

**A critical inquiry into the absence of a gender equality discourse in the coverage of the land redistribution issue in two Zimbabwean newspapers, The Daily News and The Herald, between 01 February and 30 June 2000.**

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## Abbreviations

AIPPA	Access to Information and the Protection of Privacy Act
AMI	Africa Media Investments
ANZ	Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CIO	Central Intelligence Organization
FAMWZ	Federation of African Media Women Zimbabwe
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MMPZ	Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe
WLLG	Women and Land Lobby Group
ZAMPS	Zimbabwe All Media Products Survey
ZANU (PF)	Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front)
ZIANA	Zimbabwe Inter Africa News Agency
ZIMPAPERS	Zimbabwe Newspapers
ZMMT	Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust
ZWRCN	Zimbabwe Women Resource Centre and Network

## Acknowledgements

This thesis is a culmination of my age-long interest and involvement in the fight for the realisation of women's rights in Zimbabwe. My interest in ensuring that women's issues are mainstreamed into the news discourse led to my involvement in many training workshops during my initial years as a journalist which nurtured my quest for gender equality in the media, and through the media.

My interest could not, however, been strengthened had I not taken some gender training courses with the Federation of African Media Women Zimbabwe (FAMWZ) which made me stumble upon, and realise, the existence of gender discrimination in the way news is represented in the press and electronic media. Having been made aware of gender inequality, through the courses organised by FAMWZ, I am grateful for the Belgian Technical Cooperation (BTC) scholarship that enabled me to study for the MA degree at Rhodes University in South Africa for which this thesis is a requirement. This research could not have been undertaken had it not been for the generous BTC scholarship.

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Finally, though I always had thought it trite to say so, this is one piece of work where it must be stated emphatically that all errors of interpretation or otherwise are solely the responsibility of the researcher—and no one else.

## **Abstract**

The media, which help define what we think and our roles in the society, have a crucial role to project both men and women's issues so as to change people's perceptions and stereotypes about the role men and women play in the society. There is need, therefore, to ensure gender equality in the operations of the media so that issues to do with both men and women get adequate and equal coverage. This study on the reportage of the land redistribution exercise in Zimbabwe has, however, exposed the gendered nature of the operations of the media, particularly in the news production process. It provides that, overall, the news discourse is a masculine narrative whose androcentric form is a result of, and is protected by, claims to 'objectivity,' 'professionalism', 'impartiality' and the pursuit of a journalistic routine system that hegemonically prioritises men's issues over those of women. The situation, as the research shows, has not been helped by journalists' incapacity to do thematic appreciation of issues and their over-inclination towards a simplistic event-based journalism that fails to question policies as they are enacted and implemented in gender-skewed processes. The lack of gender policies, the operations of patriarchy and the pursuit of a journalistic routine system that sees nothing wrong with the ostracisation of women issues are very fundamental findings that the research uses in its attempts to explain why the gender equality discourse was left out of the news reports about the land reform exercise in Zimbabwe.

# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

## Introduction

My interest in gender issues, a result of the gender theories I learnt as part of my training as a journalist, enticed me to explore the issue of gender equality and how the Zimbabwean press covered the current (2000-)<sup>1</sup> land redistribution programme in the country. My study is based on the coverage of this issue in Zimbabwe's two main newspapers, *The Herald* and the *Daily News*. The gender dimension is an angle that was not covered in most reports on the redistribution of land. Most reports centred on debates about the appropriateness of the methods used to redistribute the land and the violence that characterised the exercise (Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe February-June 2000 reports).

The absence of the gender discourse in the press reports on the land reform is not particularly surprising given the ambiguities within the Zimbabwean constitution on gender equality and property ownership. While section 23, 2(b) guarantees that "no person shall be treated in a discriminatory manner by any person acting by virtue of any written law or in the performance of the functions of any public office or any public authority", section 23, 3(b) overrides the guarantee by asserting that "the application of African customary law in any case involving Africans where such persons have consented to the application of African customary law supersedes the Roman-Dutch law." As most African women in the rural areas in Zimbabwe are married under customary law, their consent to its broader application would therefore be considered *de facto*.

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<sup>1</sup> During the research, the land reform exercise was still officially in progress. The government had not given a timeframe within which it would finish the exercise.

In addition to realising that the constitutional ambiguities and their contribution to the discrimination against women were important themes to be reported by the media, my expectation that gender equality was an important issue in the coverage of land reforms was heightened by the fact that Zimbabwe is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). As CEDAW is explicit on how gender equality should be fostered by governments in land reforms, I was keen to inquire why the press was not taking the government to task for flouting the convention's recommendations by not prioritising gender equality in the land reforms.<sup>2</sup>

My research sought to establish why the newspapers did not pick up on the theme of gender equality in their reportage of the land reform exercise by probing why media producers involved in the writing and editing of stories could leave out this important issue.

### **Background to the research**

Statistics from studies done to evaluate the programme show that an average 15 percent of the redistributed land has gone to women, despite women's groups' insistence on 52 percent, which is reflective of the female-male ratio in the country's demographics.<sup>3</sup> Below is a table that shows the allocation of land according to gender in each province in the 'Fast Track' land redistribution programme.

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<sup>2</sup> Section 14.2 reads, "State parties should take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women." Sub-section (g) adds that governments should strive to ensure women have "access to agricultural credits and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equality in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes."

<sup>3</sup> The statistics came from an interview I had with Women in Land Lobby Group Director Abby Mugugu on 17 July 2004. The statistics she gave were quoted from The Utete Presidential Land Audit Report Volume 1 2003.

Province	Model A 1		Model A 2		Model A 2			
	Number of males	%	Number of Females	%	Number of Males	%	Number of Females	%
Midlands	14 800	82	3 198	18	338	95	17	5
Masvingo	19 026	84	3 644	16	709	92	64	8
Mash Central	12 986	88	1 770	12	1 469	87	215	13
Mash West	21 789	81	5 270	19	1 777	89	226	11
Mash East	12 967	76	3 992	24	*	*	*	*
Mat North	7 919	84	1 490	16	574	83	121	17
Mat. South	7 754	87	1 169	13	215	79	56	21
Manicaland	9 572	82	2 190	18	961	91	97	9
Total	106 986	82	22 723	18	6 043	88	796	12

Figure 1

- The Break down of figures by gender for Mashonaland East Model A 2 were not available. (Table extracted from the Utete Presidential Land Audit Report 2003)

The table shows that out of the 17 998 people allocated land under the A1 Model<sup>4</sup> in Midlands Province, 14 800 (82 %) are men and only 3 198 (18%) are women. Under the A2 Model<sup>5</sup> in the same province, out of a total of 355 people allocated land, only 17 (5%) are women while 338 (95%) are men. In Masvingo Province, out of a total 22 670 people allocated land under Mode A1, only 3 644 (16%) are women. Under Model A2 in the same province, out of 773 people allocated pieces of land, only 64 (8%) are women. The rest of the men-to-women ratio in the way the land was allocated is shown by the figures and percentages given in the diagram.

What is interesting to a media scholar about the above figures is that despite the apparent short-changing of women in the redistribution of the land, and the government's disregard of the international conventions to which it is a signatory, the press did not prioritise the issue in its news coverage (Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe Reports February-June 2000).<sup>6</sup>

The period, 01 February to 30 June 2000 that I chose for the study, marked the height of farm invasions and political campaigning in Zimbabwe, before the country voted for its fifth parliament. The most topical issues during this time were the invasion of white-owned farms and the political campaigns of the two most significant parties, Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Predictably, the issue of land was high on the manifestos of both parties and thus formed the central focus of media coverage as shown by the MMPZ reports.

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<sup>4</sup> A1 Model is a villagisation land redistribution model that was adopted by the government to decongest rural areas. It is mainly a small-scale farming model meant for subsistence farming.

<sup>5</sup> The A2 Model is for commercial farming. Under this model farmers were allocated large tracts of land amounting to more than 400 hectares.

<sup>6</sup> Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe (MMPZ) is a non-governmental organisation that does research on media coverage of topical issues in Zimbabwe. It produces detailed weekly reports that analyse media issues as they were covered during the week. It is these reports that reflect an absence of a gender equality discourse in the press coverage of the land redistribution exercise.

My research probed why the country's two most widely circulated daily newspapers during the peak of the land redistribution process, the privately owned *Daily News*<sup>7</sup> and the government-owned *The Herald*, did not consider the land redistribution issue from the angle of its impact on women in their extensive coverage of the phenomenon. The two papers were chosen because each mirrors the political bias of Zimbabwean society, representing two polarised ends of Zimbabwean politics, and because they were the most widely read papers at the time<sup>8</sup>. *The Herald* tends to favour the government and ZANU-PF in its reporting, while the *Daily News* leans towards a more liberal perspective that coincides with the MDC policies.

### **The press in Zimbabwe**

The print media in Zimbabwe are dominated by state controlled publications. These are publications in which the editorial policy is influenced either directly or indirectly, by the state (The Zimpapers Editorial Policy). Currently, after the closure of the *Daily News*, there are three daily newspapers: *The Herald*, *Chronicle* and *The Daily Mirror*. *The Herald* and *Chronicle* are controlled by the government through the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT), which is an entity that was created by the government in 1981 through funds provided by the Nigerian government. Through the ZMMT, the government bought the Zimbabwe Newspapers Group (Zimpapers), the company that owns *The Herald* and *Chronicle* and their sister weeklies, *The Sunday Mail* and *The Sunday News*. The minister of information and publicity appoints Zimpapers Pvt Ltd board members, and the board members then make key editorial appointments to all state media outlets (Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act 2002). This ensures that the publications support government positions on issues, and never paint the government negatively<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> The *Daily News* was closed by the government-appointed Media and Information Commission (MIC) on 12 September 2003 after it failed to register with the government as required under the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA).

<sup>8</sup> According to the Zimbabwe All Media Products Survey August 2003, The *Daily News* had the highest circulation figure (46 000), while *The Herald* had a circulation of 45 000.

<sup>9</sup> Part of the Zimpapers editorial policy document reads, "Newspapers will be supportive of Zimbabwe and its goals, and generally supportive of the elected government of the day."

Apart from the two weeklies mentioned above, the state-controlled *The Sunday Mail* and *The Sunday News*, Zimbabwe has four other weeklies owned by independent publishers and the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO). These are: the *Sunday Mirror* and *Financial Gazette*, owned by the CIO and *The Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Standard*. Which are published by Zimind Publishers (Pvt) Ltd, which is owned by South African-based Zimbabwean businessman, Trevor Ncube.

There are some magazine publications, many of which are published by the state-run Zimpapers<sup>10</sup>. There is also the Roman Catholic run *Moto* magazine, which, because of the prevailing harsh economic conditions, has been restricted to circulation in the small town of Gweru where it is published.

Besides the publications mentioned above, the state, through the Zimbabwe Inter Africa News Agency (ZIANA), also runs provincial publications in all the country's ten provinces. These are, *Masvingo Star* (Masvingo Province), *Harare Post* (Harare Province), *City Courier* (Bulawayo Province) *Pungwe News* (Manicaland Province), *Ilanga* (Matabeleland South Province), *Indonsakusa* (Matabeleland North Province), *Chaminuka News* (Mashonaland East Province), *Nehanda Guardian* (Mashonaland Central Province), *Gweru Times* (Midlands Province) and *The Telegraph* (Mashonaland West Province).

While it might have been important to look at other newspapers and magazines, I selected *The Herald* and the *Daily News* for my study, because they were the most widely read in the country as a whole (Anderson and Olsen, 1997:47). To understand how these two dailies, *The Herald* and *Daily News*, could have excluded a discourse of gender equality in their coverage of the land redistribution, it is important to examine their editorial policies and shareholding structures.

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<sup>10</sup> Zimpapers publishes three magazines: *The New Farmer* (Farming news), *Travel* (tourism and travel) and *Trends* (Fashion news)

### **The Zimbabwe Newspapers Group (Zimpapers) Ownership Structure (publishers of *The Herald*)**

The shareholders of a newspaper normally influence the editorial policy and the content that gets into the newspaper (McManus 1996: 146). Cognisant of this, it is therefore, necessary to look at the ownership structure of Zimpapers, the publishers of *The Herald*, and find out the role the shareholders might have played in the exclusion of the gender equality discourse in the paper's reportage of the land reform exercise.

Zimpapers is the largest and oldest media organisation in Zimbabwe established in 1891 by settlers led by Cecil John Rhodes. Formerly the Rhodesia Printing and Publishing House, Zimpapers was established in 1980 through a Government buy-out of the South African Argus Group's controlling stake. The Zimbabwe government has the majority shareholding through the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust (ZMMT). Although the ZMMT was not initially a majority shareholder, by 1981 it had acquired a 51 percent stake in Zimpapers, effectively becoming the largest shareholder in the company (Saunders 1991:75). The rest of the shares are owned by pension funds, insurance companies, investment funds and individuals. The following diagram reflects the ownership structure in the Zimpapers Group (December 2004 Annual Report):

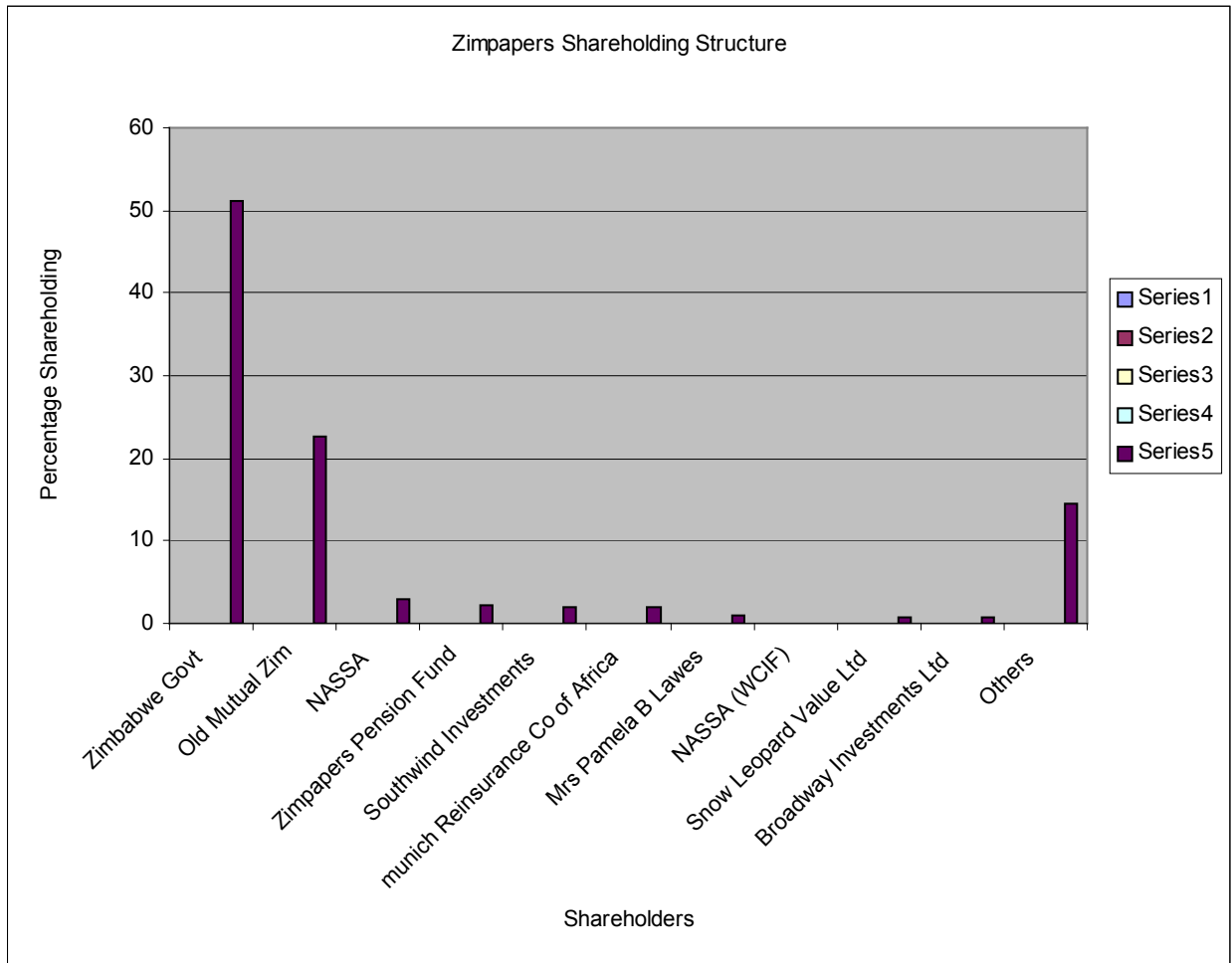


Figure 2

As illustrated by the above, the government of Zimbabwe has a controlling stake in the company that publishes *The Herald*. This gives the government a platform to influence what content gets into the paper and this is normally expressed in the editorial charter of the organisation. Such influence might be used to ensure that the paper does not question government policy. It comes as no surprise that the paper did not criticise government on the exclusion of women in the land redistribution exercise despite the country being a signatory to international and regional conventions that outlaw gender discrimination.

*The Herald's* failure to take the government to task over the exclusion of women from the land redistribution can be partly explained by its editorial policy which it shares with

other newspapers under the Zimpapers stable. The policy is explicit on how the newspaper should relate with its major shareholder (The Zimbabwe Government) it demands that: “Newspapers will be supportive of Zimbabwe and its goals, and generally supportive of the elected government of the day”(The Zimpapers Editorial Policy Document 1999). One could argue that if *The Herald* were supposed to be “generally supportive of the elected government of the day”, it would probably not question why government reserved only 20 percent of the land for redistribution among women.

### **The Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ) (Publishers of *Daily News*)**

The Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ), which published the *Daily News*, was launched in July 1998. Its founding editors, Geoffrey Nyarota and Wilf Mbanga, teamed up with Africa Media Investments (AMI) and other foreign investors to start a media house which brought a new dimension to government’s relationship with the media. Through its fearless and non-partisan stance, the ANZ publications provided a platform for questioning government policies, a feat that was not only novel and taboo, but out of sync with the editorial policies of state controlled publications.

The investors in ANZ included foreign entities such as the Bank of Scotland; the Independent Newspapers of South Africa; Tindle Newspapers, also from South Africa; Cross Graphics, a British supplier of printing and associated equipment; Allied Press, New Zealand's largest private media group; and Commonwealth Publishing Limited. The international shareholders were grouped under the name Africa Media Investments (AMI), a British company with interests in African media. Initially, AMI was supposed to hold 60 percent of the shares, with its Zimbabwean partners getting the other 40 percent. However, because Zimbabwean investors could not raise the required capital, AMI increased its share in the company. AMI ended up holding more than 83 percent of the total shares in ANZ. The company had eight directors: Stuart Mattinson (chairman), Much Masunda (chief executive), Geoffrey Nyarota (editor-in-chief), John Mkushi, Judith Todd, (daughter of former prime minister of Rhodesia, Sir Garfield Todd), Edwin

Manikai, Derrick Smail who held the biggest stake in AMI and stayed in England, and a Mr N. Mpofu. (ANZ Company Profile 1999).

The company's shareholding structure changed in 2002 when Zimbabwean communications mogul Strive Masiyiwa bought into ANZ through his company, Mediation Investments (Pvt) Ltd which acquired part of AMI. Mediation Investments ended up holding 50 percent of the total shares in ANZ, while AMI, the original majority shareholder had 32 percent. Diamond Insurance Company of Zimbabwe owned one percent of the shares, while the rest of the shareholding (17 percent) was spread between Southern Life Association, Intermarket Life Assurance, NDM Investments (Pvt) Ltd, Batanai Capital Finance (Pvt) Ltd, Dr Ali Mohamed and Judith Todd (ANZ Company Profile 2002). Below is a diagram that shows the percentage shareholding in ANZ shortly before the closure of its publications.

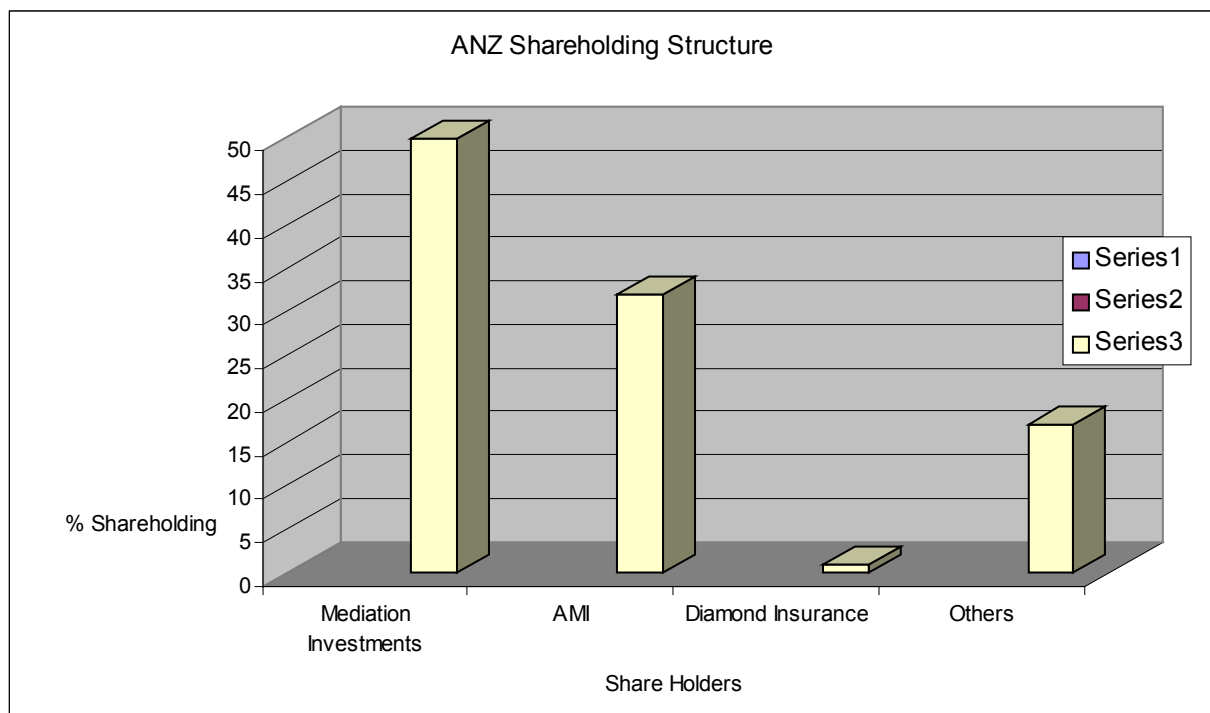


Figure 3

Documents on the two companies that own the two publications chosen for this study show that both media organisations, *The Herald* and *The Daily News* are published by entities dominated by male shareholders and this could have been one of the reasons why their content is generally not sensitive to issues that concern women. The government of Zimbabwe which has a 51 percent stake in the publishing company that owns *The Herald* is male dominated: women constitute only 9 percent of cabinet ministers ([www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx? 73470](http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?73470). Accessed on 30 November 2004). Similarly, the *Daily News* was mostly male-owned, with Judith Todd being the lone female director (Daily News Inaugural edition 19 September 1999).

### **Research problem and hypotheses**

My research aim was to investigate why *The Herald* and the *Daily News* omitted a gender equality approach in their coverage of the land reform during the period under study. The absence of this approach is particularly significant as the land reform was undertaken with the purported objective of fostering equality in land ownership in the country. I also wanted to understand why the journalists who covered the phenomenon did not question the marginalisation of women. Women constitute about 86 percent of those who do farm work (Goebel 1997). Furthermore, by 1996 there was a higher percentage of women than men taking up training for Master Farmer certificates (Goebel 1997). It is interesting to note, however, that despite women doing the actual work on the farms and taking up training courses in farming, only 15 percent were beneficiaries of the land reform. The above realities prompted me to probe why the media did not seem interested in questioning this situation.

I questioned whether the exclusion of a gender equality discourse resulted from the patriarchal nature of journalistic practices, blinding them to the discriminatory way in which land was allocated. I also tried to establish whether the absence of gender policies and training programmes in the media houses contributed to journalists' disinterest in looking at the land reform from the perspective of ensuring gender equality in the allocation of land.

Also considered were the journalists' conceptions of what constitute news: their news values. I probed how the journalists' conceptions of newsworthy phenomena contributed to their exclusion of gender related issues. My research approach was to use these hypotheses as entry points into discussions with media workers about why the gender equality discourse was absent in their news texts. The post-structural feminist epistemology and the socio-cultural approaches to the sociology of news that shaped the way the research was undertaken meant that a qualitative research approach was adopted, and that the people chosen as informants were allowed to give their own accounts of the phenomenon under study with minimum intervention by the researcher.

### **Justification for the research**

Women play a key role in subsistence agriculture in Zimbabwe. Apart from forming 52 percent of the country's population, 86 percent of them depend on the land for their own and their families' livelihoods (Goebel 1997:37). They are the main providers of labour for farming (approximately 70 percent) and are the primary managers of homes in communal areas, as many men are migrant workers (Goebel 1997:38). Furthermore, the government is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Declaration on Gender and Development (1997) which note that all persons should have the right to equal access to public resources in their countries, among other things. The issue of ensuring women's needs in land reform becomes a fundamental human rights issue in light of the conventions Zimbabwe is party to. It is appropriate that government and policy makers be taken to task when they abrogate their duty to ensure that citizens are treated fairly, especially where the allocation of a finite national resource is concerned. More importantly, it is part of the watchdog function of liberal media to ensure government enforces the dictates of the various regional and international conventions and protocols it signed.

The task of ensuring that the government delivers on its responsibilities lies partly with the media. When the media fail to question government's unfair treatment of some of its citizens, there is a need to investigate the functions of the media. It is against this

background that I felt duty-bound to find reasons why the media failed to play its role as the “Fourth Estate” (Carey 1988) concerning the exclusion of women from the land redistribution. The research, therefore, sought to find reasons why the media failed to critique the government’s land reform process regarding gender equality in land ownership patterns in the country.

The investigation was also carried out with the view of ensuring that women’s issues get media coverage, and that policy makers address the gender inequalities fostered by land reform. The research, therefore, became a form of struggle for gender equality in policy formulation and implementation in critical sectors of the Zimbabwean society. Talking of feminist research as a form of social struggle, Lather argues that,

The overt ideological goal of feminist research in the human sciences is to correct both the *invisibility* and *distortion* of female experience in ways relevant to ending women’s unequal social position. (1991:71) [Italics in original]

This research, therefore, does not only seek to expose the inequalities in the way land was redistributed, and the media’s coverage of this process. It also endeavours, among other things, to lay the foundation on which women’s exclusion from mainstream media could be understood and fought against.

## **Methodology**

The theories and epistemological framework that I adopted for this study demanded that the methodology and methods used in this inquiry be suitable to achieve the objectives of the research. My concern that journalists give lucid accounts of how they treated stories on the redistribution of land made it imperative that I adopt a qualitative approach to data gathering. To achieve this end, I used in-depth interviews with them to find answers to the research question. As one scholar notes, “If given a chance to talk freely, people appear to know a lot about what is going on” (Bertaux 1981:39). And since my approach was sociological, the answers to the research problem were to be found in “the experiences of the individuals whose work and lives are the stuff upon which the social abstractions of the media are built” (Seidman 1991:4).

The sample consisted of people chosen for their involvement in the production of news stories carried by the papers during the study period. This approach was justifiable in terms of Deacon et al's view that qualitative research methods do not always follow conventional sampling procedures but, instead, depend upon the creativity and resourcefulness of the researcher (1999:54-5). At times, it is not the number of people that you talk to about a research problem that matters, but the appropriateness of the people to the research that is being undertaken. Rubin and Rubin (1995) support the idea of a small sample as long as it yields the necessary information:

With the first principle of qualitative sampling—what we label *completeness*—you choose people who are knowledgeable about the subject and talk with them until what you hear provides an overall sense of the meaning of a concept, theme or process. Sometimes interviewing one very informed person is all that is necessary (Rubin and Rubin 1995:72).

For this research I interviewed the then news editors and chief reporters of both newspapers. The news editors were chosen because they are responsible for overall content and angles of news, while the chief reporters were the ones tasked with reporting on the most topical issues, like the land reform. I also interviewed the papers' political reporters since the land reform had assumed a political dimension with the impending elections for the country's Fifth Parliament. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed for the purposes of data analysis. I then used discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis to make sense of the interview data.

## **Definitions**

**Gender:** It is a societal ascription of what it is to be male and female. It is a social construction that distinguishes femininity from masculinity.

**Gender equality:** The view that both men and women in a society must be accorded the same rights, importance and opportunities in life.

**Fast Track Land Reform:** The accelerated distribution of land that was adopted by the Zimbabwe government shortly after its defeat in the February 2000 referendum.

**News Values:** The professional guidelines that journalists follow in determining what is and is not newsworthy.

**Objectivity:** A belief that reality can be captured and presented in an impartial and unbiased manner. It stems from a positivistic notion that natural science can be used to ensure that reality is presented in ways that are free of bias and subjectivity.

**Positivism:** A theory that stresses the natural science approach to understanding reality, where phenomena can be isolated and variables controlled so that ‘unbiased’ conclusions about reality can be achieved.

**Post-structuralism:** At the centre of post-structuralism is a resistance to any form of definition or identification “...presumably because such practices represent an attempt to pin down an essence which does not exist” (Gavey, 1998:119). According to Foucault (1988:18) “...the premises of post-structuralism disallow any denominative, unified, or ‘proper’ definition of itself.” It is a theory that does not subscribe to the explanation of social reality in terms of grand narratives or meta-theories. Loosely speaking, post-structuralism encapsulates any theories or methods of analysis, including deconstruction and some psychoanalytic theories, that deny the validity of structuralism’s method of binary opposition and maintain that meanings and intellectual categories are shifting and unstable.

### **Delimitations of scope and key assumptions**

The object of the research was to question why the *Daily News* and *The Herald*, part of ‘the Fourth Estate’, failed to take the government to task for not ensuring gender equality in its redistribution of land when it is a signatory to regional and international conventions that outlaw such discrimination.

A guiding premise was that that the media, as the 'Fourth Estate', had an ethical obligation to query the government's failure to adhere to international and regional conventions that it is a signatory to. From this perspective, the media should have taken the government to task for not ensuring equality in the land reform policy as espoused by section 14.2 of CEDAW. It was also assumed that there might be a number of factors that contributed to the 'media blackout' in this regard. Key among them were assumptions that the media are patriarchal in nature and hence they excluded discourses that sought to foster gender equity. I also assumed that the absence of gender policies in newspaper organisations contributed to the marginalisation of a gender equality discourse in their reportage. However, the prior assumptions only paved the way for discussions with informants. I did not go out to test these hypotheses, but to find out why those who were involved in the writing and editing of stories, did not take the gender equality angle in their coverage of the land reform.

### **Thesis Structure**

The thesis has five chapters. Chapter one is the introduction. It gives a background to the study, its justification and general information on the press in Zimbabwe. It also gives background to the two daily papers under study. Chapter two details the theories used in the study and reviews literature in the field of inquiry. Chapter three focuses on the research methods used in the study, while Chapter four analyses the data emanating from the research. Chapter five wraps up the report giving conclusions on hypotheses emanating from the field. It also gives suggestions for policy makers and gives recommendations for further research.

### **Conclusion**

The research sought to understand why the gender equality discourse was left out of the reportage of the land redistribution exercise by the newspapers chosen for this study. A qualitative research approach was adopted to enable the researcher to use appropriate methods that sought to understand the phenomenon under research from those who were

active participants in the production of the newspaper stories on the land redistribution exercise. Throughout the research project, the researcher was cognisant that it is by allowing the people involved in the production of the newspaper stories to give an account of how they work that he could understand why the gender equality discourse was absent from their stories on the land reform programme. All the theories and research methods were specifically, and specially, chosen to ensure the interviewees played an active role in finding answers to the research questions.

## CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction**

A critical analysis of the exclusion of women in news discourse shows that the primary procedures in news production are rooted in a masculine ordering of events. This patriarchal approach towards news as a paradigm (Reese 1997), provides the rules of inclusion and exclusion that govern and inform 'news values'. Interesting to this study is the argument that 'news values', the idea of 'objectivity', 'value-freeness' and 'impartiality' that journalists claim to observe as guidelines in news production, are not overtly masculine but are "framed in apparently gender-neutral terms" (van Zoonen 1989:84) yet exuding a masculine prioritisation of issues which is almost hegemonic hence invisible from an uncritical eye.

This study will employ a sociology of news approach that incorporates post-structural feminism to critique the news production process with the intention of exposing its gendered nature. The chapter begins by briefly outlining post-structural feminism and how it informs a critique of news values. A detailed discussion of Schudson's (2000) cultural and social organisational approaches to the sociology of news production will follow. The discussion locates news in relation to the social and cultural practices of the society in which it is produced. It highlights that news is not "just a happening in the world; it is a relation between a certain happening and a given symbolic system" (Sahlins 1985:153).

The chapter also describes and explains the role that media houses, individuals and organisations that relate to news producers as sources, play in influencing and shaping the news product. Throughout the discussion, a clear link between the cultural values and practices of the society in which the news is produced and the process of news production is made to explain how news is shaped by the cultural practices. However, the discussion is constantly cognisant of the fact that the process of news production is not overly

determined by cultural and organisational practices *per se*. The discussion thus, incorporates post-structural feminism into the socio-organisational and cultural approaches to news production, so the analysis is not restricted to the two approaches mentioned earlier.

The chapter closes by explaining the need for a feminist-influenced reconceptualisation of news values extricated from a post-structural feminist perspective that calls for a re-ordering of priorities in society and a wider cultural change that theorists believe will transform the masculine nature of news. Post-structuralists, according to Lavie and Lehman-Wilzig, believe that,

..wider cultural change such as increased influence of women in society as a whole, rather than a change in the gender of the average editor, will inevitably lead to greater salience being given to ‘female’ topics and values (if such really do exist) (2003:18).

In other words, post-structural feminists believe that in the case of extensive society-wide cultural change, an adjustment in the scale of newsworthiness will occur even if newsrooms remain the exclusive providence of men. However, before delving into details about post-structural feminism and how it could be applied to the study of news production and the exclusion of gender discourse in news, it is pertinent that I explain the two theories that are merged to come up with post-structural feminism, that is, feminism and post-structuralism. I will start with feminism.

## **Feminism**

Feminism can be described as a social theory which posits that society discriminates against women, systematically depriving them of individual choice, political power, economic opportunities, media exposure and intellectual recognition, among other things (Stacey 1993). It is pertinent to note here that the discrimination is rooted in the operation of a patriarchal system that historically privileges men over women. Fundamental to feminism is the perspective that women have been “left out of codified knowledge; where men have formulated explanations in relation to themselves...” (Spender 1981:02). Feminism as a theory, therefore, entails a body of knowledge which offers critical

explanations of women's subordination and exclusion from fundamental social processes obtaining in society. By referring to the explanations of the women's subordination as critical, I posit that feminist theory's explanation of the subjugation of women "does not seek to reinforce or legitimate, but rather attempts to undermine, expose or challenge, women's subordination" (Stacey 1993:50). Typically, feminist theory offers some kind of analysis and explanation of how and why women have less power than men, and how this imbalance could be challenged, expurgated or transformed (Stacey 1993:50).

By using patriarchy as a point of entry, most feminist theories trace the "historical emergence of particular forms of inequality between women and men, in contrast to the view that gender inequality is natural" (Mies 1986:38). Furthermore, by locating the subordination of women in social historical processes and the operations of power (in its Foucauldian sense), to include, exclude or dominate the other in discursive formations (Eley 1992), feminism moves closer to the explanation of social phenomena in post-structural terms. It takes cognisance of the eclecticism characterising the explanation of the subjugation of women and their exclusion from news discourse. At the same time, it suggests that there is no one truthful and objective explanation of the subjugation.

### **Post-structuralism**

Before marrying post-structuralism to feminism, it is important to explain what post-structuralism is. Defining post-structuralism is difficult, if not impossible, since it is centred on the understanding that no universal and normative explanation of phenomena exists (Gavey, 1998:119). This includes post-structuralism itself. It is its reflexive and interpretivistic hallmarks that make attempts at defining the term difficult. Chris Weedon, a scholar who attempted to define the term and link it to feminism, is cognisant of the challenges to be confronted in such an endeavour. She argues that post-structuralism "does not have one fixed meaning but is generally applied to a range of theoretical positions developed in and from the work of Derrida (1973, 1976); Lacan (1977); Kristeva (1974a, 1981, 1986), Althusser (1971) and Foucault (1978, 1979a, 1979b, 1981, 1986)" (1987:19).

According to Weedon (1987), one can attempt to explain post-structuralism by outlining what it does. I will argue here that it decentres meaning, rejects the universalising tendencies of philosophy, and critiques the explanation of 'reality' through grand narratives. It does not see 'reality' but 'realities' that are constructed as a result of subjective understandings of phenomena based on one's personal, psychological and social-cultural presuppositions. Advancing the same observations about post-structuralism, Grassie (1997) explains how post-structuralism moves away from the structural construction of reality approach, arguing that post-structuralism challenges

...the possibility of simplistic, unidirectional causative analysis, while continuing to argue that reality is in some significant sense hidden from direct observation and commonsense. Post-structuralism removes all foundational categories by re-examining them as the causative products of some other factors. There is no available a priori, no Archimedean point of reference, on which to ground human reason. What is "reasonable" in this neo-Kantian formulation is somehow an inter-subjective projection onto phenomena. There is no direct experience of reality without interpretation; and all interpretation is in some sense corrupted by the cultural and personal prejudices or prejudgments of the interpreter (<http://www.voicenet.com/~grassie/Fldr.Articles/Postmodernism.html>)

Post-structuralism employs a hermeneutic approach to understanding social phenomena and meaning construction. It understands the processes of meaning-making and production of media texts as subjective phenomena, albeit linked to social cultural practices. Just as how the individual, social and cultural factors are considered in hermeneutical textual analysis, the same strategy is used in understanding human behaviour and how people construct symbolic images and make meaning of them. In the words of Grassie (1997) "The problem of reading and understanding a "text" becomes a new metaphor for all kinds of understanding, including the understanding of social and biophysical phenomena" (<http://www.voicenet.com/~grassie/Fldr.Articles/Postmodernism.html>).

## **Applying post-structuralism to feminism**

The post-structural feminist approach that I use with the sociology of news theory combines the characteristics of post-structuralist and feminist theories outlined above. It incorporates the critique of patriarchy that feminism offers, but goes beyond the structural limitations of a cultural critique of the subjugation of women that the approach adopts. Rather, it provides an understanding of oppression in broader terms. In other words, it goes beyond the cultural and organisational determinism that Schudson's (2000) cultural and socio-organisational approaches to news production suggest, by realising that the subjugation of women is multi-faceted and needs a more complex analytical approach to understand the phenomenon.

I will explain Schudson's cultural and socio-organisational approaches to news production, then use a post-structural feminist approach to highlight their limitations before embarking on a discussion of post-structural feminism and the production of news.

## **The cultural and social organisational approaches**

Schudson's (2000) cultural and social organisational approaches to news production offer an epistemological shift in understanding how news is produced. Moving from a positivistic conception of news production where 'news is news' and is linked to a reality 'out there', Schudson (2000) offers an explanation of news production as a social practice that is influenced by the overarching cultural practices in a society as well as the organisations that produce or supply the news. Both approaches view news as "a story" (Tuchman 1976) which is "manufactured by journalists" (Cohen and Young 1973:97). Tuchman (1976) explains that taking news as a story does not imply it being fictitious, but helps in capturing the intricacies that characterise the process of its production. She argues that,

To say that a news report is a story, no more, but no less, is not to demean news, nor to accuse it of being fictitious. Rather, it alerts us that news, like all public documents, is a constructed reality possessing its own internal validity. (1976: 97)

Arguing through a strong cultural approach, Schudson posits that news is defined in terms of its relation to socio-cultural practices. He argues that an event becomes news when its significance coincides with what is deemed relevant to a particular cultural community. To support his argument, Schudson (2000) quotes anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (1985) who argues that “an event is not just a happening in the world; it is a relation between a certain happening and a given symbolic system” (1985:153). Both the cultural and the social organisational approaches that Schudson uses critique the ideas of ‘objectivity,’ ‘impartiality,’ ‘value freeness’ and ‘professionalism’ that positivists use to argue that reality can be captured in its ‘untainted’ form. The two approaches acknowledge that,

Reality is never experienced by social man in the raw. Whether the reality in question is the brute force of nature, or men’s relations with other men, it is always experienced through the mediating structures of language. And this mediation is not a distortion or even a reflection of the real; it is rather the active social process through which the real is *made*. (Fiske and Hartley 1978:161)

The two approaches therefore argue that the analysis of news production should be cognisant of the cultural and organisational factors that constitute the product called news. Through the two theories outlined above, Schudson (2000) concurs with Philip Schlesinger that,

News must be assessed as a cultural product which embodies journalistic, social, and political values. It cannot be, and certainly is not, a neutral, impartial, or totally objective perception of the real world (Schlesinger 1978:165).

The approaches also do not hold on to the idea of ‘objectivity’ that positivists use to argue that an ‘impartial’ reporter, “one socialised into obeying the rituals of naming, describing and framing realities,” is capable of ‘gathering’ news in its untainted and impartial form (Allan 1998:131). They also do not agree with the ‘objectivity’ argument that “the production process is simply a set of technical routines which enables the producers to secure an undistorted picture of reality” (Schlesinger 1978: 163-164). Rather, they posit that “news is what newspapermen (sic) make it” (Gieber 1964:173). They hold on to the idea that news is a creation, a consciously manufactured product out of a myriad of events that happen in the world that could pass as news.

While the two approaches outlined above have a lot in common, the organisational approach notes that cultural institutions and actors do not possess complete autonomy from fundamental socio-organisational processes that influence the process of news production. The organisational approach specifies the particular culture, that is, organisational culture, which is used in news production while the cultural approach refers to culture as if it is a universal concept. Rather than referring to culture as if it were a homogenous phenomenon, the organisational approach that Schudson (2000) uses gives specific reference to what one could call ‘organisational culture’, which is a consensus on the values that govern the production of news and the work of journalists. It acknowledges that,

News-making is a consensual process. The forming of consensus takes place within a context of shared values-conventions about news as well as conceptions of the newsman’s role...So long as newsmen follow the same routines, espousing the same professional values and using each other as their standards of comparison, news-making will tend to be insular and self-reinforcing. But that insularity is precisely what newsmen need. It provides them with a modicum of certitude that enables them to act in an otherwise uncertain environment. (Sigal 1973:180-181)

The social organisational approach also details the role that organisations that are used as news sources play in giving angles to news stories. It specifies organisational influence and splits it into two separate but related categories. It analyses the influence of the media organisation that produces the news and at the same time, describes the role that organisations that supply the news, like governments, political parties and other civic bodies play in shaping news. Most importantly, it explains that “the source-journalist relationship is a... tug of war” in which sources attempt to manage the news, putting the best light on themselves while journalists concurrently manage the source in order to extract the information they want (Gans 1979:117).

Taken together, the cultural and socio-organisational approaches provide a framework for analysing the news production process in a way that recognises the broader cultural practices of a community, the mundane everyday practices, while paying equal attention to the influence rendered by the news media routine system and the media-organisation-source relationship. However, the two approaches, even when taken

together, do not offer a comprehensive framework which one can use to analyse the production of news from a gendered perspective. Post-structural feminism can be used to critique the short-comings of the two approaches. While it is interesting to use post-structuralism to critique these two approaches, the most significant aspect is that it can be combined with the two approaches to provide a more complex theoretical framework to analyse phenomena related to the production of news. My discussion of post-structural feminism will not only critique the two approaches to understanding news, but will also offer insights into how post-structural feminism could provide a comprehensive framework for analysing the gendered nature of news production. My discussion will, therefore, both critique the cultural and socio-organisational approaches as well as explaining how post-structural feminism helps to foster a deeper understanding of the process of news production and how gender equality issues are left out of the news discourse.

### **Post-structural feminism and the production of news**

Post-structural feminism, like all feminisms, liberal, radical, socialist, Marxist, psychoanalytic and existentialist, to mention but some examples, “laments the ways in which women have been oppressed, repressed, and suppressed” while at the same time celebrating “the ways in which so many women have beaten the system, taken charge of their own destinies, and encouraged each other to live, love, laugh and be happy *as women*” (Tong 1989:02 italics in original). It provides a critique of social life that I will use here to analyse the production of news that excludes women. Although most of the critics I use in my argument cannot be normatively labelled post-structural feminists, most of their arguments make sense within a post-structural feminist framework. Their concern with the use of language and culture, the role of social institutions, and the interplay of power in the process of producing gendered news, coincides with Chris Weedon’s justification for using post-structuralism to addressing feminist concerns. In justifying the use of post-structuralism in feminist issues, Weedon maintains that she,

..would argue the appropriateness of post-structuralism to feminist concerns, not as the answer to *all* feminist questions but as a way of conceptualising the relationship between language, social institutions and individual consciousness

which focuses on how power is exercised and on the possibilities of change. (1997:19, italics in original)

I use a post-structural feminist approach to critique the process of news production and show its exclusion of women from news discourse. According to van Zoonen (1994), many scholars (Creedon 1989, Diekerhof *et al.* 1985, Neverla and Kanzleiter 1984, and Van Zoonen and Donsbach 1988) argue that “survey data from most Western countries suggest that it is in the definition of newsworthiness, particular angles and styles, professional norms and values that the masculine nature of journalism expresses itself” (van Zoonen: 1998: 35). Journalists, apparently, valorise the masculine nature of news by their claim that “news is news” (Diekerhof *et al.* 1986: 157, and) thus has nothing to do with subjective conceptions. As Lavie and Lehman-Wilzig (2003) note, such an understanding emanated from the 1980s and 1990s school of thought that “news production, in its very essence, is professional and non-gender specific—or put more bluntly: ‘news is news’ and it doesn’t involve gender” (2003:08). This argument has often been buttressed by journalists’ claims to objectivity, arguing that they shelve their subjectivities and think ‘professionally’ when writing news stories. What is not often critiqued is that,

To think ‘professionally’ is, evidently, not compatible with thinking as a ‘woman.’ Commonly regarded almost as a synonym for objectivity, the concept of professionalism has come to hide its value-based roots. (Gallagher 1989:82)

It is ironic that while most news organisations rationalise the exclusion of women from news discourse on the basis that their practices rest on notions of balance and objectivity, “the news organisations have never claimed to balance the concerns of women against those of men nor maintain objectivity between a male and female point of view” (Rakow and Kranich 1991:13). Rather, “the appeal to ‘objectivity’ becomes a defensive strategy, one which assists the journalist in countering charges of sexism (as well as racism, among others) being levelled at specific instances of reporting” (Glazener 1989:128).

Many women have cited the concept of objectivity in news reporting as valorising the exclusion of women on the pretext that the exclusion is justified as a ‘true reflection’ of the phenomenon being covered (van Zoonen 1988). Tracing the concept of objectivity to

the positivist epistemological approach to research and knowledge acquisition, van Zoonen (1994) argues that the traditional science approach in ‘news gathering’, with its emphasis on objectivity, ‘value-freeness’ and ‘neutrality’, has been concerned with “themes, theories and methodologies which have been shown to be male-biased in that the particular experience of men has often been presented as having universal validity” (1994:14). She further argues that ‘objectivity’, ‘value-freeness’ and ‘neutrality’ are offsprings of the hegemony of masculine modes of thinking and that the traditional science approach to knowledge acquisition they envisage, “not only ignores women’s themes and experiences, it also denies the validity of women’s ways of knowing (1994:14).

Where attempts have been made to problematise the concept of news values and the ideas of ‘objectivity’ ‘fairness’, ‘value-freeness’ and ‘professionalism’, the theories and methods applied have been silent on the issue of gender. Starting from the early works on the subject like those by Gieber (1964), Cohen and Young (1973), Tuchman (1976), Gans (1979), Fishman (1980), and Hackett (1984), to the more recent scholarship by Schudson (2000) and Lichtenberg (2000), among others, the issue of gender is missing in their analyses of news values and the process of news production. Rather, these studies have tended “to adopt male-generated analytical and theoretical constructs (Gallagher 1989:76) which “miss the deeper meaning” of the structural relationship between communications and the problem of gender (McCormack 1983:281).

It is also interesting to note that even studies that have been specifically carried out to deal with specific gender issues in news have ended up circumventing the issue of gender, news values and news production. As noted by Lavie and Lehman-Wilzig (2003),

Several recent theoreticians (Kitzinger 1998; Carter 1998; Sidmore 1998; de Bruin 2000) have pointed out that even extensive studies of news, including those that deal with relevant gender aspects, have mostly ignored the politics of gender in the news production process and news professionalism within this context (2003:08).

While Lavie and Lehman-Wilzig (2003) do well to point out the absence of gender in most news production studies, their study in Israel also falls short of a clear understanding of the situation they discerned. Although their inquiry was focussed on probing the relationship between an increase in the number of female journalists and the salience of gender equality news, their findings also help to outline the patriarchal nature of news values which the researchers could not discern. While there is no doubt the researchers did well to argue their case that there was no discernible gendered criteria in selecting news-worthy stories by their subjects, it is their failure to link this almost 'universal' conception of newsworthiness to the patriarchal ordering of issues which is the focal point of my critique on their work. Like other theorists before them, (Schudson 2000; Tuchman 1978; Hackett 1984), Lavie and Lehman-Wilzig (2003) commit the same error of looking at news values with apparently 'ungendered' eyes, thereby failing to link this almost universal conception of news values to patriarchy.

While I agree with Lavie and Lehman-Wilzig that "at times the significant exclusion of women in news discourse exists inherently because it is eroded by the comprehensive organisational mechanism of news production which obliterates the possibility of identifying it in the final product" (2003:10), I argue that critical analysis can unravel it no matter how covert it is.

The post-structural feminist approach, together with Schudson's (2000) cultural and socio-organisational theories adopted in this research hope to unravel the covert means that the procedures of news production employ to exclude gender equality discourse in news. This will be undertaken by questioning the hitherto taken for granted masculine understanding of news values by offering a critique of the "basic assumptions, conventional wisdom, media myths and the accepted ways of doing things" (Halloran 1982:171) which lie at the heart of journalism's claim of objectivity. By infusing feminism into the cultural and organisational approaches to the production of news, this study questions the gender-based power relations in society and critiques the social structures that promote a masculine ordering of issues at the expense of gender equality.

The cultural approach will be used to explain the exclusion of gender equality discourses in news in terms of the overall cultural experiences of the Zimbabwean society in which the discourses are found. This approach adopts a stand-point similar to the one Stuart Allan adopts in his critique of news discourse which he codes, “(En)gendering the truth politics of news discourse.” Allan posits that,

...it is at the level of the everyday, in the ordinary and more often mundane activities of processing ‘raw facts’, that certain types of ‘news values’, information gathering techniques, and ‘styles of representation’ inform not only the construction of truth but also its narration in androcentric terms. (Allan 1998:131)

His emphasis on analysing the mundane, the everyday life and social practices of a particular society to understand why the news discourse is gendered offers a good framework within which one can probe the process of news production. However, the influence of culture on news production is not going to be the only explanation that will be used to study the exclusion of gender discourses in the news reports. The post-structural understanding that “Discourses, even hegemonic discourses, are not closed systems”(Hekman 1990:145), provides the impetus for this research to turn to other discursive practices, other than those influenced by culture, to explain the exclusion of women in news discourse in general, and the land reform reports, in particular. The use of post-structural feminism with both Schudson’s (2000) cultural and social organisational approaches, gives this proclivity that post-structuralism pushes for. I will therefore explain the exclusion of gender discourse in news in terms of the organisational routines that journalists follow in their day-to-day work while maintaining a focus on the role that culture plays in the same news production process.

Where the cultural approach offers a framework for analysing the external influences on the process of news production, the socio-organisational approach will take me into the newsrooms where journalists work, as well as the boardrooms of those who act as news sources. I will use the organisational approach to argue that since most organisations operate in patriarchal environments (McLaughlin 1998), the organisational culture and

news angles are likely to be patriarchal. As theorists have observed, “the media are frequently not the ‘primary definers’ of news events at all, but their structured relationship to power has the effect of making them play a crucial secondary role in reproducing the definitions of those who have privileged access, as of right, to the media as ‘accredited sources’ (Hall et al 1978:59). The influence of the news organisation and the organisations which act as its sources cannot, therefore, be over-emphasised.

Since the cultural and social organisational approaches that I use in critiquing the process of news production emphasise the structural relationship between the news production process, culture and socio-organisational structures, my use of post-structural feminism in conjunction with the two other approaches will break the barriers hampering the incorporation of other frameworks of analysis. Post-structural feminism offers a useful philosophy for diversity in feminism and critical work because of its acceptance of multiple truths and rejection of essentialism. Its use in this research enables me to understand the news production process in more nuanced and diversified ways, even though the use of the cultural and organisational approaches suggest that they provide the absolute frameworks that provide all the insights that I am looking for.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that the exclusion of women in general, and gender justice in particular, from the news discourse is rooted in the masculine nature of news values which, ironically, most studies treat as if they are gender neutral. It has shown that far from being ‘objective,’ and being of a universal currency, news values are ideologically laden with definitions of what is news. Such definitions are also determined by those with power to define the criteria and treat others as peripheral subjects of the news discourse.

The discussion has also shown that while the cultural and socio-organisational approaches to the news could be used to critique the concepts of news values and related issues like ‘objectivity,’ ‘value-freeness’ and ‘professionalism’ from an epistemological perspective, their silence on the masculine nature of news values can be understood when

the discussion incorporates post-structural feminism. I also argue that a critique of news values and their influence on the production of news should not assume a theoretical closure that hinders other perspectives from being used to understand the same phenomenon. Post-structural feminism, incorporated into the sociology of news approach used in this discussion, provides the theoretical eclecticism that captures the relativity of the process of news production.

Finally, the chapter has shown that there are many reasons for the exclusion of women from news discourse and have to be understood in their context and through the subjective presuppositions of the researcher, the social cultural processes in the society under study, and the organisational influence that the news sources and media houses have on the production of news. The chapter also emphasises that the theoretical, structural, cultural, organisational and psycho-social explanations that have been offered here are not exhaustive of the lenses that could be used to probe the same phenomenon. Other academic and non-academic perspectives could be applied to understand the same phenomenon, either in exactly the same way as I did, or in totally different ways with totally different results.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

Feminist research on media content has mostly centred on the images of women in media texts. Much has been written on the portrayal of women in ways that perpetuate a patriarchal perception of women and their role in society (van Zoonen 1998). Other researches continue to document women's under-representation as newsmakers and sources in both print and broadcast news (Rakow and Kranich 1991:09). Attempts to understand why women are portrayed in the manner they are, or left out of important newspaper discourses completely, have mostly dwelt on the relationship between the ratio of male-to-female journalists (Rakow and Kranich 1991:09).

To add on to the research on issues I raised above and to what is already known about women and how they are treated by news institutions, I sought to understand the process of news production and how it excluded the gender equality discourse in the texts studied. To do this, I undertook in-depth interviews with the journalists responsible for writing stories on the land reform exercise. Rather than carrying out an audit of female voices on stories on the land reform, I sought to establish reasons why the gender equality discourse was left out of these reports. Like Rakow and Kranich (1991), I had hypotheses that guided my inquiry into the subject. Spearheading my interviews were hypotheses that sought to establish whether the exclusion of the gender equality discourse occurred as a result of the conventions of newsgathering and writing, under-representation of women as reporters, or the sexism or ignorance of individual male editors and reporters, among other assumptions.

A qualitative approach to investigating the exclusion of the gender equality discourse was adopted and great care was taken to ensure that the journalists interviewed expressed themselves freely. I made sure the interview situation resembled an everyday conversation to create an atmosphere in which the interviewees told their stories freely. As feminists argue, an interview "should not involve a scientific instrument sterilely

applied to a passive object, but should resemble normal conversation in which the interviewee influences what comes out of the interview” (Rubin and Rubin 1995: 37).

The research was done in Harare, Zimbabwe, from October 02 to November 03 2004 and the respondents were chosen from the two major daily newspapers during the period 01 February to June 30 2000. These were news editors, chief reporters and senior political reporters whom the researcher identified as centrally involved in the production of news in the two newspaper organisations. In trying to ensure that I gave the interviewees a platform to tell their stories freely, I used a post-structural feminist approach to interviewing. The in-depth interview was adopted as it suited well with the post-structural theoretical framework within which the study was conducted.

### **Justification for the Paradigm and Methodology**

The emphasis on ensuring that the journalists chosen as key informants in the research provided lucid accounts of how they produced stories on the land redistribution called me to adopt a qualitative approach to data gathering. Furthermore, my incorporation of postmodernism and post-structural feminism into the cultural and socio-organisational approaches to the study of newsgathering also demanded this. Thus, the in-depth interview method was adopted to allow interviewees to bring their personal insights and experiences to understanding the process of news production. As one scholar has noted, the in-depth interview method, “with its affinities to conversation, may be well suited to tap social agents’ perspective on the media” (Jensen 1982:240). I will start by giving an outline of qualitative research in general before I delve into a more comprehensive description of qualitative in-depth interviewing which yielded much of the data for this research.

### **Qualitative Research**

The qualitative research approach, which borrows heavily from an interpretivistic way of social inquiry, operates from the assumption that there “...is not one reality out there to

be measured” and that objects and events are understood by different people differently (Rubin and Rubin 1995:35). It rejects the positivist assumption that social facts exist independently of the observer and can be perceived from without (Briggs 1986:22). Similarly, it critiques the individualistic and positivistic assumptions regarding, in Karp and Kendall’s (1982:251) terms, “the stability and observability of social facts.”

While positivists assume that “knowledge is politically and socially neutral,” and that such knowledge is achieved by following “a precise, predetermined approach to information gathering” (Rubin and Rubin 1995:32), qualitative research posits that social phenomena are not value free, and that “social research is not about categorising and classifying, but figuring out what events mean, how people adapt, and how they view what has happened to them and around them” (Rubin and Rubin 1995:34-35). Qualitative researchers, therefore, examine meanings that have been socially constructed and consequently accept that values and views differ from place to place and group to group. This approach to information gathering is greatly influenced by postmodern epistemologies (Fontana 2003:52). Indeed, my own understanding and use of qualitative research in this project was greatly influenced by the postmodern, and post-structural feminist approaches to social inquiry alluded to in Chapter 2.

### **Postmodernism (post-structuralism) and the in-depth interview**

Although there is nothing regarded as postmodern interviewing *per se*, postmodern epistemologies have profoundly influenced most researchers’ understanding of the interview process (Fontana 2003:52). By emphasising the discarding of grand narratives in understanding social phenomena, postmodernism has ensured that the interview process provides “openness to qualitative diversity” and “the multiplicity of meanings in local contexts” (Kvale 1996:42). It also ensures that “knowledge is perspectival” and “dependent on the viewpoint and values of the investigator” (Kvale 1996:42). Within a postmodern framework, I used the in-depth interview to unearth the different reasons why a gender equality discourse was absent in the two dailies’ reportage of the land redistribution. Consequently, the interviews revealed the existence of a multiplicity of

ways of understanding the exclusion of a gender equality discourse in the two dailies' coverage. These are discussed in full detail in Chapter 4.

In using the postmodern approach to interviewing, I tried to avoid a situation where my prior hypotheses would affect the course that the interviews would take, thus I deliberately adopted a strategy that would enable the interviewees to do much of the talking. I also ensured that the approach was aimed at getting as many 'truths' about why the gender equality discourse was left out of the land reform news reports rather than go out to try and prove the existence of some preconceived explanations on the phenomenon. Advancing the same argument for adopting postmodernism as an epistemological approach to social inquiry, Fontana posits that postmodernism,

proposes that, in the name of grand theorising, we have suppressed this ambiguity [of meaning] in favour of a single interpretation, which is commonly touted as "the truth," rather than a choice among many possible truths. (2003:52)

He maintains that postmodernism orients theorising and interviewing and, indeed, society itself, not as "a monolithic structure but as a series of fragments in continuous flux" (Fontana 2003:52). A postmodern approach to social inquiry therefore seeks to understand social phenomena in its nuanced form rather than developing forms and formats into which explanations on social phenomena are grouped. It consequently persuades us to turn to these fragments, to the minute events of everyday life, seeking to understand them in their own right rather than gloss over differences and patch them together into paradigmatic wholes (Silverman 1997).

The postmodern epistemology adopted in the in-depth interview used in this research also meant that I did not seek to unravel some 'truth out there' about the absence of the gender equality discourse in the two newspapers. Neither did I seek to come up with one 'objective' grand theory, replicable in various situations, to explain the phenomena under study. Rather, I adopted Dean and Whyte's understanding of the role of the postmodern interviewer:

...not that of fishing out for ‘the true attitude or sentiment,’ but one of interpreting the subtle and intricate intersection of factors that converge to form a particular interview. (1958:38)

Consequently, the postmodern approach to interviewing adopted in this research meant I was not overly concerned with issues of internal validity and the replicability of the research project by a different researcher. Instead, my concern was that my theories and methods were capable of yielding sensible and important information on the subject under study. As Kvale notes, “Today, the legitimation question of whether a study is scientific tends to be replaced by the pragmatic question of whether it provides useful knowledge” (1996:42), and mine did. Like Rubin and Rubin I adopted the view that,

Qualitative research is not looking for principles that are true all the time and in all conditions, like laws of physics; rather, the goal is the understanding of specific circumstances, how and why things actually happen in a complex world. (1995:38),

The influence of postmodernism on this research also shaped how the in-depth interviews were carried out--especially regarding the roles of the interviewer and the respondents. My approach was different from ‘traditional’ interviewing in significant ways. The boundaries between the respective roles of interviewer and respondent were blurred as a result of the researcher’s quest to reduce the interview into an everyday conversation in order that the respondents were as comfortable and informative as was possible.

Unlike the ‘traditional’ approach where the interviewer is not supposed to influence the interview process, the interviewees and I collaborated in constructing the narratives that came out of the interviews. In this regard, I ensured that the questions that were asked in order that the discussions moved from one topic to the other were as smooth as was possible to avoid reminding the interviewees that they were being interviewed. Efforts were made to make sure the aspects of an everyday conversation were maintained throughout the interviews. I also ensured that after introducing the subject of the interview, ideas emerged from the interviews, from the lives and examples of the interviewees. This was helped much by the post-structural feminist approach that I have allowed to influence the way I carried out the interviews. I will, at this point, turn to look

at the influence that post-structural feminism had on the nature of interviewing adopted in this research.

### **Post-structural feminism and the in-depth interview**

The adoption of a post-structural feminist approach to the interviews helped me not only to use the relativism of feminism in understanding the exclusion of a gender equality discourse, but also helped to draw me into the world of the interviewees, rather than remaining a “detached” observer of the phenomenon under investigation.

This approach not only gave me the opportunity to express my own feelings on the subject, it also shaped my view of the purpose of my research. Like Rubin and Rubin (1995), I adopted a stance that enabled the interviewees to see that just as I was keen to hear their stories, so was I prepared to share my own feelings on the subject. Rubin and Rubin argue that by adopting a post-structural feminist approach to interviewing, one has to be aware that,

You are not asking someone to tell you what you won't share with them, and by examining your own feelings on the subject at hand you become more aware of what you are asking others to reveal. (1995:37)

What the two authors are positing is that by adopting a post-structural feminist approach one cannot help but become an active participant in the interview process. It is also true that one does not only become an active participant, but the whole purpose of interviewing becomes an active participation in some form of social struggle for a cause. This became the prime purpose of my study: to see a gender equality discourse mainstreamed into news reporting. Lather supports this position, arguing that,

The overt ideological goal of feminist research in the human sciences is to correct both the *invisibility* and *distortion* of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position (1991:71. Italics in original)

The interview process, in post-structural feminist terms, therefore, becomes a source of important information and a form of struggle for social justice. While this research is

academic, it has also been prompted by my desire for the advancement of gender equality in general, and in the way land is allocated to people in particular. O'Hara points out the advocacy role that the post-structural feminist interview can play:

If there is no absolute truth “out there” to create pristine “expert systems” that can somehow solve our problems mathematically,...if we accept that when we enter into dialogue we both change; if it is true that we create reality, which in turn creates us, then we are called to a new community. If I can make culture I must act responsibly (1995:155).

A post-structural feminist approach also enabled me to “work out a methodology that was gentler, that listened more and talked less, that humanized both the researcher and the interviewee, and that focussed more on those who had little or no societal voice” (Rubin and Rubin 1995:36). The in-depth interview thus gave latitude to the interviewees to articulate their experiences with minimal intervention from the interviewer. As Rubin and Rubin note, “If positivists disempowered interviewees” the adoption of a post-structural feminist approach towards data gathering in this research “empowered them” (1995:42).

## **Research Procedure**

### *The Sample*

Each research design guides the researcher about what and who to ask (Marshall and Rossman 1989). The theoretical framework and the methodology used in the study also determine who to interview in as much as they influence which research methods to use. The size of the sample is also determined by the research question and the theories governing the research. In postmodern research, where people focus on smaller parcels of knowledge and where society is studied in its fragments (Silverman 1997), the samples used are almost, always, small depending on the nature of the subject under investigation. As Kvale observes,

If the goal is to predict the outcome of a national election, a representative sample of 1000 subjects is normally required, so qualitative interviews will be out of the question. If the purpose is to understand the world as experienced by one person, this one subject is sufficient. (1996:102).

In this study, the researcher sought to understand why there was an absence of news stories that dealt with the issue of gender equality regarding the land redistribution. I thus interviewed people who were directly involved in the production of news. A closer look at the process of news production and my experience as a journalist, suggested that people like the news editors, chief reporters and senior political reporters of the two papers should be interviewed. As Rubin and Rubin note, with qualitative research, the most important thing when sampling is to identify people who will yield as much information as needed by the research:

With the first principle of qualitative sampling—what we label *completeness*—you choose people who are knowledgeable about the subject and talk with them until what you hear provides an overall sense of the meaning of a concept, theme or process. Sometimes interviewing one very informed person is all that is necessary. (1995:72).

They also argue that what is important is not how many people you talk to, but whether the answer works (Rubin and Rubin 1995:73). In this study, I interviewed six people who were involved in the production of news at the two newspaper organisations: the then *Daily News* and *Herald* chief reporters, news editors, and senior political reporters.

#### *The Field Work: interview guide*

The research process started with the compilation of an interview guide. The questions on the guide were discussed with other journalists before the final interview guide was compiled and used.

The research guide, as the name implies, is a set of questions that guide the researcher in finding answers to her/his research questions. The guide suggests themes to be covered. It is not a template containing questions to be religiously asked of every respondent. Rubin and Rubin argue that,

...designing a qualitative interview study is like planning a vacation. You have an overall idea of what you want to see and do, but you are not locked into a fixed itinerary. You allow sufficient flexibility to explore what you see along the way. You know which guidebooks and maps to take but are not sure what parts of each will prove useful. You change plans as new adventures entice you, but you keep the final destination in mind. (1995:42)

They suggest that one cannot plan the entire design for a qualitative project in advance, because the design changes as one learns from the interviewing process. But one can begin the work with a rough and tentative design, “talk with potential interviewees, sort out initial ideas, refocus the research, and decide with whom else to talk to and about what” (Rubin and Rubin (1995:43). The importance of having a flexible design and the willingness to redesign the guide is that it encourages one to listen carefully to interviewees, without discarding what does not fit into one’s initial conception of the research problem. This flexibility also enables one to explore research areas that were not initially anticipated.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Research ethics are about how to acquire and disseminate trustworthy information in ways that cause no harm to those being studied (Nueman 1994; Rubin 1983). This is particularly important in qualitative research. In these interviews, where one persuades people to talk, one has to be careful about how one encourages respondents to commit themselves to the interview. It is particularly important that the researcher observes the respondents’ right to informed consent while still retaining leverage towards persuading them to cooperate, and to guarantee the confidentiality of their identities.

As Rubin and Rubin note, “When you encourage people to talk to you openly and frankly, you incur serious ethical obligations to them” (1995:93). They argue that, “These ethical obligations require avoiding deception, asking for permission to record, and being honest about the intended use of the research” (1995:94). They argue that the researcher is obliged to ensure that interviewees are not hurt emotionally, physically, or financially because they agreed to talk to the interviewer (1995:94).

Kvale (1996) suggests a set of ethical questions for the researcher to consider at the start of a research project. He encourages researcher to ask themselves the following questions and find positive answers to them:

- What are the *beneficial* consequences of the study?
- How can the *informed consent* of the participating subjects be obtained?
- How can the *confidentiality* of the interview subjects be protected?
- What are the *consequences* of the study for the participating subjects?

In this study I tried to observe most of the concerns raised above. A written letter from the Rhodes University, Journalism and Media Studies Department, not only served as an introductory note, but also assured interviewees that the research was purely academic and that participation was voluntary. Pre-interview discussions with interviewees, which dwelt on the prevailing socio-economic turmoil in the country, also eased the atmosphere before the interviews. This allowed all six interviewees to ask about my whereabouts during the preceding year since they knew me prior to the interviews. My explanations gave them the assurance that I was doing academic work, and this was very important as journalists were being harassed by government functionaries at the time of the research.

I also promised that the research report would not mention names although their identities would become known because I stipulated their positions. However, people would only know who spoke, but not necessarily what particular opinions they held and this, I presume, would guard against any retribution, as no one, except the researcher, would be able to directly link the interviewees with direct quotes from the interview data. I also informed them that in addition to being an academic inquiry, my plan was to make the research findings available to interested organisations like the Women and Land Lobby Group (WLLG), the Federation of Media Women in Zimbabwe (FAMWZ), Zimbabwe Women Resource Centre and Network (ZWRCN), GenderLinks in South Africa, and any other parties interested in the development of gender equality in Zimbabwe or southern Africa. I explained that the circulation of the research results would be done as an effort to raise awareness on the exclusion of women in important development discourses in the region.

### **Data Analysis**

According to van Zoonen, qualitative data analysis is often neglected, “even in publications entirely committed to qualitative methodologies in mass communication research” (1994:140). In this study, I used textual and critical discourse analysis to analyse the interviews. While the task of analysing interview data is one of the most critical and messy aspects of qualitative research, it remains exciting because one discovers themes and concepts embedded in the interviews (Rubin and Rubin 1995:226).

### **Discourse Analysis**

Since the interview data could not, on its own explain the phenomenon under investigation, I undertook a discourse analysis of the interview texts. As van Zoonen notes,

Data, whether quantitative or qualitative, do not speak for themselves but are constructed in the research process and the answers to be derived from them are the result of interpretative procedures followed by researchers rather than self-evident, natural knowledge encapsulated in them and waiting to be caught with the appropriate instruments. (1994:143)

Discourse analysis entails the description of text and talk in terms of theories developed for the several levels of analysis needed by the researcher. Discourse analysis

...recognises that text and talk are vastly more complex, and require separate, though interrelated accounts of phonetic, graphical, phonological, morphological, syntactic, micro and macro-semantic, stylistic, superstructural, rhetorical, pragmatic, conversational, interactional, and other structures and strategies (van Dijk 1991:110).

The above explanation implies that the complex analysis of data envisaged by discourse analysis does not limit the analysis to the 'textual', but also accounts for the relations between the text and its social, cultural or historical contexts. As van Zoonen notes, "The analytical procedure moves from a focus on the smallest units present in texts (words, concepts, propositions) to the examination of relations between these concepts and the overall meaning they can be thought to be part of" (van Zoonen 1994:142). She further argues that while other qualitative kinds of textual analysis focus on what has been said, "discourse analysis provides the additional advantage of taking up *style* of talk as well, examining paradigmatic (which words are chosen) and syntagmatic (how they are combined) choices of the participants" (van Zoonen 1994:142 *Italics and brackets in original*).

While the use of discourse analysis resulted in a lot of information and meaning being interpreted from the interview transcripts, the influence of post-structural feminism in this research influenced me to go a step further in my analysis by adopting critical discourse analysis to explain phenomena emanating from the research. It is necessary here that I briefly look at critical discourse analysis.

## Critical Discourse Analysis

As noted earlier, the “overt ideological goal of feminist research in the human sciences is to correct both the *invisibility* and *distortion* of female experiences in ways relevant to ending women’s unequal social position” (Lather 1991:71) (*Italic in original*). I have indicated in this chapter that while this research is academic, it has a social and moral obligation to add to the voices calling for gender equity in society. To achieve this, I used critical discourse analysis to understand the galaxy of interview data at my disposal. Phillips and Jorgensen (2002) note that:

Critical discourse analysis does not understand itself as politically neutral (as objectivists social science does), but as a critical approach which is politically committed to social change. In the name of emancipation, critical discourse analytical approaches take the side of oppressed social groups. Critique aims to uncover the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of unequal power relations, with the overall goal of harnessing the results of critical discourse analysis to the struggle for radical social change (2002:72) (*brackets in original*).

So, apart from aligning me to the cause of women calling for gender equality in society, using critical discourse analysis enabled me to note some phenomena, even though they were not necessarily present in the interview texts. I then used these phenomena to come up with explanations on why a gender equality discourse was absent in the news reports on the land redistribution exercise.

Critical discourse analysis does everything that discourse analysis does, but goes a step further by being “sensitive to absences as well as presences in texts—to representations, categories of participant, constructions of participant identity or participant relations which are not found in the texts” (Fairclough 1995:58).

In my analysis, I took note of issues like the participant’s political affiliation, which was not necessarily in the text, to account for a participant’s explanations.

## **Conclusion**

The methodology and methods adopted in this research allowed the interviewees to be as informative as was possible. The use of postmodern and post-structural feminist approaches to in-depth interviewing ensured that I anticipated a variety of reasons for explaining the absence of a gender equality discourse in reports on land redistribution in the two newspapers. While the postmodern (post-structural) approach influenced me to discard grand narratives in explaining and classifying the data collected in the research, the post-structural feminist approach ensured that I ‘lived’ the lives of the interviewees. In other words, post-structural feminism in this research blurred the distinction between the interviewer and the interviewee. This worked to calm the interviewees and get their consent, and enabled them to disclose as much information as was needed for the purposes of this research.

In sum, the qualitative approach adopted in this research enabled me to use different theoretical angles to understand the social phenomenon and look at it from a local perspective. In Bryman (1988:61)’s words, qualitative research added an expressed commitment, in this research, to “viewing events, actions, norms, values etc. from the perspective of the people who are being studied.”

## CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS

### **Introduction**

The news media are sites at which women, the women's movement, feminism and women's issues are ignored or displayed in particular ways (Rakow and Kranich 1991:09), and the challenge to many researches, is to find reasons why this is so. We need to understand whether this happens as the result of conventions of newsgathering and writing, the underrepresentation of women as reporters or the sexism or ignorance of individual male editors and reporters, among other reasons (Rakow and Kranich 1991:09). In my interrogation of the reportage of the land reform exercise in Zimbabwe, I examined the above possible reasons for the exclusion of the gender equality discourse in the newspapers and tried to link them with actual processes of news production at the two media organisations which published the papers under study. I also tried to connect theoretical developments in the field of communication concerning the nature and functions of news, and the various narratives that came out of the interviews I had with media personnel from the two papers chosen for this research.

After transcribing the interviews, I went through the interview transcripts analysing the interviewees' narratives, the words and language they used, and arrived at reasons why a gender equality discourse was missing from the newspaper reports on the land redistribution exercise. These were (i) the masculine nature of news discourse (ii) the attitude of journalists towards issues to do with women, (iii) the relationship of news to the political and economic interests of men, (iv) event-based journalism, (v) the purported objectivity in covering news items, (vi) the lack of capacity to do thematic coverage of news items, (vii) the issue of patriarchy and (viii) the absence of gender policies in newspaper organisations.

## **Research Findings**

Using thematic coding I came up with eight categories of explanations of the absence of a gender equality discourse in the newspapers under study. Jensen succinctly explains the thematic coding approach as a loosely inductive categorisation of interview or observational extracts with reference to various concepts, or themes (1982:247). He further posits that the process comprises the comparing, contrasting, and abstracting of constitutive elements of meaning (Jensen 1982:247). For the purposes of the data analysis and direct quotations, I have changed the names of the interviewees to, Moses, Martha, Joseph, Joshua, Mary and Pharaoh, all biblical names to ensure confidentiality of the people interviewed and to ensure the reader observes the consistence and identification of each person's argument where quoted. Below is a discussion of the reasons for the absence of the gender equality discourse in the reportage of the land reform exercise reports by the two daily papers.

### **News as a masculine narrative**

Communication scholars have been developing the notion that news serves a narrative function in Western cultures, circulating meanings that, in general, confirm and conserve existing social and economic relationships (Carey 1988, Hartley 1982 and Manoff and Schudson 1987). These social and economic relationships have always subjugated women to the will and whims of men (Schudson 1987). Through connections to literary, cultural, socio-organisational, postmodernist (poststructuralist), psychoanalytic, semiotic, symbolic interactionist, and radical feminist theories, among others, feminists have come to comprehend the full significance of gender as a social construction and as a system of social relations that posits two groups of people, women and men, as different and as unequal (Rakow and Kranich 1991:9-10). Feminist studies on the news discourse have, from their understanding of gender relations as unequal, thus, attempted to question, "whose story" is being told in the news genre (Bird and Dardenne 1988:79).

While male journalists have attempted to answer the above question by insisting that news is news and that it has nothing to do with gender (Lavie and Lehman-Wilzig 2003),

thus being everyone's story, feminist studies have revealed that "news is not only about and by men, it is overwhelmingly seen through men" (Hartley 1982: 146) and is largely "men talking to men" (Molotch 1978: 180). Martha, one of the journalists I interviewed, believes that the idea of news as a masculine narrative led to the exclusion of the gender equality discourse from the reports on the land reform exercise. She believes that when journalists look at news as a discourse, they do not see a place for gender in the genre. She argues,

I don't think when they [journalists] look at news items they ever think of what role gender plays. They just don't think women have a place in the newspapers, especially on issues like politics, economics, business, those are areas for men. There is that attitude that women's place is in the kitchen, thus they would not be considered on issues that are in the public domain.

The most unfortunate thing about this masculine way of looking at the news narrative is that even female journalists do not consider gender as fit to be included in the news discourse. Mary laments this scenario when she argues that, "the problem is made worse by the fact that women [female journalists] are not gender sensitive themselves. They don't have gender awareness" and are more likely, as Martha notes, "to also look at women issues in the same way men do". The view of news as a masculine narrative is a culmination of several years of cultural socialisation and a journalistic training regime that perpetuates the view of news as a masculine discourse, at least according to Martha. This way of looking at news is largely responsible for the exclusion of the gender equality discourse in the reportage of the land reform in Zimbabwe.

Fiske (1987) tries to explain this masculine nature of news by linking the news discourse, its production and consumption, to Habermas's "public sphere", "the province of elites and men, who thus people the news" (Rakow and Kranich 1991:12). Expanding Fiske's argument, Rakow and Kranich argue that "Women's absence from the public sphere as well as their lack of status as authority figures or experts gives the news media a ready-made justification for women's absence from news programs" (1991:13).

It is interesting to note here that the issue of land redistribution in Zimbabwe was heavily politicised and, once submerged into the realm of politics, which is the subject of the public sphere, as Fiske (1987) notes, the discourse became exclusionary of women. The reports on the land reform, therefore, found space in an arena [public sphere] that calls for their representation in a masculine narrative. Joseph notes this politicisation of the land reform programme when he explains that one has to look “at the context in which the land reform was done” to appreciate why some discourses were left out. He argues that

... it was not for the government [at the time] to start to look at the nitty-gritties on how they were going to redistribute land, but the main issue was to disempower the white commercial farmers who were funding the opposition. So the major issue [that newspapers concentrated on, was government attempt] was to cripple the opposition by dealing with its major financiers, the white commercial farmers.

It is important therefore, to note that once the issue of land redistribution was put into the realm of politics, the “public sphere,” it became apparent that government no longer considered the issue of gender very pertinent to the programme. Martha argues that,

When we look at the land issue there were a lot of issues at play. It was looked at as a more political discourse. It had more to do with the politics that was going on between the two parties, MDC and Zanu PF. These were the main issues to look at. When it came to women, although women were part of it, they were left out of the discourse.

Joshua justifies the exclusion of the gender equality discourse from the land reform reports by the media by assuming the political dimension that the whole process had taken was exclusionary of all other discourses. He insists that,

First of all, there was no need for the government to look at the issue of equitability and the like. The first point was to take the land, then after taking, going into the nitty-gritties of who was going to take this land later on. Unfortunately, the time frame covered by your research is outside the period when government was to look at the nitty-gritties of who was to get what.

That there was a direct link between the land reform exercise and the struggle for political survival by Zanu-PF is evident in media reports during the period of my research (Media Monitoring Project Report March 2000). This link between the land reform and the struggle for political survival, as argued by Joshua above, meant that the media gave priority to discourses linked to the politics of the day unfortunately excluding important issues like the need to ensure gender equality in the way the land was redistributed.

Linked to the treatment of news as a masculine narrative are issues of the trivialisation and ridicule of women's issues by journalists that were noted by Tuchman (1978) and Robinson (1978) that I discuss below as part of the reasons why the gender equality discourse was left out of the land redistribution news reports.

### **Attitude towards issues to do with women**

Scholars like Tuchman (1978) and Robinson (1978) have documented instances where the coverage of issues pertaining to women has been trivialised and ridiculed. This trivialisation has led to the exclusion of women's issues from newspaper discourse. On the few instances that women are made subjects of news items, they are portrayed in derogatory ways that paint them as the total opposite of the 'reasonable' men (Hartley 1982). As Cowie (1978) notes, women and women issues are at times included in the news genre as a sign<sup>11</sup> to signify what it is not. In other words, the inclusion of women issues in the news genre would be for comparative purposes that would show that women are different from another sign, men. This often leads to trivialisation and ridiculing of women's issues. This trivialisation is often done through what van Dijk calls "strategic use of irrelevance" (van Dijk 1991:114). This is when unnecessary detail is used in stories to trivialise any attempts that seek to portray gender issues in a way that accords respect to women. This can be done at the level of writing the story or in news conferences where news ideas are discussed.

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<sup>11</sup> As Hartley (1982) notes, the meaning of a sign is determined by its relationship to other signs in a sign system and its meaning, in other words, is defined by what it is not. He further argues that "Woman" has meaning not because it refers to some real, pre-given entity that the word tags but because it is different from another sign, "Man".

The effect, if it is done at the level of the conference, is to ensure women issues are excluded from the newspaper discourse all together. An interesting example is that given by Martha of her male workmate who, in dismissing the need for articulation of gender equality on a daily basis in newspapers, challenged a diary meeting by arguing that women issues will not sell the papers because “no one would want to read about sanitary pads all the time.”

As Martha notes, reducing women’s issues to talk on sanitary pads is both trivialising and ridiculing the same discourse and this is what van Dijk calls “strategic use of irrelevance” (1991:114). Such a practice is often associated with cultural attitudes that treat women as lesser beings and Martha attempts to describe the phenomenon when she observes that, “there is that attitude that women’s place is the kitchen thus they cannot be considered on issues that are in the public domain”. She maintains that unless that attitude is eradicated, journalists, male and female, and the society at large, will continue to ridicule and trivialise efforts aimed at mainstreaming gender issues into the news discourse. She, as van Zoonen has already done, argues that any improvements in women’s treatment in the news media will require not simply more coverage of women or more women journalists but a fundamental change in news as a narrative genre (van Zoonen 1988:35). She implores journalists to appreciate that, “women’s issues are not sanitary pads, menstruation or pregnancy” but that “they are real issues of equality to anything, be it in politics, land redistribution and the like.” She further argues that women deserve equal treatment as really serious news items. It is her argument that “... if we reduce women’s issues to sanitary pads, pregnancy and all other issues that refer specifically to their biological set up, and in a derogatory manner, then they [women’s issues] would certainly not sell newspapers”.

It is pertinent to mention here that the argument that women’s issues do not sell newspapers is a question of attitude rather than fact. This attitude was not only found in journalists, but is part of a general societal reaction to issues that seek to address the concerns of women.

Like Martha, who captures this societal attitude towards the issue of gender equality in the land redistribution, Mary was also critical of the attitude exhibited by her male counterparts in view of women's concerns in the way the land was allocated. She blames the people who implemented the programme for deliberately excluding women in the exercise, and more so, lamented the way in which the male journalists seemed to condone the exclusion of women in the redistribution exercise. She explains that,

While there was policy [government, 20 percent quota for women] that women would benefit from the land redistribution exercise, generally, there was a lack of political will, on the part of chiefs who were distributing land, to seriously consider women and this attitude, unfortunately, found its way into the newsroom.

It is interesting to note the language used by some of the journalists in the interviews to ascertain their attitude towards issues to do with gender and women. The word *noise* appears in three separate interviews with different journalists with reference to women's calls to be allocated land:

Joshua: "We don't believe that a woman should be given land because she is a woman. If she fails to exhibit capacity to farm, then there is no reason to **make a lot of noise** about them receiving land."

Pharaoh: "If they [women] **made such noises**, [calling for equitable land redistribution] it was out of our earshot. If they had cried for the land, certainly we could have covered them. But as far as I remember, there were no such calls hence the newspaper could not spearhead their campaign."

Moses: "It is not like it's a deliberate policy that women shouldn't make it to the front page. It depends on the impact of the story, how it affects our social, economic or political well-being. But if they [women] are going to **make a lot of noise** about that, obviously the stories will get prominence."

The above examples show that, apart from the concerned journalists advocating event-based journalism, believing that there should be some action for them to warrant coverage of women's concerns, the journalists, somehow, look at the articulation of women's concerns as a kind of interference. That is the kind of meaning of noise that comes out of Joshua's use of the word. He looks at the calls for women to get land as some unnecessary or worthless fuss that should not be material for newspapers. Although in the statements by Pharaoh and Moses the word noise might be taken to refer to loud arguments that are brought to the attention of people or demonstrations or activities that produce visibility, it is the denotative meaning of noise that quickly gets one's attention hence my argument that the use of the word has some derogatory undertones, albeit very subtle in the statements by Pharaoh and Moses. Such a view towards women's issues would certainly not enhance chances of gender issues being covered in the newspapers analysed.

### **Absence of women as sources**

The gender baseline study commissioned by the Federation of African Media Women Zimbabwe (FAMWZ) in 2002 revealed that only 15 percent of all sources, in news discourse are women.

([www.kubatana.net/html/archive/media/040723famwz3.asp?sector=MEDIA](http://www.kubatana.net/html/archive/media/040723famwz3.asp?sector=MEDIA)).

The ostracisation of women from being sources of news stories or experts, might lead to the exclusion of feminist discourse from the news as the conventional reliance on authoritative sources by media personnel to provide interpretations of events give the story its frame, just as reliance on "experts" gives voice to a particular segment of the population at the expense of others (Rakow and Kranich 1991:13). That the absence of the gender equality discourse in the reportage of the land reform was partly the result of the media's non-use of women as news sources is manifest in the account by Moses when he tries to defend his paper's exclusion of the theme. Trying to absolve the media of allegations of discriminating against women in their coverage of the land reform, Moses does "not think the blame" [for the exclusion of women from the land reform reports]

“should lie squarely with the media since we have various female organisations, women lobby groups, parliamentarians and it is their duty, at times, to bring these issues into the public domain, and they didn’t.” He further posits that the media are not always everywhere, thus there is need for different social groups to make efforts to ensure the media cover their concerns. He argues,

What we would expect from the women lobby groups or civic society at large is to bring that issue [gender equality in land redistribution] to the attention of the public through media, through press statements. That might actually assist because at times, the media is not ubiquitous; it has its own shortcomings. Maybe that was not realised, but I still don’t think the omission was deliberate on the part of the media.

While Moses’ argument above could be very plausible, it also shows that the media did not seek expert opinion from women on the issue of land redistribution since there is the argument that the women “were supposed to bring the issue to the attention of the public through press statements”. There is an interesting paradox in Moses’ argument. While he acknowledges the possibility of women becoming expert voices for news stories, he still believes it is the women who were supposed to make efforts to avail themselves for the role, not the conventional newsgathering procedure where the media have to initiate contact with the news sources.

What is apparent in Moses’ argument is that the media, that is, the two newspapers, did not see women as authoritative and credible enough sources in their reportage of the land reform, and thus did not approach them for expert opinion, as the “conventions of news gathering and reporting might have demanded (Eliasoph 1988:313). What resulted was the marginalisation of women’s opinion from the reportage of the land reform exercise and the general treatment of women as “ordinary people” who appeared infrequently in the news and typically stand for a social aggregate, while well-known male individuals were used to represent social and political groups (Sigal 1987:12). The apparent exclusion of women from acting as sources in the stories on the land reform, as shown in Moses’ defence of the newspapers, therefore, could be linked to the absence of the gender equality discourse in the news reports since the use of male sources could ensure reality is described and captured in androcentric terms.

It is apparent, from the above discussion, that the conventions of news gathering and writing follow set routine rituals that are, unfortunately, masculine and exclude women's perspectives. It is, therefore, important to discuss the journalistic routine in news production and how it marginalises women.

### **The journalistic routine**

The operations, the demands, and everyday routines of journalism have contributed to its orienting of the news narrative as a masculine discourse that is exclusionary of feminine points of view. As Rakow and Kranich have observed, it is not always true that “men conspire to exclude women” but “rather, news media personnel work within a taken-for-granted meaning system in which it simply makes sense to do these things” (1991:12). More often than not, the news organisations' appeal to the need to be 'objective', 'balanced' and 'impartial' as basic tenets of being 'professional,' are the major vectors for the exclusion of women from the news discourse.

The argument that newspapers cover issues 'objectively' and in a 'balanced' and 'impartial' manner is one, which is found in many editorial policy documents of most newspapers.<sup>12</sup> However, it is ironic that while most news organisations argue that their news practices rest on notions of 'balance' and 'objectivity', “the news organisations have never claimed to balance the concerns of women against those of men, nor maintain balance between a male and female point of view” (Rakow and Kranich 1991:13). If they had done so, then the editors would have demanded that journalists balance the masculine way in which the land reform was being reported with a more gender sensitive approach that would take cognisance of the existence of a female point of view on the events taking place at the time.

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<sup>12</sup> The editorial policy of the *Daily News* insisted that reports shall be fair, balanced and accurate and diversity of opinion shall be encouraged.

On the contrary, “the appeal to ‘objectivity’ has become a defensive strategy, one which assists the journalist in countering charges of sexism [as well as racism], being levelled at specific instances of reporting” (Glazener 1989:128). Joshua stresses that his paper is objective and impartial, and does not discriminate regarding which people to cover. He argues that it is not the policy of his paper to play an advocacy role, insisting that particular groups be covered even when the groups themselves do not raise their concerns in the public. He insists that,

That is the policy at the paper [not playing an advocacy role], thus we have very little we can do. I believe that society is not divided in that dichotomy of men and women alone. That is the reason we insist we cover everyone.

It is important to note here that the idea of “covering everyone,” as Joshua puts it, rests on the tenet of impartiality and that of not playing an advocacy role. It assumes that the papers would report on events that would have happened in an ‘unbiased’ manner since they would not be taking sides with any group. But the idea of covering everyone in an ‘objective’ and ‘impartial’ way is often used as a smokescreen by newspapers to cover their sexist way of treating issues. For this reason, the argument that the journalists go about their work ‘professionally’, only serves to counter criticism on the journalistic routine, which, with its insistence on ‘objectivity’ and ‘impartiality,’ has ensured women are often excluded from the news discourse and the exclusion is claimed to be a typical reflection of reality. Let me then look at the idea of objectivity in more detail.

### **Purported objective coverage**

Hiding behind “objectivity” is probably the most used, or abused, form of reasoning by those accused of marginalizing others in their news reports. Journalists, apparently, valorise the masculine nature of news by their claim that “news is news” (Diekerhof et al 1986:157) thus it has nothing to do with subjective conceptions. As Lavie and Lehman-Wilzig (2003) note, such an understanding emanated from the 1980s and 1990s school of thought that news production, in its very essence, is professional and non-gender specific—or put more bluntly: ‘news is news’ and it doesn’t involve gender” (2003:08).

Van Zoonen (1994) argues that this ‘traditional’ science approach to ‘news gathering’, with its emphasis on ‘objectivity’, ‘value-freeness’ and ‘neutrality’, has been concerned with “themes, theories and methodologies which have been shown to be male-biased in that the particular experience of men has often been presented as having universal validity” (1994:14). In outlining his defence for *The Daily News*’ exclusion of a gender equality discourse in its reportage of the land redistribution process, Moses directly touches on what van Zoonen observes, arguing that for him, there was no exclusion of women’s concerns in his paper’s coverage of the issue because, in covering his so-called “disadvantaged groups”, the paper was also covering the concerns of women. He argues that,

Obviously when you [the researcher] talk of us covering disadvantaged groups like farm workers you are talking of us covering women because most of the farm workers were women, so by covering farm workers we were also covering women.

He does not, here, take into consideration that the issue that the papers were concentrating on was male-to-male violence that ensued when male farm workers clashed with hordes of male farm invaders. For this reason, in articulating the concerns of farm workers, the *Daily News* was focussing on the plight of male farm workers who were butchered by armed male farm invaders. By attempting to extend the papers’ concern about this group of male farm workers to include the concerns of women, most of whom were not farm workers, Moses is trying to universalise the concerns of men. This, done in the name of “just covering events pertaining to the land reform exercise”, [objective coverage] as Joshua puts it, hides the value judgements that drove journalists into covering the violent events at the expense of the gender equality theme.

It is also true that, by insisting that journalists were just covering events related to the land reform, without pausing to think of the implications that the exercise had on gender equality, the journalists are trying to hide behind the idea of ‘objectivity’ for their exclusion of the gender equality discourse in their reportage. Joshua tries to hide the ideological nature of news production by arguing that the news was a true reflection of

events ‘out there’ that they ‘gathered’ and processed into news. This, according to him, does not include playing some advocacy role. He argues that,

So far we’re just covering events relating to the land programme. There has not been a deliberate policy to play an advocacy role, to say give land to women. The media has tended to just report what has been going on. It is now up to the individual women [sic] groups to lobby for equitable distribution of land.

What the above statement suggests is that news is about what happened, events. The work of an ‘impartial reporter’, one socialised into obeying the rituals of naming, describing and framing realities, therefore, would be to go ‘out there’ and ‘gather’ news in its ‘untainted’ and ‘impartial’ form (Allan 1998:131). Such a conviction conceals the ideological nature of news. It conceals the idea that “news is what newspapermen (sic) make it” (Gieber 1964:173). With an understanding that news is ‘impartial’ and can be ‘objectively gathered’ in its ‘untainted’ form, male hegemony has been perpetuated in the newspapers in the name of objectivity. It is this hegemonic and androcentric way of looking at phenomena that facilitates the exclusion of the gender equality discourse in newspaper discourses. The routine of news production, the everyday processes that journalists embark on in their work, revolve around a masculine way of looking at phenomena, hence the patriarchal discourses in their work. What Joshua calls “just covering events” is not a value-free process. Looking at issues ‘impartially’, “just covering events,” without playing “an advocacy role, to say give land to women” is not value free. As Gallagher (1989) notes,

To think ‘professionally’ is, evidently, not compatible with thinking as a ‘woman.’ Commonly regarded as a synonym of objectivity, the concept of professionalism has come to hide its value-based roots (1989:82).

So in trying to think ‘professionally’ and ‘objectively,’ journalists think in androcentric terms and the news they produce is worded in a masculine framework. This is the same issue that comes out of Moses’ argument that, in covering farm workers, they were also covering women issues. Maybe Phillip Schlesinger sums it up when he says,

News must be assessed as a cultural product which embodies journalistic, social and political values. It cannot be, and certainly is not, a neutral, impartial, or totally objective perception of the real world” (1978:165).

One can, therefore, argue that the exclusion of a gender equality discourse in the newspaper reports studied is an indication of the work of a value system that is operational in media houses which discriminates against women but in a hegemonic and subtle way that many believe there is nothing wrong with its operation.

### **Event-based journalism**

Three of the journalists interviewed pointed out the idea of journalists’ obsession with reporting on events, as opposed to themes, as one of the major reasons why the gender equality discourse was left out of reports on land redistribution. Moses argues that,

During that time the concentration was on the exercise itself, how it was being undertaken. There was a lot of violence against farm workers, against some white farmers, so I think a lot of papers got bogged down in the violence at the expense of other issues.

Responding to a follow-up question on why the newspapers got “bogged down in the violence” at the expense of other discourses coming out of the land reform, Moses does not see anything wrong with the exclusion of the gender equality discourse and other issues that could have been pertinent. Rather, he insists that during the period under investigation, “the idea [among journalists] was to criticise the manner in which the government was acquiring land” [the violent farm invasions] and by extension he is suggesting that the issue of allocating land equitably, between men and women, was not an issue compared to violence. What comes out of Moses’ argument is that where there are events, such as violence, reportage on them takes precedence over thematic inquiries pertaining to the same phenomena. In other words, the existence of action [violent invasions] obliterates the need to critically analyse the phenomenon being reported on. I have termed this type of journalism “event-based”, and its pursuance played an important

role in stifling coverage of the gender equality discourse in the reportage of the land reform exercise.

It is interesting here to note that most of the journalists interviewed thought that there were a lot more fundamental issues to be reported on than the issue of gender equity in the allocation of land. Joseph believes that the issue of crippling the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party by disempowering its chief financiers, the white commercial farmers, was a more fundamental theme than the issue of gender equality in the sharing of the land. He, however, believes that while the existence of such more important issues might have led to the exclusion of the gender equality discourse, the most fundamental reason was that newsrooms lacked capacity to deal with themes that were not event-based.

Drawing parallels between the media personnel in Zimbabwe and those in other countries, he argues that the issue of journalists not reporting on themes was a major problem in Zimbabwean journalism, which was not confined to the theme of gender equality alone, but to anything that needed a thematic critique. He, therefore, attributes the exclusion of the gender equality discourse from media reports to the poor intellectual quality of journalists whom he perceived, were not educated enough to analyse issues thematically. He argues that:

Those who write and edit the newspapers articles are morons. A clique of uneducated lot who think that one is called a political reporter or political editor because he travels with the president [of the country] to Mauritius...In other countries someone who is a political editor has done political science at the university or is a professor or doctor of political science. So they know beyond rallies, beyond sloganeering. We lack the capacity in newsrooms to deal with issues beyond what we see, beyond what happens.

For Joseph, it is the calibre of journalists that leads to the absence in newspaper reports of thematic questioning of government policies and decisions, rather than the existence of more fundamental events that eclipse the said themes.

Joseph's argument that the journalists in Zimbabwe lack the intellectual capacity to do critical articles on policy matters finds vindication in Joshua's insistence that his paper was supposed to cover "events relating to the land redistribution programme", without critiquing the themes that came out of the same process. Joshua insists that,

So far we're just covering events relating to the land programme. There has not been a deliberate policy to play an advocacy role, to say give land to women. The media has tended to just report what has been going on. It is now up to the individual women groups to lobby for equitable distribution of land.

Joshua's insistence that newspapers should "just cover events" points to the extent to which the journalists try to cover up their critical shortcomings by insisting on a type of journalism that does not expose their intellectual inadequacies. For this reason, it is not surprising that most of the stories in the newspapers are event-based, hence the exclusion of themes that require critical inquiry. Joseph argues that this intellectual inadequacy meant that journalists in the country are more inclined towards reporting on issues like violence, which do not need critical inquiry in their reportage like violence. He argues that,

Violence can be written about by even a grade one child. You don't need an intelligent person or a PhD person to see that someone has been attacked. These are the obvious and that is what newspapers were concentrating on.

Joshua's insistence that the women should be seen making movements and "noise", to use Moses' word, so that the issue of equitable land redistribution be covered in the media, shows the extent to which Zimbabwean journalism is obsessed with covering events. You have to do something; there should be action before a theme is considered suitable newspaper material. Moses uses the need for there to be some event before newspapers can pick on a theme to report on to defend his paper's exclusion of the gender equality discourse. In his defence, he blames women and women's groups for the exclusion:

I don't think the blame should lie squarely with the media. We have various female organisations, women groups, we have female parliamentarians. It is their

duty, at times, to bring these issues into the public domain, and they didn't seem to make a lot of noise about that issue...

He thus completely abdicates the role that the media should play as the 'Fourth Estate'. If women are expected to be proactive in ensuring that their concerns are covered by newspapers, one wonders whether men should also demonstrate, or "*make noise*", when they want issues to be heard in the public sphere. One would have thought that newspapers, like public broadcasters, had the social responsibility to educate, inform and entertain. Part of the informative role, as the 'Fourth Estate', would, therefore, be to raise awareness on the need for government to ensure equality, in the land redistribution exercise which was taking place in the country. The papers were supposed to have reminded the government of the principles of CEDAW which the government had signed. CEDAW stresses the need for states to ensure equality, in terms of gender; in any form of land distribution is undertaken in any signatory country. Article 14 (ii) (g) demands that signatory states ensure that women "have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform, as well as in land resettlement schemes." The newspapers, as part of the 'Fourth Estate', should therefore have reminded the government that it had an obligation; to ensure equality in the way the land was redistributed.

### **Lack of capacity to do thematic coverage**

This issue is related to that of event-based journalism that I dealt with above. It is a point that was emphasized by Joseph who argues that those involved in the production of news in Zimbabwe lack capacity to do stories that "go beyond what they see." He strongly believes that the issue of gender equality and land redistribution was not an event, but a theme, hence it needed a journalist who could do critical research, a feat he deems too demanding and academically challenging to the nature of journalists in Zimbabwe. He believes,

One needs to be sober [when researching on stories of the nature of those that deal with gender equality in land reform]. You need to be critical. You need to

research, to consult scholars because the land reform which took place in Zimbabwe is not the first of its kind.

He says that the capacity to do such critical work is lacking, “from the editors right to the cub reporter,” in Zimbabwean journalism. He also notes that because of this lack of capacity to deal with critical policy matters in Zimbabwean newspapers, there are no stories that challenge policy that come out of the papers. He argues,

Even now five years after the invasions, have you seen a news article critiquing the land reform, the achievements and shortfalls of the land reform? Even on the government part, they are still politicking instead of dealing with real issues.

Martha concurs with Joseph on the lack of critical prowess amongst journalists:

It [the exclusion of gender equality discourse] has something to do with training. We can't even say it's because there are a few women in the newsroom because women [female journalists] also look at women issues in the same way men do. There should be training to look critically at issues journalists report on. The dynamics at play and the society the journalists live in, its beliefs, should be part of the training so that journalists would begin to question them vis-à-vis an event.

The arguments by Martha and Joseph point to the idea that the exclusion of gender issues in the newspapers is a result of the failure by Zimbabwean journalists, to analyse issues and come up with insights that could make important newspaper articles. Since gender equality is not an event but a theme, the calibre of journalists in the country according to Joseph, “from the editors to the cub reporter,” cannot handle such a critical issue and develop it into an interesting subject for newspaper coverage.

### **The issue of patriarchy**

While just two journalists, Martha and Mary, mentioned patriarchy as a major reason for the absence of the gender equality discourse in the newspaper reports, the male journalists' framing of answers and choice of words pointed to patriarchy as an exclusionary discourse. In a patriarchal Zimbabwean society, according to Martha, where boys are socialised to play a leading role compared to their female counterparts, there is

bound to be instances when the subjugation of women and their subsequent exclusion from policy issues is evident. She argues that the perception of women as always being “in the kitchen” is a major reason why concerns about gender equality in fundamental national development programme are excluded. She argues that,

When you look at it [exclusion of gender equality discourse in newspapers] may be one has to look at how boys and girls are raised. All this masculinity business, men are supposed to do this, boys are taught to be politicians, doctors, and when it comes to girls, they’re taught to fantasize on how their weddings are to be like. From an early age, boys and girls are taught to aspire to play different roles in the society. Their worlds are gendered. Girls aspire to be wives, aspire to be mothers, aspire to be models. They aspire to be beautiful for their men, and men are taught to be leaders, to play the leading role in the society and it’s sort of naturalised. And these roles are perpetuated in the newspapers hence the fact that women are left out of public discourse.

It is the patriarchal way of prioritising issues that led journalists to believe that the most critical issue during the period under review was, for example, the disempowerment of white commercial farmers rather than the exclusion of women in land redistribution. Joseph argues that the “major issue” was government’s attempt to “cripple the opposition by dealing with their financiers-the white commercial farmers”, not “to take land and say I want to give this portion to whites, this to blacks and this to women.” What comes out of the above argument is that gender issues take a back seat when compared to ‘the real political issues’ and that the socialisation that members of the society receive at a tender age, dichotomises their roles in society as adults. What needs to be explained here, is that the prioritisation of issues as more important than others is heavily influenced by patriarchy in the newsrooms. Party politics, dominated by men, got precedence over genuine issues of equality along gender lines simply because the journalists working on the stories are socialised to believe issues concerning men are more important than those that seek gender equity.

Mary develops the above argument when she comments on the patriarchal perception of issues concerning women, arguing that they are considered as “soft news” and therefore not given due attention and often assigned to junior reporters. She argues that,

Gender news is regarded as soft news, just like health news and these are beats assigned to women and the fact that there are few women in the newsroom, compared to men, such issues rarely find people to cover them.

She suggests that because of the patriarchal socialisation obtaining in the country, even the few women in the newsroom are not sensitive to gender equality issues. She observes that:

The problem is made worse by the fact that the women are not gender sensitive themselves. They don't have gender awareness. They need to go for training. You find out that women who write on gender issues [elsewhere] are gender activists in their own right and gender activists in the newsrooms are very few.

It is important to note here that the allocation of gender issues to junior reporters is clear testimony to the low esteem with which the issue of gender is held in the Zimbabwean newsrooms. It is no surprise therefore, that these stories [gender stories] by the junior reporters are not used in the newspapers at all.

The issue of patriarchy and the exclusion of a gender equality discourse in newspaper reports on the land redistribution also surfaces in the various accounts of the journalists interviewed, especially where they try to justify the exclusion. While it is not largely overt, the journalists believe that the gender equality theme was not important compared to the theme of violence that the papers religiously and dutifully reported on. This understanding had nothing to do with the sex of the reporter interviewed.

### **Absence of policy on gender at the newspapers**

The absence of clear-cut policies on gender at the two newspapers was pointed out as one of the reasons why the gender equality discourse was not considered by the two newspapers for coverage. It is my submission, as Moses notes, that if newspapers have clear policies on gender and have gender desks in the newsroom, "obviously it might click on the person manning that desk that there is the issue of land, are women being

empowered?” The absence of gender policies, thus, becomes an important issue in the analysis of why the gender equality discourse was left out of the newspaper reports.

While having a policy in place and implementing it are two different things, the absence of policy is itself a policy (Khattak 1989). Bye (1972) develops this argument when he posits that in the absence of a written document, whatever the authorities choose to or not to do becomes policy. It is pertinent to note here that the absence of a gender policy in a patriarchal society might mean that the patriarchal way of looking at things becomes the guiding principle and unwritten policy. Both Mary, from *The Herald*, and Moses, from the *Daily News*, pointed out that their two organisations had no policies on gender in their newsrooms<sup>13</sup>. Mary explains that she has never seen a policy document on gender since she started working for *The Herald* in 1980, when Zimbabwe attained its independence. She reveals that:

As for our organisation, we don't have such a policy [gender]. I have never seen a policy on gender at this paper although the government has a gender policy. I don't know how our company will incorporate it.

Moses also noted: “We were very sensitive to issues pertaining to gender but there was nothing in black and white.” My argument is that the absence of gender policies at the two newspapers might have led to the emergence of some unwritten policy of treating issues with a patriarchal eye. This explains why most of the journalists interviewed, especially men, did not see anything wrong with the exclusion of the gender equality discourse in the news reports on the land redistribution. Their patriarchal perspective made them believe the fundamental issue at play was the politics of the day, which, according to them, had nothing to do with gender equality. However, it is encouraging that some of the journalists interviewed pointed to the absence of the policy as a major reason why the discourse was excluded from the newspaper reports and are now calling for such policies to be implemented in the newsrooms. Moses argues that,

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<sup>13</sup> The *Daily News* just mentions, in its editorial policy document, that it would not discriminate against any section of the society on the grounds of gender, among other issues, but this is not developed into a fully-fledged gender policy.

The reason that might have led to that omission [exclusion of gender discourse] is the fact that most of these media houses don't have gender policies. Suppose you had a gender desk at The Daily News, The Herald or The Independent, obviously it might click on the person manning that desk that there is the issue of land, are women being empowered? I think it is time our media houses really move in the direction of setting up gender desks.

As noted earlier, the absence of policy is policy itself, and the net effect is that the absence of a gender policy in the newsrooms meant the adoption of a masculine tendency to trivialise issues to do with women hence the total exclusion of a gender equality discourse in the newspaper reports.

## **Conclusion**

The use of critical discourse analysis in the analysis of the interview data yielded very interesting points to explain the exclusion of a gender equality discourse in the newspaper reports on the land redistribution exercise. It allowed me to look at specific language aspects of the interviewees' responses while keeping the researcher at liberty to analyse the social and cultural milieu of the respondents to come up with explanations on the exclusion. While a thematic analytical approach enabled the researcher to come up with the themes that were prevalent in the journalists' explanations of the exclusion, the critical discourse and the discourse analysis approaches ensured that explanations went beyond what was said by the journalists. Rather, discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis approaches enabled the researcher to focus on what was said and that, which was absent but implied by the interview texts. Furthermore, the critical discourse analytical approach made it possible for the researcher to present his findings in a way that suggested his involvement in the fight against the subjugation and discrimination of women in the society. The critical discourse analysis approach tied in well with the post-structural feminist approach used throughout this study in that it enabled that the interview data be analysed with the objective of uncovering "the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of unequal power relations, with the overall goal of harnessing the results of critical discourse analysis to the struggle for radical social change" (Phillips and Jorgensen, 2002:123).

## CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

### **Introduction**

The hypothesis underlying this study was that news is a masculine narrative. The study probed this hypothesis using the reportage of the land reform process, and tried to find reasons for the exclusion of a gender equality discourse in the news coverage of the land redistribution exercise. The land reform exercise serves as a historical epoch and valuable episode in the history of the media in Zimbabwe which presented an opportunity for feminist study to expose the gendered nature of news. This is because the exercise was ostensibly undertaken to ensure equality in land ownership patterns in the country.

Research data, however, shows that the news discourse, during the period covered by the study, was masculine and that not even one story in the two newspapers dealt with the issue of land redistribution and the need to ensure gender equality in the way land was redistributed. Eight issues to explain the phenomenon came out of the research. The researcher established that the news discourse was a masculine narrative that, unfortunately, did not give emphasis on issues that concern women. It was also noted that issues like the journalists' attitude towards issues to do with women, absence of women as news sources, the journalistic routine, purported objective coverage, the issue of event-based journalism, lack of capacity to do thematic coverage of issues, the operations of patriarchy and the absence of gender policies at newspapers all contributed to the exclusion of a gender equality discourse from the newspaper reports on the land redistribution exercise in Zimbabwe.

### **Conclusions about the research problem**

Since the research sought to establish why the gender equality discourse was left out in the news reports on the land reform exercise, it is pertinent that I offer a brief summary of the answers that came out of the research process.

Firstly, the researcher found out that the issue of news being presented in a masculine narrative played an influential role in the exclusion of the gender equality discourse. Since journalism latently assumes that news concerns the actions of men (Molotch (1978) and that the form in which it is written is outwardly masculine, the narratives on the land redistribution, therefore, tended to exclude discourses that sought to be feminine.

Secondly, the purported idea of objective coverage of issues ensured that gender discourses were left out of the news articles on the land reform. The need for objectivity and impartiality in journalists' execution of their daily work have been pointed out as part of this routine system that has systematically ensured that women's issues are excluded from the news discourse. In his defence of the exclusion of a gender equality discourse in his paper's reportage of the land redistribution exercise, Joshua touches on the journalistic tenet of covering issues 'objectively' and 'impartially', without, however, being conscious of how these tenets contributed to the exclusion of the gender discourse. He argues; "we're a family paper so we do not discriminate. We just cover events as they are (objective). That is the policy at the paper, thus we have very little we can do". Joshua seems unaware that "just covering events as they are", is not a value-free process but one that is "cloaked in an ideology of objectivity and truth" ((Rakow and Kranich 1991:11) which favours men over women.

Linked to the issues of objectivity and impartiality is the third reason for the exclusion of the gender equality discourse in the coverage of the land redistribution by the two newspapers--the effect of journalistic routines on their coverage of issues. Journalists work within set professional routines which guide their operations and these routines, unfortunately, have the net effect of excluding gender and women issues from the news discourse. As Rakow and Kranich have observed, it is not always true that "men conspire to exclude women" but "rather, news media personnel work within a taken-for- granted meaning system in which it simply makes sense to do these things" [exclude women] (1991:12). These routines include the issues of objectivity, impartiality, truth, conventions of newsgathering, news values, among others. These journalistic routines are

latently laden with some hegemonic patriarchal ideology reinforced by a journalism-training regime that emphasises on their ritual and uncritical observance.

The absence of women characters as sources in the news stories, the general attitude that journalists show towards issues to do with women and the absence of gender policies at the newspapers studied and the operations of patriarchy also contributed to the media blackout on the gender equality discourse. It is my argument that had newspapers sought to use women as sources to comment on the themes they wrote on, then critical issues on the need to ensure gender balance in the way land was distributed were going to come out. The same is true about the absence of gender policies at the newspapers as Moses observed. Moses rightly argues that if the two newspapers had gender policies they followed and adhered to, they would have began to question the issue of gender equality when the land was redistributed.

Finally, the issues of event-based journalism and lack of capacity to do thematic research on issues also led to the exclusion of gender-related discourses in the reportage of the land redistribution exercise. The journalists were keen on reporting on events, what they saw, at the expense of themes that needed thorough research and sober analysis. Since the issue of gender equality is a theme not an event, it was not considered for coverage. As Joshua has noted, the perchance for reporting on events, event-based journalism, is partly to do with the journalists' lack of capacity to do thematic research on issues and the issue of the easiness of covering events compared to themes.

### **Implications for theory**

The research revealed the importance of an awareness campaign to inform people that a feminist oriented approach towards social change is not the exclusive business of women, but a cause for all those concerned with fighting for social good. Unfortunately, most of the journalists interviewed in this research felt that women should champion the cause for gender equality alone. As one journalist noted, “the media has tended to just report what

has been going on. It is now up to the individual women groups to lobby for equitable distribution of land”.

The use of post-structuralism in this study has, however, shown that the discourses and theories that can be used to explain the exclusion of women are not closed discourses, and that one does not necessarily have to be a woman to carry out feminist research. Judith Butler addresses this concern when she argues that "... there need not be a 'doer behind the deed,' but that the 'doer' is variably constructed through the deed" (1990, 142).

I used many approaches to understanding the phenomenon under study, including post-structural feminist theory, as well as cultural and socio-organisational theories. This has shown that in post-structural research, theories and discourses are not closed systems. As Susan Hekman writes:

Discourses, even hegemonic discourses, are not closed systems. The silences and ambiguities of discourse provide the possibility of refashioning them, the discovery of other conceptualisations, and the revision of accepted truths. (1990, 187)

The research has, therefore, shown that social phenomena are complex, and that no one theory or group of people can exhaustively capture and account for them. The post-structural approach used in this research project also showed that no grand theory could be used to explain complex social phenomena.

### **Implications for policy and practice**

A fundamental implication of my research is that the whole institution of journalism in the country should be overhauled. For any improvements in women’s treatment in the news to be realised, we do not simply require more coverage of women or more women journalists, but we need a fundamental change in news as a narrative genre (van Zoonen 1988, Rakow and Kranich 1991). However, before the news narrative is reinvented, we need to understand that contemporary news is a masculine genre, telling a masculine story, from a masculine point of view, to a masculine audience. To change this, a new thrust has to be put in place, beginning with the way journalists are trained. Measures

should be taken to ensure that critical and well-educated journalists are produced so that journalism moves “beyond dealing with events and what we see”, as noted by Joseph.

My recommendation, to rectify this anomaly, is therefore, to make fundamental changes in news as a narrative (van Zoonen 1988:35). This could be achieved by discarding themes, theories and methodologies that foster discrimination in the operations of journalists and media houses. There should be a shift from a positivist way of looking at news, and journalists should be taught that news is what they make it (Schlesinger 1978) and that it is a result of their subjective considerations. If journalists were made to realise this, then there would be a need for them to assume a degree of social responsibility that would enable them to play an advocacy role to fight different forms of societal illnesses, such as the discrimination against women, in their reportage. It is important for media training institutions to desist from fooling trainee journalists that the news production process is value-free and that they could be ‘objective’ and ‘impartial’ in the way they cover issues.

Once a post-structural methodology is adopted in looking at potential news items, there could be different ways of looking at issues. A shift from the positivist emphasis on ‘objectivity’, ‘value-freeness’ and ‘impartiality’, towards the post-structural subjectivity, with its emphasis on a multiplicity of ‘truths’ as a way of looking at social phenomena, would ensure that journalists consider their assessment of events and themes more deeply. For instance, the idea of land redistribution in Zimbabwe was hinged on the purported need to ensure equality in the land ownership patterns in the country (*Herald* 14 June 2000). It would then be the duty of a post-structurally oriented journalist to question the idea of equality. It would be necessary for this journalist to question whether there was equality between men and women, whites, blacks, coloureds, Indians, and virtually every group of people in the country. As a result, the coverage of the land reform exercise would not be centred on simplistic dichotomies in which the tendency would be to look, quite literally, at the issue in terms of black and white. Newspaper rhetoric would, therefore, not only be centred on the issue of racial inequality in land

ownership patterns, but a more diverse discourse that does not marginalise other variables such as gender, ethnicity, and social class.

This can be achieved if news is regarded as a subjective product of journalists' personal considerations of phenomena that obtain in their societies of operation, rather than an objective reflection of the events that manifest themselves in front of them. There should be a total shift from the positivistic way of looking at the news genre to a post-structural view of news that accepts that what we read as news is a product of the subjective work of journalists who make it, rather than an 'objective' reflection of some 'truth out there' captured by an 'impartial' and 'unbiased' reporter.

Gender mainstreaming should also be part of media training institutions' curricula, while each media house should make efforts to put in place a gender policy that it should enforce. As has been reflected in the accounts of the journalists interviewed, there is a tendency to use a positivist approach to news production, hence the obsession with 'objectivity', 'impartiality' and 'balance'. Efforts have to be made to make journalists shift from using positivism in understanding social phenomena to applying a post-structural approach that would enable them to draw on their subjectivities to understand and represent social events without fear of accusations about bias and impartiality. Newsrooms should provide journalists with the latitude to tackle issues post-structurally. Emphasis should not be on journalists going 'out there' to 'gather' some 'reality'. Rather, the newsroom manager should allow the journalist to use her/his understanding of the phenomenon, its historical and social context, and any other discourses around it, to come up with an account that s/he feels best explains the subject being represented.

### **Limitations**

In a lot of researches where extensive and in-depth interviews are the primary source of data, there is always the effect of time. Because the period taken for the interviews (one month) was short, I was unable to re-interview the informants after going through the

interview transcripts. This was due to the limited time that I was to spend in the field researching. My budget, which was catering for things like my accommodation during the research period, did not allow me to do follow-up interviews. Such follow-up interviews could have allowed me to seek clarification on some issues that, I should admit, I would have preferred clarified by my interviewees had I gotten a chance to re-interview them.

Another limitation of my research is that the political volatility and harassment of journalists that ensued during the time of the interviews might have affected the quality of journalists' responses to the research questions. This might have been because with the operations of secret state agencies, no one, including the journalists I interviewed, trusted anyone with information. For this reason, some of the responses might have been formulated to keep journalists out of potential trouble emanating from giving honest assessments on 'sensitive' issues. This was despite the assurances I gave them that the research was purely academic. The issue of giving 'politically correct' responses could have been possible since the Zimbabwe government is notorious for sending its spies to universities and colleges where there are a number of Zimbabwean students. There could have been suspicions that I could be one of the spies sent to Rhodes to spy on Zimbabwean students there.

### **Further research**

This thesis does not claim to give exhaustive reasons why the gender equality discourse was left out of the reports on the land reform exercise. There could be other reasons that can be used to account for this absence, and it is my argument that they could be gotten through further research in the same area. Further research on different publications can be conducted with different methodologies to possibly come up with different explanations for the same phenomenon. Interesting researches can also be conducted, not necessarily on the media, but on government and the ministry responsible for land redistribution, to find reasons why only 15 percent of the 52 percent women population in the country got some pieces of the land that was redistributed.

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## Appendix

### Interview Transcripts

Below are extracts from the interviews that I carried out with the informants in this research. It should be noted out that parts where the interviewer and the interviewees warmed up before the interviewees started to respond to the issues put to them have been left out.

#### **Martha**

Question: We have generally been observing that women issues are not receiving a lot of coverage in the newspapers. During the period February 01 to June 30 2000, the height of the land invasions, there were a lot of stories on the land redistribution, the need for equity in land ownership patterns. Interestingly, there were no stories that touched on gender and equity in the land redistribution. In your opinion, what could have caused such an absence?

Answer: I think it's because of the socialization process, you see that journalists, media owners and managers have been socialized to think of news in a certain way. I don't think when they look at news items they ever think of what role gender play. They just don't think women have a place in the newspapers, especially on issues like politics, economics, business, those are areas for men. There is that attitude that women's place is in the kitchen, thus they would not be considered on issues that are in the public domain.

Q: So can we say the reasons you outlined above apply to the absence of gender equality discourse on the land redistribution?

A: When we look at the land issue there were a lot of issues at play. It was looked at as a more political discourse. It had more to do with the politics that was going on between the two parties MDC and Zane PF. These were the main issues to look at. When it came

to women, although women were part of it, they were left out of the discourse. I'm not quite sure why they were left out. But the discourse prevalent was politics and gender was not even considered an issue.

Q: Wasn't gender supposed to be included in that political discourse?

A: Journalists were caught up with issues between the two political parties and subsequently ignored issues to do with women and land.

Q: Do you think issues like the editorial policy played a part in sidelining this gender equality discourse from the newspapers?

A: I think it plays a major role. Even if you ask other women in the media they would tell you that when it comes to issues with gender, media houses seem disinterested. For instance there was a page in The Herald devoted to gender issues which was derogatorily referred to as "prostitutes' column". This ties in with the perception that women's organizations and women who fight for gender equality want to break up other people's families. There is always this perception that these women who are vocal have been failures in marriage. If you look at the stories that come up in the media reinforce such a perception.

Q: So should we say that even if there is nothing in black and white in terms of editorial policy, there are some operational rules that sideline women in terms of how women are viewed by newspaper people?

A: It's more at an operational level. Even where courses are taught at some media training institutions, gender is put as a separate subject, away from politics, economics. Even when it comes to the newsroom, gender is viewed as some separate discourse, separate from other news items. So in the end that's how women are sidelined, especially when women's issues are viewed as gender issues. Even when you look at women in politics, their issues are separated from the so-called mainstream political issues.

Q: You were talking of socialization. What sort of socialization is it which leads to women being sidelined?

A: When you look at it, may be one has to look at how boys and girls are raised. All this masculinity business, men are supposed to do this, boys are taught to be politicians, doctors, and when it comes to girls, they're taught to fantasize on how their weddings are to be like. From an early age boys and girls are taught to aspire to play different roles in the society. Their worlds are gendered. Girls aspire to be wives, aspire to be mothers, aspire to be models. They aspire to be beautiful for their men, and men are taught to be leaders, to play the leading role in the society and it's sort of naturalised. And these roles are perpetuated in the newspapers hence the fact that women are left out of public discourse.

Q: What about the idea that women issues don't sell newspapers?

A: I think one of the major problems is that we try so much to separate women's issues from the mainstream. Because if we have women's issues like women in politics, why should it only be women in politics while we don't have a section like men in politics? It's like we're separating issues from the mainstream. Even when women are portrayed in politics or economics, it's taken as an exception, it's outside the normal. And to most men it becomes news only because it is not normal. Journalists generally do not take women's issues or gender equality issues seriously. For example, one journalist, in dismissing gender issues in the newspapers said no one is interested in reading about sanitary pads all the time. Women's issues are not sanitary pads, menstruation or pregnancy. What we call women's issues are real issues of equality to anything, be it in politics, land redistribution and the like. But if we reduce women's issues to sanitary pads, pregnancy and all other issues that refer specifically to their biological set up, and in a derogatory manner, then they would certainly not sell newspapers. When you look at the journalists we have, they would certainly concentrated on these superficial issues at the expense of serious issues.

Q : What's the reason why journalists look at issues superficially?

A: It has something to do with training. We can't even say it's because there are a few women in the newsroom because women also look at women issues in the same way men do. There should be training to look critically at issues journalists report on. The dynamics at play and the society the journalists live in, its beliefs, should be part of the training so that journalists would begin to question them vis-à-vis an event.

### **Joseph**

Q: Why were there no stories on gender equality in the reports on land redistribution during the period February 01 to June 30 2000?

A: We look at the context in which the land redistribution was done. You should look at the February 2000 referendum. You must also look at who was behind the government defeat. You must look at the role played by the white commercial farmers. How they put a lot of financial support to the opposition and to groups who were against the ruling regime. And it was not for the government to start to look at the nitty-gritties on how they were going to redistribute land but the main issue was to disempower the white commercial farmers who were funding the opposition. So the major issue was to cripple the opposition by dealing with their financiers, the white commercial farmers.

Q: But within such an agenda we heard the government talking of ensuring equitable land ownership patterns.

A: First of all, there was no need for the government to look at the issue of equitability and the like. The first point was to take the land then after taking, going into the nitty-gritties of who was going to take this land. You must appreciate that when government

took this land, it was not given to particular individuals. All the land that was taken at that time was state land. But having acquired that land then the government was supposed to look at the fact that they had particular constituencies, they had women, they had blacks, the disabled people who wanted that land, then distributed it to them. But firstly the government was not supposed to take the land and say I want to give this portion to whites, this to blacks and this to women. First of all the agenda was to take land and after taking the land then it was supposed to be the primary role of the state to decide who was supposed to get the land.

Q: I thought when the government moved in to take land, there was talk of the need for blacks to own the land?

A: That was secondary. The first point was to take the land from the 4000 commercial farmers who were suspected of supporting the MDC then distribute it to blacks.

Q: To black men?

A: Black men and women. You must understand that when the land was taken, there were also influential women in the ruling party, government ministers, and there were also researches done before the acquisition, reports done by women, for instance, the report done by Rudo Gaidzanwa. The land review committee of 1992. There were also women who recommended government to take land.

Q: Why then didn't the newspapers pick on the theme of gender equality in the redistribution of the land?

A: Newspapers are not journals. Journals do critical information gathering. What newspapers were doing under that euphoria of land reform was to really deal with the surface of the issue not going down.

Q :Do you mean newspapers by their nature should not do critical research?

A: They should but they are not research producing systems like journals.

Q: What then makes them just look at issues superficially?

A: You must understand, for instance, if they're daily papers, they will be running against time so they will be no time to go into deep research. And also not only that, you also need, particularly in the case of Zimbabwe, to look at newspaper organisations or institutions of news. Who man them? Do people who man them have capacity to do research papers? How can you expect an 'O' level to do critical analysis of the land reform? So you must look at who runs newspapers. Are newspapers run by intellectuals? Do people who run newspapers have the capacity to do informed critical papers on critical policy matters in the country? If you expect Deketeke (Editor of The Herald) who has never written a one page dissertation to write a critical article on a thorny issue such as the land reform, then you're expecting too much. You must also look at the development of journalism in the country. Do we have such people to do such work you're asking?

Q: So are we saying that it was because of lack of critical capability that journalists could not pick on the theme of gender equity in the land reform when they could pick on the theme of violence?

A: Violence can be written about even by a grade one child. You don't need an intelligent person or a PhD person to see that someone has been attacked. Those are the obvious and that is what newspapers were concentrating on.

Q: So do you mean the issue of gender was not an issue that was explicit that you needed someone critical to cover that?

A: One needs to be sober when you cover such issues. You need to be critical; you need to research, to consult scholars because the land reform which took place in Zimbabwe is

not the first of its kind. If you look at the example of South East Asia, how the people in Malaysia and even Japan took their properties, took their land after the collapse of the regimes in Europe to find how they did it. In fact, they did exactly what the government of Zimbabwe did. You first take the land and put it in the custody of the state and it is the state which would then look into the critical sectors in its economy to decide on who should be given the land. It is important then to look at the land committees that Mugabe put in place, the Bhuka committee, the Utete Committee. These were now the committees which were supposed to look critically to what was supposed to be done in terms of policy implementation, in terms of equitable distribution of land in terms of A1 and A2. Who was supposed to get A1 and who was supposed to get A2? But in the first place you wouldn't expect any government, particularly in a quasi-revolutionary mood that was prevailing then to say that government was supposed to look at the issue of women.

Q: I would have challenged the media to look at such things.

A: We spoke of capacity in the newsrooms. Even now five years after the invasions, have you seen news articles critiquing the land reform, the achievements and shortfalls of the land reform? Even on the government part, they are still politicking instead of dealing with real issues.

Q: So basically what you are saying is that there is lack of capacity in the newsrooms to tackle intricate policy matters?

A: That is the fundamental issue. They have no capacity. They have no capacity! Those who write and edit the newspapers articles are morons. A clique of uneducated lot who think that one is called a political reporter or political editor because he travels with the president (of the country) to Mauritius. They say a political editor is such because he covers a presidential rally or an opposition rally at Zimbabwe Grounds. Then that person calls himself or herself a political editor. What does he know about the subject of politics? In other countries someone who is a political editor has done political science at the university or is a professor or doctor of political science. So they know beyond rallies,

beyond sloganeering. We lack the capacity in newsrooms to deal with issues beyond what we see, beyond what happens.

Q: What about when Mugabe was presented with the Utete report, he said his government won't give land to women because they don't want to facilitate divorce, to destroy marriages. Why didn't newspapers pick on that issue and report on it?

A: I think that is not true.

Q: But I was there and he said that in my presence.

A: But what is happening on the ground is contrary to that, there are women who were given land. There are women farmers but we might not know the extent in terms of percentages. I know of a female reporter who was given land. Where corruption was not rampant there are women who were given land.

Q: Would you then link the absence of the gender equality discourse to your newspaper's editorial policy?

A: It was not the editorial policy. Its lack of capacity to look at issues. From the editors right to the cub reporter, they simply have no capacity. They have no training, they lack training.

Q: You wouldn't consider the way how people are socialised generally to believe that women issues are not issues at all for the absence?

A: While it might be an issue, the issue of patriarchy and that most newsrooms are male dominated but my fundamental point is that there is lack of capacity to appreciate issues on the part of editors, reporters and everybody else in the newsrooms.

## **Moses**

Q: Why was there no coverage on the gender equality theme in the reports on land redistribution in your paper when there was extensive coverage of violence and equality in terms of land ownership in terms of black and white?

A: I want to think that during that time the concentration was on the exercise itself, how it was being undertaken and as you are aware there was a lot of violence against farm workers, against some white farmers so I think a lot of papers got bogged down in the violence and the nature of the implementation of that programme. And, it depends now from which side you look at the exercise, whether it was being done in an orderly manner. I think the idea was to criticise the manner in which the government was acquiring that land as you are aware some people bought this land and were now being displaced. So maybe the thinking was that if the situation was normalised and the process was undertaken in an orderly manner, maybe the issue of gender was to be brought on the agenda if the programme was implemented successfully. I don't think it was a deliberate omission on the part of the papers but because of the way the programme was undertaken.

Q: You also don't think it's an extension of the way how women are viewed in the society, they are not viewed as newsworthy?

A: No I wouldn't say that because I know towards 2001, there were exhortations by women groups that women should also get land and that got coverage but not as much coverage as would have been expected. But I don't think that the blame should lie squarely with the media. We have various female organisations, women lobby groups, we have female parliamentarians. It is their duty, at times, to bring these issues into the public domain, and they didn't seem to make a lot of noise about that issue and as you are aware now that issue has been brought up in the ZANU PF People's Conference but it has not been followed up. What we would expect from the women lobby groups or civic society at large is to bring that issue to the attention of the public through media, through press

statements. That might actually assist because at times, the media is not ubiquitous; it has its own shortcomings. Maybe that was not realised, but I still don't think the omission was deliberate on the part of the media.

And another thing might have led to the omission is the fact that most media houses don't have gender policies. Suppose if you had a gender policy at the Daily News, the Herald or The Independent, obviously it might click on the person manning that desk that there is the issue of land, are women being empowered? I think it is time our media houses really move in the direction of setting up gender desks in the media houses. Then obviously if you have a gender desk, it will be a specialised area where you have specialised reporting on issues affecting women in the socio, economic and political limelight.

Q: Some women I have spoken to are against this idea. They argue that they want to put gender issues into the mainstream. Like if we are looking at gender equality and the redistribution of land, it should not be confined to the so-called women's pages. The reports should be in the main pages, probably the front page, that is their argument.

A: It is a very interesting argument because what determines what goes on the front page is the impact of the story on the nation. For them then to say each time something is written about women or disadvantaged groups it should be front page, then that will depend on the editorial policy of the newspaper. If it is a story worth putting on the front page, the conference would sit and the editors would give it its due prominence. It is not like it's a deliberate policy that women should not make it to the front page. It depends on the impact of the story, how it affects our social, economic or political well-being. But if they're going to make a lot of noise about that, obviously the stories will get prominence.

Q: So during your time at the Daily News, you didn't have like a deliberate policy that catered for marginalised people like women?

A: We actually had a desk that catered for marginalised groups like women. We used to reserve, I think on a weekly basis, quite a number of pages dealing with issues of women and other disadvantaged groups.

Q: But during the period February 01 to June 30 2002 there were a lot of stories dealing with the land redistribution and its impact on farm workers but surprisingly there were no articles that tried to tackle gender inequality in the way the land was redistributed.

A: Obviously, when you talk of us covering disadvantaged groups like farm workers you are talking of us covering women because most of the farm workers were women so by covering farm workers we were also covering women.

Q: It is not explicit that you were concerned of women. May be you covered farm workers because there were men among the majority of female farm workers.

A: No, not necessarily. We didn't think of making a distinction because obviously farm workers have always been a marginalised group by virtue of their wages, access to education, to health and that is not discriminatory at all. If you are a farm worker at a particular farm, you are not considered in terms of sex because when attention is paid to those particular issues, I don't think the government or a particular civic organisation involved in labour issues, when they approach a particular farm they don't say we want to solve women issues but they would use a holistic approach.

Q: So at the Daily News, you can safely say there was no deliberate policy to ensure gender equality?

A: We were very sensitive to issues pertaining to gender but there was nothing in black and white which is what I was saying earlier on that media houses should come up with gender policies in black and white so that every journalist who works for that media organisation becomes gender sensitive in their reportage.

Thank you!

## **Pharaoh**

Q: There have been a lot of stories on the land reform exercise between February 01 to June 30 2000. Surprisingly, none of the stories tackle the issue of gender equality in the land redistribution exercise. What do you think is the reason?

A: Having worked for the Herald, we have always had a tendency to cover everything that we come across, so we covered the land reform in the best way we could have. The issue of women and land ownership wasn't a topical issue and I think that it escaped us.

Q: Why do you say it was not topical when women groups always advocated that women also get a fair share of the land?

A: if they made such noises, it was out of our earshot. If they had cried for the land, certainly we could have covered them but as far as I remember, there were no such calls hence the newspapers could not spearhead their campaign.

Q: Does it mean that people have to 'make noise' as you put it, in order to have their concerns covered? Aren't journalists supposed to do some agenda setting on issues like this?

A: It is always easy if people are proactive in order that their concerns get represented in the media. The women were supposed to have pushed for their cause through the media. If they had called for press conferences, workshops and any other forum, the journalists would have generously covered their concerns.

Q: But I thought farm workers did not call for press conferences, neither did they have an association that issued press statements to highlight their plight but their plight was extensively covered by the press?

A: The farm workers' issue was different. If you see, their so-called plight was extensively covered by the independent papers, mainly The Daily News, because their supposed plight was used to demonise the government, to rubbish the land reform exercise. They were pawns in a power game between government and its detractors.

Q: So in your opinion you don't think there was something that newspapers could have done to highlight the need for women to get a fair share of the land?

A: No, the women should have used the newspapers to get the coverage that was necessary for their cause.

Q: Issues like editorial policy, how do you see them contribution to the exclusion of the gender aspect in the reportage?

A: As far as I know, we had no policy that discriminated against anyone, neither did we have a policy that instructed us to cover specific groups. So I wouldn't say the editorial policy played a part.

Thank You!

## **Mary**

Q: There has been an absence of stories on gender equality in the land reform exercise during the period February 01 to June 30 2000. What do you think would have lead journalists to concede that the theme was not newsworthy?

A: I think it was a problem on our part as journalists. There was a lot of news as far as the land redistribution was concerned because there was a 20 % quota for women to benefit

in the programme. Basically, it was a problem of attitude on our part reporters not to pick on that theme. While there was policy that women would benefit from the land redistribution exercise, generally there was lack of political will on the part of chiefs who were distributing land not to seriously consider women and that attitude, unfortunately, found its way into the newsroom. Whilst gender refers to both men and women, us women are generally marginalised because women issues are considered not news issues hence there was no one to pick on such an issue in our paper. Actually it was not adequate for me to cover all these issues alone. We need more people who're gender sensitive and this is what is lacking in our newsroom.

Q: You were talking of the attitude in the newsroom. What type of attitude is that?

A: Aah, gender is regarded as soft news just like health news and these are beats assigned to women and the fact that there are few women in the newsroom, compared to men, such issues rarely find people to cover them. The problem is made worse by the fact that women are not gender sensitive themselves. They don't have gender awareness. They need to go for training. You find out that women who write on gender issues are gender activists in their own right and gender activists in the newsroom are very few.

Q: Could you relate the absence of the gender equality discourse in the newspapers to our socialisation, generally, in the society?

A: Indeed, yaaah because my bosses sometimes admit that the way they were brought up has impacted on their thinking that women's issues or gender issues were not issues at all. I remember some couple of days ago, a chief sub editor on my desk pleading with me that I should teach men in the newsroom to be gender sensitive because they have been brought up to believe that women should be subservient, they are lesser important and their issues are not issues at all. I remember sometime, that time I was working on the night desk, he was actually advising me to move from that desk and work during the day because I was a woman. I actually sympathise with the men for their lack of understanding in gender issues and most of them have sympathised with me on my work in trying to sensitise reporters on gender issues. They understand our concerns as women

but I think it's a process, it might take a hundred years. Its true the way they were socialised has had an impact on their reporting on gender issues.

Q: How do you see your editorial policy's contribution to this exclusion?

A: It still boils down to the same issue again. Whether or not there is a policy it depends on who is gate keeping and whether that person is gender sensitive. We might have a policy but you need someone who pushes it through. But as for our organisation, we don't have such a policy. I have never seen a policy on gender at this paper although government has a gender policy. I don't know how our company will incorporate that. But I can see that with our editorial department, there has been a deliberate effort to have as many women as possible in the newsroom as you can see there are quite a number of women in the newsroom now. More so, some women are slowly rising through the ladder into management positions. The fact however, remains that men's attitude towards issues considered feminine has generally been negative and I feel this is why we failed to pick up that theme

Thank you!

## **Joshua**

Q: Can you explain to me things that you consider before a story is published?

A: We check on things like libel, accuracy and whether it doesn't contravene any section of AIPPA (Access to Information and protection of Privacy Act). So we check all those things.

Q: What about when a journalist is out there, how does he come to decide that the issue is newsworthy?

A: Generally journalists are supposed to gather anything that is newsworthy. They collect and then they write. When the stories come in, we check on all those things I have alluded to. Then we consider which stories to use and which ones not to use. It's really the prerogative of the editor to decide which story is to see the light of the day and which one is not published.

Q: Like on the issue I have alluded to earlier on, the land redistribution exercise, there is virtually an absence of stories which deal with gender and equitable distribution of land in your paper during the period I indicated, what do you think were the reasons?

A: Well that issue has come up. The issue of equitable distribution of land among various groups, be it ethnic, tribal, gender and so on. They have come up at various fora. But well, so far we're just covering events relating to the land redistribution programme. There has not been a deliberate policy to play an advocacy role, to say give land to women. The media have tended to just report what has been going on. It is now up to the individual women groups to lobby for equitable distribution of land. I think in as far as covering the whole exercise, I think the media, especially the public media, have covered almost there is to cover. Like I said before, the media are not supposed to play an advocacy role.

Q: Why?

A: Well we just believe that, like in our case, anyone who has capacity to farm should be given land regardless of him/her being male or female. We don't believe that a woman should be given land because she is a woman. If she fails to exhibit capacity to farm then there is no reason to make a lot of noise about them receiving land. Basically, as a media house, we are aware that the government, I am not speaking like a politician, but we are aware that the government invited people to apply for land and some of them didn't apply

they thought the government was joking. Some didn't take it seriously. Now that they have realised this thing is going on now they have suddenly started putting pressure on authorities to consider them. If the truth is told, some of the people have never officially applied for land. We're aware that government is giving land to people who have demonstrated capacity to engage in commercial farming activities in as far as A2 Model is concerned. And in as far as A1 is concerned, government allocated land to families and women have benefited in the process. So we just treat everyone is equal but at one point we have also articulated the concerns of women and we will continue to cover any groups which feel that they might want to benefit.

Q: But in your own opinion when you see the theme of gender equality and land redistribution, do you think it is an important issue that should have been given prominence?

A: It could be, depending on what a particular paper chooses. We are a family paper so we do not discriminate. We just cover events as they are.

Q: In just covering events as they are, as you choose to put it, don't you see yourself covering issues from a male perspective?

A: That is the policy at the paper, thus we have very little we can do. I believe that society is not divided in that dichotomy of men and women alone. That is the reason we insist we cover everyone.

Thank You!