

## Media Framing of Land Reform in Zimbabwe

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Tendai Chari

### Introduction

That the land issue has been the epicentre of Zimbabwe's socio-political and economic struggles since colonial times is hardly disputable. The extensive coverage of the country's land revolution in the local and global media, particularly after the launch of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) in the year 2000, attests to the potency of the mass media in public opinion formation. The news media determine which issues members of the public think and talk about. Through various discursive practices and interpretative frameworks, the media direct the public's attention to certain issues and formulate certain mental pictures and perceptions in readers (McCombs 2002; Lipman 1922). This chapter employs framing analysis to examine the representation of land and agrarian issues in the Zimbabwean and international media, in order to better understand the role played by the media in moulding public opinion and perceptions of land and agrarian issues in the post-FTLRP period. The key question posed is: how were the various social and political actors presented by these media and how were their perspectives on land and agrarian issues represented? A purposive sample of news articles published in Zimbabwean publicly-owned newspapers (mainly *The Herald* and the *Sunday Mail*), privately-owned newspapers (mainly *The Daily News*, *The Zimbabwe Independent*, *The Standard* and *The Financial Gazette*) and selected international news organisations, as published between January 2000 and November 2007, were subjected to content analysis. In addition, interviews were conducted with key informants and documents were analysed, in order

to complement data from content analysis. Newspaper articles lend themselves to content analysis because they are retrievable from archives. Also, content analysis enables the researcher to make replicable and valid inferences from data, in order to provide 'knowledge... insights and representation of facts and a practical guide to action' (Krippendorff 1980: 21). The study is grounded in framing theory and social construction theory, which accentuate the role of the media in the construction of social reality (Tuchman 1978). According to Entman:

To frame is to select aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral education and/or treatment recommendation for the item prescribed (1993: 52).

For Melkote, framing involves ignoring certain aspects of an issue, creating an artificial balance, exaggeration, lack of analysis of events and the use of a narrow selection of experts (2009: 549). Parenti argues that:

The most effective propaganda term is that which relies on framing rather than on falsehood. By bending the truth rather than breaking it, using emphasis, nuance, innuendo and peripheral embellishments, communicators create a desired impression without resorting to explicit advocacy and without departing too far from appearance of objectivity (1993: 200).

Hence, framing influences how people think about issues by invoking certain interpretations of information. The way in which the news is packaged, the amount of exposure or placement given to an issue and the overall accompanying headlines and visual effects, engender certain ways of interpreting reality. The extensive coverage of land reform and agrarian issues in the local and international media could have encouraged certain interpretations of these issues. Unpacking these perspectives is a core objective of this chapter. Although land and agrarian issues have been perennial issues on Zimbabwe's media agenda since colonial times, there is a general agreement that media attention increased significantly after the year 2000, when government instituted a constitutional amendment that empowered government to expropriate land without paying compensation.<sup>1</sup> The FTLRP initiated in July 2000 radically transformed the agrarian sector in a manner that had far-reaching socio-political ramifications (see Moyo and Yeros 2008). Its execution and implementation invited diverse responses from both domestic and international media. Some critics accuse both the local and international media of various shortcomings in their reportage of the land reform.

While some accuse the media of propagating reform ‘distortions’ and ‘misconceptions’ about the land reform programme (Stone 2007; Taylor 2007; Chari, 2010; Elich 2011), others charge the media of ‘less comprehensible’ coverage, resulting in the propagation of ‘myths’ rather than reality (Scoones and Mavedzenge 2010). As a consequence, media representation of the land reform in Zimbabwe has been a terrain for the contestation of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses. The challenges faced by the media in representing the multi-layered conflicts and complex elements of this issue has been alluded to by various scholars who acknowledge that the centrality of the land question is intricately linked with the race question (see Mamdani 2008; Muzondidya 2011; Gowans 2008; Elich 2011).

Mkodzongi succinctly comments on the shortcomings in analysis of the land reform thus:

An analysis of the arguments against radical land reform reveals a chronic failure by both journalists and academics to provide a balanced view of the Zimbabwean land issue; the causal factors of landlessness steeped in the country’s history are often ignored. There is a tendency to confuse the land issue with Mugabe’s political expediency and in the process the baby is thrown away with the bath water. The genuine need for land, which is reflected in many rural areas across the country, is simply dismissed as Mugabe’s political posturing. What is often forgotten is that not very long ago millions of Africans were deliberately disenfranchised by a system of state managed repression, segregation and violence (2010: 2).

There is merit in Mkodzongi’s argument in the sense that both academics and journalists have exhibited a tendency to engage in emotive debates that centre on personalities rather than issues, thereby missing opportunities to critically evaluate Zimbabwe’s radical land reform programme.

Media coverage of the land issue during the period under examination reveals competing versions of reality epitomised by vested group interests in the context of a bifurcated political economy of the media. While reportage is largely event-based, scholarly literature on the subject tends to be highly opinionated, selective, emotional and personalised (see Curtin 2008; Blair 2002; Meredith 2002; Bond and Manyanya 2002).

An academic inquiry on how the perspectives of different actors have been articulated in the media is still missing. Nor have the implications of media reporting of land and agrarian issues on policy matters and public opinion been adequately interrogated. The ideological assumptions underpinning the content and its possible impact on readers and the socio-political climate in which the content was produced are examined in this chapter.

### **Perspectives on Zimbabwe's land question**

The land issue in Zimbabwe is both a consequence and a cause of the struggle for liberation and has always been at the core of the country's political, economic and social struggles, beginning with the first Chimurenga (*Imfazwe*) in 1896. That the land issue threatened to derail the 1979 Lancaster House negotiations for independence between liberation movements and Ian Smith's regime, demonstrates the emotive nature of the land issue. After striking a compromise, the Patriotic Front later announced that:

We have now obtained assurances that Britain, the United States of America and other countries will participate in a multinational donor effort to assist in land, agricultural and economic development programmes. These assurances go a long way in allaying the great concern we have over the whole land question arising from the great need our people have for land and our commitment to satisfy that need when in government (Utete 2003: 16).

Even though the pledge by the British and the Americans to fund land reform was not inscribed in the constitution, the Patriotic Front was persuaded to accept the compromise after being put under pressure by the Front line States who had been their benefactors. In addition, the Declaration of Rights (Section 16 of the Zimbabwe Constitution) circumscribed the compulsory acquisition of any property, including land, for a period of ten years after the date of independence. Any constitutional amendments during this ten year period needed a 100 per cent majority, something that was impossible given the fact that whites had 20 seats reserved for them under the same constitution for the next seven years.

Realising the duplicity of the deal, the then president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere commented that it would be impossible to:

...tax Zimbabweans in order to compensate people who took it away from them through the gun. Really the British cannot have it both ways. They made this an issue and they are now making vague remarks mixing rural development with the question of land compensation. The two are separate... The British paid money to Kenya. That the future government of Zimbabwe must pay compensation is a British demand and the British must promise in London to make the money available (Utete 2003: 17).

As a result, white farmers who were reluctant to relinquish their land sold land that was mostly in poor ecological regions through the 'willing seller-willing buyer' arrangement, resulting in land reform moving at a very slow pace during the first few years after independence. The situation was compounded

by the fact that the Government of Zimbabwe did not have enough funds to procure land for resettlement programmes intended to decongest rural areas (Stoneman 1988). A formal announcement by the new Labour government in Britain in 1997, that it had no obligation to fund land reform in Zimbabwe, marked the turning point in relations between Zimbabwe and its former colonial master. This change in position was articulated by the then British Secretary for International Development, Claire Short, who wrote a letter to the Zimbabwean government stating thus:

I should make it clear that we do not accept that Britain has a special responsibility to meet the costs of land purchase in Zimbabwe. We are a new government from diverse backgrounds without links to former colonial interests. My own origins are Irish and as you know we were colonized and not colonizers (Utete 2003: 15).

After the rejection of a government-sponsored draft constitution in the February 2000 referendum, the government amended the constitution by retrieving a clause from the rejected draft constitution to give effect to Constitutional Amendment Act Number 16 (Act 5/2000), which empowered the government to compulsorily acquire land without compensation. The 'historic' nature of this amendment was dramatised in the state daily, *The Herald* of 7 April 2000, thus:

Zimbabwe yesterday took a giant leap towards correcting the historical imbalances in land ownership when Parliament passed a Bill which gives Government the power to compulsorily acquire land for resettlement without paying compensation. The MPs [who voted in favour of the law], who included Vice-President Muzenda and Msika, immediately broke into the liberation war song "Zimbabwe Ndeyeropa" [Zimbabwe's independence was won through bloodshed] soon after the bill was passed as British High Commission Officials trooped out of the Speaker's Gallery. Some MPs could not contain their joy and swayed to the rhythm of the song, while others clapped and banged benches in ecstasy (cited in Willems, 2004: 167).

The period following the amendment witnessed an intensification of occupations of white-owned commercial farms. The farm occupations and the subsequent FTLRP in July 2000 became major talking points in the local and international media, soliciting varied interpretations in relation to their causes, objective and impacts on the economy and social relations.

### **The media situation during the colonial period**

The media in Zimbabwe traces its history to the colonial era, with the establishment of the Argus Printing and Publishing Company, which

formed *The Herald* and *The Bulawayo Chronicle* in 1892. Editorially, the two newspapers sought to protect the economic and political interests of the minority whites, who had taken the land from the indigenous blacks by violent means. In its maiden issue, *The Herald* stated that:

The aims they (the publishers) will keep steadily in view will be to advance to the fullest of their powers the mining and agricultural interests, to discuss and criticise moderately, but without fear or favour the topics of the day or hour and to promote fellowship and unity amongst all classes of sections of the white community (Gale 1962: 19).

This introduction shows that these newspapers had the fundamental objective of underpinning the economic and commercial interests of the ruling elite. For instance, *The Rhodesian Herald* (now *The Herald*) of July 1893 justified land grab from the indigenous people by stating that blacks were not using a 'large portion of their rich and fertile country and the indemnity for expenses incurred could be paid without hardships to the natives in farms and mining gold' (Utete 2003: 10). The newspaper denigrated blacks, in order to justify land dispossession. In 1895, the newspaper continued in the same vein, stating, for example, that:

For Rhodesians it was absurd to take the untutored savage, accustomed as he is from time immemorial to superstitious and primitive ideas of law and justice and suddenly to try and govern him by the same code of laws that govern a people with many centuries of experience and enlightenment (*The Herald*, April 1895, as quoted in Gale 1962).

*The Herald* was also used to celebrate the work of white farmers and to project them as the messiah of the blacks. White commercial farmers were lionised for their farming prowess as a way of justifying colonialism. A case in point is *The Rhodesian Herald* of 22 December 1893, which featured a letter complementing white farmers in the country. The story was headlined 'Go Ahead Farmer' and read thus:

A gentleman recently from a trip in the country writes to us—"I have done a good deal of travelling in this and other districts. I am inquisitive wherever I go and always have thought farming the real mainstay of any healthy country. For these reasons I bring to your notice the good work being done by a farmer (Mr. Tapsell) about 14 miles east of Salisbury. Real progress characterises his farm. He has nearly completed a water furrow 10, 000 feet long, which will bring 500 acres of excellent wheat land under cultivation. Half of this ground is already ploughed and ready for seed. Mr. Tapsell has also prepared a site for a flour mill and will order machinery for three pairs of French Burr stones with dressers and cleaning

apparatus driven by turbine. On the farm there is a piggery of 50 grunTERS-most excellent porkers they are too. Energy of this sort is the highest compliment that can be paid to the fertile nature of Mashonaland and if there were many more like Mr. Tapsell, breadstuff and bacon would soon be at reasonable rate (*The Rhodesian Herald*, 22 December 1893).

This article shows that the colonial press was keen to portray white farmers as hardworking, self less and patriotic citizens who were determined to see their nation prosper. This portrayal was an open endorsement of the status quo, which was characterised by skewed racial ownership patterns of land ownership. This clearly demonstrates that, contrary to the myth that the media seeks to report issues objectively and impartially, their primary aim is to serve the hegemonic interests and aspirations of those who own them. The story about Mr Tapsell cited above shows that the colonial press was no exception to the rule.

As has been observed above, the colonial media developed a representation of indigenous blacks as 'untutored savages' who did not know how to fully use the land and of white settlers as energetic, knowledgeable gentlemen who understood how to make the fertile lands produce.

### **The media context after independence**

At independence in 1980, Zimbabwe inherited a relatively diversified media terrain, including the blossoming of the private press during the political and economic transitions dominated by white capital. The private sector grew rapidly between 1980 and 1990 and the number of privately- owned publications tripled in the first six years of independence (Saunders 1991: 3).

The government acquired the Rhodesia Printing and Publishing Company from the South African- based Argus Newspaper Group using a grant provided by the Nigerian government. This acquisition made the government the major shareholder in the newly- created Zimbabwe Newspapers (1980) Ltd (popularly known as Zimpapers), owned by the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT), which also owned the Zimbabwe Inter-Africa News Agency (ZIANA), the Zimbabwe Information Service (ZIS) and the Community Newspapers Group (CNG).

During the first decade of independence, the media enjoyed relative independence and freedom to publish or practice, the only requirement being to register with the Post Office. The only other legal restrictions related to pornographic material and public decency, racist material and information deemed to threaten state security such as the disclosure of military secrets.

The next decade would be remembered as 'the golden age' of the press in Zimbabwe as it saw unprecedented growth of new privately-owned publications. A factor in this growth was the quest for alternative political voices generated by the formation of a new political party, the Zimbabwe Unity of Movement (ZUM) and the changes arising from the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). Some publications folded, among them the first privately-owned daily newspaper, *The Daily Gazette* and its sister publication, *The Sunday Gazette*. The latter folded due to 'undercapitalisation, lack of feasibility studies prior to launching, competition from the Zimpapers titles, high interest rates and lack of advertiser support' (Kupe 1997: 27).

The launch of *The Daily News* in 1999 by Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ), a group backed by a 'consortium of institutional and private investors from Zimbabwe and abroad' (Waldahl 2004; Ronning and Kupe 2000) marked the beginning of a new era in Zimbabwean media history. *The Daily News* grew rapidly to threaten the dominance of the state-controlled daily, *The Herald*. *The Daily News* and its allies in the private press were stridently critical of government policies. The private press subscribed to an independent watchdog role, seeking to expose the corrupt practices of government officials (Waldahl 2004). Much of the private press initially offered unqualified support to the MDC and the government came to label *The Daily News* 'an opposition mouthpiece' (Chikowore 2000). While *The Daily News* and other privately-owned publications saw themselves as independent, balanced and impartial, the conflict of views with the state-controlled media drove the two newspapers beyond the boundaries of professional and ethical journalism (see Chari 2007, 2009, 2010). As a result, their readers found it impossible to maintain a critical distance on national issues and chose to become captive to the passions of the political protagonists. Media reportage of the land reform, therefore, took place in a context of intense political and media polarization, which epitomised a fractured society. This polarization was dramatised by a newspaper columnist thus:

The polarization in our society today is best depicted in the press. Basically, the press is either pro-government or anti-government. Sometimes objectivity is sacrificed on the altar of expedience in order to be true to their chosen position. If you buy newspapers from one divide, you will get half the story (MMPZ 2002: 82).

It is against this backdrop of political polarisation that various positions about the land reform were articulated by the different media. An appreciation of this broader context will, therefore, help one understand the dynamics that shaped their framing of the land reform in Zimbabwe.

### **Approaches to land and agrarian reporting since 2000**

This section examines literature on media representation of land and agrarian issues after the introduction of the FTLRP in 2000. Although the primary focus of this chapter is media representation of land and agrarian issues, it is imperative to acknowledge the outpouring of literature on land reform and agrarian issues from other standpoints, particularly after the FTLRP (see Alexander 2006; Moyo 2001, 2007; Moyo and Yeros 2005, 2007a, 2007b; Sachikonye 2003; Scoones et al 2010). Sachikonye (2003), for example, examines the impact of FTLRP on farm workers, noting that less than 5 per cent of the total number of farm workers in the country benefited from the FTLRP and less than 20 per cent of women in the country got land under the programme. This study gives a historical account of the land issue since 1980. Government efforts to address the issue are acknowledged and obstacles therein are highlighted. The study notes that during the period 1980-2000, farm workers were marginalised in the land reform and agrarian discourse. After 2000, the *Jambanja*<sup>2</sup> period, the discourse on farm workers became more polarized between those who supported *Jambanja* and those who opposed it. A limitation of this study is its failure to critique the 'schizophrenic' tendencies of farm workers who could not identify themselves either with the peasant land movements or the urban working class that was clamouring for land. As a consequence, farm workers became pawns on the political chessboard as the state was keen to use them as evidence that beneficiaries of the land reform programme came from all classes, while white commercial farmers were keen to use them as 'human shields' for stalling the land reform.<sup>3</sup> Although Sachikonye acknowledges that his study was provisional, as the full ramifications of the land reform on farm workers and the broader economy would take longer (Sachikonye 2003: 25) he does not acknowledge government efforts to cushion farm workers from the vagaries of the FTLRP at the time and also downplays how some commercial farmers were not willing to adhere to the legal instruments put in place by the government to cushion farm workers from the negative effects of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme.<sup>4</sup>

Alexander (2006) gives a useful historical account of the land problem in Zimbabwe, although the drawback of her study is over-reliance on journalistic sources and analyses and also its failure to transcend the polarization characterising the Zimbabwean society at the time.

Moyo locates land occupations within a global context, pointing out that events of the late 1990s in Zimbabwe are a manifestation of a 'larger phenomenon underway in the South' (2001: 3110). The popular view that

land occupations in Zimbabwe were stage-managed by the state, in order to retain power is interrogated and a more nuanced approach demonstrates that land occupations were linked to unresolved grievances associated with the failure of the developmental prescriptions of the North on the South. He notes that attempts to settle the land question in Zimbabwe using market instruments had failed and that the urban-based civil society in Zimbabwe had never prioritised land reform, resulting in it being alienated from the 'rural civil society' (Moyo 2001: 313).

Moyo also demonstrates that land occupations in the country have been an ongoing phenomenon in the rural areas, both before and after independence. He argues that land occupations represent 'an unofficial or underground social pressure' to force land redistribution and further argues that the '2000-2001 land occupations mark the climax of a longer, less public and dispersed struggle over land, under adverse economic conditions that have been exacerbated by the onset of economic and political reform' (Moyo 2001: 314). This argument debunks popular perceptions that land occupations were a 'new phenomenon' and that they were necessarily sanctioned by the state all the time.

Moyo and Yeros (2007a) identify the state as the locus of the land reform in Zimbabwe, arguing that 'peripheral capitalism' has been unable to resolve the national and agrarian question over the years, resulting in these problems recurring as social and political crises with a potential to escalate to revolutionary situations. They note that the Zimbabwean state has, from time to time, shown tendencies of 'radicalisation' which reached a climax between 2000 and 2003. This radicalisation had begun with government interventions in the economy in 1997, the suspension of the ESAP and the listing of 1471 white owned farms for expropriation.

Moyo and Yeros (2005) also explore the ideological shifts within academia from the late 1990s and how these shifts have shaped the framing of debates on land reform. They argue that assumptions about concepts such as neoliberalism, sovereignty and self-determination tend to be emptied of their content in the euphoric discourses on 'democratisation, human rights and good governance', such that the neoliberal frames of analyses have resulted in the demotion of fundamental human rights such as the right to 'self-determination' which can only be fully realized through land redistribution.

In spite of the existence of a significant body of literature on land and agrarian issues, there is, however, a troubling paucity of literature that examines media discourses on land reform and agrarian issues per se. Considering the role played by the media in mediating the land reform programme in Zimbabwe,

this is baffling. This section, therefore, examines the extant literature on media representation of land and agrarian issues in Zimbabwe. Such literature is thus far fragmented, as it is scattered in a few journals, opinion pieces and reports by Non-Governmental Organisations (see MMPZ 2000, 2002; Willems 2004; Harvey 2000). The bulk of writings about Zimbabwe's land issue are journalistic exposés in local and international newspapers and online websites of major news organisations such as the BBC, CNN, AFP and others. These journalistic exposés are largely authored by undercover correspondents<sup>5</sup> (because of the country's restrictive media environment), who have very little knowledge of the country's socio-political context (see MISA 2009).

As a result, some scholars have criticised western journalists for 'distorting' the truth about the land reform in Zimbabwe. Elich, for example, writes:

For years, Western journalists have castigated Zimbabwe's land reform program. From afar, they pronounced land reform a failure for having brought about the total collapse of agriculture and plunging the nation into chronic food insecurity. Redistributed land, we are continually told, went to cronies with political connections, while ordinary people were almost entirely excluded from the process. Farmland went to ruin because of the incompetence of the new owners. These were simple messages, drilled into the minds of the Western public through repetition. For Western reporters, certain that they owned the truth, emotion substituted for evidence (2011).

Apart from the journalistic writings, the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (MMPZ)<sup>6</sup>, a Non-Governmental Organisation and 'media watchdog', has published reports on local media coverage of various issues in the country. However, these reports tend to be quantitative since they focus on how much broadcast time or space in newspapers is devoted to particular issues. As a result, these reports lack qualitative analytical depth since they are primarily concerned with the question of media bias. Holsti (cited in Riffe et al 2005) argues that quantitative analysis trivialises issues and fails to show their significance, since it is preoccupied with frequency of stories, rather than the social, political and economic conditions in which those stories are produced. Apart from methodological limitations, the MMPZ itself tends to uncritically applaud the private media, while routinely criticising the state-owned media, giving an impression that the MMPZ itself is biased and, therefore, unable to maintain critical distance.

Willems (2004) uses qualitative content analysis to examine the coverage of Zimbabwe's land reform by *The Herald* and *The Daily News*. Her study only covers the period immediately after the 2000 referendum and is limited to

two newspapers, thus limiting the range of discourses on the land issue to the two newspapers. She does, however, bring out useful insights on the shortfalls of the two newspapers in their coverage of the land issue. In 'Remnants of Empire: British media reporting of Zimbabwe', Willems (2005) argues that the manner in which the British media cover the land issue in Zimbabwe reflects the capitalist interests and colonial legacy of Britain in that country.

Harvey employs Chomsky and Herman's propaganda model to examine the coverage of the land issue in Zimbabwe by western news agencies. He notes how British, United States of America and New Zealand media 'manufactured consent' through slanting and spinning stories on the land issue in Zimbabwe (2000: 1). News selection was used to disguise the colonial links that Britain has with Zimbabwe and Britain's moral 'indebtedness' to that country. Farm occupations, the plight of white farmers and their families, were given more priority in the news. These were covered with what Harvey refers to as 'heavy sentimental rhetoric, in order to wring the sympathy of the international audience' (Harvey 2000: 9). Harvey argues that the British media sought to divert attention from Britain's 'blameworthiness' over Zimbabwe by focusing on the personal plight of white commercial farmers whose farms were being occupied. The British media presented white commercial farmers as 'worthy victims' by featuring them 'prominently and dramatically' in the news so as to evoke the sympathy of the international audience who are dominantly white. On the one hand, because America does not have any colonial links with Zimbabwe, the American media did not 'excessively humanise' the white farmers. On the other hand, New Zealand, a former colony of Britain, had its media parroting the British media because of the colonial ties between the two countries. A significant number of commercial farmers (who lost their land during the violent take-over of white owned farms period) immigrated to New Zealand, meaning that New Zealand was 'bearing the brunt' of the land reform. Also, by virtue of New Zealand being a member of the Commonwealth, the New Zealand government had an interest in the issue. Through 'mass media sourcing', the New Zealand media managed to saturate the news with its government's voice as government officials were given unlimited opportunities on air (*ibid.*: 10). Thus, Harvey provides important insights on the dynamics of the land issue in Zimbabwe, even though his study covers only a brief period.

Thus far, scholars who have analysed the international media's representation of the land reform in Zimbabwe have focused on the shortfalls of media coverage of the land reform. Key points are that:

- Media coverage of land reform in Zimbabwe is highly contested;
- Media coverage of Zimbabwe's land reform programme reflects ideological bias and distortions and lacks objectivity;
- Media representation of land reform is heavily influenced by the colonial links between Zimbabwe and Britain; and
- The global capitalist interests of the West also influence the way the foreign media represent land reform in Zimbabwe.

### *Public media framing of land and agrarian issues*

The public media, namely newspapers under the Zimpapers stable and the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, generally echoed the government's position on issues such as farm occupations, violence in the farms, conflicts over land, the food security situation, sanctions, productivity, effects of farm occupations and other events.

This point of view can be seen with regard to many issues. Land occupations were judiciously defended by these media and they were described as 'demonstrations by land hungry peasants'. For example, *The Herald* of 4 April 2000 described land occupations as spontaneous uprisings by the masses, claiming that:

...land hungry war veterans poured into at least 30 commercial farms countrywide last month after the rejection of the draft constitution and to exert pressure on the government to speed up the resettlement programme.

The rejection of the draft constitution in February 2000 was described as a 'temporary set-back on the revolution'. The killing of white commercial farmers on farms was interpreted as 'unfortunate' and, in some instances, the murders were blamed on the victims who were accused of fanning violence. The rejection of the draft constitution was framed as 'a vote against land reform'. Similarly, *The Herald* of 7 April 2000 quoted President Mugabe, who said:

To us as government, what the war veterans have done is a clear demonstration that the government has delayed in redistributing land. This is a clear peaceful demonstration and there is no problem with that... We warned the farm owners not to resist, fight or take up arms. And should they do that, we shall not be responsible for the consequences. Those who have tried to fight have created problems for themselves. It is difficult for us to protect them should they trigger violence.

The public media, therefore, took a cue from pronouncements by ruling party officials in its coverage of the land reform, thus showing that ownership and control played a crucial role in shaping discourses about land reform.

A perception was created that the violence on white commercial farms had the tacit approval of the government. As a result, the private media published a flurry of news stories alleging that certain arms of the government endorsed the land occupations. The public media downplayed the killings of white commercial farmers by maintaining silence about the news. In some cases, the killers remained nameless (e.g. unknown assailants, 'alleged war veterans', or just 'two gunmen'), (see *The Herald*, 9 May 2000; *The Sunday Mail*, 2 July 2000; *The Herald*, 8 August 2000; *The Herald*, 16 May 2001). Where a black farm worker was killed, the death would be given prominence, while the death of whites was downplayed. Typical headlines that presented white commercial farmers as villains and not victims include: 'White commercial farmers perfect economic terrorism' (*The Herald*, 24 September 2001), 'Nyamandlovu farmer dies in shootout with war veterans' (*The Herald*, 19 April 2000), 'Beatrice farmer murdered' (*The Herald*, 9 May 2000), 'Farmers on warpath' (*The Herald*, 8 August 2000), 'Odzi farmer kills resettled farmer: resettled man ran over, dragged for 20m' (*The Herald*, 16 May 2001) and 'Farmers organize attacks on war vets, police issue stern warning' (*The Sunday Mail*, 2 July 2000).

The overall impression created through these headlines was that white commercial farmers were the aggressors, rather than victims. Where victims of violence were black villagers or settlers, they were given extensive and prominent coverage by the public media. A case in point was when a new settler, one Mapenzauswa, was allegedly killed by a white commercial farmer, Bezuidenhout, in Mutare, in 2001. Mapenzauswa's death was widely covered by both the print and electronic public media, while the private media gave it very little attention, often describing the deceased as 'an invader', thus creating the impression that his death was deserved.

State-owned newspapers published opinion pieces historicising the land issue, primarily suggesting that it was an unfinished historical item on the decolonisation project. Examples include an opinion piece by Kenneth Kaunda headlined 'Western Countries Wrong' (*The Herald*, 14 June 2007) and Neil Thomas's 'Zim's suffering externally driven' (*The Herald*, 14 January 2007). The public media, therefore, harked back on history to show that the ZANU-PF leadership was being unfairly blamed for the situation unfolding in the country, when, in fact, the West, particularly Zimbabwe's former colonial master, Britain was to blame for the crisis.

International condemnation of the land reform programme and domestic resistance was buttressed by a well orchestrated propaganda machine led by

news organisations such as the BBC, CNN, Sky News and Reuters. This international propaganda machine forced the public media within Zimbabwe to adopt a defensive stance, particularly in the initial stages of the FTLRP. As a consequence of the international condemnation of the land reform, the public media became defensive and started publishing news articles that gave even the slightest endorsement of the land reform programme, particularly by people from outside the establishment. Support from the SADC region and beyond was particularly viewed positively (See Box 8.1 below for examples).

### **Box 8.1: Public media land headlines on regional responses**

- ‘German delegation implores state to intensify land reform process’ (*The Herald*, 10 March 2000)
- ‘Over 50 per cent of South Africans support ex-combatants occupation of farms’ (*The Herald*, 04 May 2000)
- ‘Anglican Church backs Land Reform Programme’ (*The Herald*, 13 April 2000)
- ‘We support Zanu (PF) on Land Issue: Former ZIPRA members’ (*The Herald*, 25 April 2000)
- ‘Methodist Church welcomes land talks’ (*The Herald*, 02 May 2000)
- ‘ZCTU calls for speedy land redistribution’ (*The Herald*, 02 May 2000)
- ‘Communal farmers support farm invasions’ (*The Herald*, 09 June 2000)
- ‘SA demonstrations support Zimbabwe war veterans’ (*The Herald*, 27 May 2000)
- ‘Zambia backs land reform programme’, (*The Herald*, 09 June 2000)

The public media accentuated the view that land redistribution was necessary to address imbalances created by many years of British colonialism. The land issue was often projected as a bilateral dispute between Zimbabwe and its former colonial master. The former was criticised for attempting to internationalise what was ‘clearly a bilateral issue’. Britain was often criticised for showing sympathy for its ‘kith and kin’ (meaning white commercial farmers whose land had been expropriated). For instance, the then Minister of Information and Publicity, Professor Jonathan Moyo was quoted by New Zealand TV1 (07 May 2000) saying:

...when black people die like one million people die in Rwanda, the whole world, (Western World) is not worried. When two whites originally from Britain (sic) die in Zimbabwe, the whole world press is descending on us, just for two whites who have died (Harvey 2000: 3).

This statement shows that the Zimbabwean government perceived Britain as 'ethnicising' the land issue. Some scholars attribute the fallout between Zimbabwe and Western governments to the land reform (Chingono 2010; Chigora and Dewa 2009). Chingono argues that it is because of the land issue that Zimbabwe was put under sanctions after 'a fatal politicization and tragic internationalization of the land issue'. These views show that the land reform in Zimbabwe is complex and has many facets to it. By concentrating on the historical aspects, the public media failed to critique the impact of violence on society and on the economy as a whole. In addition, they also failed to expose other dimensions of the land issue such as skewed gender and class relations in the land reform discourse.

Some of the problems noted in the various land audits (e.g., the Flora Buka Report of early 2003 and the Utete Report also of 2003) were suppressed by the public media (see Chabarika 2003; Mphisa 2009). Problems that were suppressed included multiple farm ownership, low uptake of farms and the manner in which powerful elites took advantage of the land redistribution exercise at the expense of the poor peasants.

In addition, irregularities such as the expropriation of farms protected by Bilateral Investments Protection Agreements (BIPA) and those protected through the Zimbabwe Investment Centre and Export Processing Zones were ignored. Legal impediments facing the FTLRP, haphazard allocations of land and selection of beneficiaries, as well as problems of insecure tenure and collateral security were overlooked in spite of the fact that these were acknowledged government authorities (Utete 2003: 21).

If the public media had exposed some of the irregularities in the implementation of the land reform, the necessary remedies could have been taken and some of the negative effects of the land reform programme would have been rectified. By presenting the land reform through 'rose tinted lenses', the public media abdicated their responsibility to inform and educate citizens.

It is also worth noting that, while some social groups such as war veterans were projected as taking a leading role in the FTLRP, their voices were eclipsed by those of ruling party elites. War veterans were only depicted as active agents during violent confrontations with white commercial farmers. In most instances, they were lumped together with 'land hungry peasants' or masses.

During the 'land invasions', war veterans were largely projected as the vanguard of the 'Third Chimurenga'<sup>7</sup> and the public media often described them as 'peaceful demonstrators'. It was often argued that war veterans' patience had run out. It was said that the war veterans were merely showing their displeasure at the slow pace at which the land distribution exercise was moving (e.g., 'War veterans vow not to leave farms', *The Herald*, 3 April 2000).

Whereas the private media projected war veterans as violent or rogue elements, the public media portrayed them as peace-loving citizens. In order to reinforce this notion, they were reported as cordially co-existing with white commercial farmers. A case in point is when war veterans agreed on a peace deal (brokered by Father Fidelis Mukonori of the Catholic Church) with the Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) in April 2000 (*The Herald*, 20 March 2000). War veterans were described as 'peace-loving' people whose quest for justice was not being appreciated by the detractors of land reform. The refusal by some war veterans to vacate white-owned farms was justified on the grounds that war veterans had long historical ties with the land (ibid.: 1). A statement by Andrew Ndlovu, one of their leaders, is instructive in this regard:

the people want their land now. They do not want any obstruction. If we moved off the farms now, then we would have waived our right to land because that will be a violation of our rights as citizens of this country. Our historical background speaks for itself. Moving off the farms will be tantamount to disregarding the sacrifices of the people who fought for this country. Law is law and politics is politics. How do you marry the two? (*The Herald*, 20 March 2000).

On the one hand, veterans were projected by the public media as positive agents of change with a history of fighting for justice. On the other hand, white commercial farmers were largely presented by the public media as anti-land reform, racist and selfish (e.g., 'Anglo-Saxon racism at war with Zim over land' (*The Sunday Mail*, 20 April 2008). The CFU was projected as uncooperative and was blamed for the violence in occupied farms, with the CFU portrayed as preoccupied with selfish interests (e.g., 'CFU in new bid to remove occupiers', *The Chronicle*, 11 April 2000). The view that white farmers were not against the land reform per se, but the method used to acquire it, was dismissed by the public media.

The public media also gave the impression that the land reform programme enjoyed support that cut across the social and political divide. For example, support from civil society organisations<sup>8</sup> was given prominence in the news headlines. Hence, headlines such as 'Anglican Church backs land reform programme' (*The Herald*, 13 April 2000), 'Methodist Church welcomes

land talks' (*The Herald*, 02 May 2000), 'Churches urge state to speed up land reform' (*The Herald*, 18 December 2001), 'ZCTU calls for speedy land redistribution' (*The Herald*, 02 May 2000) were sometimes found in the public media since they endorsed the land reform. These headlines show that the government was concerned with moral issues in the implementation of the FTLRP, particularly the issue of violence on the farms.

In the same vein, when the International Socialist Organisation (ISO), through its leader, former opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Member of Parliament for Highfield, Munyaradzi Gwisai, endorsed the FTLRP in 2002, his position document entitled 'MDC Go Back to the People' was quoted extensively in the public press to legitimate the Fast Track Land Reform (for example: 'Gwisai dismissal from MDC unjustified', *The Herald*, 8 December 2002; 'Revolt against MDC leaders Gwisai urges supporters', *The Herald*, 5 December 2002). Gwisai was one of the very few personalities from the opposition who openly supported the land reform. As a result, he was quoted saying:

...if you look at what has happened in the world, what is clear is that when land is taken from people, it is not a tea party. Thousands of our people were killed and massacred by the colonialists in order for them to get the land. Tens and thousands of people were murdered, were robbed and were raped in the 1890s (SW Radio 2005).

The co-optation of 'unfamiliar sources' such as Gwisai by the public media shows that the government was keen to make the land reform as all encompassing and inclusive as possible. The sidelining of 'civil society' groups perceived to be anti-land reform resulted in a very narrow perspective of the land reform in the public media.

Apart from civil society groups, farm workers were opportunistically represented in the public media. While their voices were also scarce, they were conveniently used to magnify the cruelty of their white bosses. Farm workers were thus portrayed as victims of exploitation by commercial farmers. Stories focused more on how white farmers were coercing their farm workers to vote for MDC. For instance, *The Herald* reported that:

Zimbabwe's farm workers normally treated with contempt by their 'baases' suddenly have new importance thrust upon them as potential voters for the Movement for Democratic Change as the farmers desperately try to keep the status quo on land in place. Vote for Zanu (PF) and you are out, they are threatened by the farmers, who hope to keep their stranglehold on vast tracts of fertile, idle land with a possible change in government (25 April 2000).

It does not come as a surprise that farm workers benefited the least from the FTLRP because their voices were marginalised in the public media. The public media could not positively influence policy decisions in relation to the plight of farm workers. Clarke notes that farm workers were:

...seldom interviewed in the media or by other branches of the media. Their high rate of illiteracy imposes a severe disability upon them in a word... These workers have no collective voice at a national level...It is not surprising then that the debate and discussions on farm labour policy proceeds in a way which excludes the subjects of the discussion, as if by some stroke of magic the very people most concerned about were not even there, except as objects of manipulation in varying degrees of benevolence (cited in Sachikonye 2003: 23).

This shows that media representation of land and agrarian issues could have been broader so as to provide an outlet for marginalised voices. By so doing, the multiple dimensions that characterised land reform could have been unravelled.

### **Private media framing of land and agrarian issues**

With the exception of *The Daily Mirror* and *The Sunday Mirror*<sup>9</sup>, private media generally gave the FTLRP negative coverage. They focused on negative elements of the FTLRP such as the violence on farms and the negative impact of farm occupations on food security and the environment. Examples include: '\$75b farm equipment vandalized, stolen', *The Zimbabwe Independent*, 15 August 2003; 'Land crops set to decline by 60%', *The Zimbabwe Independent*, 30 May 2003; and 'War vets illegally auction farm equipment', *The Zimbabwe Independent*, 8 February 2002.

Unlike the public media, the privately owned media did not make much effort to historicise the land issue. This a-historical approach resulted in the private media labelling the Fast Track Land Reform a 'political gimmick' by the ruling ZANU-PF party. For example, headlines such as, 'Land Reform: a Revolutionary Move or Political Gimmick?' (*The Daily News*, 3 March 2003), 'What is Mugabe's real motive on the land issue?' (*The Daily News*, 24 April 2001) and 'Corrupting the law' (*The Standard*, 22 August 2002) illustrate the point. These headlines show that the private media placed emphasis on the property rights of the white commercial farmers, while ignoring the unlawful way in which blacks were disposed of their land during the colonial era. The cynical tone of these headlines betrays the private media's ahistorical approach as it creates the impression that the land reform programme was merely a propaganda tool meant to divert the nation's attention rather than to correct colonial injustices.

Thus the ‘No’ vote in the referendum was described as ‘a victory for democracy’ and a vote of no confidence in President Mugabe and his government. This representation also demonstrated the personalisation of national issues. A senior journalist with *The Daily News* wrote that:

The referendum turned into a trial of Mugabe’s rule as well as a crucial assessment of his government’s legitimacy. While Mugabe’s drubbing gave the presidential court a scare it also shook the foundation of the political establishment which had confidently assumed that the draft would be nodded through. Most here believe the ‘No’ vote in the referendum augurs well for the country’s democracy (Thondlana 2000).

Reducing the ‘No Vote’ to a defeat for Mugabe was one of the most serious shortcomings of the private media in the sense that the opportunity to broaden the scope of debates on key national questions of historical significance such as the land question was squandered as reason gave way to emotion.

Land occupations were characterised as ‘primitive’, ‘barbaric’, ‘land grab’, while the FTLRP was described as ‘chaotic’, ‘violent’, ‘anarchic’. At the height of the Fast Track Land Reform, the private media carried more stories that sought to de-legitimise the FTLRP. Typical headlines are shown in Box 8.2 below:

### Box 8.2: Typical private media headlines

- ‘Avoid primitive solutions to land’ (*The Daily News*, 25 March 2000)
- ‘EU supports calls for rule of law’ (*The Daily News*, 11 April 2000)
- ‘Government deploys army to direct farm invasions’ (*The Zimbabwe Independent*, 20 April 2000)
- ‘Mugabe gets tough with land grabbers’ (*The Financial Gazette*, 22 July 2004)
- ‘Government’s chaotic land reform vexes planners’ (*The Standard*, 28 November 2004)

The private media suggested that the economy and not land was the top priority of the nation in contradistinction to the ruling party’s election campaign theme, ‘Land is the Economy and the Economy is Land’. In order to buttress this view, *The Daily News* published an opinion survey in which

it concluded that land was not the most pressing issue in Zimbabwe. Instead, top priorities were identified as rising prices of commodities, unemployment, poverty, corruption and the falling value of the local currency. An opinion piece in *The Daily News* of 1 October 2002 stated that:

To say land issue is the issue in Zimbabwe is a paralysis of analysis. Land is a smokescreen and Mugabe knew he could exploit the mistrust and differences in the global village to cobble up an excuse for lawlessness, the dictator's haven. That it took 20 years for Mugabe to act on the land question seems lost to the solidarity bloc who feels he is righting colonial wrongs (Guma 2002: 2).

Thus the view that the land reform was a diversionary tactic by an opportunistic leader and a government whose popularity was waning was bolstered by such headlines as: 'What has Zanu PF been doing for 20 years?' (*The Zimbabwe Independent*, 21 December 2001) and 'Zim's land allocation deeply flawed' (*The Zimbabwe Independent*, 20 May 2005). *The Daily News* of 18 April 2000 published an article by one David Mills which sought to prove that land was not a priority issue in Zimbabwe, but that the economy was.

There is need to understand and appreciate that our attention is being diverted from the real issue and threat confronting Zimbabwe. We are being drawn into debates on the land issue and the rule of anarchy, when the most serious and pressing problem that we should be debating and concentrating on is the rapidly declining state of the economy and how will the economy be restored to a more viable one (Mills, *The Daily News*, 18 April 2000).

Attempting to separate land and the economy was flawed in the sense that Zimbabwe's economy is agro-based and the fact that the country's secondary and tertiary industries were intricately connected with the agricultural economy. It is therefore inconceivable how the economy would industrialise if its major resource, the land, remained in the hands of a few white commercial farmers.

The private media were keen to prove that the Zimbabwean government was wrong in embarking on the Fast Track Land Reform and did not listen to wise counsel. As the land reform was singled out for the country's multifarious problems, the impact of droughts, the decelerated foreign direct investment and the deleterious effects of sanctions imposed on the county by Western countries were completely ignored by the private media. This myopia was in spite of the fact that even the most strident critics of the ZANU-PF government, such as the Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (MMPZ), acknowledged the negative effects of sanctions. The MMPZ noted that:

... none of the private newspapers offered informed analysis on the effect that freezing international financial assistance would have on the economy and therefore the generality of Zimbabwe (MMPZ 2002: 69).

Also, *The Financial Times* (Britain) acknowledged the negative effects of economic sanctions on the country when it noted that:

Mr. Mugabe and his regime have been remarkably resilient. The country is enduring de-facto sanctions; the IMF and World Bank have frozen loans, aid is limited to humanitarian needs and foreign investment has dried up (*The Financial Times*, 18/08/01, cited by Fahim Ahmed 2002: 5).

Moyo and Yeros demonstrate how the Zimbabwean economy was subjected to economic sanctions since 1998, when Britain imposed a military embargo on the country, the IMF and World Bank suspended lending to the country in 1999 and all donor development assistance was frozen after the year 2000 (Moyo and Yeros 2007: 14-15). Development assistance contracted from \$562 million in 1994 to \$190 million by 2000 (ibid.: 15). Thereafter, donor assistance (except humanitarian aid) ceased after the enactment of the Zimbabwe Democracy and Recovery Act (2001) by the United States of America government (ibid.: 15).

Most recently, the Minister of Finance in the coalition government, Tendai Biti, admitted that sanctions, primarily the Zimbabwe Democracy Act (ZIDERA), were hurting the economy. He noted that:

... if you consider for instance the World Bank right now has billions and billions of dollars that we have to access but we can't access unless we have dealt with and normalised our relations with IMF. We cannot normalise our relations with IMF because of the voting power. It's a veto of America and people who represent America on that board (who) cannot vote differently because of ZIDERA, so it is critical (NewZimbabwe.com, 3 May 2009; *The Herald*, 2 May 2009).

This goes to show that the privately-owned media failed to present a broader perspective of the causes of Zimbabwe's economic dislocation by singling out land reform as the sole source of the country's economic problems while ignoring or minimising the impact of sanctions imposed on the country by Western countries.

This selective memory on the causes of the country's economic collapse exposed the uncritical journalism on the part of the privately-owned media and punctures the myth that the private media in Zimbabwe is the beacon of journalistic independence and excellence. The private media accused the government of resting on its laurels for many years by not instituting land

reform with vigour after 1980, only to wake up when its grip on power was threatened. The plethora of legal and political obstacles that stood in the way of land reform, such as the property safeguards in the Lancaster House Constitution, the fact that the British and American governments reneged on their financial obligations and the resistance by white farmers were ignored by these media.

Ahmed (2002), however, notes that, although Britain and the United States of America pledged \$2 billion to compensate white farmers, they failed to pay this money. Resistance by white farmers against land reform technically disabled the government, rendering it a sitting duck for the greater part of the post-independence period. Ahmed notes that:

...the commercial Farmers Union of white farmers blocked many initiatives for rural relocation. They controlled 90% of all the agricultural production, paid one-third of the country's goods. The continuing colonial mentality of the land lords was evident from the fact that they carried on voting for the former party of apartheid, the Rhodesian Front, until recently that is when they struck on a more sophisticated weapon; the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) (Ahmed 2002: 2).

Again, the private media's stance that war veterans and peasants lacked a genuine desire for land and that they were merely political tools of the government was an inadequate analysis of the situation on the ground. On the one hand, private media discourse portrayed war veterans as 'thugs', 'terrorists', 'murderers' and 'henchmen'. On the other hand, newly resettled farmers were caricatured as 'cell phone farmers', 'Mugabe cronies', 'idle party hacks', or people with no desire for farming. Such representations gave the impression that the only beneficiaries of the land reform were the elites. Findings of recent studies on the land reform contradict this view (see Moyo and Yeros 2009; Scoones et al 2010; Scoones and Mavedzenge 2010; Elich 2011; Winter 2010; Mataire 2010). For example, a study conducted by Ian Scoones and colleagues at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex (UK) (*Zimbabwe's Land Reform, Myths and Realities*) dispels the myth that the major beneficiaries of the land reform were elites. In addition, the study also debunks the myths that:

- Land reform has been a total failure;
- There is no investment on the resettled land;
- Agriculture is in complete ruins, creating chronic food insecurity; and
- The rural economy has collapsed (Scoones and Mavedzenge 2010).

Scoones notes that: 'What we have observed on the ground does not represent the political and media stereotypes of abject failure; but nor indeed are we observing universal, roaring success' (cited by Winter 2010: 1). Since no attempts were made to consider 'positives' of the land reform programme, implying, for instance, that all new farmers were lazy and lacked the desire to farm, the private media fell prey to partisan interests the same way the public media did. Their uncritical condemnation of newly resettled farmers gave an impression that they endorsed the status quo.

An example of their stereotypical lazy farmer is found in an article published in *The Zimbabwe Independent* which states that:

Here in lies the biggest problem with our new farmers and government is playing right into the hands of greedy sharks out to make a quick buck. Some of the people who got huge tracks of land not only lack the skills and interest in farming, they also have no culture of long term investment and sacrifice. While the white farmers who were removed from the land had spent painstaking years borrowing and investing in infrastructure, from dams to irrigation equipment, the new guys want everything on a silver plate, so they can become instant millionaires (*The Zimbabwe Independent*, 06 May 2005).

The image of the new farmer as a pathologically lazy person in the privately-owned newspaper is a sharp contrast to the white commercial farmer who is portrayed as a 'jolly good fellow' who has fallen victim to the whims and caprices of a 'deranged regime'. In the private media, as much as in the foreign media, the white farmer is a 'messiah' who can extricate his nation from the jaws of the worst famine ever in history by producing unlimited quantities of food. Hence, some stories focused on the 'brutal' murder of white farmers, providing lurid details of these 'gruesome' acts, in order to invoke the sympathy of readers and to project the government as a devil. Examples are: 'Commercial farmer under siege at farm' (*The Standard*, 11 July 2004), 'Ex-fighters hold farmer hostage for three days' (*The Daily News*, 9 July 2001) and 'Another white farmer killed' (*The Daily News*, 12 December 2000).

'Victims of violence' were given a long leash to empty their souls. The Commercial Farmers' Union (CFU) and Justice for Agriculture (JAG) bodies, which represented white farmers, particularly enjoyed the generosity of the private media as sources of news. For example, in *The Daily News* (27 March 2002), the CFU spokesperson Jenni Williams was given a long leash to make allegations about 'suspected' ZANU-PF supporters who allegedly had descended on some farms in Marondera, harassing commercial farmers in the area. Alleged perpetrators of the violence were not given an opportunity to rebut these allegations in spite of their seriousness.

It has been argued that anti-land reform lobbyists used the issue of 'wrong methodology' in land expropriation as a smokescreen. Ahmed, for instance, notes that 'In 1990, parliament passed the Land Reform Act, which proved popular among the majority of the workers and peasants, but evoked fierce resistance from wealthy whites' (2002: 2). Goncalves (1993) chronicles government efforts to speed up land reform after the expiration of the ten year period imposed by the Lancaster House Constitution. These include the 1990 Constitutional Amendment and the 1992 Land Designation Act (LDA), both of which were attempts to create leg room in order to tackle the land problem (Goncalves 1993: 6). In 1997, the government earmarked 1470 white owned farms for compulsory acquisition, but did not succeed due to legal impediments mounted by the farmers. Evidence provided by the scholars cited above testifies that, while an orderly land redistribution exercise was desirable, legal impediments and the intransigence of white commercial farmers made it impossible for government to expedite the land redistribution process. The 'orderly' process between 1980 and 1999 had not achieved much and, perhaps, a more radical approach was inevitable in order to pacify the restive peasant population which was clamouring for land. Thus the charge that the government only became serious about land reform after the rejection of the February 2000 referendum is a mis-analysis of the Zimbabwean state. Tendencies of 'radicalisation' were present even before the 2000 referendum (Moyo and Yeros 2007a). After the Land Designation Act (1992), some farmers challenged its constitutionality and took the government to court, resulting in President Robert Mugabe vowing that he would disregard any court decision that would stand in the way of land reform. He told a ruling ZANU-PF party central committee meeting that:

I, Robert Mugabe, cannot be dragged to court by a settler ... if white settlers took the land from us without paying for it, we can in a similar way just take it from them, without paying for it, or entertaining any ideas of legality and constitutionality (Goncalves 1993: 7).

This also shows that claims by some sections of the privately-owned media that Mugabe used the land reform programme to retain his waning power need to be moderated as much as it is a truncation of history. Thus the a-historical stance taken by the private media in their coverage of land reform prevented them from properly explaining the complex nature of the land issue, the Zimbabwean state and President Robert Mugabe as a person.

Unlike the white farmers who enjoyed generous coverage, farm workers were hardly interviewed in the private media. They were more spoken about than they spoke. When they were spoken about, the objective was to portray

Mugabe and his government as cruel and uncaring. Examples of headlines conveying such a message include: ‘Displaced farm workers now destitute’ (*The Standard*, 25 April 2004), ‘Women farm workers bear the brunt of land seizures’ (*The Standard*, 9 January 2005) and ‘Disaster strikes-Ethnic Cleansing-mass displacements’ (*The Zimbabwe Independent*, 31 August 2001). The emphasis on the ‘victimhood’ of farm workers in the private media gave the impression that the condition of farm workers in the new dispensation was worse than during the era of white commercial farmers (see Thornycroft 2009). A report commissioned by the General Agricultural and Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe (GAPWUZ) echoed similar sentiments. A farm worker who was interviewed by researchers who compiled the study is reported to have said:

I would like Murungu<sup>10</sup> to come back because these issues of trauma were not there during Varungu’s time. You just knew that you would go to work and get paid at the end of the month and if you did not perform well you would deal with the foreman and be sent back home (GAPWUZ 2009: 55).

As a consequence of them being projected as passive victims of the land reform, farm workers were not adequately given voice. Emphasis on their victimhood meant that they appeared more as pawns on the chessboard of political machinations, rather than as active agents. Like their public media counterparts, the privately owned media became hostages of political forces, thus failing to represent the land reform from a much broader perspective. However, unlike the public media which attempted to historicise the land issue, the privately owned media accentuated the property rights of the white commercial farmers, democracy, human rights and rule of law. Partisanship and their a-historical approach gave way to selective coverage of issues related to land reform, distortions and an oversimplification of complex issues around the land reform, thereby abdicating their responsibility to inform and educate the Zimbabwean public and the global community about the situation in Zimbabwe.

### **Framing of land and agrarian issues in the international media**

Representation of land and agrarian reforms in the international media since 1997 was shaped by the foreign policies of the various western countries towards Zimbabwe. Following the election of the Labour Party in Britain in 1997, relations between Zimbabwe and Britain deteriorated (Chigora 2006: 61). The FTLRP and President Mugabe’s refusal to renew a second round of the economic structural adjustment programmes or what was described as a ‘conflict of values’ has been cited as the harbinger of the fallout between the West and the

ZANU-PF government (Chigora 2006). Reportage on land reform inevitably foregrounded the 'breakdown of rule of law', 'good governance' and 'democracy' in Zimbabwe, thus mirroring the contours of Western foreign policy.

The land redistribution was often described as 'land grab', 'land seizures', 'theft', 'violent' and 'barbaric'. For example, *The Telegraphy* (16 July 2000) reported that land grab chaos was looming in Zimbabwe. This report was after the then Vice President, the late Joseph Msika, promised war veterans that the government would accelerate the land redistribution exercise. Other news headlines which conveyed similar messages included: 'court backs land seizures' (CNN.com, 4 December 2001), 'Zimbabwe presses its seizures of farms' (*The New York Times*, 12 November 2000) and 'Zimbabwe's large farms face squeeze' (BBC News.com, 6 January 2000). These headlines were consistent with the views of most Western countries which saw land reform as a violation of property rights.

Ankomah (2000) contends that, when covering Africa, the western media are guided by four codes, namely, their country's national interest; their government's lead; government leaning; and advertisers and readers. By projecting human rights issues, the international media sought to divert attention from the indebtedness of countries like Britain to Zimbabwe since Britain had reneged on its pledge to fund land reform. Instead, the blame was laid on President Mugabe's 'corrupt' government. Some critics argue that the West has unjustifiably placed primacy on issues of democracy, good governance and rule of law at the expense of Zimbabwe's national question, which is the land issue. *The Scrutator*, for example, argues that in:

...the absence of political economy context and theoretical framework, much of our writings on human rights, rule of law, constitution etc, uncritically reiterate or assume neoliberal precepts. Human rights is not a theoretical tool of understanding social and political relations. At best, it can only be a means of exposing a form of oppression and, therefore, perhaps, an ideology of resistance (*The Scrutator*, cited in Raftopoulos 2005: 2)

Moyo and Yeros (2008: 2) concur that the issue of 'democracy is intrinsic to both the agrarian and the national questions'. They add that in Zimbabwe, democracy was a result of the overthrow of colonialism, but this democracy fell far short of addressing historical imbalances.

In terms of human rights (in this case the property rights of whites), President Mugabe's persona became synonymous with the 'Zimbabwean crisis'. Examples of headlines which suggest this personalisation of the land issue include: 'Is Mugabe's strategy working?' (The BBC, 13 April 2000), 'Mugabe

defends land seizures' (CNN, 13 April 2000), 'Stay Cool on Zimbabwe Crisis, Mugabe says' (Reuters, 13 April 2000), 'Embattled Mugabe confronted by rule of law' (*The Guardian*, 13 April 2000), 'Mugabe warns boers to leave' (BBC News, 8 April 2000) and 'Mugabe "will not negotiate" over white land' (*The Times*, 8 April 2000). Personalisation resulted in the oversimplification of the issue, as important dimensions of the land question were marginalised. The excessive focus on the deaths of white commercial farmers, while downplaying the plight of black victims of the violence amounted to 'ethnicisation' of the land issue (Willems 2005). Ethnicisation meant that more sympathy was shown towards white victims of the land occupations, while black victims were ignored. While more space was devoted to recounting the ordeals of white commercial farmers, black victims were conspicuous by their absence. Numerous stories were devoted to the deaths of white farmers such as David Stephens and Martin Olds.<sup>11</sup> Examples of such headlines include: 'White farmer killed in Zimbabwe' (*BBC News*, 18 March 2002), 'White farmer killed by Zimbabwean war veterans' (*The Guardian*, 8 August 2001), 'White farmers in Zimbabwe struggle against increasing violence' (*The Telegraphy*, 11 June 2010), 'Mugabe warns 'Boers' to leave' (*The Observer*, 8 April 2000) and 'Seventh white farmer killed in Zimbabwe' (*The Independent* (UK), 13 December 2000).

On 8th March 2002, the BBC (Online) published a story about the death of Terry Ford, who was allegedly shot dead on his farm near Norton. Terry was found 'propped against a tree outside his homestead'. In the same story, we are told about the death a black security guard, who had been beaten to death at a farm outside the town of Marondera. While a lot of detail is furnished about the white farmer (the method used to kill him, the place of killing and the tragic manner he died, as well as the fact that he was the tenth white farmer to be killed under similar circumstances), very little information is supplied about the black security guard. This shows that western media sought to racialise the violence associated with the farm occupations. Doing so diverted attention from the legitimacy of land redistribution in the country.

Harvey notes how the BBC and *The London Times* gave reports that were 'saturated with humanistic rhetoric that supported the tremendously good white farmers and their families' (2000: 5). According to Harvey, an excessive amount of detail was devoted to 'irrelevant information' in order to incite the sympathy of readers. Information – on how white farmers were attacked, their life styles, names and other minute details – not linked to the story was often too detailed for a news article.

Harvey argues that the key ideological positions projected in these reports are imperialism and the humanist values that uphold it. This representation of white farmers sharply contrasted with that of farm workers who were largely marginalised in the land reform discourse. Taylor argues that:

Western interest and media coverage are inseparable when it comes to Zimbabwe; here we witness the enforcement of the myth that whiteness is power. In particular, a western assumption about the worth of white life over black life is so clearly exposed in recent western media reporting in Zimbabwe (2007: 3).

Thus, white stories of ‘victimhood’ continue to trump black stories of racial injustice. ‘And yet on what grounds can it be argued that white suffering is more important than the past and present suffering of black Zimbabweans?’ (ibid: 3).

Whereas in the initial phases of the FTLRP, attention was mainly focused on human rights violations, in the post FTLRP phase, the international media sought to vindicate themselves by focusing on the ‘negative consequences’ of the FTLRP foretold at the onset of the programme. During this phase, stories on social and political calamities befalling Zimbabwe, such as those occasioned by food shortages, shortage of basic commodities, ‘plummeting production’ levels and ‘drying’ of foreign currency reserves, were the staple diet of the international media (See Box 8.3 for examples).

**Box 8.3: Typical headlines on the ‘crisis’ outcome**

- ‘White land grab policy has failed, Mugabe confesses’ (Reuters, 03 March 2005)
- ‘Food Crisis in Zimbabwe Worsens’ UN (AFP, 03 October 2003)
- ‘Zimbabwe’s food crisis: What went wrong’ (Reuters, 01 August 2002)
- ‘Mugabe Blockading Food Relief– Zimbabweans Starve’ (*The Mail and Guardian*, 17 November 2002)

The number of Zimbabweans ‘facing starvation’ as a result of the land reform was a common feature in the news. Figures varied from publication to publication. For example, *The Mail and Guardian* reported that ‘Six million Zimbabweans face starvation’ (17 November 2002), while *The Times* (London) put the figure at ‘five million’ (14 October 2008). The emphasis on food security and the insinuation that only white farmers could save Zimbabwe from starvation was an implicit endorsement of the skewed racial ownership of land that existed before the FTLRP.

Another aspect which was emphasised by the international media was the so-called ‘contagion effect’ of the Zimbabwe land reform. There were concerns about Zimbabwean-style farm invasions spilling into neighbouring countries where the land issue had not been resolved, primarily, South Africa and Namibia. If what was happening in Zimbabwe went unchecked, these countries would sooner or later catch ‘the Zimbabwean disease’, so went the reasoning. In the news, South Africa and Namibia were ‘warned’ not to emulate the Zimbabwe-style of land reform. Such headlines include: ‘Regional concern over land crisis’ (BBC News, 16 May 2000), ‘SA land reforms walk uneasy path’ (Reuters, 28 October 2004) and ‘Reform to be according to Law’, Nujoma (AFP, 23 April 2004).

The entrenched commercial interests of the West influenced the Western media to avoid looking at the land issue in Zimbabwe in a dispassionate manner, resulting in numerous stories that were left yearning for attention. Thus, the entrenched positions resulted in crucial facts such as those exposed by Moyo et al (2009) and Scoones et al (2010), studies (see above) either obfuscated, distorted, convoluted, or completely omitted from the discourse altogether (see Box 8.4 below for more missing stories about the land reform).

#### **Box 8.4: Missing stories in the domestic and international media**

- Facts about current distribution of land
- Actual impact of the Fast Track Land Reform
- Impact of droughts on the economy
- Land policy relating to tenure and farm size
- Actual number of people needing food assistance
- The food security situation in the country
- Production levels
- The main beneficiaries of the land reform

Moyo also notes that social facts on the ground show that land redistribution has redressed the imbalanced racial legacy, but has at the ‘same time spawned new inequalities which are less sharp, while challenges to the outcome by former land owners remain’ (Moyo 2007: 1). Distortions and omissions in the media resulted in a paucity of information on a number of issues and the public are ill-informed, confused, or completely ignorant about certain important issues. Representation of land and agrarian issues in the international

media demonstrates that institutional, ideological, political and other facts can impose limitations on the media, thereby preventing them from properly executing their democratic mandate of informing the citizens.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed framing of land and agrarian issues by the local media (private and public) and the international media between 2000 and 2007.

A review of headlines in the post-2000 era indicates that private media accentuated property rights, democracy and rule of law in their framing of FTLRP, while the public media projected the necessity of correcting historical imbalances and social justice and the international media focused more on humanitarian aspects, violence and human rights issues. During this time period, both private media and international media replicated the dichotomy defined by colonial media: These representations set up a contrast between the well-meaning, responsible, skilled white farmer and the incompetent, greedy and dangerous black interloper. Zimbabwe's state media, post-2000, has positioned itself in opposition, justifying black ownership and the credibility of indigenous Zimbabweans as farmers. These extreme positions reflect the political polarization of the media at the time.

Representation of land and agrarian issues reflects the existence of conflicting ideological values. On the one hand, the state media foregrounded the necessity of land reform in order to correct historical imbalances. On the other hand, the local-privately owned media and the international media accentuated neoliberal democratic values such as 'property rights', 'rule of law' and 'democracy and good governance'. The contention in this chapter is that media framing of Zimbabwe's land reform programme, particularly by the privately-owned and the corporate-funded Western media reflected a simplistic and dichotomised view of the land reform, whereby the Zimbabwean state under the leadership of President Mugabe has been constructed as both another African dream that has become a nightmare (Akpabio 2008) and a titan 'at the forefront of the battleground against Western imperialism' (Rutherford 2005). These generalisations have resulted in numerous blind spots in the land and agrarian discourse, what one can call a 'crisis of framing' land and agrarian issues, epitomised by selective voicing of social and political discourses on land reform, generalisations and self-serving evidence of failure or success of the land reform programme. Rutherford rightly points out that: 'these competing generalisations neglect some of the complexities associated with the current Zimbabwean conflict. What they overlook are the overlapping

'territorializing projects', 'the varied political attempts being made to control and influence the Zimbabwean people and their relations' (p. 103). Findings from this study bring under the spotlight neoliberal conceptualisations of the media as 'public spheres' or 'watchdogs', particularly in societies plagued with socio-economic conflicts. It is therefore imperative to re-think these classical formulations of the media in order to locate the proper function of the mass media in transitional societies.

## Notes

1. After the rejection of the draft constitution in February 2000, the ZANU-PF government passed Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Number 16 (2000), which empowered it to expropriate white- owned land.
2. Loosely translated, '*jambanja*' means violence in Shona. Shona is the main vernacular language spoken in Zimbabwe.
3. There were reports in the public media that farm workers were being mobilized by their employers to vote against the government-sponsored draft constitution as an incentive to protect their jobs.
4. For instance, the government put in place a statutory instrument in terms of Section 17 of the Labour Relations Act, which prescribed the requirement and mode of compensation to all farm workers affected by the land reform. This law entitled all affected farm workers to receive severance packages calculated on the basis of their current salaries and their period of service.
5. For instance, BBC and CNN, which were banned by the Zimbabwean government because of their hostile reporting, were allowed back into the country in July 2009 after the formation of the coalition government.
6. According to the Report by the Commonwealth Observer Group (2000), the MMPZ is funded by the Norwegian International Development Agency (NORAD) and the Open Society Initiative for Africa (OSISA). The MMPZ is biased in favour of the private media. Its weekly reports routinely criticize the public media, while lauding the private media.
7. The fast-track land reform was officially known as *The Third Chimurenga*.
8. Mainstream civil society organizations in the country do not regard the War Veterans Association of Zimbabwe as civil society, presumably because of its alliance with the state.
9. The two newspapers pursued a middle of the road approach characterized by neutrality on land reform, for example: 'More resources- for land survey' (*The Sunday Mirror*, 12 November 2006) and 'The hidden hand in Zim politics' (*The Sunday Mirror*, 9 July 2006).
10. "Murungu" is singular for 'white man' and "Varungu" is the plural.
11. These were the first two white farmers to be killed after the land occupations started.

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