

THE LOCAL MEDIA AND ZIMBABWE'S LAND REFORM PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

The article aims to examine the role which was played by the Zimbabwean print media during the country's land reform programme which was forcibly implemented by Zanu PF in 2000. The Zimbabwean media, particularly the print media, did not adequately cover the progress and significance of land redistribution but rather meddled in the murky politics between the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (Zanu PF). The influence of the media in the modern era cannot be ignored because of its potential to mould public opinion, deliver justice and to create connectivity between the government and the public. Responsible media is capable to transform livelihoods particularly because of the trust the people have in electronic channels such as the internet, television and radio. Besides, print media in Zimbabwe commands a lot of influence because of the literacy rate currently above ninety per cent of the total population. Instead of educating the peasants on how the land reform could improve human security, the local print media was predominantly influenced by the struggles between the political parties.

Keywords- Media, Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (Zanu PF), Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), land, violence, war veterans

INVESTIGATIVE INSTRUMENTS

Interview

The researcher carried out interview an interview with a police officer in order to unravel why the violence during the land reform went unabated resulting in gross human rights abuses.

Media Study

The research benefited from the electronic media particularly the internet to comprehend the positive and negative roles of the media in conflict situation.

Primary documents

The Government of Zimbabwe parliamentary debates were significant in elucidating why land reform was a pertinent issue since independence. It is also crucial to understand the "war veteran" referred to in the paper because Zimbabwe possesses various categories of war veterans, many of whom fit in the political sense. This therefore explains the utility of the *War Veterans Act, 1992*.

Secondary sources

Since the paper focuses on the contribution of the local print media during the country's land reform programme, various newspapers were employed to elaborate the argument advanced herein. Zimbabwe's daily and weekly newspapers such as *The Herald*, *The Sunday Mail*, *[The] Daily News*, *Newsday*, *The Standard*, *The Patriot*, *Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Financial Gazette* were used to illustrate how the various media institutions portrayed the land reform. The method benefits us to prove how the media was influenced by the prevailing political struggles in the country. The bulk of the rural peasantry became divided with regard to the land reform mainly because of the political labels attached to the invaders. The media could have empowered the peasants through educating them on how they could benefit from the nationwide exercise regardless of one's political affiliation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The article is hinged on two media theories, the social responsibility theory and the development media theory. Media development is a prerequisite for the media to be effective and efficient vehicles of community development. The influence and near monopoly position of the media impose on them an obligation to be socially responsible, to ensure that all sides are honestly presented and that the public has sufficient information to decide; and that if the media do not take on themselves such responsibility it may be necessary for some other agency of the public to enforce it (Siebert et al., 1956). The social responsibility theory suggests that the media has a moral responsibility to consider the societal needs when making newsroom decisions. Development media manifests itself in several forms but essentially suggests that although media freedom is desirable, it should be a servant to the requirements of socio-economic and political development (http://www.le.ac.uk/oerresources/media/ms7501/mod2unit11/page_07.htm).

The main principles of development media theory are as follows:

- Media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy;
- Freedom of the media should be open to restriction according to (1) economic priorities and (2) development needs of society;
- Media should give priority in their content to national culture and language;
- Media should give priority in news and information to links with other developing countries which are close geographically, culturally or politically;
- Journalists and other media workers have rights/ freedoms as well as responsibilities;
- In the interest of development ends, the state has a right to intervene in, or restrict, media operations and devices of censorship; subsidy and direct control can be justified (McQuail, 1987).

Freedom of the media represents a crucial step towards societal development because it allows people to speak their mind on issues impeding development and solutions for improvement. An overview of the social responsibility theory and the development media theory exhibits the pivotal role that the media plays in the development of the communities they serve. Print, broadcast and electronic media contributes a significant role in influencing and dictating the developmental process

because they bring closer many stakeholders interested in community projects. The media, for example, informs the buyer what a cotton or maize producer in Zaka is expecting to take home while the producer is made aware of the factors affecting the price of his/her product. The media undoubtedly creates a useful linkage at various levels of development. Media for development uses the media to deliver useful information on issues such as health care, poverty reduction, good governance, and environmental protection (Centre for International Media Assistance).

Definition of key terms

Sustainable development is “Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (The World Commission on Environment and Development or the Brundtland Commission, 1987).

Media is the means of communication that reach large numbers of people, such as television, newspapers, and radio (The Free Dictionary). The definition could also be expanded to refer to outdoor media such as billboards and posters. The audience does not necessarily need to be large.

Land reform refers to a purposive change in the way in which agricultural land is held or owned, the methods of cultivation that are employed, or the relation of agriculture to the rest of the economy. Reforms such as these may be proclaimed by a government, by interested groups, or by revolution (Encyclopaedia Britannica). The terms land reform, land redistribution and land invasions would be used interchangeably in the paper.

War veteran is “a person who underwent military training and participated, consistently and persistently, in the liberation struggle, which occurred in Zimbabwe and neighbouring countries between 1 January 1962 and 29 February 1980 in connection with bringing about Zimbabwe’s independence in 18 April 1980” (War Veterans’ Act 1992).

INTRODUCTION

In 2000 Zanu PF embarked on a controversial and violent fast track land reform programme. The invasions received a lot of media attention, both local and international. The manner in which the land reform was portrayed by the local print media sharply contrasted the role of the media as agents of development. The article is based on the premise that responsible media is vital to the fulfilment of socio-economic and political goals of societies. The media is an indispensable instrument of national policy. If leaders fail to control it, they may lose public touch. We are living in a media flooded society where, as part of our everyday lives, we come into contact with a wide variety of media texts and forms of media output (O’Sullivan, Dutton & Rayner, 1998, p. 87). According to Graves (2007), advances in media technologies have allowed the media to deliver news and information to millions of people and to share stories as they transpire around the world. Moreover, the establishment and spread of the telegraph system has enabled foreign reporters to file their stories in hours rather than weeks while the cable and satellite technology have created even more opportunities for people to be connected (Ibid). Radio broadcasts conveyed the sounds of the world into people’s living rooms and provided live broadcasting of events as they unfolded whereas the arrival of television allowed people to see what they could only imagine previously (Ibid). The rapid

development and globalisation of the communication process has connected almost all people throughout the world by means of information technologies such as the internet and satellite systems.

Zimbabwe's shrunk media space has managed to widen horizons since the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) formed in 2009 as per provisions of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) signed in September 2008. Article 19 of the GPA states the nation's desire to ensure the opening up of the airwaves and the operation of as many media houses as possible (Sibanda, 2012). The reforms were imperative cognisant of the bombardment of *The Daily News* printing press on January 28, 2001. After reopening, *The Daily News* and its sister paper *The Daily News on Sunday* were closed down again on September 12, 2003 on charges of publishing unlawfully without a license (Maruziva, 2004, p. 109). The Media and Information Commission (MIC) instructed the Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ) to cease publishing its two titles until it was issued with a registration certificate. This was immediately followed up by the siege of the buildings and equipment of ANZ by armed police (Ibid). The ANZ only started republishing with the dawn of the inclusive government in March 18, 2011. *ZBC TV* and radio stations were used by Zanu PF for political mileage by discrediting the MDC, the main contender for the throne.

Prior to the GNU, the print and broadcast media were conquered by the Zanu PF government through its publications such as *The Herald*, *The Sunday Mail*, *The Chronicle* and *The Manica Post*. Broadcasting channels were the *Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation Television (ZBC TV)*, *Radio Zimbabwe*, *Power FM* and *National FM*. After the formation of the GNU, publishing licences were granted to a few companies while the broadcasting sector witnessed limited companies being granted licences to operate. Although milestones have been achieved in print media, nothing has been virtually done in liberalising the broadcast media. Zanu PF tactfully used the state-owned media to denigrate the MDC as an anti-land reform party ill-advised by the Western countries. On the other hand, the private media vilified the land reform on the basis that the black farmers were incapable of utilising land to full effect due to lack of inputs. Production levels were understated while senior and influential members of Zanu PF were identified as the chief beneficiaries of the land reform. Consequently, the land reform became a distorted story because the media played political roles at the expense of the people who wanted to be relieved from packed reserves.

The land invaders were and are still perceived as incompatible and retrogressive elements of the society. Folks who remained in the rural areas were made to believe, through the rampant abuse of human rights and scattered cases of corruption involved in land redistribution that this was not the proper *modus operandi*. The truth of the matter, as the bulk of evidence reveals, is that the 2000 land redistribution in Zimbabwe was mainly carried out for imminent political gains. Zanu PF's political message at the height of the land reform and elections became "Land is the Economy and the Economy is Land" (Kanyenze, Kondo, Chitambara & Martens, 2011, p. 93). The land reform was carried out at a critical stage when the MDC was evidently becoming popular with the electorate. It was obviously a mammoth task for known and perceived MDC supporters to grab land. The paper argues that the private print media was supposed to set aside political spectacles and enlighten the nation about the benefits of an honest and transparent land reform programme rather than castigating the people who had occupied land as unproductive. The media should also have played a leading role in the mobilisation of resources for the new farmers.

On the other hand, the state media became pre-occupied in criticising people who had objected to the procedural mechanisms used to occupy land in 2000. Instead, the state media should have encouraged the rural peasants who were being manipulated by the political parties to occupy land despite one's political orientation. The opposite was true because the state controlled media became Zanu PF's mouthpiece. The rural people have the potential to contribute to economic growth instead of being manipulated by politicians who rule with a term of office in mind.

ZIMBABWE'S LAND ISSUE IN RETROSPECT

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

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

The environmental degradation reflected the pressure that existed on reserves allocated to Africans. Aerial photographs of Tribal Trust Lands demonstrated the contrast between deterioration in eroded areas and recovery of areas after they had had "proper" protection (Rhodesia Parliament, Third Report of the Estimates Committee-The Mining Aspect of the Mining of Mines and Land, 16 January 1969, p. 4). Photographs taken in 1963 detailed the deterioration which had taken place (Ibid). Africans received blame for the deteriorating food production in the country as evidenced by complaints from the colonial officials who argued that "We are inclined to blame the native for working his land merely to get sufficient food for himself and his family without regard to the country's need for increased food production" (Southern Rhodesia Sabi-Lundi Development Second Interim Report June 1948, p. 5). African areas were neglected as revealed by the deployment of agriculture trainers and conservation officers to European areas alone (Ibid). Chief engineer Gibbs confirmed the deliberate European policy to empower whites at the expense of black occupied areas when he confessed, "I had no time to examine the position in the Native Reserves, and in any case it will be the task of the newly appointed Native Production and Marketing Council to estimate the additional staff necessary to increase and direct native production along proper lines" (Ibid, pp.5-6).

It is apparent that the land tenure tilted in favour of the Europeans in spite of the fact that they constituted an "insignificant proportion" of the total population. Between 1980 and June 2002 the government acquired 3, 6 million hectares of land on willing seller-willing buyer and resettled 75,697 beneficiary families. In the Constitutional Amendment Act number 2 of

2000, the Government said no to buying land and yes only to compensation for improvements (Parliamentary Debates, 2001, p. 7). Under the plan, the Government seized 50 percent of Zimbabwe's prime land comprising 12 million hectares without paying any compensation for the land but improvements made on it (The Financial Gazette, 2001). The state was empowered to acquire land compulsorily, without compensation for the land but only for improvements (Kanyenze, Kondo, Chitambara & Martens, 2011, p. 93). President Mugabe argued that former Zimbabwe's colonial power Britain and not his government were supposed to pay the white farmers for the land which was originally confiscated by British colonial authorities from the Africans (The Financial Gazette, 2001). The tribunal of the Southern African Development Community ruled in November 2008 that Zimbabwe's land reform processes had been racist and illegal because farmers ought to have been compensated for their farms (Jakachira, 2011).

After independence many rural people expected the government to expedite land redistribution but this did not happen until 2000. Five years after independence, eighty three family squatters from villages around Mount Darwin, such as Matope, Chizanga, Chomagora and Madziwa refused to leave the government acquired Muskham farm near Mount Darwin. One of the squatters, Madziva, argued that, "...we feel we should be considered for resettlement on this farm. We want land to farm on and be able to feed our families (The Herald, 1995). The Land Tenure Commission headed by Rukuni had advised in 1994 that it was needless for the majority of white farmers to cling to the huge farms they could never productively use while potential farmers were desperate for land (Chitsaka, 1995). In 1996, 75 families had their huts scorched for settling in Heroes Acre Mountains in Mt. Darwin but defiantly rebuilt again (Chisoko, 1996). Some families used to live in Karanda but left as families grew bigger. One affected person Vhurumu justified why they settled in the area, "Some of us used to live in Karanda, but as our families grew bigger, we were faced with a severe shortage of farming land and the mountains were the most convenient as the soils were suitable for sustainable farming" (Ibid).

Tensions over land were apparently visible because the crowded rural folks desired to be allocated spacious farming land. Fourteen villages of Chiguhune communal lands (between Mashonaland East and Manicaland provinces) and commercial farmers in Gutu wrangled over land seized by the white settlers during the colonial era (The Herald, 1997). Again in 1997, the head of department for southern Africa in the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Hansen) visited projects funded by Denmark in Chimanimani, Birchenough Bridge and Mutoko and expressed concern over the overcrowded communal lands which was clear that a land resettlement programme was needed (The Herald, 1997). Zimbabweans voiced about the biased distribution of land but the government paid little heed to the concerns. The then Chairman of the Land Acquisition Committee (Joseph Msika) criticised villagers who had invaded farms and settled themselves without authority when he advised the invaders that, "I urge them to be a little more patient as we are resorting to methods that will expedite settling of people province by province" (Ibid). Some 81 villagers from Murehwa had occupied Paradise Farm but were moved back to their homes after they had been addressed by Chief Mangwende and other officials (Ibid).

The media reiterated the urgent need for land redistribution,

The all-important land issue, which they say [IMF] they want convincing explanations on is one issue they should never be allowed to dictate. Many Zimbabweans perished for land, which is yet to be equitably redistributed. The

IMF would want the few who own vast tracts of fertile land cling to them and are not really bothered about the majority cramped on poor soils (The Herald 1999).

In 1997 the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference issued a statement on their position regarding the land issue. The major emphasis was put on the need to address issues such as compensation, ecological preservation and the need for equitable distribution of land,

A war was fought and blood was spilt over the ownership of land. Lasting peace and prosperity can only be achieved if the land is shared equitably...if land is used or misused, in a way incompatible with the common good, the State may put it to better use by redistribution. In order to carry out this long and complex process of redistribution and resettlement, a suitable mechanism must be established to ensure that justice, equity and fairness are preserved at all levels. Compensation must reflect the effort which the former owner put into the land and enable him/her to continue being productive for the benefit of the nation. No citizen of Zimbabwe can be legally prevented from appealing to the courts as neutral arbiters, whatever the issue maybe.

The state has a duty to ensure that farm workers who lose their employment as a result of land redistribution find alternative employment or land redistribution find alternative employment or land on which to settle. The common good requires that the redistribution of land be undertaken in such a way that the ability of our agriculture to feed Zimbabwe, and indeed neighbouring countries, is not affected. For ecological preservation, land must be given a priority concern (Catholic Bishops of Zimbabwe, 1997).

Land redistribution occupied a dominant priority soon after independence but it was not forcibly pushed until 2000, a scenario resembling political struggles within the country.

President Mugabe expressed how the land issue had been an overdue process when the war veterans led the invasions, "...to us the government what the war veterans have done is a clear demonstration that the government delayed in redistributing land. This is a clear peaceful demonstration and there is no problem with that..." (EISA, 2000) The land reform was exploited by the war veterans who had been neglected in their quest for economic prosperity since 1980. The deprivation ultimately led the invasions to be rapid and violent while the rural populace provided tremendous support. War veterans defied High Court orders to vacate commercial farms after the General Agricultural and Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe (GAPWUZ) had insisted that the invasions threatened members' jobs (The Herald, 2000).

There was growing discontent in war veterans' circles concerning their welfare which the government had failed to seriously consider in its reintegration process. The War Veterans Census (WVC) (1993) administered to eighteen thousand five hundred ex-combatants (18, 500) throughout the country showed a very disadvantaged and impoverished status initially after the war. This was followed by pathetic living conditions evidenced by poorer socio-economic status (ZNLWVA, 1996, p. 1). A war veteran who was involved in the seizure of an idle farm (Jotham Farm) in Masvingo since 1987, complained that, "...we went to war with the aim of changing oppressive laws as well as getting land but 20 years later we still have nothing" (Bara, 2000). The war veterans allocated land to themselves while others were constructing houses (Ibid). The socio-

economic predicament of the war veterans made it smooth and possible for the government to mobilise the former combatants for its political objectives, chiefly the castration of the opposition.

In the early 1990s about 2 000 and 3 000 former freedom fighters in Masvingo province had registered for resettlement although more were still landless (Mungoshi, 1996). By 1996 a total number of 20, 000 former fighters wanted land countrywide but the government had managed to resettle just 500 (Ibid). The war veterans wielded a lot of unchallenged authority which they exerted unopposed. In 2001, the then war veterans' leader Joseph Chinotimba announced a list of properties to be seized such as parastatals and a funeral-undertaking firm to party supporters after the official May Day celebrations in Harare (The Financial Gazette, 2001). War veterans' invaded firms such as Bulawayo based textile company Merspin and demanded the reinstatement of retrenched employee's (Ibid). Some companies, including one dental surgery in Harare, closed down after being forced down by war veterans to pay off millions to sacked workers (Ibid). The then ZNLWVA Harare province vice-chairman Chris Pamire and secretary Chinotimba spearheaded the campaign to kidnap company executives who were forcibly taken to the party's offices for "re-education" (Masamvu, 2001).

War veterans are hitherto a force to reckon with since the 2000 land invasions in which they were leaders. The 2008 Zanu PF "million man march" was led by war veterans' leader Jabulani Sibanda specifically to "lobby" for the re-election of Robert Mugabe as party president in the forthcoming 2008 elections. War veterans thronged the city of Harare with posters written, "Reduce speed, war veterans. Land to the people" (Chinaka, 2009). It is well documented that former guerrillas had been deprived for a long period and as a result they have been made instrumental in pursuit of the government's political motives. In February 2000, when inflation was sky-high, the government awarded war veterans an additional \$4, 800 each on top of their monthly pensions of \$2, 000 (The Daily News, 2000). The government's intentions to please the war veterans for its political ends were further made clear in May 2007 when teachers' salaries were doubled from Z\$3 billion to Z\$6 billion while war veterans' allowances rose from Z\$1,6 billion to Z\$9 billion (Zimbabwe Independent, 2008). The government received criticisms when it started to pay allowances to village heads and chiefs, ahead of parliamentary elections scheduled for April 2000. Basing on statements made by Masvingo Governor Josaya Hungwe, the decision was perceived as a vote-buying strategy, "We have given you power so that you spearhead our goals in your areas. If we fail to get the necessary support and desired results in the rural areas, we will point fingers at traditional leaders, particularly chiefs" (Ibid). In 2001, a number of non-commissioned former ZANLA and ZIPRA guerrillas in the armed forces were promoted. This initiated divisions in the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) as highlighted by one disgruntled officer from Bulawayo's Llewellyn Barracks, "...all former war veterans who were sergeants in the ZNA were...promoted to non-commissioned officers while better qualified young officers who joined the army after 1980 were ignored" (Masunda, 2001).

THE LAND ISSUE AND THE MEDIA

Britain funded land acquisition in Zimbabwe but withdrew support when she said that the plan was being abused by government cronies at the expense of the country's poor (The Financial Gazette, 2001). Claire Short's (the then British Secretary of State and Secretary of State for International Development) letter of 5 November 1997 informed the Zimbabwean government about the cessation of Britain's support on the land reform. Short wrote to the Zimbabwean

government, “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 colonised not colonisers” (Kanyenze, Kondo, Chitambara & Martens, 2011, p. 91). According to the then British High Commissioner to Zimbabwe (Peter Longworth), a review of the resettlement programme in 1998 concluded that its record was flawed because some settlers ended up in poverty (The Daily News, 1999). In 1999 the European Union (EU) promised \$1, 36 billion for economic reforms and \$200 million for land resettlement, but only after the government had met the targets set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (The Daily News, 1999). The conditions of the IMF loan exposed the vulnerability of Zimbabwe’s sovereignty considering the statement of the then EU’s head of delegation in Zimbabwe (Asgar Pilegaard) who threatened that, “A slip-up on one aspect may jeopardise the project” (Ibid). This to an extent exposed the intransigency of Western countries in assisting Zimbabwe’s land reform programme.

People who occupied land in 2000 are commonly referred to as *Vekumapurazi*, *Vekujambanja* or *Vekuhondo yeminda* literally meaning “those who violently occupied land”. These terms have some derogatory connotations depending on who is using them. The expressions normally evoke memories of 2000 where *toi toi* (turmoil) was the order of the day. Zanu PF supporters marched throughout the country singing party jingles and songs used by guerrillas during the Second *Chimurenga* (Zimbabwe’s war of liberation from 1966-1980). The Zimbabwe land invasions witnessed shameful scenes of violence. Properties belonging to white farmers and MDC activists were looted unabated. The scenarios symbolised the climax of moral decadence and obviously a sign of a new political dispensation. At a time when the MDC was persecuted, its party members were labelled as perpetrators of violence. *The Herald* (2001) commented that, “The MDC is provoking violence and this should be nipped in the bud before it develops further like it did in last years’ parliamentary elections...” The police was rendered powerless in such volatile environment because the superiors had/have strong links with the Zanu PF party. Constable Chinare (pseudonym) elaborated the challenges faced by police officers when he bared that, “It was simply impossible to control war veterans and other Zanu PF supporters because it was like signing your resignation letter” (Chinare, 2012). The Zimbabwe Republic Police boss Augustine Chihuri warned that he would not tolerate opposition politics in the police force and all senior officers suspected of sympathising with the MDC were either fired or transferred (Masunda, 2001). The ZRP became an extension of Zanu PF militia which terrorised opposition activists. The paradox is that the people needed to be protected from the police and the army than the security forces protecting the people.

Zimbabwe’s political landscape took a different twist beginning 2000 as a result of the formation of the first ever vibrant opposition party in 1999, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) under the leadership of Morgan Tsvangirai. This saw Zimbabwe reverting to the bipolar situation which existed prior to the Unity accord of 1987 (Masunungure, 2006, p. 6). The MDC was a serious political hazard to Zanu PF’s unchallenged rule for 20 frozen years. Politicking *per se* was not enough especially to those Zimbabweans who were convinced that Zanu PF had outlived its usefulness. However, the state media argues that it is a misconception that the land reform started in 2000 after the realisation by Mugabe that he would lose the election to be held that year. The argument is that by 1998 the government had bought 3, 5 million hectares for resettlement purposes and compensation had been paid (Guvamatanga, 2011). While one might be tempted to take this opinion seriously, it would be a Herculean task to ignore the politically loaded nature of Zimbabwe’s land invasions. Whether

Zanu PF was thinking of the land invasions or not, elections in 2000 meant survival or death. This brings the Clausewitzian dictum of war as a continuation of policy by other means. Clausewitz demonstrated that each war had its own character, which was shaped both by its political purposes and by particular means to achieve them (Gooch, 1997, p. 13). Violence was the means which was used to dislodge all real and perceived government opponents. Zanu PF has evidently used the media to advance its “ballot agenda” as deliberated by Ruhanya (2011),

Like the Rhodesian Front, Zanu PF uses ZBC, which is supposed to be a public broadcaster, covertly and overtly to further its political interests. The broadcast media in Zimbabwe is used to vilify opponents of ZANU PF and President Robert Mugabe despite the fact that the regime has lost the democratic legitimacy to government. It is also used to manufacture consent through repeated lies and disinformation about the political and economic imperatives, especially during election times (Ruhanya, 2011).

It is verifiable that the media contributed to the polarisation of the Zimbabwean society in many ways. Views and opinions which encouraged violence were published for public consumption at a moment when public tempers were very high. Mkangi (2001), writing for *The Herald* emphasised that, “Thus, to regard the method used to repossess the land, as a mindless orgy of violence targeted against an innocent white minority is to miss the point...that is why, during the past 15 months, the world has come to know of the deaths of five whites killed, but barely is the world aware of 34 Africans killed during the same period?” While it is true that news is sometimes biased, one cannot go to the extent of justifying a death with another death. This kind of unprofessionalism would regrettably take us to the primitive levels of existence. Many people could not sympathise with Zanu PF for a multiplicity of challenges which were pointed to the former liberation party. The late Chairman of the Zimbabwe’s National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA) Chenjerai Hunzvi said that by voting against the draft constitution in 2000 the people had given the government a vote of no confidence. He reiterated that the people were angry that top government officials whom he alleged were corrupt continued to hold posts (The Daily News, 2000). According to Hunzvi, the same people were being recycled, a scenario which did not improve and change the thinking in the government. Hunzvi explicitly made it clear that, “We are unable to realise and accept that 20 years after independence; we have a new generation of voters, whose majority do not ascribe to the revolutionary ideas that brought about independence” (Ibid).

MEDIA AS AN INSTRUMENT TO SPREAD HATE SPEECH

One major step that was taken by the private media to delegitimise the land reform programme was to blame the land invaders as unproductive people, “Across the country farmers have reported damage to property, thefts of fuel and food, destruction of crops and disruption of farming activity” (Kahiya, 2000). While a lot of activity was underway, the land invasions were tagged all the negativity. The process of repossessing land was presumed a stumbling block to the developmental objectives of the country. According to the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), providing secure access to land for the rural population represents one of the key factors in achieving food security and sustainable agriculture development (FAO, 2002, p. 26). The land invasions were viewed as a national tragedy which needed international attention as exposed, “In this time of a tragic national disaster with thousands of Zimbabweans being rendered homeless in a most

frightening situation, having lost everything, hanging onto trees for days at a time waiting for rescue, winds and floods, what do we do from the exalted war veterans?” (Greensleeves, 2000)

The state media verbally attacked all the people who were against the procedures of land redistribution as enemies of the motherland. Zanu PF was branded a progressive party while the MDC represented a party without vision as illustrated below,

“ While Zanu PF talks about land reform, indigenisation and economic empowerment, inputs support for farmers etc., MDC-T is busy talking about homosexuality, legalising prostitution, opposing empowerment, reversing land reform, curtailing male libido, nude diplomats etc. And then they turn around & claim elections are rigged!” (The Herald Staff Reporter, 2011)

The state controlled media castigated the opposition and private media as Western puppets who depended on foreign guidance and could hardly act independently. The gospel was preached with propagandistic overtones seeking to gain legitimacy in the face of a dwindling electorate. A state newspaper castigated the MDC as retrogressive by saying, “The opposition MDC is fighting a government whose land policy is to give back the land Africans thought it was worthy to die for” (Mkangi, 2001). Echoing the same sentiments, Guvamatanga (2011) said that, “The unshakeable truth about the land issue and reclamation has been covered by a web of propaganda that is being driven by the whites and their local media”. The MDC was portrayed as a puppet party of the West because of its known links with countries in Western Europe.

Moreover, the state media expressed its hatred of the MDC as evidenced by Kanengoni’s statements, “Let us for a moment ignore the fact that MDC was created by the whites. Let us ignore the fact that over 90 per cent of their funding comes from Western international capital (Kanengoni, 2010). Consequently, the insults meant that all the people who criticised the procedures of land occupation were labelled “sell-outs and unpatriotic” by the state-controlled media. This gave the impression that the MDC was against the land reform yet the party had spelt out the necessity of an audited land reform programme in its strategic plans. The MDC promised a “people driven land reform” and committed itself to purchasing 6, 7 million acres of land (MDC, 2009). Zanu PF took advantage of its monopoly over the air waves to denounce the MDC in every manner possible. While Zimbabweans were willing to participate in the process of land redistribution, the cancer became its politicisation such that known and alleged MDC supporters were not eligible for “Zanu PF land”.

Through the influence of the state media, *Vekumapurazi*, *Vekujambanja* or *Vekuhondo yeminda* viewed some of the rural folks and urbanites who had turned a blind eye on the land invasions as enemies of the “Third *Chimurenga*”. The state media danced according to Zanu PF tunes and neglected its role of uniting the nation through responsible coverage of events. The media has a social responsibility to be accountable and “objective” for the benefit of the society. The private media likewise flexed its muscles in denouncing the land reform for low production in the newly invaded farms. The private media took lead in convincing the masses that land invaders were rogue elements of the society who were dragging the country into an acute food crisis, citing inadequacy of farming equipment to do business for the benefit of the country.

The private media, particularly *The Financial Gazette* (2009) argues that Zimbabwe has struggled to feed itself since 2000 when portions of productive farm land were expropriated by government from the whites for redistribution to landless and ill-equipped blacks. This echoed the gospel preached by the MDC at political gatherings whereby the opposition discredited the land invaders for occupying land without even a donkey that could be used for draught power. The media made a colossal blunder by carrying similar messages for public consumption. It is true that the land invasions witnessed a sharp deterioration in food production. The once bread basket of southern Africa country is now reliant on maize imports from neighbouring countries like Botswana, Zambia, South Africa and Malawi. It is true that the land reform programme played part to the collapse of the agricultural sector because no measures were put in place to support the new farmers. The distribution modalities had detrimental effects to human security and the economy but it would be a miscarriage of justice to treat the land invaders as unproductive people when no measures have been put in place to sustain their farming activities.

DISTORTION OF LAND UTILISATION

While it is acknowledgeable that a sizeable number of land invaders are still struggling to utilise land, a lot of progress is taking place in the farms because the people are growing cash crops like cotton and other grains for sale. The domestication of a wide range of livestock has been made possible by spacious grazing lands. There has been a significant change in farming standards because the people were able to buy farming essentials like scorch carts, cattle, and ox-drawn ploughs among other agricultural basics and family luxuries. The media deliberately ignored these developments only to focus on the violence that was taking place in the seizure of white owned farms. *The Financial Gazette* (2009) argues that the haphazard land reform programme in 2000 decimated agricultural production, the engine of Zimbabwe's economy and this worsened the crisis. It is presumably well expected that the land reform programme was not going to yield instant results because farming is an extensive process that requires hard work, financial support and good rains. Settler agriculture took several decades to prosper while African labour was instrumental to the development of this exploitative form of agriculture. The land reform of 2000 was expected by some media institutions to be miraculous. The private media set its bars too high for an ordinary village farmer who had this arduous task of clearing land until the final stage which is tillage. Media coverage diverted people's attention to the "underutilisation" of land yet the people of Zimbabwe were attempting to escape the poverty cycle.

According to Scoones et al. (2011), one of the recurrent myths about Zimbabwe's land reform is that investment has been insignificant in the new resettlements because the land lies idle, people are not committed to farming and infrastructure is destroyed, neglected or non-existent. An excerpt from the story that was carried by the *Financial Gazette* (2009) explores how the media portrayed the land invaders as highly unproductive people:

Billions of dollars have been pumped into input support schemes to farmers in which seed, fertilisers, fuel and other vital components for improved productivity have been provided. Yet, despite all these support schemes, there is little evidence of improved productivity among the majority of the resettled farmers. Grass, grass everywhere is what I have seen in my drives around the country... In addition, what one hears is the deafening din of the perpetual "new farmers" clamouring for more support. They demand more money, fertilisers, seeds, fuel and whatever else Government is prepared to offer them because they are convinced they are entitled to such freebies and that it is

Government's responsibility to provide...a large number of the so called new farmers are holding onto land they are incapable of utilising productively and should be removed from these farms.

The private media has not given the newly resettled farmers a chance to show their worthy but they have they been heaped all the blame as realised in Masara's (2011) report,

More worrying ... is the fact that most of these new farmers that are abandoning their farming businesses are reported to be turning to "better paying" ventures, like poaching the animals in their allocated areas. In fact, the land reform programme has been blamed for the bulk of the environmental challenges that currently face Zimbabwe, among them deforestation, water pollution, poaching and land degradation.

While environmental degradation is a challenge that needs tight legislative instruments, a lot of productive activities are underway in the occupied farms. Despite several setbacks, people are doing their level best to improve their livelihoods.

It is important to note that the media was addressing a politically divided nation whose leaders had continued to preach hate speech. It is an undisputable fact that the land invasions were chaotic but this does not discredit the rationale of land redistribution because violence was a by-product of Zanu PF's attempt to hang on to power. Disputing the capability of new farmers automatically invites two questions, "Who was feeding the Zimbabweans before the white settlers invaded our country" and "how did settler capitalist agriculture prosper?" The media confused the people because *Vekumapurazi*, *Vekujambanja* or *Vekuhondo yeminda* were and are viewed as people antithetic to development because they were seen as practically doing nothing to feed the country. A research by lead author Scoones concluded that "people were getting on with things in difficult circumstances and doing remarkably well" (Winter, 2010). The Zimbabwean land issue was enormously misrepresented by the local private and public media because genuine grievances were unnecessarily politicised. In some political and media circles, the land reform programme has been vilified and relegated to the realm of political silliness and labelled the height of political blunder (Kathemba, 2011). The media reported with political binoculars and got the whole story wrong. What largely remained was a fragmented society without tolerance to diverse political opinion. The media failed to unite people but rather entrenched the polarisation that already existed in the country.

In a more positive manner, the media uncovered the challenges faced by the new farmers such as poor sanitation, lack of health and educational facilities. The villagers who were resettled in the Makume Range, Sovelele and Battlefields areas in Rutenga (Masvingo) during the 2000 fast track land reform programme, complained that they were at the mercy of cholera, measles and malaria outbreaks (Chirara, 2011). One of the beneficiaries (Dube) complained that, "I moved from Mberengwa after the government promised us better lives but now I am regretting ever coming here. We have to travel 15km every day to fetch water from Mucheni River and if one falls sick they will have to travel 40km to Rutenga clinic" (Ibid). The villagers also revealed that the number of women dying while giving birth was on the increase as most midwives in the area were poorly trained (Ibid). Among other challenges, infrastructural developments in the farms are simply pathetic. Many people rely on unprotected water, schools, clinics and transport networks from very distant areas and this has compromised the quality of services these people receive especially on health and education.

The media also played a crucial role in raising a number of pertinent issues related to rampant human rights abuses during the land invasions. The private media took the lead in exposing the loopholes in Zimbabwe's land redistribution exercise by stressing some of these issues; the human rights abuses arising from the occupations, the corrupt activities involved in land invasions and the impact of land reform on the environment. The private media also publicised the plight of farm workers who had been displaced as a result of the land reform. Many farm workers were perceived as enemies of the revolution because most of them supported the interests of their white employers so as to protect their jobs which earned them a living. The farm workers suffered a lot of abuses and those who resisted land occupations were regarded as sell-outs and they were beaten up (Nyasveti, 2008). Farm workers who were accused of resisting the land reform exercise and siding with white commercial farmers, were sent packing together with their former employers (The Standard, 2005). The farm workers faced serious challenges and many of them had "nowhere to go" as they were foreign immigrants. Commercial farm workers' plight did not start with the land invasions commencing 2000. Many of them had for long failed to acquire birth certificates and national registration cards, death certificates and in registering as voters (The Daily News, 1999).

DISTORTION OF BENEFICIARIES

The land reform has been hitherto described as a process that benefited Zanu PF top leadership at the expense of the ordinary peasants who had been disadvantaged for long as shown, "...the land reform, has largely benefited the bigwigs in Zanu-PF, including their associates, some of whom helped themselves to several farms in total disregard of the one-man one- farm principle which could have helped decongest the land pressures in the communal areas" (The Financial Gazette, 2012). *The Daily News* (1999) echoed the sentiments by saying "It is true that political heavyweights have been favoured over ordinary peasants...the peasants may have gained here and there, but most of them must suspect that the government, through the heavy-handed tactics of Zanu PF, is once again being less than honest with them." This is not really the case because a lot of rural people were allocated pieces of land although there was need to show allegiance to the ruling party. It is also true that some senior party members are using their political influence to dislodge long time beneficiaries of the land reform as evidenced in the case of former Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe Governor Kombo Moyana who was involved in dispute with new farmers at Calgary Farm in Mazowe District (Chikwati & Mhizha, 2012). Consequently, the farmers had the sizes of their farms slashed to accommodate Kombo Junior and Georgina Brown. The beneficiaries, who were settled in 2006 at the farm, had their farms reduced to an average of 66 hectares while Kombo Junior was allocated 312 hectares (Chikwati, 2012). However, according to Mashonaland Central Governor and Resident Minister Advocate Martin Dinha, "What happened at Calgary Farm is part of the rationalisation process government has embarked on to ensure that all designated farms are fully utilised. It is our land policy that anyone who has not taken up the allocated land will have the offer letter withdrawn and the land given to other farmers willing to use it productively" (Chifamba & Chikwati, 2012).

CONCLUSION

Media ought to be as responsible as possible in the sense that it has a dual capability to transform and destroy lives. If the Rwandan genocide was instigated by a radio bulletin (Mutere, 2006: 5), the Zimbabwean media bewildered and misled people on how land redistribution represented a gateway to poverty alleviation and community development. The onset of the year 2000 witnessed profound changes in the political and economic landscape of Zimbabwe. The fast track land reform

programme was haphazardly launched by the Zanu PF government after the results of the referendum had warned ZANU PF of its shrinking support base. What followed was political madness as the “Prince” chose to be hated than to be loved. The Machiavellian ghost hovered Zimbabwean politics beginning 2000 as the land invasions witnessed the shedding of blood, massive displacements and the development of a fear syndrome within the people. In the midst of this pandemonium, the Zimbabwean print media made an unbalanced coverage of the land reform. Little efforts were made to pressurise Zanu PF to stop treating the land reform as a preserve for its members alone. The people who had invaded land lacked infrastructural, psychological and financial support because the private media fomented the general local and foreign view that the black farmers could not fully utilise land. As expected, the media was influenced by the political upheavals but finally forgot to awaken to the fact that the people were caught between a hard place and a rock. The paper elaborates on how the media failed to represent the interests of the rural peasantry by acting as mouthpieces of political parties.

Despite exposing various issues pertaining to human right abuses, the media definitely missed the point. The media could have utilised the opportunity to unite a politically divided nation. The state media forgot to inform the nation that many Zimbabweans supported the land reform but what only differed was the way of doing it. Land could have been peacefully taken from the whites without harassing fellow countrymen. Land was supposed to largely benefit all Zimbabweans. On the other hand, the private media ignored the huge impact being made by the new farmers. The Zimbabwean print media has been carried away by the political divisions in the country to the extent of making open biases. This is worryingly a stumbling block to sustainable development because conflict and development are incompatible. The media is also crucial in peace building through addressing perceived grievances which are crucial for human security and national development.

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