

Framing of Land Ownership in *The Herald* Newspaper in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to critically unpack the frames through which the concept of land ownership was discussed in *The Herald* newspaper during the land reform exercise, also known as Third Chimurenga or “Fast Track Land Reform Exercise,” which was earnestly conducted in the period 2000–2008. The potential of the media in general, and *The Herald* newspaper in particular, to mould public opinion cannot be ignored. The article is guided by framing theory in its exploration of land ownership discourses in the Zimbabwean media. Framing theory refers to how the media packages and presents information to the public. Accordingly, the media highlights certain events and places them within a particular context to encourage or discourage certain interpretations. In this way, the media exercises a selective influence on how people view reality. This article argues that land, according to *The Herald* newspaper, belongs to the Black majority or native people of Zimbabwe, and ownership of land was legitimised generally through skin colour and place of birth. In this respect, *The Herald* newspaper took a positive stance toward the inevitability of the Land Reform Programme. However, it did not clearly state whether all Black people had equal access to the land or had the same right to own land. To demonstrate the above, two stories from *The Herald* newspaper, namely: “Land: Central to Liberation Struggle” (18 April 2005); and “Land Reform Pinnacle of the Struggle” (10 August 2004) were purposively sampled. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique used in selecting stories that have particular characteristics within a canon of newspaper stories that are of interest, and which will best enable the researcher to answer research questions. The two stories above were chosen since both focus on land ownership in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: framing theory; land reform; ownership; state media; *The Herald*; Zimbabwe



Introduction

During the pre-colonial period, native Africans in Zimbabwe lived in areas with fertile soils such as Makoni country, which was (later) cut into numerous European farms (Nyagumbo, in Bakare 1993, 43). The native people worked on the land and produced food to subsist themselves. In some cases, they generated surplus produce, which they could then barter trade or sell to others. Bakare (1993) further observes that in the pre-colonial era, land was—and continued to be in the post-colonial epoch—a form of a person's identity and was always regarded as sacred. In view of the latter point, it is therefore crystal clear that loss of land suggests loss of one's fathers and the home of one's childhood (Bakare 1993, 43).

In order to forestall losing these sanctified lands, kings, chiefs and headmen were selected in communities to look after lands and this was done under customary land tenure ownership. Customary land tenure ownership involved the idea that land was owned by the whole community and was at the disposal of individuals of that community. While Africans regarded land as revered in the pre-colonial period, the British, on the other hand, thought otherwise. As long as the land was arable or had minerals, the British always made sure that they possess it. They could even displace the inhabitants forcefully, as underscored by Bakare (1993, 50) when he says:

For Rhodes and his Pioneer Column, inspired from early childhood by traditional legends such as Robin Hood and his band of Merry Men, there was nothing wrong with the idea of fighting for land, even if it was land already belonging to others. The BSAC's desire under Rhodes' leadership to invade Zimbabwe in order to occupy and plunder its mineral resources was, within the context of British culture, an acceptable thing to do.

Implied by the excerpt above, is that the British did not have respect for the laws or tenure systems of Africans. Additionally, one can ultimately argue that the removal of Africans by the British from their traditional communal lands was indeed not a terrible thing in their eyes, because these communal lands were not fenced or clearly marked. As shown above, unmarked land, to the British, meant that it was not owned, thus the traditional African concept of ownership was taken advantage of. It is, therefore, apparent from the language used by Bakare (1993) that the two divergent views on land ownership systems by Africans and the British became the backbone of the British occupation of the native or African people's land. It was, thus, the source of the three revolts, namely the First, the Second and the Third *Zvimurenga* (liberation wars). This article argues that this was the first arena of the debate regarding who the real owner of the Zimbabwean land is.

While the native people of Zimbabwe wanted their land back, because they regarded it as part of their identity, history and livelihood, the British settlers' interest in owning land lay solely in the potential mineral resources. Mining speculation was the primary reason for Rhodes's desire to go north. When the British arrived in what is now called Zimbabwe, they forcefully removed Africans off their land and they pushed them to

what is now known as “reserves”; these reserves were crowded and environmentally degraded (Amanor and Moyo 2008). The establishment of reserves created huge inequalities of land between White commercial farmers and Blacks. White commercial settler farmers were left in control of a hugely disproportionate share of land (Raftopoulos and Mlambo 2009). Mugabe (2001, 36) reiterates this point:

The main basis of our fight with settlers, a fight which began at the very onset of colonialism, had been the national question of land. It informed Zimbabwe’s entire politics, generated a solid support base for the armed struggle with all its attendant hazards, and spurred our fighters on, right up to the bitter end. Land, Land, was the cry—it was also the cry and plea in church. Apart from being the basis of our liberation struggle, its loss was the basis of African poverty and indigence in this country. To this day, alienation remains casually linked to the poverty and backwardness of our people. Equally, to this day, its allocation is largely as shaped by the same forces and decrees.

The above makes four fundamental contributions to the understanding of the land issue in Zimbabwe. The first contribution is that the question of land did not start in the year 2000, as some people and newspaper journalists would like to think or seem to think, but can be traced as far back as the periods of pre- and post-colonisation as Masiwa and Chipungu (2004) highlight in their chapter, “Land Reform Programme in Zimbabwe: Disparity between Policy Design and Implementation” in *Post-independence Land Reform in Zimbabwe: Controversies and Impact on the Economy*:

Land is a natural resource that has always been hotly contested among groups of people living between the Zambezi and the Limpopo. Before the arrival of the first European settlers over a century ago, bloody tribal and ethnic battles were fought for land. The Europeans found two major tribes, Shona and Ndebele living in the now Zimbabwe. The livelihood of the former tribe was based on agricultural and pastoral activities while that of the latter was largely based on highly organised military structures. The colonial conquest of the country by the British in the late 1880s destroyed these systems and subordinated the African people in both political and economic terms. Economic subordination started by the passing of the Land Apportionment Act in 1930, which formalised racial separation of land. Africans lost their coveted land and substantial economic power as they were driven to marginal areas with inherently poor soils and erratic rainfall. (Masiwa and Chipungu 2004, 1)

Masiwa and Chipungu (2004) further say that the passing of a series of repressive laws by the British, which prohibited the Black majority from participating in the mainstream economy, drove the disgruntled majority of Blacks to take up arms and fight a protracted war against the injustices. When the Black majority won political independence in 1980, the new ZANU PF government promised the empowerment of the people by giving them land; and a policy tool identified for this purpose was the Land Redistribution and Resettlement Programme. The first phase of the Land Reform Programme was launched immediately after the attainment of independence in September of 1980, and the second phase came into being at a time when the ruling government was reeling under a number of negative developments (Masiwa and Chipungu 2004, 1). Among such was the

introduction of an Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), whose impact, according to Kanyeze, in Masiwa and Chipungu (2004, 1), on the economy and the general populace was negative. On the other hand, new political parties that were determined to challenge the vanguard ZANU PF government—especially the Movement for Democratic Change—“forced” ZANU PF to embark on a second phase of the Land Resettlement Programme earnestly in the year 2000 in order to ensure their relevance in the Zimbabwean political sphere.

Mutanda, in his article “The Local Media and Zimbabwe’s Land Reform Program” (2012, 264), defines land reform as a purposive change in the way in which agricultural land is held or owned; the methods of cultivation that are employed; or the relation of agriculture to the rest of the economy. Reforms such as these may be proclaimed by a government, by interested groups, or by a revolution. Secondly, the fact that land was taken by the colonisers by force and trickery became the major source of revolt in Africa in general and in Zimbabwe in particular, as Woddis (1960, 1) reiterates:

Both during and since the great scramble for Africa by the Western imperialist powers at the end of the nineteenth century, land-grabbing has been the central aim. By direct seizure, conquest, pressure on chiefs, trickery, swindling, the repudiation of pledges and promises, by every means open to them, the representatives of the European powers took land.

One conclusion that can be drawn from the above is that land in Africa, and in Zimbabwe in particular, was grabbed by the colonisers. Grabbing suggests seizure, stealing or taking away something by force. The linguistic indices indicating that land was grabbed from Africans support the Zimbabwean government’s own vocabulary, which emphasised the invasive nature of colonialism on African land. On the other hand, the wording of Woddis (1960) on how the land was grabbed from Africans questions and complicates the grand-standing attitudes of newspapers in Zimbabwe, who suggest that the colonisation of the African land was a painless process.

The third contribution is that the deprivation or loss of land was and is a cause of extreme poverty levels seen in Africans in general and Zimbabweans in particular today. In other words, loss or robbery of African land consequently led to African impoverishment. Masiwa and Chipungu (2004) consequently emphasise that socially, land reform resettlement programmes were intended to address issues of equity in the distribution of land with a long-term effect of ameliorating poverty among the rural populace. Mugabe (2001, 41) underscores the above when he says that land is the economy and the economy is the land. Moreover, the reason for the wholesale taking of land in so much of Africa was two-fold. Woddis (1960, 8) says the seizure of land was meant:

... to prevent the African peasant from becoming a competitor to the European farmer or plantation owner; and to impoverish the African peasantry to such an extent that the majority of adult males would be compelled to work for the Europeans, in the mines or

on the farms. Thus, not only the enrichment of the Europeans but the deliberate impoverishment of the Africans became a cornerstone of official policy.

And lastly, the inequitable distribution of land, as Raftopoulos and Mlambo (2009) indicate, was an accumulation of gunpowder which later on exploded during the Third Chimurenga. It can, therefore, be argued again that when journalists are reporting about the land issue in Zimbabwe in the 21st century, they should inform readers that the so-called Third Chimurenga is a continuation of the first two *Zvimurenga* (liberation wars/struggles) which were fought before political independence was gained in 1980.

From this brief background, it can be argued that Africans engaged in farming activities even better than the settlers, hence the fear by the British settlers to leave out Africans with pieces of land that would enable Africans or the native people to compete with them (the British) in the market. This is contrary to some media or newspaper reports or to the language of reportage used by some media organisations regarding the Third Chimurenga, namely that Africans could and still cannot do farming better than Europeans. Moreover, Woddis (1960) highlights that land and its ownership is “a touchstone” for the African Movement and this means that African land became the property of the settlers when it was grabbed. It was, in fact, in protest against the seizure of land, that the African National Congress was formed in South Africa in 1912. Mugabe (2001) reiterates the aforementioned point or contribution made by Woddis (1960, 1):

The goal and struggle for self-determination and sovereignty which you [the mass] supported, even at great personal peril for some of you [the mass] included, in fact rested and depended on our sovereign right, access, control and use of those resources which God in [H]is infinite generosity gave us [the people of Zimbabwe].

In addition to the above, Mutanda (2012) highlights that Zimbabwe inherited an unbalanced and racial land tenure system because the majority of the land was still under the ownership of the minority White population. All in all, forty-two thousand (42 000) acres of land were reserved for 2 400 000 Africans, whereas 48 000 acres were reserved for only 234 000 Europeans. The Rhodesians defended their unfair policies by arguing that the calculation of land distribution on a purely arithmetic base was completely unsound because it ignored the following factors:

- Contributions to the national income and other factors which could not be ignored.
- Private capital established at upwards of £250 000 000 invested in European farms on water supplies, fences, conservation works and other capital expenditure.
- The 1959 total gross output of £52 400 000 from European agriculture in Southern Rhodesia compared with £14 7000 000 from African farms. Tobacco alone provided £27 700 000 of vital exports.
- European agriculture provision of 230 000 Africans with employment (40 per cent of the total African labour force). (Southern Rhodesia Legislative Assembly Second Report of the Select Committee on Resettlement of Natives, 16 August 1960, 49, in Mutanda 2012, 266)

The land tenure tilted land in favour of the Europeans in spite of the fact that they constituted an “insignificant proportion” of the total population (Mutanda 2012). The Land Tenure Commission headed by Rukuni advised in 1994 that it was needless for the majority of White farmers to cling to huge farms they could never use productively, while potential farmers were desperate for land (Chitsaka 1995, in Mutanda 2012). Discussion of the above is vital in that whenever journalists write about land in Africa in general and in Zimbabwe in particular, they should bring this historical framework into context. This historical context will make journalists aware or mindful of the frames or language of reportage to use in order to capture almost all details regarding the land issue in Zimbabwe. The language in which Mutanda (2012), Masiwa and Chipungu (2004), Mugabe (2001), Bakare (1993) and Woddis (1960) narrate the necessity of the land reform, openly suggests that language and naming are political terrains of struggle. Language is not freed of the values it contains, as is suggested in neoliberal talk.

Theoretical Framework

The core idea of Social Construction Theory, according to Wendy (2009), is that news is dependent on contingent aspects of people’s social selves. Implied by this theory is that an issue could not have existed, had people not constructed or invented it. Had people been a different kind of society with different needs, values or interests, they might well have put together a different kind of issue or reality, or presented the issue at hand differently. What is further suggested by this theory is that news is a social construction of reality and this construction or organisation is done or framed through language. A frame, according to Chapman and Lupton (1994), Entman (2003), Iyengar and Simon (1993), is a means of packaging and positioning an issue so that it conveys a certain meaning.

Chapman and Lupton (1994, 12) define framing as the emphases placed around particular issues that seek to describe what this issue is really about, and as the process by which someone packages a group of facts to create a story. Schon and Rein (1994, xiii) define frames as the broadly shared beliefs, values and perspectives familiar to the members of a societal culture (and likely to endure in that culture over long periods of time), on which individuals and institutions draw in order to give meaning, sense, and normative direction to their thinking and action in policy matters. Framing does not only define an issue, but also suggests solutions. Thus, if we alter the definition of problems, then the response also changes (Wallack 1993, 82). In a nutshell, a frame is a collection of anecdotes/stories and stereotypes that individuals rely on to understand and respond to events or issues. It is an inevitable process of selective influence over the individual’s perception of the meanings attributed to words or phrases. Frames or languages also define the packaging of an element of rhetoric in such a way as to encourage certain interpretations and to discourage others.

Specifically, frames or languages in political news call attention to some aspects of reality, while obscuring other elements, which might lead audiences to have different reactions. In this way, framing or language becomes an important mechanism by which

ideology is transmitted through news (Akhavan-Majid and Ramaprasad 1998). News, thus, is never a vehicle for transmitting facts but a source through which institutionalised ideology is conveyed. Consequently, the language of news reporting never exists in a political, economic and ideological vacuum but serves as a filter to organise the reality.

In view of the above, Entman (2003, 52) avers that the language of reportage can be examined or identified in the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments. Consequently, in order to make the frame or language function for political and ideological purposes, journalists make use of many devices in news reporting. Those techniques include: the choice of words used to depict participants and issues; the manner in which issues are framed; the tone and emphasis of the report; the way a news story is organised; the selection and omission of events; and the use of typical labels for persons, events and situations (Durham 1998).

What follows is a textual analysis of the reportage on land and ownership in *The Herald* newspaper in order to ascertain how it packages and positions the issue. Analyses of the stories are done under the following sections: linguistic analysis; omission analysis; limiting debate analysis; and sources analysis. Entman (2003, 52) suggests that a textual analysis of the reportage of an issue like land reform looks at how language has been used in defining problems by determining what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits; diagnose causes by identifying the forces that create the problem; make moral judgments by evaluating causal agents and their effects; and suggest remedies by offering and justifying treatments for the problems.

Framing the Concept of Land and Ownership in *The Herald* Newspaper

The Herald, according to Chibuwe (2016) was founded in 1891 by W. E. Fairbridge as the *Mashonaland Times*. It changed its name to *Zambesia Times* before becoming the *Rhodesia Herald*. At independence in 1980, it became *The Herald*. During colonial times, it was a subsidiary of the Argus Group owned Rhodesia Printing and Publishing Company. Chibuwe (2016) further says that newspapers under the company were tightly controlled by the colonial regime through a plethora of restrictive laws. After independence, the new government set up the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust and, through a deed of donation from the Nigerian government, acquired a controlling stake of 51% in Zimpapers, the former Argus Group (Saunders 1999). The Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust was supposed to be a buffer between the government and Zimpapers, but due to financial constraints it became reliant on government funding, which resulted in the government side-lining the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust. The government started hiring and firing editors. In view of the above historical background of *The Herald* newspaper, it can be concluded that it is state owned since it gets most of its funding from the government. Being state owned also implies that the content reflected in the newspaper perpetuates and supports the government's ideology.

Below is a story-framing analysis of the concept of land and ownership in *The Herald* story “Land: Central to Liberation Struggle,” written by Caesar Zvayi on 18 April 2005. It is important to note that the story was published on a day that the country celebrated independence. Every year on 18 April Zimbabweans remember the anniversary of their country’s independence from foreign rule; the day on which a presidential speech is read out to the public, which tallies with current national themes and the nation’s history (Bute and Harmer 1997). Woddis (1960) states that land was the route to African revolt and in that respect, *The Herald* story significantly narrates Zimbabwe’s history and one of its achievements—the return of land to its rightful owners, the Black majority.

Land: Central to liberation struggle

By Caesar Zvayi

TODAY, after 25 years of independence and democratic government, the central objective of the liberation struggle – the return of land to its rightful owners, the black majority, that had been stolen – is still far from reality.

Land was the rallying point of the liberation struggle as it is the basis of our survival as a people.

The importance of land was summed up by Thomas Jefferson when he said that "the Africans land is much more than a factor of production as we are also spiritually anchored in the lands of our forefathers."

This is why land is such an emotional issue to both Zimbabweans and Britons.

The greatest accomplishments in distributing this critical resource can be understood by looking at the historical background that has made land such a thorny issue.

Robert Cary, in his 1970 book, "Charter Royal", reveals that as far back as the early 1880s, the British South Africa Company (BSAC) had reserved 50 percent of the lands north of the Limpopo not only in their gold deposits, but in their potential to support "thousand-tonne farmers and their families".

This was typical of the colonial period when the economy revolved around pastoral and arable farming; the same "gold" which continues to buttress our economy today.

Afterwards gold deposits failed to equal those of the Rand and gold in South Africa; the settlers began growing maize and cotton on land that was approximately 100 million acres in Mashonaland alone.

This inhuman dispossession forced the people of Mashonaland to migrate and move up arms, against the settlers between 1896 and 1897.

The First Chimurenga was followed by the promulgation of the Land Apportionment Act, which was designed to take more land from the black majority beginning with the so-called Native Reserve Areas.

This law created the infamous "native reserves" whereby dispossessed African families were herded like cattle.

The native reserves were predominantly located in agro-ecological regions four and five which are characterised by unreliable rainfall and poor soils.

From 1900 to 1911, the number of settlers' Gold farms increased from 600 to 607; and by 1914, white farmers who made up only 3 percent of the population controlled 75 percent of the most productive land.

The settlers were confined to 23 percent of the land (the native reserves).

The settlers set up a commission in 1925 to see how best they could use more of the country for themselves and their children; the commission was known as the Morris Carter Commission.

This Commission recommended the increased marginalisation of the indigenous people culminating in the Land Apportionment Act of 1931.

The Act excluded Africans from agro-ecological regions four and five, which were considered to be the best for agriculture, and which continued to buttress our economy today.

The African majority was, thus, confined to the poorest lands where they eked a bare existence on very small plots. Most of the people had no choice but to migrate to the cities in search of work.

At the end of the second European war historically known as a "world war" brought an influx of European settlers who were sent over and for their service to the British Crown. These immigrants were forced off arable land into the drier regions.

The Land Apportionment Act was amended in 1951 giving rise to the draconian Land Husbandry Act which formalised forced labour and limited African families to have only cattle on extra hectares of land. A lot of families had to leave extra lands confiscated by the white loot committees.

The Land Apportionment Act was again amended in 1961 when one-third of the land in Rhodesia was in the hands of a few thousand whites.

The Rhodesian government passed the Tribal Trust Lands (TTL) Act in 1962. The Act provided for the division of native black lands that were then herded into the reserved TTLs.

The resultant high population densities in the TTLs led to overgrazing, overfarming, overproductivity, overstocking and overgrazing all of which entrenched poverty in the African communities.

The central rallying point of the liberation struggle was the return of land that were lying idle.

From 1960 to 1971, the number of settlers' Gold farms increased from 607 to 70; and by 1971, white farmers who made up only 3 percent of the population controlled 75 percent of the most productive land.

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As a result between 1980 and 1990, the Zanu PF Government compulsorily acquired 70 000 farms out of the envisaged 160 000 or 3.5 million hectares of land. When the 160 year period lapsed in 1990, the Land Acquisition Act was amended to remove the constitutional restrictions to land acquisition.

Battle lines were thus drawn between the people and the white-dominated Supreme Court of Zimbabwe. In Harare on January 14, Chief Justice Anthony Gubbay delivered the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Amendment) (No. 11) Bill setting out the amendment of Section 16 of the Constitution that deals with "protection from deprivation of property" as "described".

The Constitutional Court gave the State the sole right to determine the prices of commercial farmland whenever it compulsorily bought land for resettlement.

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The affected white farmers were not to be allowed recourse to the courts if they felt the prices were unfair.

Justice Gubuya openly said he would strike down the amendment if ever it was adopted by Parliament.

Thus, began the protracted fight between the white judges and the Government that sought to correct the perceived constitutional infirmities of the white judges, among them Justice Ferney Blakie and Nick McNally unconvincingly left the bench after failing to rule the spirit in the letter of the law in matters of land reform.

With the amendment to the constitution Act provided for the speedy acquisition of land, the Government did not have the money to pay for the farms.

It, thus, had to honour the financial pledges they had made at the Lancaster House conference.

The Conservative government of John Major, which had been elected in 1992, had lost the election in 1997, was defeated by Tony Blair's Labour party in 1997 and the rest, as they say, is history.

On November 8 1997, the new British Minister for Overseas Development, Clare Short, wrote a letter to the then Minister of Agriculture, Cde Kambiri Kasang, saying the Labour government would honour the pledges made by Thatcher and Major.

The Zimbabwean Government was left with no choice but to amend the Land Acquisition Act to allow for the expropriation of land for the infrastructure developments on the farms.

In June 1998, thousands of restive land-surveyor communal farmers from Zimbabwe's rural areas and the urban areas, demanding white-held commercial farms as their parishes had run out.

A spate of copycat occupations followed in various parts of the country.

The Cde Kambiri, which had the unenviable duty of placating the restive populace, persuaded the communal farmers to be patient and organised a

Land Owners' Conference that was held in December 1998.

The conference, however, failed to yield positive results, leaving the Government to conclude that no alternative was required for resettlement.

The British instead thought it was more economical to fund an opposition party to topple the ZANU-PF Government than to implement land reform.

The fast track and reform programme was launched on July 15 2000. It was undertaken in an accelerated manner with reliance on domestic resources.

The Rural Land

ZIMBABWE'S SILVER JUBILEE
CELEBRATING
25 YEARS
OF
INDEPENDENCE AND DEMOCRACY

Occupiers (Protection from Eviction) Act [Chapter 20-26] was passed on February 4 2002 to protect the resettled farmers from evictions.

On November 11 last year, the Supreme Court upheld these land acquisition laws.

Justice Luke Malaba upheld the laws in a ruling in a case instituted by a white commercial farmer, Mr George Pretorius Quinrell, who was contesting the acquisition of the farm he held.

Quinrell wanted the court to nullify the acquisition laws passed by Parliament, he challenged the

constitutionality of the Land Acquisition Amendment Act, the preliminary notice and the legitimate notice and Cabinet at the time of the acquisition of "new" farm.

Fear four Administrative Court judges were also appointed to deal with any to expedite the clearing of cases.

That the claims by MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai that without the MDC there would have been no land reform and were never settled has been officially delivered land to the people.

Over the past five years 5 890 farms covering an area of 7 204 660 hectares have been resettled. A total of 1 446 farm families have been resettled under the A1 model on 2 611 farms (4 236 076 hectares); whilst 14 500 people have been resettled under the A2 model on 2 333 farms (2 329 283 hectares).

This massive empowerment has transformed the agricultural landscape as production has picked up on the resettled farms.

However, as to what detractors in the opposition say, the newly resettled farmers are not failed "wild mushrooms" since they have had only a few drought-stricken seasons on the farms.

They have thus not yet matched the production levels achieved by white commercial farmers over a 10-year period.

The ZANU-PF is bound to change in the near future as the ZANU-PF Government has and is prohibiting limited basic infrastructure such as boreholes, diphants, latrines, schools and farms, support to the resettled farmers.

The Government has also made an undertaking to provide secondary education such as schools, as well as medical and rural service centres as soon as resources become available.

As we mark our Silver Jubilee of independence we have every reason to celebrate the correction of the historical injustices that had entrenched poverty among the black majority.

Figure 1: *The Herald* story “Land: Central to Liberation Struggle” 18 April 2005 (Retrieved from *The Herald* Library on 20 November 2011).

On how Land and Ownership should be Perceived by Readers

The dominant or surface reading that *The Herald* story “Land: Central to Liberation Struggle” by Caesar Zvayi wants its readers to understand and accept, is that the Land Reform Exercise was carried out because the government wanted to give land back to its *rightful owners, the Black majority* (18 April 2005). In order to convey this reading to its readers, *The Herald* newspaper, through Caesar Zvayi, selected and used certain words in the story as shown below.

Linguistic Analysis

Words are very precise building blocks that form the basis for all communicated ideas. They hold truths or lies but are always the products of expression. People express themselves not only through what they say, but how they say it. Kress and Leeuwen (1996, 2) state that the arrangement of words (syntax) in a news story affects the meaning so created and syntax allows an idea to be established in any number of ways. The native people, during the colonial era, were deprived of their land by the colonisers, the British. The removal of the native (inborn) people from their land culminated in a protracted armed struggle. This struggle was meant to liberate land, amongst many other issues, which according to the story “Land: Central to Liberation Struggle” was reported as being *central*. In 2005, the government of ZANU (PF) was still in the process of repossessing land from White commercial farmers and redistributing it to the native people of Zimbabwe. It was, therefore, an opportune time for *The Herald*—through its reporter, Caesar Zvayi—to relay the message of land as being the backbone of the liberation struggle; especially on Independence Day which was being celebrated on 18 April 2005 (the day the story was published).

Chapman and Lupton (1994) define a frame as a means of packaging and positioning an issue so that it conveys a certain meaning. Framing is seen by Chapman and Lupton (1994) as the emphases placed around particular issues that seek to describe what the issue is really about, and as the process by which someone packages a group of facts to create a story. Willem (2004a) quoting Brookes (1995), states that in the study of media discourses, headlines are important in the sense that readers often tend to focus on them rather than on the contents. Headlines serve as summaries of news articles and emphasise what the journalist considers to be the most important or most remarkable points of an article. So, in an attempt to state the historical surroundings of land issue in Zimbabwe, *The Herald* newspaper used the headline “Land: Central to Liberation Struggle” in order to capture the message that land was at the centre of African revolt (Woddis 1960) or was the pinnacle of the struggle (*The Herald* story “Land Reform Pinnacle of the Struggle,” 10 August 2004).

In view of the above, *The Herald* newspaper through the headline “Land: Central to Liberation Struggle” endeavoured to create in the minds of its readers the idea that the major reason for engaging in the liberation struggle was the ownership of land, as

underpinned by Woddis (1960) who says that land was the root of revolt in Africa. This idea is augmented by President Robert Mugabe (2001, 36):

The main basis of our fight with settlers, a fight which began at the very onset of colonialism, had been the national question of land. It informed Zimbabwe's entire politics, generated a solid support base for the armed struggle with all its attendant hazards, and spurred our fighters on, right up to the bitter end. Land, Land, was the cry—it was also the cry and plea in church.

The Herald newspaper captured the above idea through the careful inclusion of the word *Central*. The word *central* is synonymous with “innermost” or “pinnacle” in another story in *The Herald*, 10 August 2004. The ultimate aim of the selected headline was to show to readers or consumers that land in Southern Rhodesia was the innermost or fundamental thing that Africans wanted to repossess when they engaged in a fight with the settlers or colonisers. What then follows is the message that land reform was aimed at returning or restoring land to the Black majority. What is more, the so-called Black majority are the ones labelled or denoted as the *rightful owners* in the story “Land: Central to Liberation Struggle.” The story “Land: Central to Liberation Struggle” furthermore states:

TODAY, after 25 years of independence and democracy, Zimbabweans celebrate the realization of the primary objective of the liberation struggle, the return of land to its rightful owners; the Black majority that had been disenfranchised for over a century. (*The Herald*, “Land: Central to Liberation Struggle,” 18 April 2005)

What is, therefore, crystal clear from the above excerpt, is that land should be given back to its *rightful* or lawful owners—the Black majority. This land has for over a century been in the hands of illegal settlers, the British. Moreover, the word *return* in the extract above suggests the repossession of the land that had been stolen or robbed (Woddis 1960) and was for over a decade in the illegal hands of the settlers or the colonisers who, according to the story, are a minority group.

Omission Analysis

In emphasising certain frames, newspapers can omit or deliberately choose not to use other words that could result in different meanings. Omissions occur when important information is not reported or is reported incompletely. In other words, omission can be taken or viewed as news that should have been reported but is left out of the news people read, see or hear. When important news is omitted, readers get a slanted or distorted perspective of an issue, as Jefferson in Purvis (2001, 9) comments:

The man who never looks into a newspaper is better informed than he who reads the newspaper; in as much as he who knows nothing is nearer to truth than he whose mind is filled with falsehoods and errors.

Obviously, no newspaper can cover every newsworthy story from every possible perspective. However, if important stories or issues like land reform are incompletely reported, or presented with facts that are not adequately verified, then the obligation to seek the truth is undermined. In that case the information that is omitted can be as important as the information that is published. While it is well acknowledged that land reform was the pinnacle of the struggle, in *The Herald* stories dated 10 August 2004 and 18 April 2005, the newspaper through its language of reportage did not clearly explain whether all citizens of Zimbabwe (the Black majority) were entitled to this land, despite their political affiliations. More importantly, the story “Land: Central to Liberation Struggle” was biased in the sense that it concealed the fact that not everybody viewed land as central in Zimbabwe. President Mugabe (2001, 120) put these different attitudes towards land in historical perspective when he observed that there were people who cherished the Third Chimurenga and some who did not, or who would even do anything to thwart its success, when he rhetorically asked:

Have we told them [our people] that the land is being brought to them by a ZANU (PF) government? Have we told them who it is that opposes land reforms, who it is that is fighting for the continued occupation of **our** land by a mere 4 000 White commercial farmers?

The quotation above helps to portray the failure of Zvayi’s story to clearly enlighten readers that the struggle for land was waged on different ideological planes. The extract above furthermore seeks to illustrate in a very subtle manner the idea that it was the Movement for Democratic Change (which happened to be the main opposition party then) that was trying to distract land reform. However, this culminated in the deference (Derrida 1998) of the intended meaning when some readers and scholars, like Willem (2004b) and Chari (2008), began to label land reform as a political gimmick by the ZANU (PF) leadership. Moreover, this omission created a lot of challenges, especially during the distribution stages of the land.

The language of reportage in the story “Land: Central to Liberation Struggle” of 18 April 2005 in *The Herald* failed to portray to readers who the *rightful owners* were/are amongst the native people of Zimbabwe, or who decides who the rightful owners are.

Limiting Debate Analysis

Generally, people in positions of power often try to use the media to promote their positions or their spin on events or issues. The *status quo* hopes that their interpretation of events is accepted, rather than questioned by the media. In this regard, they could make readers or citizens believe that their view of events is/should be shared by all right-thinking people. Sometimes the media, or at least some media, knowingly or unknowingly act as debate-limiting agents. According to Curran Gurevitch, and Woollacott (1982, 21), they (the media) act in tandem with the dominant institutions in society by accepting the official positions without adequately scrutinising the assertions of those officials. Consequently, the media thus reproduce the viewpoints of dominant

institutions not as one among a number of alternative perspectives, but as the central and obvious or natural perspective (Curran et al. 1982). According to adherents of the Marxist political economy, in the mass media there is a tendency to avoid the unpopular and unconventional and to draw on values and assumptions which are most valuable and most widely legitimated (Murdock and Golding 1977, 37).

The claim in the headline that land is “Central to Liberation Struggle” is to a greater extent substantiated in the story. *The Herald* revealed that the Black majority were forcibly confined to 23% of the land with the poorest soils. The native reserves, according to *The Herald* story and Brown (1959, 5), had poor soils, usually the poorer types of granite-sand known technically as Class III land; while the European land contained nearly all the areas of fertile soil in the colony. Accordingly, the prime reason for the struggle or land reform was, therefore, to correct the colonial inequalities (*The Herald* story “Land: Central to Liberation Struggle,” 18 April 2005) in terms of the total land space and the fertility of the land.

The other reason that was set forth in the story above was that land is a sacred resource in the sense that it is a form of a person’s identity, history and livelihood (Bakare 1993, 46) and as such should be given to its rightful people. To underpin this fact, *The Herald* story quoted Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa as saying: “[T]o us Africans, land is much more than a factor of production as we are also spiritually anchored in the lands of our fathers.” As a result, the removal of the Black majority from their lands also implies delinking them from their spiritual fathers, popularly known as ancestors. Ultimately the Land Reform Programme was meant to reunite the Black majority with their ancestors. What is, however, not clear or omitted in the story is how the Black majority was going to be linked to their ancestors/spiritual fathers. Whether people were going to be resettled in their original places of genesis or otherwise, was not clearly enunciated.

Sources Analysis

Very often in journalism it is not the actual reporting that is biased but rather the very sources themselves. According to Sigal (1973), it is more objective to look at who the sources are instead of trying to interpret what the sources are saying. Nothing legitimises a piece of news like commentary from an acclaimed expert or government official. People like thinking that they are getting the story straight from the horse’s mouth.

The story or the language used by the reporter of *The Herald* story emanated from multiple sources, as evidenced by the introduction of the voice of the Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa. This introduction, to some extent, improved the validity of the story, since the incorporation of a different voice is usually seen by some readers as an index of independence; implying that it is outside the ZANU PF party structures. On the other hand, the story was marred by the absence of opposing voices, especially on some of the grey areas such as who are the liberators of the land in Zimbabwe? Again, failure by the story to include other opposing or divergent voices in the country with

regards to who should decide on the characteristics of the people to be resettled or what criteria should be used in identifying the people to be resettled, put out of sight a lot of information that could have made the story more valued by its readers.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to examine the language or frames through which the concept of land and ownership was discussed in the state-owned media in Zimbabwe. *The Herald* newspaper was used in this exploration. A textual analysis of *The Herald* stories “Land: Central to Liberation Struggle” (18 April 2005) and “Land Reform Pinnacle of the Struggle” (10 August 2004) revealed firstly that Blacks (the native people of Zimbabwe and not the White race) were the rightful owners of the Zimbabwean land, since they are the ones who had been displaced of their land during colonialism. Secondly, from the two stories that were analysed textually, it was not clear whether the so-called Black majority was referring to all the native people of Zimbabwe, despite their political affiliation. This endorses the framing theory that specific undue emphasis on certain aspects may present a biased or incomplete truth.

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