

Mining the Truth: Representation of Land and Land Redistribution in Zimbabwe in the *Daily News*

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to scrutinise the way in which the concepts of land and land redistribution were discussed in the private media in Zimbabwe during the Zimbabwe land reform exercise – dubbed the “third Chimurenga” – that took place in the period 2000–2008. This study makes use of the framing theory. The framing theory is an adaptation of the agenda-setting theory and it talks about the way in which the media diverts the attention of audiences from the importance of an issue to what it wants to project; it places the issue in a field of meaning. This article firstly argues that although the ZANU-PF-led government stated that land was going to be redistributed to the landless black majority, the private media in general and the *Daily News* in particular reported that it was the black minority (the elite class) who obtained most of the land at the expense of the poor and middle-class black majority. Secondly, it argues that the land redistribution exercise was not meant to correct colonial land imbalances but was instead used by the ZANU-PF-led government as a means to avenge the referendum which they had lost in February 2000. The referendum was perceived as intending to change the Constitution in favour of the ZANU-PF. Lastly, this article argues that land, according to the *Daily News*, was supposed to be given to people (regardless of their race) who were making or going to make the land productive and not the poor, landless black majority. In order to authenticate the above claims and arguments, a number of the *Daily News* stories – purposively sampled during the period – will be used as examples.

Keywords: redistribution, land, private media, *Daily News*, Zimbabwe

Introduction – The *Daily News* Newspaper

The *Daily News* is a private or independent newspaper because it is independent of the government. Being independent of the Government means that the *Daily News* does not receive funding from the Government of Zimbabwe. It is therefore indirectly controlled or influenced ideologically by the government. However, it is dependent both on advertising revenue and on individuals who represent narrow class interests and it is aligned with corporate interests. In terms of content, the *Daily News* aims to inform and challenge conventional opinion (conventional opinion as reflected in the state-owned media).

The newspaper is guided by a neoliberal ideology and plays the role of a watchdog or the Fourth Estate. The term “watchdog journalism” refers to forms of investigative activist journalism aimed at holding accountable public personalities and institutions whose functions have an impact on social and political life (Wasibord 2000). The *Daily News* can thus be characterised as exposure journalism in the public interest. In view of the above, it can be noted that most Zimbabweans perceive the *Daily News* as a newspaper which exposes truth all the time on various issues in general and the land reform programme in particular. This is exemplified by the report, “Press bombing is misdirected anger” by Muwoni (2001) (see Figure 1).

In the report above, Muwoni commented on the way the *Daily News* reported on the feelings of Zimbabwean citizens following the death of the Democratic Republic of Congo President Laurent Kabila. He says that, “To *The Daily News*; I say keep up the good work lest we become a nation of pretenders, you honestly and accurately presented the real initial reaction of most Zimbabweans to Kabila’s death” as opposed to the State media which “has become common knowledge that the State-controlled media will go to any length to paint a rosy picture of the situation in this country even though there is evidence everywhere testifying to the fact that Zimbabwe has become a stinking mess. There is a combination of wishful thinking and self-deception on a grand scale” (*Daily News* 2003).

Muwoni implied that the *Daily News* was bombed by the ZANU-PF because at a time when the economic and political situation in Zimbabwe was worsening owing to the continued legitimacy and governance crisis the country was facing, and that the ZANU-PF-led government wanted to deny Zimbabweans alternative sources of news and views and made sure that what the government was doing could not be properly and adequately exposed to public debate and scrutiny on a daily basis. This message is subtly stated by Muwoni (2001) when he says that, “*The Daily News* simply informed you [ZANU-PF] of what the people were feeling and saying, so bombing their printing press was misdirected anger.” Furthermore, the implied idea is that ZANU-PF hates to be told the truth and by extension does not like to see or hear the populace being fed the truth.

Press bombing is misdirected anger

I FAIL to understand the craziness that has gripped even the minds of the so-called intellectuals.

Accusations and protests directed towards *The Daily News* over the publication of a story about the way Zimbabweans reacted to the death of President Laurent Kabila of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) simply reflect the unwarranted and unfortunate politicisation of every facet of Zimbabwean life.

How can anyone try to draw a line between Zanu PF and MDC simply because one smiled or shed tears for Kabila?

Some people will never cease to amaze!

My feelings are that the accusations and protests are from people who actually rejoiced at the death of Kabila, and not *The Daily News*. They are trying to defend themselves.

The newspaper simply presented the mood it captured as indeed most people were jubilant.

In fact, Heritage Zimbabwe,

the government, ex-combatants and the general populace must applaud *The Daily News* for exposing the true picture of what most Zimbabweans are feeling.

I for one was actually sickened by the fact that I came across far much more people who rejoiced than those who expressed sorrow.

While I acknowledge that people have a right to express their feelings both negative and positive, I do not see any justifiable reason which warrants rejoicing in a person's death.

The painful way in which Kabila died represents a serious violation of his right to life.

The very nature of the assassination resulted in not just Kabila's death, but also that of the bodyguard who shot him.

What a double tragedy as two lives were needlessly lost.

Whatever wrong Kabila could have done to Zimbabwe, at least he deserved genuine tears of sorrow for the unjustifiable loss of his life.

Every person whether a pastor, a politician or whoever, is fallible . . . and Kabila is no exception. To imagine oneself dying the way Kabila did even for the most serious crime would be unheard of.

We might try to be exceedingly reasonable or whatever, but we will never be able to justify the villainous assassination of Kabila.

In any case who had tried him in a court of law and found him guilty of the wrongdoings we claim he did?

Let me register my contempt to most Zimbabweans out there who rejoiced at Kabila's death. How would they feel?

Life is precious and we must learn to value it.

To *The Daily News*, I say keep up the good work lest we become a nation of pretenders. You honestly and accurately presented the real initial reaction of most Zimbabweans to Kabila's death.

I was also sickened by the jubilation, it was real.

The only wrong picture that could have been painted would have been reporting that people received the news sorrowfully. The few interviewed people on ZTV1 do not flatter anyone.

Definitely after the widespread publicised condemnation of *The Daily News* who would risk being seen on national television saying he or she found the death of Kabila something to smile about.

To Zimbabweans I would like to say let's see life beyond face value and to Heritage Zimbabwe, the war veterans and Professor Jonathan Moyo, I say leave *The Daily News* alone and reprimand the people they claim to represent.

The Daily News simply informed you of what the people were feeling and saying, so bombing their printing press was misdirected anger.

L Muwoni
Chegutu

Figure 1: The *Daily News* report “Press bombing is misdirected anger” (Muwoni 2001)

That it was the ZANU-PF who bombed the printing press of the *Daily News* is further underscored by the *Daily News* in the report “Press bombed” dated 31 January 2001 which was written by the *Daily News* Staff Reporter. The reporter said that “the bombing came after the war veterans’ burnt copies of the newspaper”. Trevor Ncube, the Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of the *Zimbabwe Independent* also blamed the government for the explosion. He claimed that Mugabe “have lost the battle for the hearts and minds of the people; kill and maim are the tactics they are going to use” (Ncube 2006). The simple message of the quotation above is that the *Daily News* was bombed because it tells the truth. This report is strategically placed and analysed at the beginning of this article because the story sets the *Daily News* apart as a newspaper that was persecuted for telling the truth. The reports frame the newspaper as a victim that needs to be sympathised with.

Language of Land and Distribution in the *Daily News*

Woddis (1960, 3) pointed out that when Africans were deprived of their land, they were pushed to the so-called “Native Area[s]”. These Native Areas or Reserves as they were and are popularly known even today had “poor soils, usually the poorer

types of granite-sand, known technically as Class III land; while the European Area contained nearly all the areas of fertile soil in the colony” (Brown 1959, 5). These “Native Purchase Areas” – supposedly suitable regions of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) for developing an African “middle class of farmers” – were situated in hot, malaria-infested areas, in which great illness and suffering were prevalent among the people settling there owing to the lack of clinics and hospitals within easy reach. Other reserves had soil that was so broken and rocky that agriculture was impossible over most of the area (Brown 1959, 23). On the other hand, the colonisers or Europeans who were a minority owned vast pieces of arable land. Brown (1959, 24) who was a former land development officer in Southern Rhodesia said that:

There is a surfeit [surplus/excess] of land in the European area; and many European farmers can and do make a handsome living off their thousands of acres by improving and developing only a few of them.

In view of the above land distribution situation, the ZANU-PF-led government embarked on a fast-track land reform programme in 2000 in order to redress these land disparities which were mostly between white and black people. The *Daily News*, however, reported in most of its stories that the land redistribution exercise that was embarked on by the government of Zimbabwe was not meant to correct colonial land imbalances but to avenge the lost February 2000 referendum which was meant to change the constitution in favour of the ZANU-PF. Mutanda (2013) also argued that the ZANU-PF-led government was reluctant to deal with the land question despite the fact that many rural people were crowded in the reserves and that in 2000 it awakened to its waning popularity after the referendum defeat which coincided with the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999.

The *Daily News* claims that the constitution was crafted in such a way that white commercial farms were going to be taken away without any compensation. The fact that this constitution was rejected in the 2000 referendum by the majority was blamed on white commercial farmers who, according to the ZANU-PF as reported by the *Daily News* (Staff Reporters 2000) in the story “Ex-fighters raid minister’s farm”, “had influenced the electorate to vote against the draft because it contained a proposal empowering the government to seize land without compensation.” In a nutshell, the newspaper saw the justifications or reasons cited by the ZANU-PF-led government for conducting the land redistribution exercise as unfounded. That the land reform exercise was meant to give land to the landless black majority was further denied by the *Daily News* as shown in the report “Cornered deputy minister denies leasing farm” by Godfrey Moyo (2000) (see Figure 2).

Cornered deputy minister denies leasing farm

From Godfrey Moyo
in Bulawayo

A DEPUTY minister facing a group of angry war veterans threatening to invade white-owned and government farms in Matabeleland, last Wednesday denied he leased a government farm.

Deputy Minister of Energy and Transport, Zenzo Nsimbi's strenuous denial came amid threats by former fighters in Bulawayo that they would seize land in the Marula Block of Matabeleland South.

The war veterans, defying instructions from the government, invaded two white-owned farms in Marula Block at the weekend.

Nsimbi is among top people, in-

cluding Mines, Environment and Tourism Minister Simon Moyo, allocated farms in Marula ahead of needy villagers.

"I don't own a farm," said Nsimbi.

At a meeting in Bulawayo, war veterans threatened to occupy any farm, including those acquired by the government.

Matabeleland ex-fighters, who until recently had not invaded farms, have gone on a rampage, with President Mugabe's blessing, they claim.

They accused Mugabe of having failed to educate people on the role of ex-combatants in the liberation war. That, they said, had resulted in society not respecting them.

Said Collen Ndlovu, the secretary-general of Zimbabwe National Lib-

eration War Veterans' Association: "President Mugabe did not teach people politics. We only saw him get into Parliament, from there he got into a plane and flew around the world."

Members of the Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) told the war veterans at Marula Farmers Hall that they would not surrender land to them under duress.

CFU's executive officer Ben Zietsman said the war veterans had already invaded two commercial farms in Marula and Figtree and were threatening to go for more.

Police, Zietsman said, had promised to evict the trespassers.

"There is nothing much we can do but to appeal to the laws of the country," said Zietsman.

Figure 2: The *Daily News* report "Cornered deputy minister denies leasing farm" (Moyo 2000)

Preferred Readings

The dominant message that Godfrey Moyo, the writer of the report "Cornered deputy minister denies leasing farm" wanted to convey was that the beneficiaries of the land reform programme were not the landless black majority, but ZANU-PF elites such as Zenzo Nsimbi, the then Deputy Minister of Energy and Transport. Black people without land are portrayed as the losers whereas those who already had land, the "land full black minority", are depicted as greedy because they want more land. This idea is underscored by the Zimbabwe Liberators' Platform (2004) that says:

It gradually became clear that the old nationalist parties simply wanted to take power, change the name, flag and anthem and put blacks into positions where whites had been before. These old parties did not want radical change in a way that would open up opportunities for the masses of people.

What is significant in the excerpt above is that among the black people who were elected after independence there arose an elite minority class which took the place of the erstwhile colonial white classes in exploiting its comrades through the ownership of several farms as put forth in the stories "Cornered deputy minister denies leasing farm" (Moyo 2000) and "Sabina Mugabe, sons grab farms" (Bote 2003) (see Figure 3).

Word Choice Analysis

In order to convey to readers the message that it was mostly the influential people who benefited from the so-called land redistribution exercise as opposed to the landless, poor black majority, the reporters of the stories “Cornered deputy minister denies leasing farm” (Moyo 2000) and “Sabina Mugabe, sons grab farms” (Bote 2003), used the words *top*, *Ministers names* and the phrase *needy villagers*. The reporter says that, “Nsimbi is among top people, including [the then] Mines, Environment and Tourism Minister Simon Khaya Moyo, allocated farms in Marula Block ahead of needy villagers.” The word *top* signifies people at the apex of power. These are the people who walk in the corridors of political power and who are the powerful few or the status quo as shown in the quotation above. In order to clear any vagueness of the people being denoted by the word *top* the reporter went on naming the government ministers who are being referred to in the report as the *top* people. The report reveals that it is these top government officials who have amassed large tracts of land at the expense of the *needy villagers*. Chinodya in The Budding Writers Association of Zimbabwe (2004) accentuates this latter point when he says that, “The once flourishing farmhouses and barns were now for the ‘chefs’ who drove Mercedes Benzes and Pajeros . . . [and] some were interested in amassing farm after farm.”

The word *needy* also stands for the deprived and disadvantaged rural folk. Thus, the inclusion of the phrase *needy villagers* is meant to convey to the readers the message that these villagers really needed pieces of land to work on in order to improve their standards of living (Moyana 1984) as opposed to the few black elite – the top people – who already had large pieces of land but still continued to amass some more because it was within their powers to do so. They really did not need all the land they acquired. The state of landlessness culminated in the impoverishment of the black majority as emphasised by Woddis (1960, 8) who stated that the seizure of African 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 official policy.

The few of the black elite class who were therefore getting land were in actual fact not in desperate need of land. This message of the hypocrisy, insincerity or pretence on the part of the elite class is portrayed through the inclusion of the word *leasing*. To lease is to let or rent out property and in this case the property is the land. Renting out property (land) in this case conveys to readers the message of abundance. What is furthermore implied by the reporter through the use of *leasing* is that during the land redistribution exercise, the top elite class amassed land which they did not even use. The ultimate result of land amassment without the intention of using it was the leasing thereof.

The *Daily News* report “Sabina Mugabe, sons grab farms” by Bote (2003) (see Figure 3) also underscored the above point that it was the elite class that benefited most from the land redistribution exercise.



Figure 3: The *Daily News* report “Sabina Mugabe, sons grab farms” (Bote 2003)

The use of the noun *farms* by the reporter Takaitei Bote was meant to convey to readers the message that the elite classes took more than one farm during the land redistribution exercise. Bote (2003) said that, “The government admitted in the State media last Thursday that the land reform programme was haphazard, resulting in ‘free-for-all’ allocations. *Free-for-all allocations* suggest that top government officials allocated themselves land as they wished. Sabina Mugabe and her two sons were reported as having occupied farms which were “strategically situated around Lake Manyame in Zvimba”. What is further connoted in the story “Sabina Mugabe, sons grab farms” is that the elite classes gave themselves land which has fertile soils and with good infrastructure when compared with the lower to middle classes who received land in areas which in most cases receive little rainfall as denoted by the word *strategically*.

That it is the elite who obtained most of the land is moreover underpinned by Ruvimbo Madhaka (2003) of Harare in her letter to the *Daily News* editor titled

“Made’s so-called land audit doesn’t fool us”. Madhaka regarded the so-called land audit as a waste of time because it was:

Guided by the philosophy: ‘Let us steal and plunder as much as possible and when every member of us (ZANU-PF) is through with stealing, let us constitute a fake audit/commission of inquiry made up of our Zanu PF members who have also stolen to conduct a cosmetic audit’.

The message that the letter is conveying to readers is that land was not only amassed but also stolen by the bigwigs and it is these bigwigs who then decided to constitute a politicised commission which had the mandate of overseeing who got what and where. The fact that it was ZANU-PF officials who constituted this audit team meant that virtually there was nothing that was going to be brought to light with regard to who got what and where. If the audit team were to report the true findings it would be like shooting themselves in the feet because the report was going to show the nation that it was these bigwigs who had amassed many farms.

Edwin Munyari (2003) of Belvedere, Harare, wrote a letter to the *Daily News* headlined “God won’t bless chaotic, hate-driven, racially-fueled land reforms” with the intention of exposing to readers the message that land redistribution was racially driven. Munyari (2003) said that:

The agrarian reform was to feed the nation, not to shame Britain, the United States and fellow detractors . . . While the need for equitable land redistribution is very real, the selfishness and greed manifest in the process makes the whole thing a circus.

The message disguised by Munyari (2003) is that although the land redistribution exercise was a noble undertaking, it did not benefit the real landless people. Instead, it was only the greedy and selfish black elite that largely benefited. Furthermore, the land redistribution exercise was racially driven owing to the fact that white commercial farmers, whose farms had been taken away, were seen as bad influences on the black populace. They were blamed by the ZANU-PF-led government for enticing people to vote against the 2000 referendum.

Still on the issue of land and distribution, the *Daily News* published an article which was written by Oskar Wermter (2000) captioned “Redistribution of land must be done in an orderly fashion”. This was at a time when the fast-track land-reform programme had just been kick-started. In the article, Wermter interrogated the criterion that was used by the government when allocating land. He asked whether land was redistributed according to qualifications and under what conditions. Although the government argued that land should be allocated to the “largest and poorest population of Zimbabwe” (Moyana 1984), the *Daily News* through the article by Wermter argued that land should not be given to everyone. Instead, land should be given to those people who are able to use it productively. Wermter (2000) said that, “But one of the

ethical conditions for land tenure is that the tenant be able to use the land productively without destroying it.”

Mungoshi (1975), on the other hand, said that land should be given to the black majority since they are, firstly, the rightful owners and secondly, the ones living on barren lands. For the *Daily News*, Mungoshi’s (1975) argument could not hold water since “There are no such things as absolute right to private property. Ownership always goes together with social obligations”. In this respect, land should only be given to deserving candidates, those who can use the land productively. That the land redistribution exercise was therefore racially driven as discussed above was furthermore underscored by Wermter (2000) who said that the reason or statement that is given by the government that “Four-thousand farmers have half the agricultural land, ignores that thousands of farm labourers and their families live in that land as well”. Wermter was therefore suggesting that the number of black people already living on farms with fertile soils outnumbers that of white commercial farmers on those farms.

Although Wermter’s argument seems to be true when looked at in terms of numbers or quantity, his reasoning was based on a lack of understanding of the essence of land reform. As has been shown above, land reform as discussed at the Lancaster House conference, was supposed to improve the standards of living of the largest and poorest population of Zimbabwe. In this respect, it can therefore be argued that land reform focuses both on quantity, that is the number of people settled on arable lands, and quality of the land, in terms of soil fertility, access to roads, water sources and so forth. The standards of living of people will only improve after they have settled on quality land which they own.

That the land reform programme was not really justified was also avowed by Frizell in his letter to the *Daily News* titled “Invasion of idle land has finally exposed State hypocrisy”. According to Frizell (2000), there had been many pieces of fertile land which did not “belong” to anybody and which were just lying idle for quite a long time. So, if the government was serious about distributing land to landless people, it should have made use of this *idle* land by allocating it to the needy villagers. Thus, if the government had done this, no land could have been taken away from white commercial farmers. Since land was taken away from white commercial farmers and yet there were vast pieces of land lying idle, the *Daily News* directs its readers into thinking that the ZANU-PF-led government had scores to settle with white commercial farmers.

Frizell also highlighted that the government of ZANU-PF left out idle land and went on for white commercial farmer’s land. Frizell (2000) said:

It is evident that much good land has been lying idle for years and not been allocated to those who most desire it. Why? Is it just inefficiency? Or has it been reserved for ‘special people as popular rumour believes’ . . . How can we trust a President and a

party who know very well there is much unused land and yet they refuse to allocate it?
Why try to take more land when so much is lying idle?

Consequently, it can be argued that the land redistribution exercise was racially driven. Although the government argued that it wanted to correct colonial land imbalances, the *Daily News* through Wermter's (2000) article believes that the land redistribution exercise should not have been carried out at all. The proper way of conducting land reform, according to Wermter (2000), was not to take away extra land from white commercial farmers to add on to the land that was already lying idle for so many years, but to focus only on sharing among black people land that has been lying idle for quite a long time.

Chinja Maitiro (a pseudo name derived from the MDC slogan which calls for change in the way the country is governed by the ZANU-PF) of Mazowe underscored the above point in the letter titled "Say another 'No' to theft, corruption, dictatorship" by saying that, "we must reject a dying dictatorship that is destroying our country and tearing it apart in a desperate attempt to survive" and asking why the ZANU-PF did not settle landless people on "vacant farms and unutilized land [which] was (sic) not settled years ago". Maitiro therefore regarded land reform as an unjustified exercise as well as a political gimmick by the ZANU-PF as also underscored by the Zimbabwe Liberators' Platform (2004). What is more, Maitiro regarded land redistribution as an exercise that was meant to maim, mutilate, injure and damage the economy in so far as it was only targeted at removing white commercial farmers who were the backbone of the country's economy and giving this land to black people who did not even know in what way to use land productively – a point which was also echoed by Thomas Mapfumo in his 1991 song titled *Maiti Kurima Hamubvire* (You used to say you were good farmers). Consequently, in as far as farming is concerned, Maitiro (2000) just like Mapfumo (1991) regarded the white man as technically superior and innovative on the land when compared to the black man. In other words, the white man is seen as very productive on land when compared to the black man, as Huffman (1981, 104–106) pointed out:

It is well known that blacks have been discriminated against historically in quantity and quality of educational opportunities. This study has illuminated the discrimination against southern black farmers in quantity and quality of public agricultural extension assistance provided to them. The results from the estimated production function provide empirical support for the hypothesis of lower relative productivity or quality of black farmers' schooling and black extension compared with white farmers schooling and white extension.

Thus, according to Maitiro, a white man is a God-given master who is supposed to use land and a black man is a God-given servant. Heleta (2005) observed:

The most shocking experience for me was to see that nothing had changed for the black people living in the area and working on these farms. Black people were nothing

more than servants . . . We could see them from a distance working on the farms and in kitchens, but they seemed afraid to talk to us, as if by instruction . . . White farmers showed us around, bragging about all the land, hills and mountains they own, stretching as far as the eyes can see.

Omission Analysis

The press is presumably the bastion and defender of free expression in a democracy, but too often it has been one of the institutions that limit the range of expression, especially when conveying information that is critical to leading centres of power in society (Bennett 1996). In the article “Cornered Deputy Minister denies leasing farm” Moyo (2000) said, “A DEPUTY Minister facing a group of angry war veterans threatening to invade white-owned and government farms in Matabeleland, last Wednesday denied he leased a government farm.” Moyo wanted to convey to the readers the message that war veterans were against the ruling black elite for taking too long in allocating them land which was central to the liberation struggle. This is a point that was also underscored by Mugabe (2001, 36) when he said that:

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.

However, the Moyo’s linguistic frame is problematic in the sense that although it has acknowledged that some black elites have many farms, some white people also have large tracts of unused lands which they amassed for speculative purposes. The *Daily News* did not report to its readers this vital information. The ZANU-PF embarked on the land reform exercise because they wanted to redistribute “fertile lands [which] was mostly in the hands of white commercial farmers” (Lipton 2010).

The other vital information that the *Daily News* deliberately chose not to convey to its readers about is on the nature of the land targeted for redistribution. Mugabe (2001) said that the land that was targeted was the unsettled land or some of the land owned by some white commercial farmers that was unutilised. The word *some* does not mean all and the word *unutilised* means not being used. So, the argument put forth by the *Daily News* through the letter by Maitiro (2000) which stated that the taking away of land from white commercial farmers would maim the economy is therefore baseless in the sense that for quite a long time this land had already been lying idle. Nothing was happening on it. The only prudent thing to enhance economic growth as opposed to the *Daily News*’ thinking was for the government to acquire this land and allocate it to

landless people who would then use it productively. Furthermore, black people had been good farmers since time immemorial when compared to white people. Woddis (1960) highlighted this point when he said:

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 the adult males would be compelled to work for the Europeans, in the mines or on the farms [and this would ensure] the enrichment of the Europeans [and] the deliberate impoverishment of the Africans.

Woddis (1960) underscored the invaluable point that before the coming of the European colonisers, all the native inhabitants of Africa were economically self-sufficient. The breaking down of this self-sufficiency, the destruction of African subsistence agriculture, became a central aim of imperialist policy, which has been pursued since the beginning of the twentieth century to this very day – for a stable African peasantry, able to exist independent of European farms and mines, is the last thing imperialism will allow. As Mphahlele (1959, 319) so succinctly put it, “if a stable peasantry were to be consciously established, how many [Africans] would come to work for 3s.6d a day in the mines?” Because to secure African labour for European enterprises was no easy task; it was thus deemed acceptable to push Africans from fertile lands and transform them into “reserves” of unlimited labour.

Some white commercial farmers refused to let go of these idle lands, which culminated in most ex-combatants getting onto those farms by “force” and this culminated in the *Daily News* articles calling and presenting war veterans as trespassers as reflected in the *Daily News* article “LRF condemns State moves to amend constitution on land” in which the Staff Reporter said:

On farm invasions, the LRF [Legal Resources Foundation] said while it supported an orderly, equitable and transparent land reform programme, the current action by groups calling themselves war veterans was blatantly criminal. But what has happened recently in the name of land reform must be condemned by all law-abiding citizens. The crimes committed range from minor ones, like trespass . . .

What is implied in the quote above is that the land belonged to white commercial farmers and the ex-combatants (who are labelled as trespassers) are thieves. However, the article did not go on further to show that the ex-combatants who are regarded as invaders are actually the rightful owners of the land and they fought for it in a protracted war of 15 years until political independence was ushered in Zimbabwe in 1980. White people are in actual fact the people who should be called invaders who are trespassing on African lands.

Wermter (2000) argued that most white commercial farmers bought the land that they are settled on, however, he failed to show or indicate to the readers the way in which these white commercial farmers obtained those farms. Whether they bought this land

from the new nationalist black government or from the erstwhile colonisers is not mentioned. One critical reader of *The Daily News* argued that, “if commercial farmers bought land from the erstwhile colonizers who had obtained it through trickery and robbery [Woddis 1960] then it can be argued that these white commercial farmers received stolen property and by right are bound to lose it.” That land was also distributed to the black majority – the lower to middle class people – was not emphasised in the *Daily News* articles. The focus was only on the elite class (watchdog role). However, the challenge of this watchdog role is that it generalises issues and leaves most readers with a biased understanding of controversial issues such as land and land redistribution as exemplified by Maitiro. Maitiro regarded land redistribution as land grabs by the native people of Zimbabwe and selectively chose not to realise that these native people are the real owners of that land.

Finally, the *Daily News* also omitted information regarding the willing-buyer-willing-seller policy. Soon after independence the nationalist government introduced the willing-buyer-willing-seller system and it is this system which culminated in some “unutilised” or idle lands. White commercial farmers were not willing to sell their excess lands. This unwillingness on the part of white commercial farmers culminated in land-hungry people entering or taking those lands by force. Failure by *The Daily News* to include some of the vital information discussed above was and is detrimental since it leaves its readers with a biased understanding of issues. Commenting on the aspect of land grabs which were in other instances characterised by violence, Muchuri in The Budding Writers Association of Zimbabwe (2004) said that violence was only inflicted on farmers who were “selfish” as opposed to farmers who, “Know well about the history of our land [that land does not belong to them] and have agreed to let [Africans] stay on the other part of the land without ANY CONFLICTS OR BLOOD SHED”. What is noteworthy in the passage above is that Africans did not colonise white settlers’ land and because of that, there is no reason to pay compensation or even to introduce the willing-buyer-willing-seller principles.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to critically explore the language through which the concept of land and distribution was discussed in the private media in Zimbabwe, as demonstrated through articles of *The Daily News* published during the period 2000–2008. The *Daily News* saw redistribution of land as determined by the level of productivity on the land and not by historical prejudices or by place of birth. In other words, land was supposed to be given to people who were going to be productive on it and contribute meaningfully to the economic well-being of the nation. In view of the above, land was therefore not supposed to be distributed along racial lines. Both white and black people had and have similar chances of being allocated the land provided they make productive use of the land they receive.

The discussion above also highlighted that the land reform exercise did not benefit the poor, landless black majority. Instead, it was the black elite minority who benefited. Some of the elite, as reported by the *Daily News*, amassed many farms. Finally, the study also revealed that the elite did not use the land they acquired, instead they leased it, thus defeating the whole purpose of land reform. The poor, landless black majority have remained in their reserves which were and are still characterised by poor soil conditions and which also receive very little rainfall. The study also highlighted that the frames that were used by the *Daily News* when discussing land and land redistribution are problematic in the sense that they are subjective. They did not furnish the readers with information that the so-called white commercial farmers – whose land was taken from by the ZANU-PF-led government during the land reform exercise – also had large tracts of unused land which they had amassed during colonialism.

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