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Corporate media and the nationalisation of the economy in South Africa: a critical Marxist political economy approach

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the representation of the nationalisation of mines debate, as a developmental policy discourse, by the South African corporate media. Essentially, the objective is to ascertain the corporate media's role and influence on ideology-laden developmental policy discourses. Post-apartheid, the South African corporate media has often been accused of bias by various social actors, including South Africa's governing party – the African National Congress. These accusations have been accompanied by perceptions of the media's inability and unwillingness to partner with government in its endeavour to implement its developmental agenda. This perceived bias is accentuated when it comes to ideologically laden issues such as nationalisation. Therefore, this research study grapples, inter alia, with questions behind the drivers of these perceptions, the manner in which the media portrays the developmental policy discourse, and the role the media should be playing in the country's developmental agenda. In its endeavour to respond to some of these questions, the research study thus focuses on the representation of the nationalisation of mines debate by the South African English corporate press in 2011. Given the complex nature of the discourse, the research study utilises both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies; triangulation in particular presents this thesis with numerous advantages towards attaining deeper understanding of the representation of the nationalisation discourse. Whereas quantitative content analysis helps identify and count the number of articles and related elements in the articles, qualitative content analysis offers a chance to probe further various elements in the discourse. In-depth semi-structured interviews are also used as a secondary research technique to discover new clues on the discourse.

The research study is based on one major assumption – that structural factors such as ownership and control influence the representation of ideological policy discourses such as nationalisation – and is underpinned by four major theoretical frameworks – the critical political economy of communication; Marxist media analysis; social production of news; and decolonial theories. To comprehensively analyse the representation of nationalisation, the research study focuses on content analysis of news articles, looking at various aspects such as the structure of news as well as its headlines, sources and the general representation of the discourse; utilises theories of the critical political economy of the media and other related theories such as the social production of news and Marxist media analysis to perform qualitative content analysis; scrutinises economic factors in line with the assumption of the

study that structural factors influence the representation of the discourse by using the Marxist theories to unpack the representation of nationalisation; and utilises Marxist theories in conjunction with decolonial theories.

Among the findings of the research study presented in this thesis is that global capitalism, accompanied by factors such as commercialisation and advertising, influences the representation of ideologically laden policymaking discourses. Ownership and transformation of the corporate media also shape the representation. In this discourse there is convergence, and thus it is apparent that the media plays a pivotal role in reproducing dominant ideology which fundamentally maintains capitalism as "an inevitable and immutable" system. Also, the relationship between the state and media relations is a factor in ideological developmental discourses. Indeed, the representation of the nationalisation discourse is essentially a reflection of the corporate media's posture towards the broader developmental state and its portrayal of ideologically laden policy discourses.