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Land expropriation in South Africa: analysis and opinion on the issue in online news media

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Abstract

Land expropriation without compensation continues to be a hot and topical issue in South Africa today, with some believing that it is important to address the indelible colonial and apartheid inequalities and that land restitution is a means to further and complete reconciliation, national healing and nation building processes. However, others are of the view that land expropriation is merely an election ploy by the ruling African National Congress (ANC) to garner votes in the 2019 elections, as its electoral base has dwindled. As a result, there have been intense debates over the issue in the media, notably regarding how land expropriation should be executed. However, very little is known about how the media in the country chooses to frame the issue of land expropriation without compensation, and how it sets the agenda for its discussion. This research report attempted to fill this gap and contribute to the ongoing discussions by looking at how the land issue is being discussed, tabled and framed on media platforms. The study analyzes the dominant narratives, arguments and themes in opinion and analysis pieces on the subject published by five leading online news platforms, namely, *Sowetan*, *Daily Maverick*, *The Conversation, News 24* and *Isolezwe*. Furthermore, this research report focuses on who is speaking and establishes whether there are any biases and interests being advanced. Finally, the study touches on how the matter is inexorably tied to social, political and economic inequalities, and, if so, whether these are reflected in the opinion and analysis pieces of the selected media platforms. The research report employs framing and agenda setting theories as its theoretical frameworks to explore how the media is framing the debates and if themes of inequalities, namely, economic, social and cultural capital are reflected. It also used the public sphere, framing and agenda-setting theories to understand the debate in the media. The research found that there is a lack of racial, class and gender diversity among opinion writers in the studied media discussing the land issue and therefore not a reflection of the entire South African population. It also revealed the fundamental need for historical redress as a result of colonization and apartheid and clashing economic interests which are brought about by self-serving

interests to protect the political, cultural and economic status quo. This is reflected in the arguments and narratives used in the discussion.