

Wendy Willems

Selection and silence: contesting meanings of land in Zimbabwean media

**Article (Accepted version)
(Refereed)**

Original citation:

Willems, Wendy (2004) *Selection and silence: contesting meanings of land in Zimbabwean media*. [Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies](#), 25 (1). ISSN 0256-0054

DOI: [10.1080/02560054.2004.9653275](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02560054.2004.9653275)

© 2004 [Routledge](#)

This version available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/51154/>

Available in LSE Research Online: July 2013

LSE has developed LSE Research Online so that users may access research output of the School. Copyright © and Moral Rights for the papers on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may download and/or print one copy of any article(s) in LSE Research Online to facilitate their private study or for non-commercial research. You may not engage in further distribution of the material or use it for any profit-making activities or any commercial gain. You may freely distribute the URL (<http://eprints.lse.ac.uk>) of the LSE Research Online website.

This document is the author's final accepted version of the journal article. There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

Selection and silence: contesting meanings of land in the private and state media in Zimbabwe

Wendy Willems

Centre for Media and Film Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

Original citation:

Willems, W. (2004). Selection and silence: Contesting meanings of land in Zimbabwean media. In: *Ecquid Novi - African Journalism Studies* 25(1): 4-24.

Abstract:

The tense political environment of the late 1990s, in which the Zimbabwean government was confronted with a more vocal civil society and a new political party, set the stage for the introduction of a new private newspaper The Daily News which for the first time posed a serious challenge to the long-standing monopoly of the government-controlled daily newspaper The Herald. This paper compares and analyses how these two daily newspapers have represented the widespread land occupations in Zimbabwe which gained momentum in early 2000. It argues that media representations of the land question in the run-up to the June 2000 parliamentary elections came to parallel the polarised political environment, thereby missing chances for a serious and more subtle debate on the land issue in the Zimbabwean media.

Keywords:

agriculture, commercial farming, discourse analysis, journalism, land occupations, land reform, media, news, politics, print media, representation, Zimbabwe

Introduction

With the widespread occupation of commercial farms in February 2000, Zimbabwe's long-standing problem of its inequitable land distribution brought by colonialism regained the attention of local and international media. Whereas the farm occupations were part of a much wider economic and political crisis in the country, the media –and the foreign media in particular- often focused its attention on the land issue without relating these to other developments in the country. The Zimbabwean government became increasingly concerned about how the land occupations were covered in the media and attributed great importance to media *representations* of the land question. This is demonstrated by the government's paranoid attempts to control the operations of both local and international media through the introduction of stringent legislation.

The government also showed confidence in the persuasive power of the media. After the 2000 parliamentary elections, it increasingly began to use the state-funded media in order to win the hearts and minds of Zimbabweans for its 'fast-track land reform' exercise. A music album named 'Hondo yeMinda' [*the struggle for land*] was launched and a variety of jingles and video clips were introduced such as 'Chave Chimurenga' [*it is now war*] and 'Rambai Makashinga' [*continue to persevere*]. These would appear on state radio and television several times per hour.¹

¹ It should be noted that Zimbabwe's electronic media climate is still primarily dominated by the state broadcaster, Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC). Various attempts have been recently made by e.g. Capital Radio and Radio Dialogue to set up radio stations but these have been hampered by the government.

Acknowledging the crucial nature of *representations* of the land question in the Zimbabwean public sphere, this article analyses how meanings of land were contested in two daily newspapers, the privately-owned *The Daily News* and the state-funded *The Herald*, in the period from February 2000 leading up to the parliamentary elections in June 2000. It deals with the nature of their reporting, their selection of headlines, and their attribution of agency towards certain actors.

News is always a selection of events that are taking place in the real world at a particular moment in time. News is therefore not simply that what happens but that which can be presented as newsworthy. Whereas some events will be highlighted, others will be ignored. As Foucault (1978:27) has pointed out, silence is very much part of any discourse:

Silence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies.

Applying this to news production, Van Dijk (1991:114) argues that the analysis of the ‘unsaid’ is sometimes more revealing than the study of what is actually expressed in text. The focus of my analysis will be on how newspapers have both included and excluded information in their reporting on the need for land reform, the relation between farmers and farm workers and the causes of farm occupations.

Zimbabwe’s post-independence print media climate²

In the first decade after independence, Zimbabwe’s newspaper environment was dominated by the range of newspapers printed by the government-controlled Zimbabwe Newspapers (1980) Ltd.³ This company published two daily newspapers *The Herald* (Harare) and *The Chronicle* (Bulawayo), and four weeklies: *The Sunday Mail* (Harare), *The Sunday News* (Bulawayo), *Manica Post* and *Kwayedza*.⁴

However, with the decreasing popularity of state-sponsored print media in the 1990s, several *weekly* private newspapers such as *The Zimbabwe Independent* (1996), *The Standard* (1997) and *The Zimbabwe Mirror* (1997) managed to penetrate the country’s media market. These newspapers became increasingly critical of the achievements of the government and played an important role in exposing corruption, government mismanagement and the deepening economic and social crisis in Zimbabwe. Obviously, this also made them a primary target for the government who began to label private newspapers as ‘enemies of the state’ or ‘opposition’ or ‘white’ mouthpieces. In order to silence the private press, the government used a range of measures including death threats to and assaults on reporters, charging editors and reporters with criminal defamation, and repeatedly suing newspapers for civil defamation, claiming large amounts of damages (Saunders, 1999).

However, two radio stations, Harare-based Voice of the People (since mid-2000) and London-based SW Radio Africa (since December 2001), have successfully circumvented government’s restrictions to enter the airwaves and are currently broadcasting several hours per day on the short wave.

² This section mainly focuses on post-independence print media in Zimbabwe. For more information on the pre-independence period, see Saunders (1999), Frederikse (1982) and Windrich (1981).

³ At independence in 1980 the new government created the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT) in order to take control of the Rhodesia Printing and Publishing Company (RPP) which was set up in 1926 by the South African Argus Media Group. RPP was renamed Zimbabwe Newspapers (1980) Limited. In 1986 ZMMT took 51 percent of the shares in Zimpapers. (Saunders, 1999; Ronning and Kupe, 2000).

⁴ *The Herald* dates back from the early days of colonialism and was launched in 1892 as *The Rhodesian Herald* by the South African Argus Printing and Publishing Company.

Government attacks on the private press increased in 1999 when the government was confronted with growing political and economic pressures. The structural adjustment programme which was implemented in the early 1990s had led to the abolition of food subsidies, a sharp increase in unemployment and a decline in the provision of social services such as education and health care. In this climate of rapidly rising poverty, the government was faced with growing economic demands from members of the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA). This association was set up in 1992 by the War Veterans Act in order to improve the welfare of ex-combatants and their dependants. Despite promises to uplift their lives, war veterans became increasingly disillusioned and therefore began to put stronger pressure on the government. In 1997, the government finally succumbed to war veterans' demands when it announced to offer them pensions although these had not been included in the government budget.

The unbudgeted spending on war veteran pensions, coupled with a decision in 1998 to intervene in the Congo war, led to a decrease in donor funds and a rapid devaluation of the Zimbabwean dollar as a consequence of declining investor confidence. Civil society became increasingly vocal under these circumstances. In order to address the rising political and economic problems in the country, the labour union movement united in the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) resolved to support the formation of a new political party. This led to the birth of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in September 1999.

In this environment, Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (Pvt) Ltd established -with both local and foreign investment- two daily newspapers *The Daily News* and Bulawayo-based *The Dispatch*, and a chain of local newspapers. *The Daily News* started publishing in March 1999 and for the first time posed a serious challenge to the long-standing monopoly of the government-controlled daily newspaper *The Herald*.⁵ *The Daily News* became particularly popular in the period leading up to the 2000 parliamentary elections when it managed to triple its average sales from 35,000 to 90,000.⁶ In the same period, the circulation of *The Herald* dropped from around 90,000 to little more than 60,000 a day according to its former editor.⁷ A survey conducted by the Zimbabwe Advertising Research Foundation (ZARF) showed, however, that *The Herald* still dominated the market in terms of average readership with 713,000 daily readers whereas *The Daily News* was on average read by 424,000 people.⁸

Because of its rapidly rising popularity and critical reporting, the government increasingly came to target the newspaper. In two separate incidents, *The Daily News*' offices (April 2000) and printing press (January 2001) were bombed and in both cases the government was the primary suspect. Furthermore, journalists, reporters and the editor of the newspaper were arrested and harassed on numerous occasions.

After the 2000 parliamentary elections, Jonathan Moyo was appointed as the Minister of Information and Publicity in the President's Office which drastically came to change Zimbabwe's media landscape. Around the time of the presidential elections in March 2002, the government introduced new legislation which had important implications for both local

⁵ Some attempts to break the monopoly of *The Herald* were made by Modus Publications in the early 1990s with their launch of *The Daily Gazette*. However, due to financial difficulties the paper had to stop printing in 1994 (Saunders, 1999; Ronning and Kupe, 2000).

⁶ Personal communication. *The Daily News* Advertisement Manager, September 2001.

⁷ Chakaodza tells Herald secrets. *The Daily News*, 2001-05-21. Bornwell Chakaodza became the editor of *The Herald* in 1998 and was fired in August 2000.

⁸ As part of a survey carried out for the Zimbabwe Advertising Research Foundation (ZARF), 5000 adults in communal, resettlement, commercial farming, mining and urban high- and low-density areas were interviewed on their reading behaviour between 3 February 2000 and 13 June 2000. The results were published in the Zimbabwe All Media & Products Survey (ZAMPS) 2000, Volume Three.

and international media. The Public Order and Security Act (POSA) banned the publication or communication of statements offensive to the Zimbabwean state or to the President, or those which endanger public order, regardless of whether the information is true or false. In addition, the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) called for registration and accreditation of all foreign correspondents, local journalists, media houses and news agencies with a Media and Information Commission. *The Daily News* decided not to register as a media house but to challenge the constitutionality of AIPPA in the Supreme Court. In September 2003, the Court ruled that *The Daily News* would have to comply with AIPPA and the newspaper was advised to register with the Media and Information Commission. The commission denied registration and this forced *The Daily News* to stop publication of its paper.

The need for land reform reported

While reporting on the need for land reform in the context of the new developments in early 2000, the Zimbabwean press clearly took very different positions. Whereas *The Herald* emphasised the necessity to redistribute land, *The Daily News* focused on the negative aspects of the farm occupations.

First of all, this could be concluded from the numerous articles which *The Daily News* published on criticism of farm occupations.⁹ Various groups such as the international community, opposition parties, human rights organisations, labour unions, business community, farm worker representatives were quoted as expressing their disapproval of farm occupations although they supported the principle of land reform as long as it would be conducted in a transparent manner.

By contrast, *The Herald* carried articles in which other, mainly political, actors declared their support for land reform such as foreign governments, churches, labour unions, and most importantly ruling and opposition parties from neighbouring countries.¹⁰ However, while supporting land reform if it would be conducted in a transparent and orderly manner, some actors were reported to be concerned about the farm occupations.

Whereas the content of these types of articles in both papers did not always differ significantly, headlines were clearly distinct. *The Daily News* headlines would state that certain actors condemned land 'invasions', whereas headlines in *The Herald* would point out that certain actors supported land reform. In this case, headlines served to make clear ideological statements about the attitude of the newspaper towards the events unfolding.

⁹ *The Daily News*: Opposition political parties condemn farm invasions (2000-03-01), Farm invasions worry EU (2000-03-02), Rights group urges MPs to reject Land Acquisition Bill (2000-03-14), Mugabe urged to stop invasions (2000-03-15), Business Leaders' Forum condemns farm invasions (2000-03-16), Zara condones farm invasions (2000-03-16), Tsvangirai lashes at government over farm invasions (2000-03-27), Avoid primitive solutions to land issue: US (2000-03-27), Labour body calls for transparent land distribution, end to invasions (2000-03-29), Patrick Kombayi attacks Mugabe over invasions (2000-03-31), Norway criticises invasions (2000-04-05), EU supports calls for rule of law, end of invasions in Zimbabwe (2000-04-11), Order ex-fighters off farms, ZimRights tells Mugabe (2000-04-12), Ex-Zipra cadres attack invaders (2000-04-18), Bank warns on invasions (2000-05-31), Mbeki does not back illegal farm invasions (2000-06-12).

¹⁰ *The Herald*: German delegation implores State to intensify land reform process (2000-03-10), Villagers support farm invasions (2000-03-17), Over 50pc of S. Africans support ex-combatants' occupation of farms (2000-04-05), Anglican Church backs land reform programme (2000-04-13), We support ZANU-PF on land issue-former ZIPRA members (2000-04-25), Methodist Church welcomes land talks (2000-05-02), ZCTU calls for speedy land redistribution (2000-05-02), ZANU-PF candidate stresses need for land (2000-05-15), Lesotho supports land reform (2000-05-23), Communal farmers support farm invasions (2000-05-27), SA demonstrators support Zimbabwe war vets (2000-05-27), Zambia backs land reform programme (2000-06-09), Sanyati chiefs throw their weight behind land redistribution (2000-06-12), Swaziland in full support of land redistribution (2000-06-16), Ex-Zambian minister backs land reform (2000-06-21).

In order to further strengthen its point, *The Daily News* carried a large number of articles -mainly quoting professionals from the business community, financial sector and farmers unions- on the negative effects of occupations on the economy.¹¹ Articles reported that occupations would prevent farmers from planting wheat and vegetables, would result into reduced foreign currency earnings from tobacco which would further negatively impact on business in general and would lead to a weaker performance of the stock exchange. Furthermore, *The Daily News* was concerned about the plight of farm workers. An opinion piece in the newspaper argued that farm workers would be displaced if land would be redistributed.¹²

The Herald seemed to be less worried; it covered the issue but with significantly fewer articles.¹³ It did report that farm occupations were threatening farm workers' jobs, damaging investor confidence and hurting agricultural production but the paper tended to focus solely on the disruption of agriculture and did not include the general effects on the economy. The newspaper also argued that land reform would have positive effects. The production potential of communal farmers could be fully utilised if they would be able to move to more fertile areas. To further illustrate the crucial importance of land reform, *The Herald* frequently published pictures which were supposed to prove the marginalised position of communal farmers.¹⁴

Particularly in its editorials, the newspaper reported that land reform could improve food security.¹⁵ *The Herald* argued that commercial farmers had in recent years increasingly shifted their production from food crops such as maize to export crops such as horticulture and flowers, thereby negatively affecting food security. *The Herald* pointed out that a large

¹¹ *The Daily News*: Ex-fighters raid minister's farm (2000-03-08), ZTA statement riles farmers (2000-03-16), Fuel crisis, farm invasions affect ZSE performance (2000-03-22), Tobacco sales start slowly - Few farmers book space to sell crop at auction floors owing to recent farm invasions (2000-04-17), Workers go unpaid as farm invasions paralyse operations (2000-04-19), Invasions cost farm workers jobs (2000-04-26), Zimbabwe may face shortages of wheat (2000-05-02), Decision on land will ruin economy, says Longworth (2000-05-03), FAO warns of impending food crisis in Zimbabwe (2000-05-04), Farm invasions have destroyed economy (2000-05-04), Farm invasions: huge wheat imports expected (2000-05-05), Matabeleland farmers accuse minister of fanning violence (2000-05-15), Farm invasions: food shortages loom - 'Disruptions by war vets have prevented farmers from planting the winter wheat crop and vegetables' (2000-05-23), Farmers owe banks \$25 billion (2000-05-25), Farm invasions, forex shortage cause huge fall in fertiliser sales (2000-05-30), Bank calls for land plan (2000-05-30), 'Farm debt won't be honoured' (2000-05-31), Land invasions will affect region (2000-05-31), Act leaves farm workers homeless, jobless, says union (2000-06-05), War vets, ZANU-PF supporters disrupting winter cropping (2000-06-06), CFU predicts \$1bn losses, shortages in beef sector (2000-06-06), Land crisis likely to dent regional foreign investment (2000-06-13), Farm invasions sting beekeepers (2000-06-20), Invasions likely to cause 10% decline in economy (2000-06-21), IT firms feel pinch of farm invasions (2000-06-23), Farm invasions, fixed forex rate threaten tobacco industry (2000-06-23), Investors eye Zimbabwe's land reform after poll (2000-06-29).

¹² Mills, David. Government side-stepping real issues. *The Daily News*, 2000-04-18.

¹³ *The Herald*: Tobacco worth \$75 million lost (2000-03-08), Farm invasions, Cyclone Eline affect \$75m worth of tobacco crop: CFU (2000-03-10), 'Farm invasions impact negatively on economy' (2000-03-21), 'Farm invasions threatening plantation workers' jobs' (2000-03-22), Tobacco auction floors open today amid uncertainty (2000-04-20), Farmers: Boycott of tobacco auctions is unreasonable (2000-04-26), Farmers to lose crops and livestock worth \$4,2 billion (2000-05-24).

¹⁴ Captions *The Herald*: The shortage of land continues to haunt the landless majority of blacks after British settlers took the fertile land and established successful farms countrywide, a situation which war veterans want rectified immediately (2000-04-18). Despite the attainment of political independence by most countries, the land question remains unresolved (2000-06-07). Most communal farmers resemble this dry parched land in Makonde, Mashonaland West. Because farmers do not have tractors, they use their oxen for draught power (2000-06-21).

¹⁵ *The Herald*: Land ownership structure criticised (2000-04-01). Chakaodza, B. UNDP report shows urgent need to redistribute land (2000-04-03). Chakaodza, B. Urgent land redistribution vital for food security (2000-04-24).

part of food was now being produced by communal farmers. If land would be distributed to these farmers, the newspaper concluded, food production would increase because communal farmers tended to focus on food crops. Although it remains to be seen whether communal farmers will continue to be interested in growing food crops after resettlement, *The Herald* made numerous attempts to break down colonially rooted stereotypes of ‘unproductive peasants’. In order to reduce fears of lower agricultural production as a result of land reform, *The Herald* stressed the productivity of communal and resettlement farmers:

The acquisition of fertile land from the large-scale commercial farming sector for resettling peasant farmers will not result in a slump in agricultural production, as the farmers have proved their potential on small and marginal land. The bulk of the major crops, such as maize, cotton, groundnuts, burley tobacco and paprika, comes from the communal and resettlement farmers.¹⁶

Persistent claims that Zimbabwe will not be able to feed itself if communal farmers are settled on commercial farms have no foundation at all. Our small farmers have convincingly answered their critics by consistently producing on their small and poor pieces of land the bulk of the country’s maize and cotton.¹⁷

The resettled farmers, who were given land during the first phase of the land reform programme, have contributed immensely to the country’s agricultural production, in spite of a host of problems, such as absence of infrastructure, escalating costs of inputs and high interest rates.¹⁸

Photographs of communal and resettlement farmers “showing off with their bumper harvest” served to deliver further evidence for the productivity of small-scale commercial farmers.¹⁹

The Daily News, in contrast, did not have a lot of confidence in land reform. Although the paper was particularly concerned about the way in which it was being carried out by the government, it still failed to seriously consider and debate the option of land reform itself. Echoing the emphasis of the opposition party MDC on solving the economic crisis as first priority, *The Daily News* attempted to downplay the importance of land reform to Zimbabweans:

There is a 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 level.²⁰

The paper also published the results of a survey that concluded that land was not the most pressing issue among Zimbabweans.²¹ According to the survey, priorities were rather rising prices of commodities, unemployment, the fall of the Zimbabwean dollar, and poverty and corruption.

¹⁶ Peasant farmers prove potential on marginal land. *The Herald*, 2000-06-15.

¹⁷ Chakaodza, B. Urgent land redistribution vital for food security. *The Herald*, 2000-04-24.

¹⁸ Land reform is crucial to Zimbabwe’s future. *The Herald*, 2000-03-31.

¹⁹ Captions *The Herald*: Communal farmers have the potential to produce more if allocated enough arable land. Here, a number of tractor trailers loaded with cotton bales wait for their turn to deliver cotton at Sanyati Cotton Depot on Tuesday (2000-06-08). Despite the devastating effect of Cyclone Eline, which hit Masvingo Province last February, the Makamure family, from the recently introduced Marova Resettlement Scheme in Gutu, expected a bumper harvest at least 50 tonnes of maize this season (2000-06-12). Flashback... The Mapanzure family of Masvingo show off their sorghum crop which is drought-resistant. Black farmers can produce much more if they are resettled on arable land (2000-06-21).

²⁰ Mills, David. Government side-stepping real issues. *The Daily News*, 2000-04-18.

²¹ ‘Land is not the most pressing issue among Zimbabweans’. *The Daily News*, 2000-03-13.

Often quoting politicians, *The Herald* thus focused on the historical necessity to correct land imbalances in order to solve the issue once and for all. But the paper thereby failed to critically assess the chaotic ways in which land reform was being carried out. *The Daily News*, on the other hand, seemed to be overly concerned with the negative effects of the land occupations and often cited economists expressing concern about the future of Zimbabwe. However, as a result, the paper did not engage in a more profound debate on land reform.

Agency: farmers, farm workers and politics in the media

Since the late 1990s, the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), an umbrella organisation comprising various local NGOs, had been organising nation-wide meetings to debate a new constitution. As a result of these developments in civic society, the government decided to set up its own Constitutional Commission in early 1999. Later in the year, the commission presented its draft constitution which included clauses that would allow the government to compulsorily acquire land from large-scale commercial farmers without paying for the land itself but for improvements made on the land only. In February 2000, the government held a referendum on the new draft constitution which was, to its own surprise, rejected by 55 % of the voters.

The state-controlled *The Herald* blamed the rejection of the referendum on “the massive turnout of whites”.²² The state media explained the rejection of the constitution by whites as motivated by the clause that would allow the government to compulsorily acquire land without compensation for the land. Obviously, whites could never really have had a significant impact on the final results since they only constitute a small percentage of Zimbabwe’s population. But with the establishment of the MDC, whites did come to play a more public role in political activities and some held positions in the party. This was quickly taken up by ZANU-PF and the state media who portrayed the MDC as a party ‘funded by white farmers’ and dominated by ‘Rhodesian interests’.

After independence, white commercial farmers took a low interest in participating in national political affairs. Rutherford (2001) argues that white commercial farms in Zimbabwe have been organised by the principle of ‘domestic government’. Both the colonial and the independent government were not extremely concerned with the plight of farm workers but saw them as the responsibility of the farmer. Farmers did not have problems with limited government intervention as it allowed them to fully control their farms and farm workers. Whereas they did not have positions in government, farmers obviously had political power as a result of their strong economic position (Von Blanckenburg, 1994). In issues such as agricultural pricing policy, the government was forced to recognise their voices through their representative organisation, the Commercial Farmers’ Union (CFU).

As a consequence of their increasing presence in party politics and because of the scale of the farm occupations, farmers frequently became the target of violence. *The Daily News* paid significantly more attention to violence associated with farm occupations whereas *The Herald* generally described the farm occupations as peaceful. According to *The Daily News*, farmers were assaulted, harassed, held hostage, abducted, taken for ‘re-education’ sessions and intimidated.²³ The paper described it as follows: “Police offered no comfort as they watched helpless, mainly middle-aged whites struggling to brace themselves in the face

²² Beitbridge whites show sudden interest in polls. *The Herald*, 2000-02-14.

²³ *The Daily News*: War veterans holding Mvurwi family hostage (2000-04-06), Elderly couple attacked on farm (2000-04-12), Marauding war vets send white farmers packing (2000-04-17), Farm manager taken hostage (2000-04-24), Raffingora farmer harassed (2000-05-24), Threatened farmer files charges against ZANU-PF (2000-06-05), War veterans assault farmer; harass workers (2000-06-16), War vets besiege Macheke farmer (2000-06-23).

of angry mobs of men, women and children chanting war slogans and nationalistic songs".²⁴ In a number of occasions, *The Daily News* illustrated its reports with dramatic pictures of assaulted farmers and affected farm widows.²⁵

Both newspapers covered the murder of five white farmers although agency was attributed to different actors.²⁶ In its coverage of the killings, *The Daily News* portrayed the farmers as passive victims of violent war veterans. *The Herald* reported them as provoking war veterans thus attributing a more active role to the white farmers. For example, in the case of the murder of David Stevens, *The Herald* emphasised the story of the police spokesman:

Chief Sup Bvudzijena said events leading to his death started around 6 am on Saturday when he [Stevens] armed himself with a gun and instructed his workers to arm themselves as well. They allegedly attacked and injured 14 of 35 war veterans, who have been occupying the farm since February using spears, hoes, sticks and stones, according to war veterans at the farm. (...) When word of the attack filtered through to other war veterans occupying neighbouring farms, they went to the farm to retaliate.²⁷

The Daily News gave more prevalence to the story of the farmers' union vice president who denied that Stevens was armed and stated that the farmer and his farm workers had resisted the war veterans' encroachment earlier that day.

Another example is the murder of the farmer Alan Dunn. In covering this incident, *The Herald* paid far more attention to the fact that white farmers assaulted two farm workers rather than to the causes of the actual death of Dunn. It thus ascribed agency to the farmers whereas farm workers were in this case portrayed as victims.

Generally, the government-sponsored media represented farm workers as being oppressed by their bosses. Parallel to conceptions central during the liberation war, simply working for whites was sufficient for one to be considered as a supporter of the opposition. Closer to the parliamentary elections, *The Herald* focused on how farmers were mobilising their workers to become MDC supporters. The paper expressed concern that farm workers were forced by their 'paymasters' to vote for the MDC.²⁸ Farmers were reported to threaten their workers that they would become unemployed if they would vote for ZANU-PF since the government would then take their farms.

²⁴ White farmers abandon homes as invasions intensify. *The Daily News*, 2000-04-10.

²⁵ Captions *The Daily News*: Violence... Iain Kay, a Marondera farmer who was brutally assaulted by people suspected to be ex-combatants at his Chipesa Farm on Monday. Kay is said to have angered the ex-fighters when he failed to meet a deadline to reconstruct shacks belonging to the farm invaders that he had earlier destroyed (2000-04-05). Zimbabwean farmer Ian Hardy is given emergency treatment by medical staff at the Borradaille Hospital in Marondera, 70km east of Harare, yesterday (2000-04-17). Maria Stevens, of Swedish and Spanish descent, with her two-year-old twin boys Warren (centre) and Sebastian during an interview yesterday. Stevens' husband Dave, a commercial farmer, was abducted and then murdered by war veterans, who shot him twice at point blank range on Saturday. Five other farmers from the same Virginia farming area were abducted and severely beaten when they went to find and rescue Stevens. Over 1 000 mainly white owned farms have been illegally invaded by war veterans and villagers (2000-04-18). Sherry Dunn is comforted by neighbours after her husband was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit at the Avenues Clinic in Harare on Sunday. Dunn died early on Monday from injuries sustained when he was brutally beaten-up by people, suspected to be war veterans, who visited his Beatrice farm on Sunday night (2000-05-10).

²⁶ *The Daily News*: Campaign turns bloody - Two members of the MDC torched to death in Buhera as political violence turns nasty (2000-04-17), Another white farmer killed (2000-04-19), Beatrice farmer beaten to death (2000-05-09), Fourth farmer dies after attack (2000-05-16), Trelawney farmer shot dead (2000-06-02). *The Herald*: White Macheke commercial farmer shot dead (2000-04-17), Nyamandlovu farmer dies in shootout with war veterans (2000-04-19), Beatrice farmer murdered - Black workers assaulted in retaliatory attack (2000-05-09), Farmer and robber die after shootout (2000-06-02).

²⁷ White Macheke commercial farmer shot dead. *The Herald*, 2000-04-17.

²⁸ Farmers accused of abusing workers. *The Herald*, 2000-04-03.

Zimbabwe's farm workers, normally treated with contempt by their "baases", suddenly have new importance thrust on them as potential voters for the Movement for Democratic Change as the farmers desperately try to keep up 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.²⁹

The state media portrayed farm workers as victims of white farmers' capitalist exploitation. *The Herald* described how farmers were abusing farm workers by offering them low wages and providing them with poor accommodation. These arguments were supported by pictures showing a farm compound, hardworking farm workers and employees waiting for their salaries.³⁰

Representations in the private press differed. *The Daily News* was concerned farm workers would be displaced if land would be redistributed:

There are 500 000 farm workers who stand to lose not only the source of their incomes and ability to support their families, but where they will live when the farmland is redistributed. The average family unit is larger than four, and if we use this as the average, that is a population of 2 million people who will be destabilised and disadvantaged economically, as a direct result of the farm invasions. The average farm employs and houses more workers than the area of the farm that will be resettled with people when the farm is redistributed. Who will pay the workers on the farms where the farmer has been forced to leave the farm? That is already a problem.³¹

Whereas *The Herald* blamed farmers for coercing farm workers to vote MDC, *The Daily News* instead reported that ZANU-PF was forcing farm workers to attend rallies.³² The paper associated these meetings with all-night rallies ('pungwes') as they were held during the liberation war in order to mobilise support for the guerrilla fighters:

(...) pro-government militias, propagandists and hired thugs have intensified their assaults of political opponents and waverers at all night rallies and liberation war-style kangaroo courts set up at invaded commercial farms, growth points and in remote villages. The new wave has cowed thousands into submission and forced some to flee to towns and cities for safety and security.³³

The Daily News portrayed farm workers as victims of violence perpetrated by war veterans.³⁴ War veterans and ZANU-PF supporters were reported to beat up, threaten and intimidate farm workers, sometimes because they were refusing to join them in their farm occupations. Houses of farm workers were burnt down and property was taken. Many farm workers were

²⁹ Abused! Farm workers are threatened: Vote ZANU-PF and you are out of here. *The Herald*, 2000-04-25.

³⁰ Captions *The Herald*: Toiling for a pitiful wage... These farm workers, regarded as subhuman and treated accordingly, work on a tobacco crop at a farm outside Harare (2000-04-25). Neglected... An aerial view of typical farm compound. Farm workers' living conditions have not improved. Now farmers are promising them better lives after voting for the MDC (2000-04-25). Former employees of Utopia Farm near Goromonzi have been camping on the farm since Tuesday last week to press management to pay them their salaries for the last 14 months. Here the women prepare their lunch yesterday (2000-06-15).

³¹ Mills, David. Government side-stepping real issues. *The Daily News*, 2000-04-18.

³² Farm workers forced to attend ZANU-PF rallies. *The Daily News*, 2000-05-25.

³³ Farmers, teacher in alleged ZANU-PF hit list. *The Daily News*, 2000-05-18.

³⁴ *The Daily News*: Union slams ex-fighters for assaulting workers (2000-03-28), Mugabe threatens violence (2000-03-29), Hunzvi leads farm invasion with television crew in tow (2000-03-30), Ex-combatants assault farm workers: Union (2000-03-31), War vets burn down farm workers' houses in Arcturus (2000-04-21), New reign of terror erupts on farms (2000-04-26), War veterans continuing assaults on farm workers (2000-05-02), Intimidation, violence on farm workers continue (2000-05-04), Farm worker killed in Shurugwi (2000-05-30), War veterans assault farmer; harass workers (2000-06-16), War vets impound farm employees' identity cards (2000-06-20).

reported to have fled into towns. *The Daily News* often illustrated its reports with pictures of assaulted farm workers.³⁵

Although the newspaper did acknowledge the problems facing farm workers, they were generally not given the chance to present their own views on the situation. In all cases but one, farm workers were represented by spokespersons from farm workers unions or by the farmers. This further strengthened their positions as dependent victims and the newspaper hereby failed to recognise farm workers as autonomous individuals.

Whereas *The Herald* did not acknowledge the possibility of farm workers to vote for a political party of their choice or to escape from an exploitative situation, *The Daily News* failed to recognise their ability to speak for themselves. Furthermore, the private newspaper did not critically assess the often marginalised position of farm workers on commercial farms before the farm occupations. By expressing their concern over farm workers' position after the land occupations, they did not question the difficulties farm workers had experienced before such as often racist and paternalistic attitudes of farmers towards their farm workers. *The Herald*, on the other hand, solely seemed to focus on the structural situation of farm workers before the occupations. They did not express their concern over large-scale displacements of farm workers as a result of more recent developments.

Explanations of farm occupations (un)covered

Farm occupations have been part of Zimbabwe's pre- and post-independence history (Alexander, 1994; Moyo, 2000, 2001; Chitiyo, 2000; Marongwe, 2001). Various land tenure categories have been occupied: white-owned, state-owned and communal land. Immediately after independence, occupation of abandoned commercial farms and vacant state land often resulted into formal resettlement of communities. From the mid-1980s onwards, landless peasants also began to occupy and use land that belonged to politicians and the black elite. Reiterating colonial discourses, these people were labelled as 'squatters' by the government. In this period, the government often quickly responded to occupations, forcibly removing people from the areas they were occupying with assistance of the police and army.

In 1997 and 1998, more high profile occupation began to occur, mostly on farms which had been identified for compulsory acquisition shortly before. Farms were mostly occupied with the explicit aim of redistributing land from white farmers to landless villagers and war veterans. In some cases, people were evicted from the land and the government tried to convince them to wait for proper resettlement.

After the rejection of the referendum, a large number of commercial farms were occupied. With parliamentary elections in June 2000 and presidential elections in 2002 coming up, the government decided not to ban these occupations. Despite the far more widespread nature of land occupations in early 2000, the government did not react with mass evictions but instead tacitly tolerated the events. Although it is difficult to say *to what extent* the occupations were instigated and organised, there is no doubt that the ruling party ZANU-PF, the Zimbabwe National Army, the police and the Central Intelligence Organisation did play a significant role in the occupations.

³⁵ Captions *The Daily News*: Anarchy prevails... Farai Sandikonda sustained a broken arm and a deep cut to his head when he was attacked on Monday evening by about 27 alleged ZANU-PF supporters on Chidikamwedzi Farm in the Mvurwi district, 150km north of Harare. Sandikonda works as a game guard on the farm. He was stoned by his attackers as he tried to protect the farm manager's house which was badly damaged in the attack (2000-04-06). Violence continues... A severely beaten and burned Farai Mutenengingwa, wife of a supervisor on Dean Farm 120kms south-east of Harare, is driven to hospital in the back of farmer Craig White's truck yesterday. Mutenenginwa and several other workers were assaulted by farm invaders and labourers from different farms loyal to the ruling ZANU-PF party (2000-04-25).

But it must be noted that occupations differed enormously from region to region. Moyo (2001) argues that apart from the high profile, centrally controlled occupations, there were various other more locally driven occupations in which a variety of actors participated. He identifies occupations in which members of the ZNWVLA took a leading role, those that were started by community members or traditional leaders and were later formalised by war veterans, those ran by communities with specific grievances against particular farmers and some directed by urban groups.

Zimbabwean newspapers gave widely diverging reasons for the causes of the farm occupations. *The Daily News* generally held the view that occupations were sponsored by the government. The following descriptions of the events seemed typical for the newspaper:

The ruling party is using land as its main campaign tool for the parliamentary elections and the recent farm invasions by the former fighters have been viewed as government orchestrated.³⁶

War veterans, with government support, invaded white-owned commercial farms alleging that white farmers had influenced blacks, to reject the government-sponsored draft constitution in last month's referendum.³⁷

Political analysts say the invasions are part of a strategy to intimidate voters and cut financial support from farmers to the MDC, which gives Mugabe's ruling ZANU-PF party the strongest challenge to its 20-year hold on power.³⁸

The Daily News carried articles in which farmers were quoted as saying that the war veterans were ferried in government vehicles to their farms, that war veterans introduced themselves as ZANU-PF members and they were issued with arms from the government armoury.³⁹ The paper reported that in some instances farm occupations were even incited or encouraged by ZANU-PF officials.⁴⁰

The Daily News stressed that occupations were not spontaneous but well organised. Invaders arrived on buses and lorries and were supplied with food.⁴¹ In another article, *The Daily News* reported that villagers were being force-marched onto the commercial areas to seize land by a war veterans' leader.⁴² However the paper did not portray these villagers as passive victims but reported that they dismissed the exercise "as part of cheap politicking by ZANU-PF". *The Daily News* represented villagers as active agents resisting ZANU-PF's tactics to garner more votes.

By contrast, *The Herald* portrayed the farm occupations as spontaneous demonstrations caused by disappointment over the rejection of the draft constitution. It carried several articles with headlines suggesting that occupations were a protest against the 'no' vote and dismissed ideas that the occupations were part of ZANU-PF's election campaign.⁴³

³⁶ Zvobgo says ZANU-PF is law-abiding. *The Daily News*, 2000-03-20.

³⁷ Ex-fighters defy High Court order. *The Daily News*, 2000-03-20.

³⁸ Cabinet to discuss land crisis, election. *The Daily News*, 2000-05-02.

³⁹ *The Daily News*: Ex-fighters defy High Court order (2000-03-20), Farmers, workers join hands against invaders (2000-03-23), Farmers accuse State of arming war vets (2000-04-18), Danida vehicles used in farm invasions? (2000-04-19).

⁴⁰ *The Daily News*: Free-for-all at farms invaded in Masvingo (2000-04-04), Matabeleland farmers accuse minister of fanning violence (2000-05-15).

⁴¹ *The Daily News*: War veterans threaten to fight over land (2000-02-21), CFU says invaders have taken over 40 commercial farms (2000-03-02).

⁴² Muzenda does not regret farmers' death. *The Daily News*, 2000-04-25.

⁴³ *The Herald*: Invasions protest against 'no' vote: President (2000-03-03), Farm invasions a protest against land distribution imbalances, says Nkomo (2000-03-27), Land not being used as campaign tool: Svosve villagers (2000-05-18), Land can never be used as political gimmick: Lesabe (2000-06-21).

Land-hungry war veterans poured onto at least 30 commercial farms countrywide last month in a massive show of displeasure over the rejection of draft Constitution and to exert pressure on the Government to speed up the resettlement programme.⁴⁴

Stung by the rejection of the draft constitution in a referendum early this month, the war veterans have gone on a countrywide invasion of commercial farms.⁴⁵

The Herald vigorously dismissed the view that the occupations were sponsored by the ruling party and quoted ZANU-PF officials and villagers stating that these should not be regarded as a ZANU-PF election campaign.⁴⁶

The allegation that ZANU-PF is sponsoring the ongoing farm seizure is baseless. Freedom fighters (veterans of the liberation war) do not need to be taught by anyone the need for land. They went to war for land and unless they and the masses of Zimbabwe got back the land, we can not seriously think we are independent.⁴⁷

By representing the farm occupations as spontaneous demonstrations, *The Herald* sought to cover up the crucial role which the state undoubtedly played in supporting the occupations. *The Daily News*, on the other hand, mainly portrayed the events as dominated by party politics and therefore did not acknowledge that e.g. communal farmers and farm workers with a true desire for land often joined the occupations as they hoped to be able to secure access to land in this way. By downplaying the role of other actors in the occupations, *The Daily News* created the impression that the occupations were just being used by the ruling party to win votes in the forthcoming elections.

Conclusion

With clearly separate agendas, the two only Zimbabwean daily newspapers, the government-controlled *The Herald* and the privately-funded *The Daily News*, have drawn upon different means to represent the land question. By selecting to report on a particular issue and silencing another, through use of pictures, choice of certain headlines, and attribution of agency to certain actors, they have produced a construction of the events in Zimbabwe that served to satisfy their interests in an increasingly polarised political environment. In this tense climate, both papers became easily associated with diverging political opinions.

The Herald clearly attempted to provide a positive image of ZANU-PF's main campaign issue: its radical land reform programme. Being a relatively young newspaper and run on a commercial basis, *The Daily News* took advantage of the void created by *The Herald* which merely tended to focus on the past achievements and future promises of the government. With the increasing recognition of civil society and the labour movement, there was clearly a market for a second *daily* newspaper that would address the failures of past government policies and would provide alternative views on issues. These considerations might have induced *The Daily News* to be more sympathetic towards the opposition party Movement for Democratic Change whose main priority was economic recovery and creation of employment in Zimbabwe. MDC's neo-liberal and market-based land policy echoed donor calls for transparency, poverty reduction, the rule of law and macro-economic stabilisation.

⁴⁴ War veterans vow not to leave farms. *The Herald*, 2000-03-04.

⁴⁵ War veterans invade farms countrywide. *The Herald*, 2000-02-29.

⁴⁶ *The Herald*: Land not being used as campaign tool: Svosve villagers (2000-05-18), Land can never be used as political gimmick: Lesabe, (2000-06-21).

⁴⁷ Co-operation from all stakeholders needed in resolving the land issue, Dr Sylvester Maunganidze. *The Herald*, 2000-05-16.

In its representations of the land occupations and the land question in general, *The Herald* frequently drew upon anti-colonial discourses in which the past often played a dominant role. Colonialism had led to serious land imbalances which had insufficiently been redressed after independence. White commercial farmers continued to occupy the most fertile grounds in Zimbabwe and the time had now come to solve the land issue once and forever. Spontaneous demonstrations of land-hungry peasants on farms had proven that there was a real need for land amongst Zimbabweans. However, in drawing extensively upon the past, *The Herald* neglected to critically assess how the present land occupations would affect the land reform exercise. By ignoring or downplaying the more negative aspects of the occupations such as the violence, the newspaper failed to speculate on how the future of Zimbabwe would look like under 'fast track land reform'.

The Daily News, on the other hand, was very much concerned with the present, thereby missing its chance to reflect upon the past. Focusing on the negative economic effects of what the paper described as 'land invasions', it failed to get into a serious debate on land reform. By discrediting the land occupations as party politics, the newspaper ignored that there certainly is a clear desire for land amongst Zimbabweans. Instead of questioning the inequitable land distribution, the paper seemed to favour the status quo because of fears of disruptions to agricultural production in case of land reform.

Readers of the two papers were confronted with very different positions which clearly made dialogue or compromise more difficult. By supporting the side of commercial farmers and farm workers on the one hand, and war veterans and ZANU-PF supporters on the other hand, newspapers reinforced stereotypes of the 'good' and the 'evil'. Portraying the agenda of certain stakeholders as credible and others as illegitimate, both newspapers ignored that 'the other side' might also have a valid point to make and failed to take up a more subtle position towards the land question. Concerning the further course of events in Zimbabwe, this polarisation of attitudes might lead to more divisions on the issue within society whereas a lively public dialogue could potentially contribute to a final solution.

References

- Alexander, J. 1994. State, peasantry and resettlement in Zimbabwe. *Review of African Political Economy*, 21(61), 325-345.
- Blanckenburg, P. von 1994. *Large commercial farmers and land reform in Africa*. Avebury: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Chitiyo, T. K. 2000. Land violence and compensation. Reconceptualising Zimbabwe's land & war veterans debate. *Track Two Occasional Paper*, 9(1). Cape Town: Centre for Conflict Resolution.
- Dijk, T. A. van 1991. Media contents. The interdisciplinary study of news as discourse. In Jensen K. B. & Jankowski N. W. Eds. 1991. *Handbook of qualitative methodologies for mass communication research*. Pp. 108-119. London: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. 1978. *The history of sexuality. Volume I: an introduction*. New York: Pantheon.
- Frederikse, J. 1982. *None but ourselves: masses vs. media in the making of Zimbabwe*. Harare: Anvil Press.
- Marongwe, N. 2001. *Conflicts over land and other natural resources in Zimbabwe*. Harare: ZERO Regional Environment Organisation.
- Moyo, S. 2000. The political economy of land acquisition and redistribution in Zimbabwe, 1990-99. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26(1), 5-28.
- Moyo, S. 2001. The land occupation movement and democratisation in Zimbabwe: Contradictions of neoliberalism. *Millennium-Journal of International Studies*, 30(2), 311-330.
- Ronning, H. & Kupe, T. 2000. The dual legacy of democracy and authoritarianism. The

- media and the state in Zimbabwe. In Ronning, H. & Kupe, T. Eds. 2000. *De-westernising media studies*. Pp. 157-177. London: Routledge.
- Rutherford, B. 2001. *Working on the margins. Black workers, white farmers in postcolonial Zimbabwe*. London: Zed Books.
- Saunders, R. 1999. *Dancing out of tune. A history of the media in Zimbabwe*. Harare.
- Windrich, E. 1981. *The mass media in the struggle for Zimbabwe: censorship and propaganda under Rhodesian Front rule*. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Zimbabwe Advertising Research Foundation (ZARF). 2000. *Zimbabwe All Media & Products Survey 2000 (ZAMPS), Volume 3*. Harare: ZARF.