”. Unfortunately this embedded nature of myths is what makes them so difficult to analyze. They are often not explicit and even those who have their cognitions informed by them are not always aware of them.

The interviews with land owners highlighted this challenge. With the exception of the one participant with strong nationalistic views, other participants rarely made explicit reference to mythical beliefs about the world in general and land reform in particular. Even though he represents an exception in the study population it is worth referring to the exceptional participant to provide an example of how a myths operates.

“When the English came the Afrikaner lost his land. So there is another historical injustice that first has to be addressed. Only once the nation hood of the Afrikaner has been acknowledged can the land reform conversation move forward. And you have to see this farm in that context. It is meant to be part of the sovereign land of a future ‘Boer’ republic.” (140)

For the participant his mythical account serves a number of functions. First, it locates him in the larger order in relation to others (both those similar to him and those different from him). He takes from his account the separateness of the Afrikaner and sets then up against a number of ‘enemies’. Then it also specifies an ideal outcome in terms of the collective he belongs to. This outcome is both tangible (a sovereign ‘Boer’ republic) and symbolic (acknowledgement by others of the status of the Afrikaner as a nation). And finally it indicates how he should respond to current experiences (the needs of others should subordinate to the pursuit of his goals).

Other land owners also reflected accounts of reality that indicated their relation to others, including perceived threats. They also indicate their symbolic needs and the societal ideals to be pursued. We have already seen how land owners distinguish themselves from various ‘others’ and how the dynamics of threat influence their appraisal of these ‘others’. The one sets of ‘opponents’ that land owners are very clear about is government/government officials. For them the myth structure that informs their view of the world somehow conceptualizes government as an ‘other’ can only be existed with in a conflictual relation. A seeming contradiction though is that they also seek reassurance from government in terms of legitimating them.

7.2 Summary and conclusion

In this final section I will summarize the findings of the analysis in terms of the propositions used to investigate land owner experiences.

Land owners act toward land reform in terms of the meaning ascribed to the various concepts or events that are part of the frame of reference of land reform.

The analysis indicated that land reform research can benefit from approaches other than rational choice models. The analysis showed an interrelated symbolic network that consists of different objects with different meanings. So, for example, land owners cannot sensibly speak of their opposition to land reform without indicating what land means to them. Nor can they argue that land reform is, in principle, a cause worthy of support without explaining how experiences of interaction with various others influence their positions. Conducting a Symbolic Politics analysis of land reform implies that the most important question to ask is not whether land owners support land reform but rather what land reform (and its interrelated symbols) mean to them.

Any suggestion that land owners do not attach more than utilitarian value to land (Tsawu 2006; Claassens 1991) should be rejected. The data indicated that land owners have various symbolic attachments to land, most of which only become explicit once they experience threat. For them land is also related to higher order symbols that are references to their sense of belonging or antagonism they perceive from relevant outgroups.

Interaction with different actors result in different interpretations of land reform.

Land owners reported various interactions that shaped their experiences of land reform. Little was offered in terms of interaction with other land owners as a source of meaning. They tended to collect more meaning from interactions with those that hold different views to theirs. In general three groups of 'actors' were identified with whom land owners interact in the process of creating meaning. The first, land claimants, has varied influences on interpretations of land reform. Participants reported both positive and negative interactions with land claimants resulting in different dispositions towards land reform. The second, government/land reform officials, had mostly negative interactions with land

owners. This points to flawed administrative processes. But it also suggests that land owners have high expectations of these officials as they tolerate no failures (whereas for claimants they often externalize failed land reform initiatives by blaming others than the claimants). Finally, land owners reported a negative experience of their interaction with the 'generalized other'. This was experienced mostly through the media. Interactions that had the most negative influence on their disposition towards land reform were those with government officials or those that had explicit indications of corruption or criminality.

Land owners will support or oppose the land reform process depending on the symbolic threats or reassurances that are interpreted from the political engagements they have in terms of land reform.

As we saw in the previous chapter, land owners interpret significant and varied threats from land reform. These, for the most part, are related to land owners' sense of belonging and legitimacy. It could be argued that these threats in general result from something that is by nature only a conflict of interest. Or, put differently, it is only conflict about the right to own the land. However, as land means more than just utility to land owners, land reform holds threats that extend beyond just the loss of productive capacity.

Land reform, as a symbolic representation, requires mythical beliefs which in turn provide understanding of the nature of land owner's perceived reality, especially in terms of identifying opponents and the principles to follow for achieving what is 'right'.

The interviews conducted suggested little by way of ethnic myths. There were some references to differences between ethnic groups and certainly some participants referred to myths of descent in temporal and spatial terms. But generally speaking the explanations of the world at large for the participants are less reliant on explicit ethnic myths. The myths they rely on perform the functions of myths as suggested by Edelman and Kaufman, namely the identification of threats and principles of right and wrong. In the South African context it is almost impossible to imagine people not having in their frame of reference some sort of distinction between white and black South Africans. As much as many South Africans aspire to an account of reality that is not constantly influenced by frames of reference that dictate race based explanations most of the country's

problems, the possibility of a situation in which race is not used as a prominent explanation of intergroup relations is unlikely. In order to prevent tensions around land reform from escalating and developing into purely ethnic based tensions, Kaufman (2001) suggests that prevalent myths and attitudes should be addressed. Ethnically offensive expressions (facilitated perhaps through literature, public expressions, cultural practices and societal narratives) should be constrained. In particular Kaufman argues against expressions that question any group's nationhood or states their existence in terms of victim hood. To be clear, Kaufman does not propose the denial of historic wrongs. Rather he argues that when these expressions become the basis of the dominant myths for ethnic groups they facilitate the kind of ethnic distinction and opposition required to instigate ethnic conflict.

Chapter 8: Transforming land reform conflict: suggestions for a peacebuilding framework from the Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives

8. Introduction

This study began with the argument that South Africa's ongoing transformation, including specific transformative initiatives like land reform, contains the potential for social conflict. The concept peacebuilding was then explored as both a framework for understanding this conflict and a goal to be pursued. It was argued that existing approaches to peacebuilding can and should be augmented by the use of concepts that are more readily associated with non-rational choice approaches. In particular two sets of frameworks – the Social Identity perspective and the Symbolic Politics perspective – were explored. Both were applied to the analysis of interview data in order to develop an understanding of land owners' perspectives and alternative explanations for the conflict potential of land reform. In the opening chapter this study was described as phenomenological. It is worth referring to Polkinghorne (1989) again to indicate a broad criteria in terms of which such efforts should be judged. The claim made was that upon concluding a phenomenological study the reader should "understand better what it is like for someone to experience that" (1989:4). It is my belief that this study provided a description of land owner experiences that will allow readers to better understand their particular perspectives.

8.1 Summary of empirical analysis

8.1.1 Land owner perspectives on the purpose and process of land reform

Despite individual variations, the experiences of land reform described during this research show noticeable uniformity. Most participants have experiences of or form opinions of land reform along at least two dimensions. The first relates to their understanding of the **purpose of land reform** (this includes the reasons advocated to justify such purposes). For participants the purpose of land reform is further understood in terms of the various actors involved. Most distinguish (implicitly and explicitly) between their own understandings of purpose, their view of claimants' understanding of purpose and their view of government intentions. A second dimension in terms of which land reform is thought of and experienced, relates to the **land reform processes** participants experience. This includes formal and administrative processes as well as informal ones

(informal discussions with claimants, observing the formulation of the discourse about land reform etc).

Generally speaking land owners express resistance to the land reform process as they have experienced it up to now. Elsewhere this resistance has been confirmed to a greater or lesser extent. Gibson (2009) for example, showed how whites are opposed to land reform to a much greater extent than blacks (here I take the correlation between race and land ownership into account and feel comfortable extrapolating race-based preferences to those ownership-based ones). He argues that instrumentalism or self-interest does not account for these preferences but rather explains them referring to symbolic concerns. While I agree with some of his arguments I believe that claims such as “A basic fact of land politics is that whites do not want to address the past; blacks do” (2009:153) is an oversimplification of the reality described by his empirical research. Reicher (2004) argues that by simply reducing our explanations of social conflict to single categories and conclusions, we lose the ability to explain when and why conflicts arise and what forms they take. In other words, limiting our descriptions of experiences and attitudes towards land reform to single categories such as race (as Gibson does) reduces our ability to explain cases that do not fit with such descriptions and prescribes possible conclusions to us.

Of course it could be argued, along the lines of the framework of symbolic racism (Sears 1988), that explaining certain prejudices in terms of other identities than just race-based identities simply covers what is essentially still efforts to maintain the racial status quo while avoiding the negative response to be expected of race based discriminatory arguments. Such an argument though would not be unproblematic. Exploring the symbolic racism framework, Wood (1994) pointed out that this framework relies on individual level negative feelings of a white person towards black people in order to define racism. However, an intergroup perspective suggests that the psychological mechanisms at work result in increased ingroup favoritism and not necessarily in outgroup derogation (Brewer 1999). Conceptually the argument is also problematic as it defines racism in a very particular way. Getting back to the case of land owners and their identification I conclude that their preference for identification as farmers reflects a group based

preference that is motivated by the need for positive distinctiveness rather than an indication of negative valence towards blacks. It could be argued that what land owners are doing is changing the definition of the situation in order to avoid the loss of status through association with a stigmatized group (Ellemers and Barreto 2006).

8.1.2 Land owner experiences of land reform: the Social Identity and Symbolic perspectives

Having discussed the findings of the analysis conducted in terms of the various propositions in the previous two chapters in detail, I now offer an integrated summary of them.

First, both the Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives suggest that land owners define themselves, others and the land reform experience in terms of various group based identities. Coming from different traditions in the social psychology it is to be expected that for these two perspectives the Social Identity processes will be described differently. The Social Identity perspective gives prominence to the cognitive process that starts with categorization and relies salience to explain identification. The Symbolic Politics perspective in turn explains identity choices in terms meaning, interpretation of context and myths provide frames of reference. Regardless of these differences though, the two perspectives confirm complex identities.

Second, the perspectives show that response to land reform, whether in the form of behavior, cognition or emotion is a function of meaning rather than of invariant structures found in the context. The implication of this finding is that land owner responses are not fixed and can, depending on meanings ascribed and interpreted, be adapted. In terms of the former, land owners understand various purposes for land reform. In general three prominent understandings were apparent. One is of land reform is that it is a necessary moral imperative in order to right the wrongs of South Africa's legislated and structural discrimination against black South Africans. Another prominent meaning that was evident is that land reform is a competitive activity that is intended to produce winners and losers. For land owners this understanding holds extensive threat as they see themselves defined as the 'losers' of the initiative. It is from this understanding of land reform that most of the opposition to land reform comes. Finally there is also the view that land reform

is intended to transform agriculture. It is important to note that in such cases the transformation of agriculture is seen not as a political purpose but rather an agricultural one. Where participants hold this view they determine that land reform is necessary to ensure the development and growth of the agricultural sector in South Africa in a way that ensures food security and that is commercially viable. If land owners see this view as congruent with government position they respond positively to land reform. This view, however, is at odds with the dominant one among researchers (see, for example Hall, Wisborg, Shirinda and Zamchiya 2013; Walker 2005).

For the land owners there are various sources that supply symbolic meaning to land reform. At least three were evident in the analysis done here, namely process, discourse and outcomes. These are all experienced in interaction (in the sense used in Symbolic Interactionism) and based on interpretations of the interactions. These interpretations in turn are affected by feelings towards the relevant symbols, their dispositional structure and meanings observed from relevant 'others' (including those similar and different to them). First there is their experience of the land reform process. Generally they have negative experiences of the process, both in terms of its efficiency and the extent to which they perceive it to be hostile. More often than not their negative experiences stem from their interaction with land reform officials. Then the popular discourses that they interact with, mostly through how it is presented in the mass media, perpetuates an account of (perceived) hostility towards them. As mentioned in the analysis, land owners are sensitive to these hostile and alienating myths which they reject but feel powerless to change. Importantly, the influence of discourse on their construction of the meaning of land reform must also take into account larger societal discourses that are not necessarily related to land reform but do involve the social identities of land owners. Du Toit (2013) has in fact argued that this is exactly the nature of land reform – a part of a larger societal transformation process. Finally, the outcomes of land reform that land owners perceive also influences their construction of meaning. Where failed land reform projects are seen to be allowed or tolerated, land owners interpret this tolerance as an indication of 'hidden agendas'.

Third, both sets of analyses suggest that threat is a pervasive perception for land owners. Somewhat similar claims have been made by others. Korf and Malan (2002) for example, found that Afrikaans speaking white South Africans reported significant perceptions of threat to the continuity (the continued existence of their identity as a distinctive group) and evaluative value (the ability of their identity to contribute to positive self esteem) of their ethnic identity. In a more general study Booyesen (2007) came to a similar conclusion. Her conclusion does suggest that from the challenge to their racial identity comes opportunities for the advancement of South Africa as a whole. She states that “New social identities could conceivably be constructed, from categories coupled to professional identities, work identities, socio-economic status or other new social identities rooted in some factor other than race” (2007:16). For land owners land reform, depending on the particular dynamic between identity, meaning and context, catalogues their fears and uncertainties regarding belonging and (perceived) equality.

Of course when considering threats assessment of what provides reassurance is also required. The latter coincides with the security they find in transparent legislative processes. They rely on the known legal context (eg the constitution, relevant acts etc) to indicate their connection to the larger polity. For them the constitution indicates what they may be exposed to and what they should be protected from. The Symbolic Politics perspective suggests that people rely on interpretive accounts of reality (myths) in order to both give meaning to their experiences as well as explain the nature and expectations of these experiences. These accounts define where people belong (in terms of group relations) and what principles they should follow. For land owners there is an account of reality that suggests that others view them as ‘enemies’ and that their contributions to the meaning making process are considered to be less than legitimate.

This research has pointed out that there are Social Identity categories in operation that are generally not represented in existing literature on land reform. The general tendency in this literature is to focus on the obvious Social Identity categories of race, gender or class. Further, and related to this, the study points to the fact that group identification is not static, something that is also predominantly neglected in existing narratives on land reform. The result of failure to recognize some categories with which the participants in

this study identify as well as disregard for the fluidity of social identification leads to an inability to conceptualize creative solution to the land reform conflict.

8.2 Transforming the land reform conflict: Contributing to a peacebuilding framework from Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives

Having explored the affordances of the Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives, I can consider their potential to contribute to a peacebuilding framework. As pointed out in the first chapter, I take Lederach's (1997) framework as one of sufficient conceptual complexity to engage these perspectives. In particular at least three aspects of this framework, I argue, make it receptive to contributions from these perspectives. First, as this framework has relationships at its core, both as the basis for conflict and the long term solution to it, it provides space for Social Identity perspective contributions. The potential for Social Identity contributions to a relational framework is apparent when considering the explanation of the origins of SIT as an attempt to acknowledge the social dimension of conflict as well as offering explanation for intergroup behavior (Turner 1996). The Social Identity perspective can be said to share Lederach's preoccupation with the relational. Second, Lederach's view of both conflict and peace as processes with numerous potential pathways find resonance in both the Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives that intergroup behavior cannot adequately be described using rational choice or structurally deterministic approaches. For the Social Identity perspective the interaction between context and cognitive structure holds the potential for creative approaches to intergroup relations while the influence of meaning on behavior does the same for the Symbolic Politics perspective. Finally, while Lederach acknowledges the hierarchical structure of society (ordered in terms of class) in his description of different levels of actors in conflict/peacebuilding situations and argues that most real conflicts are practically experiences at grassroots (1997:43), he also states that in conflicts identity lines generally do not conform to the distinctions reflected in the ordering of society but rather cut across these lines in terms of ethnicity or other societal fault lines. The implication is that various identifications are possible as potential influences on conflict/peacebuilding processes. The Social Identity perspective, through the mechanism of categorization, provides for such variety in the ordering of conflict/peacebuilding processes.

The SIT perspective offers a view of the role and mechanisms of identity in land reform. SIT perspective points out that interaction between people from different groups is not solely driven by cost-benefit analysis in a pursuit of material goods. It is also influenced by psychological processes and needs that find expression in identities. The Symbolic Politics perspective suggests that conflict cannot be successfully and comprehensively resolved unless the emotional and symbolic origins of divisive politics are addressed as these conflicts are often facilitated by responses to emotionally laden symbols (Kaufman 2006). Both these approaches thus reject simple and deterministic rational actor models of conflict and conflict resolution.

8.2.1 The Social Identity perspective and peacebuilding

Turner and Reynolds's (1994) suggestions for analyzing intergroup conflict overlap, to a large extent, with what SIT offers but also includes expansions formulated in SCT. They state that accounting for intergroup conflict (from a social psychological perspective) requires at least four distinct analyses. First, an analysis of the *psychological group* (including understanding how and why groups form as well as the determinants for individual or collective behavior) is required. In this regard the SCT's exposition of the categorization process and the relationship between self and Social Identity as well as the part of SIT that focuses on how behavior moves between interpersonal and intergroup, contributes to the analysis. This is a particularly important part of analysis in real situations. The experimental situations generally described in Social Identity research have relatively simple psychological contexts (Campbell 1997). But, as was also evident in the analysis for this study, in real situations the interconnectedness of social identities adds significant complexity. Failing to deal with this complexity results in peace efforts that are limited or even misplaced as they incorrectly interpret the connection between identity and behaviors. A second requirement is an analysis of the *processes of intergroup relations*. Here SIT's causal psychological sequence that explains how and why people act in terms of a collective they associate with rather than in terms of personal idiosyncrasies, offers us the necessary instruments. Again, in the case of land reform this is a crucial element. Failure to understand the group processes results in insufficient and ineffective initiatives to ameliorate conflicts. The third necessary element of accounting for intergroup conflict is a theory of *social influence* (ie the establishment, validation and

dissemination of identities, beliefs and values). Here again SCT provides the required instrumentation. In terms of managing the land reform conflict understanding of social influence provides both explanations of what happens (who influences perceptions and why) and suggestions for how to influence the processes of the conflict (what is required to influence groups' perceptions of each other in land reform). The final important analysis is an explanation of the *content of group beliefs*, in other words an explanation of how groups view themselves and others in terms of values, who the 'others' are and how this derives from and feeds into social structures. While the Social Identity perspective offers insights into unravelling complex social situations, there is still little available that systematically investigates how content is created and structured in collective beliefs (Turner and Reynolds 1994:148).

Considering the SIT perspective's explanation of the intergroup choice (as opposed to interpersonal choice) in social conflict as determined, at least in part, by the structure of the conflict (Tajfel and Turner 1979), it would seem that the way in which the conflict surrounding land reform is structured contributes to its intensity and intergroup nature. Because the conflict is structured in terms racial groups, social mobility is not much of an option for those seeking to avoid the conflict as they cannot move from their group to another in this comparative situation. The conflict is also structured as objective because, in its current structure, a win for one group is the same as a loss for another. While it is probably unrealistic to expect the structure of the conflict to change, a move towards a situation that is not characterized as having zero-sum outcomes would greatly reduce the threat and, ultimately, the conflict.

The Social Identity perspective has focused most of its conflict reduction strategies on the categorization process. Brown (1996) has noted three particular strategies. First, crossed categorizations refer to conditions under which multiple categorizations are active at the same time. They are, in other words, cross cutting. There are some indications (although limited) that under such conditions the potential negative comparisons that would have been associated with one of the single categorizations can be cancelled by the other categorizations. In other words, if conditions can be created under which land owners and claimants can interact with each other as 'white farmers' and 'black farmers' there is a

possibility that both groups would disregard the secondary categorization. The next strategy, recategorization, entails changing the conflict context to such an extent that those perceived as members of the outgroup can be recategorized as members of a larger, higher order ingroup. In other words, creating a new superordinate identity. In the case of land reform this means, in theory, that land owners and the outgroup 'other' both somehow be released from their social identities (eg white, black) in order to embrace the higher lever category to which they both belong (remember that in the Social Identity perspective it has been argued that only groups that belong to the same higher order category can be compared), perhaps South African. Under such conditions the comparisons for the purpose of pursuing positive distinctiveness would still happen. But the relevant outgroup will now no longer be the one that originally was the outgroup. Finally, decategorization attempts to create conditions under which the regular cognitive process of categorization and comparison are no longer relevant. Under such conditions land owners and the outgroup 'other' would interact in terms of the personal and not their social identities. While this might be possible in controlled environments, it is doubtful that this could be practiced in real life situations.

Brown (2000) also presents contact hypothesis as one of the possible strategies to reduce conflict. The premise is rather simple – bring in and outgroups together under appropriate conditions as this reduces prejudice. The problem with a simple contact hypothesis is that while attitudes may change toward the individual/individuals the ingroup member come in contact with, there is no guarantee that these attitudes will transfer to all other members of the outgroup. In response to this challenge, Brewer and Gaertner (2001) points to the possibility of maintaining the multiple in and outgroup identities but changing the comparative context so that groups pursue superordinate goals in an attempt to create cooperative conditions. In this way comparisons are avoided. In the case of land reform such contact situations could be created through cooperative agricultural schemes. They would need some support to ensure that both groups participate as equals. And Brown (2000) cautions that if such cooperation ends in failure (eg a poor crop), it could result in even greater ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation.

The preceding strategies mostly focus on changing the existing comparative context in order to reduce ingroup bias. However Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears and Doosje (1999) have argued that an increase in distinctiveness can actually improve intergroup relations. In the absence of sufficient distinctiveness people might adopt a more competitive approach in their intergroup relations in order to ensure a sufficiently distinct Social Identity. The implication of this is that if any strategy to ameliorate intergroup conflict is followed reduces the distinctiveness of a particular Social Identity, another option must be available to group members to prevent them actually resorting to more intense intergroup competition. In terms of land owners the implications are that as they struggle to find positive distinctiveness there is a real risk that they may resort to more biased or discriminatory behavior.

A final possibility considered from the Social Identity perspective has less to do with intergroup relations and more with social influence. Through social influence (the control that can be exerted over the ingroup on the basis of the characteristics of the messenger and not the message (Sindic and Conder 2014)) the meanings land owners attach to land reform symbols can be adapted through the influence of an ingroup member considered to be prototypical of the group. It has been shown that when ingroup norms are adapted according to those of a prototypical member of the ingroup, it results in meaningful attitude change (Smith and Hogg 2008). Put simply this means that adapting land owner attitudes and behaviors to land reform is most effectively done through interaction with members of their own ingroups. In terms of land reform this would suggest that visible leadership is required among land owner ingroups to influence the norms they subscribe to. This most effectively done, as Lederach (1997) argues, at the level of middle-range and grassroots leadership. I would argue that this not be pursued in the form of formal politics as it could result in a politics that promotes that maintains racial distinctions as a formal division in South Africa. In terms of normalized intergroup relations it would probably be more significant for land owner values to be influenced in terms of their identification as farmers. For this existing structures of agricultural organizations and local farmer associations provide the necessary platform.

These strategies can be usefully applied at least to the *root causes*, *transformation*, *prevention* and *vision* intersections of Lederach's framework. At each of these intersections these strategies have the potential to transform relationships, either by changing the identities employed to relate to the outgroup or by changing the comparative context (through the creation of superordinate goals). In terms of the *root causes* intersection the Social Identity perspective offers the conceptual tools to analyze a conflict situation in order to find more comprehensive explanations than conflict-of-interest ones for the origins of the conflict. In terms of the *transformation* intersection the Social Identity perspective offers strategies such as the ones discussed above. These have the potential to move intergroup relations from positions of conflict and discrimination to ones of (at least at psychological level) mutual interdependence. At the *prevention* intersection the Social Identity perspective on intergroup relations and their processes offers indications of the kinds of interactions and context that should be avoided in order to prevent recurrence of conflict. And at the *vision* intersection the perspective offers the hope that, through management of context, intergroup relations can be structured in interdependent ways.

8.2.2 *The Symbolic Politics perspective and peacebuilding*

In the Symbolic Politics perspective the most appropriate suggestions for transforming the land reform conflict are probably those made by Kaufman (2001; 2006). He addresses a number of the most basic influences contributing to the conflict. First he points to the need for reassurance to be introduced into a context of mistrust. As we saw in the analysis land owners are deeply distrustful of government and other political elites they perceive as being antagonistic towards them and less so of land claimants. While Kaufman's suggestions are for violent ethnic conflicts but the principles that underpin them are still valid in non-violent conflicts. For reassurance he suggests the introduction of confidence-building measures, agreement on norms and, possibly, reciprocation in tension reduction (2001:41). In the case of land owner experiences the interviews indicated that legislative stability and equal partnerships could contribute to reassuring land owners. One interviewee also suggested that government expedite the degazetting of farms that are subject to claims that have been shown to be not legitimate claims. As long as farms are gazetted, regardless of the validity of the claims on them, they are subject to certain

provisions that prevent investment and expansion. Of course, given the principle of reciprocity, land owners also need to contribute to an environment of trust. By their own admission some of the participants indicated that when the sold land in a claim they did so at inflated prices.

Then Kaufman (2001) argues that the instrument of peacebuilding should be reconciliation. It is worth quoting him again to show how he envisages reconciliation. “What peacebuilders do is to bring people from opposing sides of a conflict together to replace the myths about the other side with better information, to replace the hostility and fear with understanding, and most of all to build cooperative interethnic relationships to replace stereotyped hostile ones” (2001:42). Reconciliation, says Bar-Tal (2000) is a long term process that requires trust and cooperation.

Finally, if we argue that Symbolic Politics is based on the principles of Symbolic Interactionism, we have to give serious consideration to the suggestion that meanings of land reform explored here are found in the behavior of people and not in the concept itself. This means that changes to the concept itself (such as adapting land reform targets or exchanging what is seen as an antagonistic mechanism with another such mechanism) will not necessarily result in changed ways of acting towards land reform. Adaptation requires a change in meaning as expressed in behavior. Or, put differently, land owners will not respond in other ways to land reform as long as the meanings they construct of it remain unchanged. In terms of a land reform that contributes to the peaceful development of South Africa this is a hopeful argument. If, as the Symbolic Politics perspective suggests, reality is constructed through interaction (and not predetermined by structure) it opens the possibility that land reform conflict can be creatively mediated to result in outcomes that contribute to development and transformed intergroup relationships. To achieve this though it would be necessary for ‘land reform’ to arouse the same response in different users (Sander 1997:27).

In terms of Lederach’s framework, the Symbolic Politics perspective again offers contributions that can be inserted at various intersections. In terms of *root causes*, *transformation* and *prevention*, meaning is key. A process that begins to adapt the meaning land owners attach to land reform (e.g. land reform as a form of identity threat)

can address at least some of the causes of the conflict as well as help to prevent recurrence of similar conflicts. The analysis conducted here also suggests that the reassurances that allow land owners to engage with land reform (e.g legislative stability) is essential to the transformation intersection.

If we consider Lederach's description of the paradoxes that characterize reconciliation, the Symbolic Politics perspective also suggests while land owners need to see land reform not as a process that targets and excludes them based on their identity, they also need to participate in a process in which their fellow citizens can express the pains of historical dispossession. In other words, they also need to engage with the meaning of land reform for other South Africans. The next paradox suggests that land owners need to adapt the meaning they attach to land reform to allow for a view that exposes past and present suffering. The bedfellow of this, Lederach would argue, is that the past (in terms of disrupted relationships) needs to be put to rest at some point for the sake renewed relationships. In terms of the final paradox shared meanings of justice and peace should be developed in order to advance reconciliation.

The analyses indicated that land owners perceive the current process as one that tends to prejudice one extreme in each of the paradoxes. In other words, their view is that expression of the past, construction of truth in a particular way and a particular kind of justice are all pursued at the expense of the other side of the paradoxes. But if Lederach's paradoxes are to offer their full potential, land owners also need to engage with the extremes they are uncomfortable with. In others words, peacebuilding will continue to elude the land reform process as long as both land owners and other actors do not embrace the paradoxes (Lederach 1997:31). In Lederach's (1997:31) own words, without the paradoxes the land reform initiative can result in "binding and crippling impasse". The Symbolic Politics perspective's focus on meaning provides an avenue that can be explored in order to facilitate engagement with these paradoxes.

The Symbolic Politics perspective, as seen earlier, surfaced the break of trust between, what in Lederach's framework would be the top level leaders on the one hand and the middle-level and grassroots leaders on the other. The perspective has thus also been shown to be useful in supporting the peacebuilding praxis of Lederach's framework. In

practical terms this means that, based on what the Symbolic Politics perspective surfaced, the land reform initiative in South Africa is in need significant intervention between the 'top' and the 'grassroots'. Without such intervention the *transformation* intersection in Lederach's framework – that is the connection between the other quadrants – will fall foul of the break in trust.

8.3 Some challenges regarding the application of the Social Identity perspective
Hymans (2002) has argued that while the SIT perspective has potential as an analytic framework to be applied to particular political events, researcher should also not assume that its application is unproblematic. Because the theory has its origins in experimental research its conceptual and methodological applications should be carefully considered when dealing with non-experimental situations (Jackson and Sheriff 2013). The first consideration Hymans (2002) suggests, focusses on a clear understanding of the distinction between preferential treatment of the ingroup and negative outgroup discrimination. In short he argues that ingroup favoritism should not be confused with outgroup discrimination as the one does not necessarily lead to the other. Ignoring this distinction leaves the theory incapable of explaining instances where clear preference for the ingroup is not accompanied by explicit discriminatory behavior to the outgroup. Some of this was seen in the data analyzed for this study. For the most part a clear picture of ingroup protection and favoritism emerged but explicit discriminatory behavioral intentions were for the most part absent.

A next consideration Hymans (2002) gives to the application of the SIT perspective to real-life situations is based on the argument that not all ingroups exist in simple dyads. In other words, social relations are often more complex than a singular interaction between one ingroup and one outgroup. More often than not ingroups define themselves and experience the world in terms of multiple outgroups. This theoretical limitation of the SIT perspective again stems from its methodological background in which experiments are mostly set up in simple dyads. From the interviews conducted for this study a picture of multipolar complexity emerged in which the parameters of both in and outgroup identities at times overlap with others in the identity scheme of the participant. One good example

is how “white” and “farmer” even though they exhibit distinct defining characteristics, at times overlap in their relation to the relevant other/others.

Finally, the SIT perspective generally assumes status parity in the experimental context (Hymans 2002). This means that results are interpreted as for a context where groups have no pre-existing status or power hierarchy. Under such conditions (the absence of power and status hierarchy) it is to be expected that groups will resort to intense competition in order to establish such a hierarchy. However, real life situations are not like this. In many instances a power and status hierarchy is pre-existent and groups have less motivation to scramble for position in the hierarchy. The end of Apartheid disrupted the stability of the status hierarchy leading to a situation in which there is renewed scramble for ranking in the status and hierarchy position (Brown 2000). The post 1994 dispensation in South Africa can then, in terms of the Social Identity perspective, be understood as one in which systemic conflict is an attempt to return stability to the system.

8.4 Future research

Suggestions for future research start from the limitations of this study. Two limitations in terms of which future research is suggested are the decisions made about sampling (the explicit focus on the white land owner population) and the methodology employed.

If the argument that an understanding of land owner perceptions of land reform is a necessary part of a process that ultimately reduces social conflict is to hold, similar understanding of perceptions of other actors in the land reform process is required. An analysis similar to the one conducted here but with land claimants and political elites as participants would certainly be valuable. As mentioned earlier research focusing on the experiences of land claimants or victims of Apartheid dispossession abounds. Generally speaking these literatures have taken structural or rational approaches to land reform. Or where they have applied the concepts of identity or Symbolic Politics they have been treated as epiphenomena of the process rather than as explicit influences.

The qualitative methodology employed in this study holds certain offer certain benefits but also has specific limitations. While this methodology has the potential to uncover variety and depth in the experience of land owners, it is not able to explore the extent to

which claims are true across an entire population. So, for example, this study concluded that perceptions of land reform cannot be explained by reference only to individual predispositions. Research exploring the extent to which such predispositions actually play a role in land reform perceptions across predefined populations would be a useful engagement with Sears' (1993) explanation of opposition to liberal or (perceived) pro-black policies as a form of symbolic racism.

Staying with alternative explanations for cognition and behavior in land reform, it could be useful to consider changes in these over time. More than one participant reported how their response to land reform changed (either from negative to neutral/apathetic or positive to neutral/apathetic) over time. The Symbolic Politics perspective could account for this change by exploring changes in the dispositional structure of land owners over time. Future research could consider the hypotheses of invariant dispositions on the one hand and change of the dispositional structure on the other, to determine how flexible or inflexible land owner attitudes toward land reform is.

A second avenue for future research is more concerned with the conceptual connections between the approaches applied here. The Social Identity and Symbolic Politics perspectives are two approaches that are conceptually and methodologically distinct. While both can be said to have their origins in social psychology they developed as part of very distinct traditions in the discipline. Yet their shared origins are apparent in their rejection of behaviorist and structuralist explanations of social psychology. As shown by others, integration between the Social Identity perspective and other theoretical approaches is probably not realistic. This however, does not mean that there is no value in exploring the conceptual links and the ways in which the approaches can enhance each other.

Next, given the importance justice, both as process and outcome (Austin 1986) is accorded in land reform (including by land owners), an exploration of differences in its conceptualization could be illuminating. While potentially highly contentious this could make a significant contribution to the understanding of the broader land reform initiative. Coupled with explorations of conceptions of justice could also be an investigation into land owners' perceptions of their status as members of various groups. We saw in the

analysis that when categorized as 'white' land owners at times exhibit the responses more readily associated with low status groups. In a study done almost two decades ago Vestergaard (2001) argued that it is only a minority of white South Africans that were perceiving themselves as a minority. The majority, he argued, were ambivalent towards their white identity. This in turn had implications for what they judged to be fair and what not. Exploring this matter again, and how it relates to perceptions of justice, seems prudent twenty years after Vestergaard's findings.

In terms of methodology and broader conceptualization the Lederach framework, as pointed out, is not the only available within which multi-disciplinary integration can be considered. Others, like Ricigliano's (2102) SAT (Structural, Attitudinal, Transactional) model, could also be usefully explored as frameworks for integration. Such integration, as should be obvious from this study, is not methodologically simple. The Social Identity perspective originated from a particular approach to knowledge construction as did Symbolic Politics (as used here). Existing peacebuilding frameworks, in turn, also developed from their own particular frames of reference and methodologies. The extent to which these methodologically disparate collections of conceptualizations can be integrated, or at least enhanced by each other, can should at some point also be considered.

8.5 Conclusion

The extent to which the research questions have been explored throughout this study has already been considered in the preceding sections. For this conclusion I do not intend to revisit these. As a conclusion I rather offer a personal view of my experience of the study and the beliefs I hold of the land reform imperative in South Africa as a result of this research.

To me this research made it abundantly clear that while land owners oppose some aspects of land reform, they in general express a need for land reform to be concluded. They understand this as a necessity for establishing sustainable relationships. This is an important observation as it highlights their understanding that a sustainable solution in South Africa is an intergroup solution rather than a division-of-material-goods solution.

At the same time the land owners experience significant identity threat as a result of how they perceive the debate to be conducted. It is certainly true that in some cases their perceptions are based on interpretations formed from specific perspectives. But, regardless of how they reach these conclusions, their lived experience is real to them. To deny this is to deny their existential reality.

Finally, I have come to believe that in order for land reform to contribute to a sustainable solution for South Africa we will have to revisit how we conduct this debate. Disagreements are not the biggest challenge to this debate. Different expected outcomes are not even the biggest challenge. If the various role players in this debate reach the stage where they withdraw from difficult conversations because the way in which it is conducted leaves them with the perception that they are not legitimate contributors to the debate simply because of their social identity, the outcome of the process is doomed to failure.

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Addendum A

Interview process and schedule

- Explain the purpose and nature of the study to participants.
- Explain rights (eg. Right to withdraw contributions) and protections (eg. anonymity) of participant
- Request consent from participant, including their signature on the informed consent document.

Introductory questions:

1. How long have you owned or managed the particular piece of land you are currently working on?
2. Have you ever owned other sections of land than this particular one?
3. How did you acquire this piece of land (eg. through market mechanisms, inheritance etc)

Questions relating to social identities

1. When talking and thinking about land reform, do you refer to yourself as a white land owner or as a farmer?
2. Do you think land reform is intended to benefit some at the cost of others? If so, who do you think are intended beneficiaries and who is being disadvantaged?
3. When conversations are being had about land reform, what draws you to the conversations? In other words, based on what do you identify with the conversation?
4. Does land reform conversations have an influence on how you feel about other people? If so, which relationships are influenced?

Questions relating to Symbolic Politics

1. How would you respond to the statement “Most white land owners view land only as a unit of production”?
2. What experiences and arguments influence how you feel about land reform?

3. What do you believe the purpose of land reform to be?

Concluding question (opportunity to offer any other insights not yet suggested)

1. If you have negative experiences or perceptions of land reform, what would change these experiences and/or perceptions?
2. If you had the opportunity to make suggestions to political authorities about land reform, what would you suggest?