

**INVESTIGATING THE POPULARITY OF THE MAIN NEWS BULLETIN ON
MUVI TV, A ZAMBIAN TELEVISION STATION: A RECEPTION STUDY OF
LUSAKA VIEWERS.**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts in Journalism and Media Studies
of
RHODES UNIVERSITY

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October 2011

ABSTRACT

The “tabloid TV” genre, like tabloid newspapers has been chastised for depoliticising the public by causing cynicism, and lowering the standards of rational public discourse. Such criticisms are not always based on a close interrogation of the reasons for the popularity of such a genre amongst its consumers. The “tabloid TV” news genre is a relatively new phenomenon in Zambia and in the African context in general. This study is an investigation of the rise in popularity of the Zambian television station, Muvi TV. It is a reception study of Lusaka (capital city) viewers, particularly the working class community, who make up the majority of the TV stations’ audience. Members of this social group who have hitherto been marginalised from mainstream media discourses were interviewed. In particular, the study explores the meanings obtained from the content of Muvi TVs’ tabloidised main evening news and its relevance to their everyday lived experiences. The TV station gives prominence to “micro-politics of everyday life”, alongside “serious” stories albeit in a more lurid, sensationalised and personalised manner. In undertaking this investigation, the study draws primarily on qualitative in-depth interviews – focus group and individual. These techniques unearth the manner in which the viewers decode the messages and appropriate the meanings into their lived experiences. The study establishes that the popularity of Muvi TV is due to the emphasis on human-interest stories epitomised by tabloid journalism values. The working class majority is able to relate and identify with these stories, and attaches greater believability to the station’s news as compared to the public broadcaster, the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC). As such, Muvi TV can be seen to fulfil a political function despite its sensationalised approach.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my (late) father, Mr. Elliot Vincent Mbatha, who believed in me and had so much faith in my ability to attain higher heights in my education. His faith in me left an indelible mark in my life which has over the years propelled me not to settle for anything less than the best. It is also dedicated to my mother, Mrs. Gladys Kapita Mbatha, who has taught me to be courageous and hopeful in the most nadir moments of life. She has worked so hard and sacrificed so much to offer the financial and moral support in achieving my educational goals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my supervisor and mentor Prof. Herman Wasserman for his astute guidance, insightful criticisms, and unwearied encouragement and support from the initial to the final level of writing this thesis. I would like to thank Prof. Larry Strelitz for introducing me to the world of reception analysis and empirical qualitative research in general, Prof. Lynette Steenveld for enabling me to better understand the field of journalism and media studies, Prof. Jeanne Prinsloo for giving me that critical edge to the subject, and Prof. Fackson Banda for sharpening my eye in media policy issues/analysis. I am also indebted to many of my colleagues for the moral support rendered during my stay in Grahamstown. I am heartily thankful to Sihle Nyathi, for her inspiration, encouragement and intellectual companionship, which aided the writing of this thesis in innumerable ways. I owe my deepest gratitude to my lifetime best friend, Douglas Sikwanda Kakoma, for putting first the best interests of my heart, for his love and moral support throughout this journey. My gratitude also goes to the sponsors, The Beit Trust and Rhodes University for making this achievement a possibility.

I am also grateful to all those who supported me in any respect before and during the completion of the project, including my employers, the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC), who gave me time away from work to pursue my studies. Ultimately, I am grateful to God, my heavenly father for His grace, favour, and for giving me this opportunity and success.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.0. Introduction

This study investigates the rapid rise in popularity of the Zambian local television station, Muvi TV, among its Lusaka viewers, particularly the working class. The study is located within the field of media and cultural studies, due to its critical engagement with popular media and its relationship to politics and democracy.

This chapter provides the contextual background and a brief theoretical framework which underpins the study. It highlights the significance of the study and sketches its objectives. It also provides the methods used to collect data and outline the overall thesis structure.

1.1. Background to the study

Three personal incidences and observations drew me to take keen interest in investigating the rapid rise in popularity of Muvi TV station, particularly its main evening news, since its first full broadcast in 2004. At the time, its broadcast licence was restricted to a broadcast radius which confined it to the city of Lusaka, but now has extended its coverage nationwide after being granted such a licence at the end of 2009. Since its inception, the television (TV) station has gained popularity amongst its Lusaka viewers, which is now extending to other parts of the country. Even though it seems to cut across social classes, Muvi TV mainly appeals to the working class majority. The TV station claims that in March 2005 it had a viewership of 84 % (currently at 85.3 %) of Lusaka's population, with 54 % of these viewers preferring it to other TV stations (Banda 2006b: 102; Muvi TV 2010). Banda (2009: 63, 65) asserts that the TV station has become a "crowd puller" in Lusaka, "imbued with greater believability than ZNBC", the public broadcaster.

My personal experiences as a viewer of Muvi TV provoked my interest in this topic. During my undergraduate degree studies in mass communication at the University of Zambia (UNZA) from 2003 to 2007, Muvi TV station programming became very popular at campus when it started its broadcast. Mostly, between 6pm and 9:30pm the student common rooms (TV viewing rooms) used to be filled to capacity with others standing outside to watch Muvi TV, a trend which has persisted hitherto. I was one of the students who would go 30 minutes earlier to secure a seat. Between the said times, the programme schedule was as follows: 6:

30pm-7pm, main evening news; 7pm-8pm, Philippine soap drama; 8pm-9pm, Mexican telenovelas; and 9pm-9:30pm, a local drama.

As students, we were more inclined to the news on Muvi TV than on ZNBC TV as it aired more interesting news stories from surrounding communities on recognisable everyday issues such as adultery, thefts, house wrangles, wife battery, abortion cases, accidents, and so on. As such, human-interest stories epitomised its main evening news, anchored on tabloid journalism values. It gave prominence to everyday micro-politics. Thus, the TV station's news arguably expressed a prototype of tabloidisation or the tabloid TV news genre. ZNBC was seen as purely government propaganda machinery as its main evening news contained mainly stories on the ruling government activities, masquerading as national issues. And so, as a way of escapism from the hegemonic discourses of ZNBC, coupled with a desire for entertainment as a diversion from studies (exacerbated by lack of enough recreational amenities at campus), Muvi TV filled the void. Its news was more appealing in its hefty coverage of human-interest stories than the "official" news from ZNBC.

Further, the local drama/comedy titled by the stage names of two comedians – *Bikiloni and Difikoti*, presented current affairs on political and socio-economic issues in a melodramatic and satirical way. They often used the vernacular language, Nyanja, with a mixture of broken English. Nyanja is a lingua franca chiefly based on Chewa and Nsenga (from Eastern Province of Zambia) (Central Statistical Office 2000: 43). It is the predominant language of communication in Lusaka, ostensibly used widely by the working class community (ibid.). Banda (2009: 65) notes that the TV station exploits the use of this vernacular language, which "has become a feature of the local interactivity...with communities hitherto marginalised from mainstream broadcasting on account of their inability to speak English". This mixture of English and vernacular languages is evident on most of Muvi TV's local programming, including the news. As such, Muvi TV has become more universally accessible within its geo-linguistic locale (Banda 2009: 63). In addition, the two comedians also coined certain phrases and a peculiar way of talking which was adapted and became part of our colloquial language in everyday conversations as students. The telenovelas and Philippine soaps had a melodramatic aesthetic appeal on issues of love, emotion, conflicts that affect classes, women, families and societies as a whole. Overall, Muvi TV offered a totally different and

attractive alternative programming from that of ZNBC TV which was filled with mostly western soaps, South African dramas and political documentaries (see Phiri 2010: 134).

Furthermore, whenever there was a student protest, the students would quickly rush to Muvi TV station to air their sentiments which would later be aired on its main evening news. This made us feel that we had a platform on which to voice out our issues as students in order to be heard by relevant authorities. ZNBC was seen as a no-go area, with its heavily guarded entrance by paramilitaries and soldiers. Its news would not accommodate voices considered as dissenting. The euphoria also extended to people in various compounds in Lusaka who would storm Muvi TV station to express their discontentment with their member of parliament (MP) or the city council, on issues such as crime, lack of proper water and sanitation facilities, poor roads, drainage systems, and waste management, among others.

In another experience, working as a TV reporter and producer for ZNBC for two years (2007 – 2009), my work placement gave me access to government offices where I would find TV sets in the offices of those at the lower echelons of government administration (such as secretaries, receptionists) tuned into Muvi TV, which ideally one would expect them to be tuned into ZNBC TV. In addition, other places where I would find TV sets tuned into Muvi TV include hair salons, barbershops, grocery shops and other business offices at open market places. People in these places, largely the working class and middle-class aspirants, also exhibited the same perceptions of Muvi TV as being more accommodating in its considerable coverage of local stories from various communities and compounds. They perceived its political news as being more neutral and more truthful than ZNBC TV news. They expressed scepticism and antagonism against the ruling government, which is represented by ZNBC. Knowing that I was working for ZNBC, they would confess this to me and suggest that we (as ZNBC) should learn from what Muvi TV is doing in its programming and news coverage, and take that path. They stated that ZNBC has lost its power and a large audience to Muvi TV, as the latter was seen as being more concerned with issues that affect the people in the compounds, whereas the former was seen as neglecting such issues.

The last incident was at Rhodes University during a Journalism and Media Studies masters' course on research methods with Prof. Larry Strelitz. In one of the topics of the course, reception analysis, one of the readings was an excerpt from Hayes Mabweazara's (2006) MA thesis from the same department on the popularity of a Zimbabwean tabloid

newspaper, uMthunywa, amongst Bulawayo's lower class majority. It somewhat correlated with my experience and observations with Muvi TV station, and thus prompted and gave me an impetus to investigate the popularity of the station, particularly its main evening news. Based on the facts and personal experiences discussed above, my main interest was in the rapid rise in popularity of this TV station and its news among Lusaka viewers, particularly the working class community (see Banda 2009: 56). I was interested in knowing the kind of journalism its news exhibited. I wanted to examine what meanings the viewers gained from the news, and how it related with their everyday lives. I also wanted to investigate the political significance of its news amongst its viewers, keeping in mind the criticism levelled against tabloidisation and "tabloid TV" genre, to which Muvi TV news arguably conforms.

These personal incidences and observations are the backdrop to the conception of this study. They sharpened my quest to investigate the reasons for the rapid rise in popularity of Muvi TV and its arguably tabloidised news in Lusaka. In this light, of particular importance is the legal administrative strategies employed by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services (MIBS) to restrict private TV stations broadcast coverage area in an attempt to ensure ZNBC's continued dominance in the advertising market; and partly to restrict the national political influence of private media players who might peddle critical political content (Banda 2009: 46, 63; Phiri 2010: 134). In addition, despite being a public broadcaster, ZNBC's main news is seen to be accessible and dominated by the ideas and opinions of the cultural and political elite, sidelining the voices of the lower class majority (Jere 2010: 154; Banda 2009: 51, 2003: 48). In contrast, Muvi TV is considered as the station for the "ordinary folk", whose vernacular such as Nyanja, has become the language of the station (unlike the English dominated ZNBC), and which provides its viewers with news content that includes voices excluded from ZNBC, such as those of the members of the working class (Banda 2009: 62). It privileges micro-politics of everyday life of its audiences presented in a more melodramatic aesthetic style, while ZNBC news is more concerned with macro-politics (such as policies, procedures, and rituals associated with formal politics – Wasserman 2010: 93) ostensibly in a "serious" and "professional" way. Micro-politics of everyday life" entail "day-to-day negotiations of unequal power relations" in various social structures of everyday life (Fiske 1989b: 56). This is discussed further in Chapter three, under Section 3.3.

1.2. Significance of the study

This study investigates what makes Muvi TV station, particularly its tabloidised main evening news popular among Lusaka viewers, especially the working class (see Banda 2009: 63-65). Not much in-depth analysis and research on specifically tabloid TV news genre (to which Muvi TV news arguably conforms) has been written in the African context. Existing texts for example, the one written by Frère (2011)¹ do not go further to interrogate and explore how consumers of tabloidised TV news negotiate and relate to it, and later integrate (or do not integrate) it into their daily lives. It merely alludes to the reasons for the popularity and success of such a news genre in the lives of its viewers (Frère 2011: 195, 199). One could assume that this TV news genre is relatively a new phenomenon to the African context. A great deal of literature and scholarly writing on African popular tabloid media (news) platforms focus on print (newspaper) tabloids (see Strelitz & Steenveld 2005; Mabweazara 2006; Steenveld 2006; Steenveld & Strelitz 2010; Wasserman 2010) and other genres of popular media/culture such as music and theatre (see Nyairo & Ogude 2005; Mano 2011). This study aims to contribute to the sparse literature in this area, as there has been no specific research on how broadcasting, particularly television in Zambia caters for marginalised communities such as the working class, nor on how popular television programmes such as the tabloid TV news genre may provide the information needs of these communities. Drawing on the Zambian context, the study thus seeks to compensate for this gap through contributing to the on-going debates about tabloid TV news from an African perspective.

1.3. Goals and objectives of the study

This study seeks to investigate the reasons for the rapid rise in popularity of a Zambian local TV station, Muvi TV, amongst its viewers in Lusaka, particularly the working class, in contrast to the public broadcaster, ZNBC. It seeks to answer questions such as:

- What attracts these viewers to Muvi TV news as compared to ZNBCs’?
- What meanings do these viewers obtain from Muvi TVs’ main news? How do these meanings resonate with their everyday lived experiences?

¹ Frère’s (2011) article focuses generally on “popular TV programmes and audiences in Kinshasa”. It particularly focuses on how “TV has become the vehicle for alternative forms of local information and other types of representation of citizens”.

- What is the social and political significance of this news which claims to tackle “serious” social, political and economic issues?
- Does the information provided by Muvi TVs’ arguably tabloidised news enable the public to exercise their civic duties, taking cognisance of the criticisms levelled against tabloidisation?

These criticisms include its emphasis on sensationalism, human-interest news, melodrama, personalisation and entertainment. These feature tropes are said to lower the standards of rational public discourse and poses a threat to democracy by breeding cynicism (Gripsrud 2000: 36; Glynn 2000: 7). It also provides information not essential to the exercise of the public’s rights as citizens (Papacharissi 2009: viii).

In pursuit of the above goals and objectives, the study draws its analysis from theoretical and normative debates and perspectives on popular tabloid media, particularly on “tabloid”, “tabloid TV” and “tabloidisation”. This literature centres on the intersection of tabloid media texts, everyday life and politics. “Tabloid” as a format, “tabloid TV” as a genre, and “tabloidisation” as a process through which the tabloid genre is applied to other forms of media such as the news will be used as working definitions in the paper (Bird 1992: 8, 2009: 41; Gripsrud 2000: 37; Conboy 2006: 212). These concepts will facilitate an understanding of the phenomenon to which Muvi TV news arguably conforms and contributes to its popularity. The normative debates will bring to the fore the cultural salience and facets of popular tabloid media. These include its “ritual function” and the potential to serve as “carnavalesque” sites for resistance against cultural and political hegemony (Gripsrud 2000: 42; Wasserman 2010: 39; Fiske 1989b: 81, 1989a: 6; Bird 1998: 35; Langer 1998: 160). It will explore tabloid media’s role in constituting an “imagined community”, as well as the ways in which the melodramatic appeal of tabloid media may inform a particular understanding of political news (Bird 2009: 42-44). Debates on the intersection of tabloid media and politics will facilitate the analysis of the political significance of tabloid TV news such as registering of audiences’ disillusionment with formal politics and serve as platforms in which ordinary people can engage, debate and contest with the “power bloc” and have their voices heard (Fiske 1989a: 8, 1992: 47; Hartley 1996: 156; Glynn 2000: 10).

1.4. Methods of the study

This study is a reception analysis, which is predicated upon a qualitative approach. Reception analysis “combines a qualitative approach to media as texts, producing and circulating meaning in society, with an empirical interest” in the consumers or recipients as co-producers and active decoders of meaning (Jensen 1988: 3). The philosophical and methodological underpinnings of the qualitative approach enabled me to use qualitative research techniques to collect contextually in-depth data derived from the conceptual frameworks of the respondents (Morley 1992: 185; Ritchie & Lewis 2003: 22; Bryman 1988: 8, 2001: 18; Morley & Silverstone 1991: 148; Babbie & Mouton 2001: 272). Thus I used qualitative methods – focus group interviews and individual in-depth interviews – in which respondents spoke about what they liked about Muvi TV news, what they gained from it and how they used the information it provided in their everyday lives. I also used qualitative thematic/content analysis for Muvi TV and ZNBC’s main evening news in order to give an overview of the kinds/varieties of their news stories. This overview also provided me with material I used during focus group interviews. Interviews were the main tool for data collection and followed a combination of semi-structured and unstructured questions (Fontana & Frey 1994: 365). Due to the nature of the study, I used convenience and snowball sampling methods to select participants. Overall, reception analysis sought to understand the political significance of Muvi TV main news, and how its audiences make meaning in a way which is “contextualised and inextricably integrated within their wider social and cultural practices” (Jensen 1991: 4).

1.5. Thesis outline

This thesis consists of six chapters. In Chapter one which is titled *Introduction*, I have presented the general background to the study, its significance, the objectives and the methods used for data collection for the study.

Chapter two, *Social context of the study*, I discuss the broader context within which the study is conducted. I also present the socio-economic and political descriptions of Lusaka (the scope of study) to locate the significance of its news.

In Chapter three, *Literature review*, elucidates the literature on theoretical debates and perspectives surrounding tabloids, tabloid TV and tabloidisation that inform this study. It discusses the socio-cultural and political significance of tabloid TV news.

The fourth chapter, *Research methodology*, outlines the research methods and procedures employed in the study. It provides the rationale for using qualitative techniques for data collection and analysis. I also explicate how the data was analysed and processed.

Chapter five, *Presentation and discussion of findings*, discusses and presents the findings of the research derived from the qualitative thematic analysis, focus group and individual in-depth interviews, based on the theoretical debates and perspectives explicated in Chapter two.

The last chapter, *Conclusion*, concludes the thesis.

1.6. Conclusion

This chapter has presented an overview of the study, its overall background and its significance. It outlined the objectives of the study and the methods used to collect data. It also gave an outline for the structure of the whole thesis.

In the following chapter, I discuss the broader context within which Muvi TV station emerges as a popular tabloid media platform. I also outline the main features of the context of consumption, Lusaka, which contribute to the political and socio-cultural significance of its arguably tabloidised main evening news.

CHAPTER TWO

Social Context of the Study

2.0. Introduction

This chapter discusses the context of the study. It locates Muvi TV station in the Zambian broadcast media landscape and its context of consumption. It provides a backdrop and a broader context within which Muvi TV news is produced or “encoded” and transmitted by the TV station’s reporters, editors and producers, and received or “decoded” by its audience (see Hall 1980: 128-131). This backdrop is necessary as it provides an understanding of how people decode media messages based on their social context of consumption. Hall’s (1980) decoding/encoding model will be used later in Chapter five to understand people’s meaning making processes. Hall’s model is further discussed in Chapter four.

The chapter first outlines the broader context of Zambia’s broadcast media and its relation to the political landscape, thus providing the background to which Muvi TV station emerges as a popular tabloid media platform. As Fiske (1987: 72) suggests, the socio-cultural and political conditions or the context of consumption of a media text (such as Muvi TV news) becomes part of the meanings and pleasures it offers to its receivers. Thus, an analysis of the media-audience nexus requires an understanding of the wider society in which both media and audience are a part (Curran & Liebes 2004: 18). As such, this chapter secondly discusses the context of reception/consumption of Muvi TV’s arguably tabloidised main evening news by providing the main features and socio-political background of Lusaka, the scope of study.

2.1. The Zambian broadcast media landscape

This section provides a brief background of the post-independence Zambian broadcast media landscape, particularly television. Private TV establishments such as Muvi TV started sprouting during this period. This section locates Muvi TV station within the broader context of this landscape, thus providing the backdrop against which the TV station and its main evening news emerge as a popular tabloid media platform and a “tabloid TV” genre, respectively. It also gives a brief background on the state-owned media, ZNBC.

The Zambian broadcast media terrain, particularly television, has been the monopoly of the state-owned TV station, ZNBC, since independence in 1964 until the introduction of

democratic plural politics in 1991. During the colonial era, the broadcast media was directly linked to the objectives of the British Empire of using the media as a tool for communicating and controlling the governed (Hamasaka 2008: 35). After the country gained its independence, the new African government under the leadership of Kenneth Kaunda simply placed itself in the place of the colonialist government and thus continued to use the mass media as tools to uphold the status quo (Phiri 2010: 135; Jere 2010: 157). Thus, ZNBC, both radio and television was purely used as a government propaganda tool for the United National Independent Party (UNIP) (Kasoma 1997, qtd. in Hamasaka 2008: 37). Consequently, ZNBC's reportorial orientation has been so embedded in the political structure that it unwittingly accords the ruling elite the role of definer of both the content and placement of news items (Banda 1997, qtd. Hamasaka 2008: 37). As such, its discourses are elite in nature, sidelining everyday life media discourses that affect the ordinary people. This mainstream media has hitherto remained mainly accessible to the socio-economically elite, with an almost absence and representation of the masses' discourses and accessibility.

The beginning of the democratic epoch in 1991 ushered in a liberalised broadcast media terrain. Consequently, private TV establishments began sprouting mid 1990s (as will be shown later in this section). Following the ascendancy to power of the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) government under the leadership of Fredrick Chiluba, this saw the promulgation of liberal market policies. This led to the liberalisation and the deregulation of the broadcast media industry. However, Banda (2003: 47) asserts that while the government after 1991 claims to have embarked on a liberalisation of the Zambian economy, there appears to have been a "cautious de-regulation" of the broadcasting regime. For instance, it enacted the ZNBC (Licensing) Regulations Act of 1994 which empowers the ZNBC to be part of the technical committee that screens the applications for a radio or television licence and their applicants (Banda 2003: 40). In addition, while this Act was meant to pave way for the liberalisation of the broadcasting sector, it still vests final authority for the awarding of radio and TV licences in the Minister (who is a presidential political appointee) of Broadcasting and Information Services (MIBS) (Banda 2003: 47).

Further, Banda (2003: 48) also hints on "Christian determinism" in broadcasting regulatory practices, where he asserts the minister awarded the majority of radio and TV licences on the basis of one's religious orientation. This was done in line with Chiluba's declaration of

Zambia as a “Christian nation”. In addition, while liberalising the media industry in terms of ownership, the ruling government still held on to the state-owned media. Consequently, ZNBC hitherto remained its propaganda machinery. It has largely been an elite medium, consisting of discourses that are far been removed or distanced from the livelihoods of the ordinary people, upon which Muvi TV capitalises.

By 2001 when the late President Levy Mwanawasa took over power, nothing much had been achieved with regard to its campaign promises of fully liberalising the media, and relegating power over the state controlled broadcast media (Phiri 2010: 140). Mwanawasa’s “New Deal” government upon ascendancy into power embarked on curbing corruption and fostering developmental programmes. With regard to the media, it did not consider media reform as a matter of urgency (Moyo 2006: 172, qtd., in Phiri 2010: 141). However, due to pressure from media houses, media professionals, lawmakers and civil society organisations, among other stakeholders, by the end of 2002 Mwanawasa’s government enacted the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) Act and the ZNBC (Amendment) Act, while the Freedom of Information Act was (and is) still in limbo (Phiri 2010: 142). It is during this period that a steady growth of private TV stations such as Muvi TV took place.

Considered as major achievements for the broadcast media, the IBA Act is aimed at providing for independent regulation of the broadcast sector, promote a pluralistic and diverse broadcasting industry (Jere 2010: 158). It provides for the creation of an independent body to oversee the issuing of licenses to people intending to enter into broadcasting (Makungu 2004: 65). The ZNBC (Amendment) Act provides for the transformation of the state-owned ZNBC into a genuine public service broadcaster and introduce TV licences for the viewing public to help fund the corporation’s public service mandate (Banda 2009: 59). It also provides for the ZNBC board to be appointed by the National Assembly, thereby removing the ministerial powers of appointment (Makungu 2004: 65). However, these pieces of legislation have not been fully implemented hitherto. So far, only TV licences have been introduced. Banda (2009: 58) notes that an earlier attempt to set up boards for the IBA resulted in a prolonged court case, which ended up with the Supreme Court ruling that the minister responsible for information and broadcasting services has a say in the selection of board members before their names can be ratified by Parliament. Thus up till now, the state has not yet facilitated the ratification of the board for both the IBA and the ZNBC Acts to

oversee its operations. MIBS continues to be the *de facto* issuer of broadcasting licenses, acts as a regulator of the media sector and oversees the operations of ZNBC (Banda 1998: 109-111; 2003: 47). Consequently, under this elusive deregulation of the media, MIBS employs a deliberate administrative procedure of limiting private TV stations' coverage area to provincial proximities in an effort to maintain the national geographic and market hegemony of ZNBC (Banda 2003: 47, 2006a: 21). As such, it can be argued the regulatory framework remains hostile towards private (TV) broadcast companies. This has stunted the growth of private broadcast media nationwide. It is against this backdrop that Muvi TV station emerged in 2003. Its broadcast coverage area was initially confined to Lusaka city, not until 2009 when it was granted nationwide coverage, and thus became the first private TV national broadcaster. Its owners challenged government's administrative strategy of confining and limiting private TV stations' broadcast areas, in that there is no such law which prohibits them (private TV stations) from going nationwide. In addition, government has taken advantage of the elusive legal acts mentioned above to muzzle/gag private TV stations as will be shown later in this chapter (see Debeljak 2010: 9). The next section discusses the current private broadcast media terrain, locating Muvi TV's development.

2.1.1. Private television broadcasting landscape in Zambia: a brief outline

At the time of writing this thesis, nothing has changed with regard to the broadcast regulatory landscape since Rupiah Banda took over power after the untimely death of Mwanawasa in 2008. The two main partially implemented pieces of legislation – the ZNBC (Amendment) Act, 2002; and the IBA Act, 2002 – still provide for the legal and regulatory framework for the broadcasting sector in Zambia. There is currently silence over the full implementation of these pieces of legislation and the Freedom of Information Bill in the media fraternity.

The development of private broadcast television stations has been rather slow due to prohibitive administrative strategies employed by MIBS to restrict such media to provincial proximities as explained above. The slow rate at which TV licences are issued by the state and the enormous cost and licence fees needed to incur in establishing a television station are also contributing factors (Banda 2006a: 22). This is also compounded by the fact that the “country is so economically backward that advertising revenue is hard to come by” (Banda 2006a: 23). Nonetheless, the deregulation process embarked upon since the early 1990s, has

witnessed a steady rise in a number of both free-to-air and satellite subscription-broadcasting services, some of which have taken a nosedive. For instance, free-to-air TV stations such as Omega TV and CASAT TV emerged at the beginning of 2000, but have collapsed due to legal and political interference (by the then “New Deal” government) for the former, and due to lack of financial sustainability for the latter (Banda 2006a: 22). Further, some satellite subscription such as GTV also plummeted in 2009 sighting the global economic crisis.

The current players in the broadcasting field include, free-to-air television provided by ZNBC, ZNBC TV 2, Muvi TV, Mobi TV, TBN, CBC TV, and CB TV; and satellite subscription is provided by MNET/DSTV, My TV and Muvi TV. The subscription Digital Satellite television (DSTV) administered by MultiChoice Africa is the first (international satellite) television station to enter the broadcast media in Zambia in the mid 1990s (Banda 2006a: 21). It offered alternative entertainment programming from that of ZNBC, but largely accessible by the elite middle class who could afford the technology that came with it. In order to stay afloat in the commercialised media environment, ZNBC entered into a partnership with South Africa’s Electronic Media Network (M-NET) to set up a joint venture called Multichoice (Z) Ltd., with the former holding 30% shareholding, while the latter the other 70% (Banda 2003: 45). The partnership entailed ZNBC’s access to MNET satellite channel thereby giving it greater penetration into remote parts of the country (Banda 2003: 45). It also meant ZNBC’s use of M-NET’s “open time” programmes (mostly American programming) for its broadcast schedule as a way of giving ZNBC’s viewers a variety of programmes (Banda 2006a: 21). Hampered by expensive decoding technologies, satellite television is considered an elitist medium targeting an affluent audience, thus sidelining the majority public such as the working class, who have no capacity to purchase such technological gadgets (Banda 2006a: 21). In addition, private satellite TV is so foreign and entertainment-oriented with little or no political content relevant to Zambia, so much that the state does not pay much attention to its potential to engender dissent and critical political discourses (Banda 2006b: 23).

In terms of private television free-to-air, Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) is the first private free-to-air TV station established in 1998 (Banda 2003: 46). This evangelical-Christian television station is an extension of America’s TBN, set up to broadcast religious

programmes. However, government's domineering power has also extended to TBN, in that it (TBN) currently repeats ZNBC TV main evening news on its channel.

Further, the other private TV stations are recent entrants which emerged after 2005 – Mobi TV (broadcast in Lusaka only) began its broadcast early 2006, CBC TV (Lusaka broadcast only) and CB TV (Ndola broadcast only) in 2008. These TV stations are too new to warrant any analysis, and are still trying to achieve comparable viewership figures in Lusaka. Their main means of survival is based on advertising revenue, and are still struggling to dislodge the ZNBC TV channel from its dominance in the market (Banda 2006a: 22). In addition, a highly competitive media terrain, has led to a further alienation of working class discourses from elite mainstream media such as ZNBC. This alienation finds prominence on Muvi TV. Muvi TV station has gradually taken away a huge chunk of ZNBC's audience share. This is discussed in detail in the next section.

2.1.2. Muvi TV station

As mentioned above, the growth of private TV broadcasting has rather been very slow. Banda (2006a: 24) asserts that politically, television attracts greater state regulation than either radio or newspapers. This is because the state is keen to see fewer competitors to ZNBC TV channels who might also peddle critical oppositional discourses.

Muvi TV station is a locally owned private, commercial free-to-air and satellite TV station. It has one channel and broadcasts on a digital terrestrial platform (Banda 2009: 54). It was established in 2002, and began its broadcast in 2004 within the confines of Lusaka city. However, in 2009 it was granted nationwide coverage, as will be explained below. It broadcasts 24 hours daily. It boasts of 65% local production programming and that its local news is becoming a reference point in the lives of its viewers (Muvi TV 2010). Its news is arguably tabloid TV genre as it gives preference to human-interest stories, with its purportedly "hard" news presented in a more lurid, personalised and sensationalised manner. The station claims that in March 2005 it had a viewership of 84 % of Lusaka's population, with 54 % of these viewers preferring it to other TV stations (Banda 2006b: 102; Muvi TV 2010). It currently boasts of 83% viewership rating of Lusaka viewers compared to other TV stations, including ZNBC (Muvi TV 2010). Even though its viewership seems to cut across social classes, the working class and middle class aspirants account for the majority of its

audience. These social groups are concentrated in Lusaka's high-density residential suburbs. These areas are faced with socio-economic problems such as low levels of education; high rates of informal employment, poor water and sanitation, amongst others (see CSPR 2011). Muvi TVs' tabloidised main evening news capitalises on such, thus paying more attention to micro-politics which account for its most news stories. As such, these stories predominantly appeal to ordinary people's everyday lived experiences. As indicated in Chapter one, the TV station has become a "crowd puller" in Lusaka, "imbued with greater believability than ZNBC", the public broadcaster (Banda 2009: 63, 65).

Muvi TV has faced political victimisation from government through MIBS since inception (See Phiri 2010: 138). One example of such victimisation occurred in mid 2009, when My TV, a privately owned satellite pay-TV provider, bought content broadcasting rights from Muvi TV station. The Minister of Broadcasting and Services Lt. Gen. Ronnie Shikapwasha issued a statement threatening to revoke Muvi TV's license as it was allegedly abrogating its license contract by broadcasting countrywide through My TV (African Press Organization 2009). Shikapwasha pointed out that My TV was also contravening its license by providing a platform for Muvi TV's restricted broadcasting license to extend their services countrywide. However, both Muvi TV and My TV contended that they were operating within the confines of their licenses, as there was no such law that prohibits buying of content broadcasting rights (African Press Organization 2009). My TV argued that due to the demand for local content on its satellite TV by the local subscribers, it saw it fit to partner with Muvi TV to broadcast some of its contents. Government later remained silent on this issue and Muvi TV continued its partnership with My TV.

At the end of 2009, Muvi TV station was granted a licence to broadcast nationwide after several previous attempts to do so were denied, ostensibly based on political grounds and the need for government to maintain ZNBC's nationwide monopoly. As mentioned earlier, the TV station challenged governments' administrative strategy to limit private TV stations coverage areas to specific areas, pointing out that there is no such law that pertains to this. It also contended that it (Muvi TV) had met the requirements regarding the capacity to broadcast nationwide (Muvi TV 2009). Prior to this, there were calls from other parts of the country for Muvi TV to decentralise its operations, resulting in the company setting up a news gathering bureau in Kitwe, on the Copperbelt Province (Banda 2009: 63). Thus, for the

first time in Zambian broadcasting history, Muvi TV has become a *de facto* private national broadcaster, alongside the main national public broadcaster, ZNBC, which hitherto monopolised the broadcasting airwaves countrywide. Further, Muvi TV has since been rolling out to areas outside Lusaka on the digital terrestrial feed (allAfrica 2009). For satellite viewers in remote areas, Muvi TV has devised a plan of subscription fees priced at almost two dollars a month, making it much cheaper than other pay TV providers like M-NET.

2.1.3. ZNBC vs. Muvi TV

Since its fulltime broadcast in 2004, Muvi TV has been a source of stiff competition for ZNBC. Consequently, because of this competitive terrain, ZNBC launched a second TV channel – TV2 – in January 2010 to be dedicated to commercial programming, in order to win back the audience it has lost to Muvi TV (Jere 2010: 161). However, even though TV2 carries local stories on its main evening news, its political news is government oriented, which is later repeated on ZNBC TV1. Thus, people associate TV2 with the latter as propaganda machinery for the ruling elite.

ZNBC is still government controlled due to the lack of the full implementation of the IBA and ZNBC (Amendment) Acts of 2002 which provide for its independence from political domination. It has hitherto functioned as a tool of the ruling elite, to help it bolster the people's support, purportedly for the economic and social development of the country, but in reality, to help it remain in power. In this light, a state regulated broadcasting sector, or public service broadcasting is often perceived as unresponsive to popular demand due to domination by a small elite (power bloc) (Curran & Seaton 1991: 461). In ZNBC's case, the public broadcaster and its main news is seen to be dominated by the ideas and opinions of the elite, promoting their interests and crowding out dissenting views that are in conflict with the state's political agenda (Jere 2010: 154; Banda 2009: 51, 2003: 48). It tends to give preference to "government activities" masqueraded as national issues (see Phiri 2010: 134; Jere 2010: 154). As Obonyo (2010: 27) notes, "in Africa the electronic media over the years has been little more than the microphone of the leader, an extension of the president's pulpit".

In contrast, Muvi TV is considered as a broadcaster for the people. Anchored on the values of tabloid journalism, Muvi TV's main evening news privileges micro-politics of everyday life that mirrors its (working class) viewership majority. In this light, it has gained popularity as a

TV station that covers human-interest stories to which the common man relates to and identifies with. Thus, as compared to ZNBC TV news, it can be argued that Muvi TV news conforms to Fiske's (1992: 48) classification of tabloid news, in that its

Subject matter is generally that produced at the intersection between public and private: its style is sensational, sometimes sceptical, and sometimes moralistically earnest; its tone is populist; its modality fluidly denies any stylistic difference between...news and entertainment.

From the broadcast media landscape overview discussed above, it can be seen that the "tabloid TV" news genre in Zambia is a relatively recent phenomenon. It is against this backdrop that Muvi TV station and its main evening news emerge as an example of tabloidisation or the "tabloid TV" news genre.

The next section discusses the context of consumption of the study, taking cognisance of the fact that the socio-cultural and political context of media consumption are intertwined with the lived experiences of the media consumers, thus has a bearing on the meanings derived from the media texts. Thus, it discusses the socio-political background of Lusaka city, the context within which Muvi TV news is received and consumed.

2.1.4. The context of consumption: socio-political and economic background of Lusaka

Lusaka, the focus of study is the capital and largest city of Zambia. Administratively, Zambia is divided into nine provinces – Lusaka (where Lusaka city is located) Copperbelt, Western, Eastern, Northern, Luapula, Northwestern, Southern and Central – which are subdivided into 73 districts (Banda 2006: 5). The population in Lusaka city is estimated at 3.1 million in 2007 by the World Health Organisation (WHO) (World Health Organisation 2010). But a recent 2010 Census preliminary report indicates that its population is at 2,198,996 (CSO 2011). According to the CSO (2011) report, Lusaka has recorded a population growth rate in the period 2000 (1,391,329 people) to 2010 (2,198,996 people) of 4.7 percent. This is attributed to the high levels of rural-urban migration, as migrants seek to benefit from urban-based employment opportunities, due to mine closures and retrenchments on the Copperbelt province, among others (World Bank 2002).

According to the World Bank report (2002), about 70 percent of Lusaka's population lives in poor, unplanned settlements. The report records that there are 37 informal settlements in and

around Lusaka, made up of nine old sites and services settlements and 28 squatter settlements. It notes that these are located predominantly to the north, northwest, and south of the central business district (CBD). Basic data on all 37 settlements indicate that informal employment is estimated at about 65 percent and unemployment at 28 percent (World Bank 2002). Household income for almost 70 percent of households is less than ZK150, 000 per month (US\$40) (World Bank 2002). These factors point to the fact that Lusaka constitutes a large urban working class community as compared to other provinces. It is this audience community to which Muvi TV largely responds and appeals to.

In addition, the inequality between the rich and the poor in Lusaka is so polarised. The presence of heightened asymmetries of income and wealth redistribution are so prevalent, that the high density urban areas in Lusaka are characterised by entrenched poverty exacerbated by the city's high cost of living (JCTR 2010). This is also reflected in the kind of media discourses found in elite mainstream media, which are divorced from the realities of the lives of the ordinary people. Thus, the culturally and politically elite with social capital tend to have easy access to formal media. Subsequently, Muvi TV tends to tap into, and address media discourses that relate to the lived experiences of the working class majority. This particular audience is technically considered as economically unprofitable by advertisers. Of interest though, is the fact that its popularity amongst such a social group has purportedly resulted into meaningful advertising revenue (see Muvi TV 2011). Steenveld and Strelitz (2010: 544) assert that the reasons behind the popularity of tabloid media should not be confused with the commercial agenda that drives the publishing or broadcasting companies. They assert that although popular tabloid media's rhetoric may be that of "serving the people" (as Muvi TV purports), this rhetoric coincides with their commercial imperative of profit making – gained precisely from those very people (the working class), who were formerly not regarded as significant enough to constitute a viable "market segment" (Steenveld & Strelitz 2010: 544).

Further, unlike other provinces, Lusaka Province has the most diverse range of languages spoken within its confines because they are not all indigenous to the province (CSO 2002: 43). However, Bemba and Nyanja are the most predominant vernaculars. About 52 percent of Lusaka's population speaks Nyanja (a lingua franca chiefly based on Chewa and Nsenga from Eastern Province) as the predominant language of communication followed by Bemba

pegged at 15.5 percent of Lusaka's population (ibid.). The CSO 2000 report indicates that only 6.6 percent of Lusaka's population speak English, which is the official language. Nyanja and Bemba are the dominant vernacular languages used in various spheres of socialisation by the working class community. It is these main vernacular languages which are incorporated in Muvi TV programming, as compared to the English dominated ZNBC (Banda 2009: 61, 62).

Further, Lusaka's socio-political significance stems from the fact that it is the centre of most of Zambia's economic and administrative activities, epitomised by the presence of the National Assembly, the State House, all government ministries' headquarters, most conglomerate and non-governmental organisations. It also houses all diplomatic missions, international organisations, all political parties' headquarters, industrial and commercial entities (Lusaka City Council 2010). Lusaka is also the biggest media market in the country. Muvi TV station's headquarters are also located in this city, amongst other television media houses such as ZNBC, TV2, Mobi TV, TBN, and CBC TV.

In addition, the physical locations of study – Ngombe compound, Kabanana site and service and Chipata compound – are one of the densely populated urban residential areas, characterised by low adult literacy and income levels (see CSPR 2011). Most people are involved in informal and low-income jobs such as – office cleaners, domestic workers, street vendors, casual workers, bricklayers, unprofessional hair stylists, *inter alia* – who account for the working class majority (see UN Habitat 2005). These informal settlements are highly diverse and include tenants, landlords, entrepreneurs and the destitute (UN Habitat 2005). These areas are also faced with acute problems such as poor drainages, sewage, water and sanitation, poor roads and waste management and high crime rate, among others (UN Habitat 2007). Muvi TV news tends to tap into these issues which are of relevance to the working class. As such, in view of the above discussion, it is this socio-political context, which contributes to Muvi TV's political significance, its popularity and appeal to the majority working class audience. This audience seemingly has different political inclinations than that of ZNBC (this is evidenced by the fact that the ruling party presidency has over the last elections lost in the capital city) (see SAPA 2007).

2.2. Conclusion

This chapter has provided the backdrop and a broader context within which Muvi TV emerges as a popular tabloid media platform. It briefly delineated the post-independence broadcasting media landscape, bringing to the fore how the political, throughout different regimes, “becomes enmeshed with the legislative” (Banda 2006: 24). This was seen in how government has administered deliberate administrative strategies to ensure the political and market dominance of ZNBC TV, while limiting private free-to-air TV stations’ broadcasting coverage to provincial proximities. It also highlighted governments’ “cautious” and elusive deregulation of the media which coupled with the latter, has contributed to the snail’s pace growth rate of private free-to-air TV stations. However, against all odds, Muvi TV has rapidly risen in popularity since its first broadcast in 2004, predominantly amongst the working class community. It capitalises on media discourses that affect and relate to this social group, which is alienated from mainstream media discourses. The chapter also discussed the context within which Muvi TV’s arguably tabloidised news is consumed by its audience. It provided the main features of Lusaka city as a politically contested terrain, which inevitably contributes to Muvi TV’s socio-cultural and political significance. The next chapter discusses various theoretical and normative debates surrounding popular tabloid media and tabloidisation, which underpin the study.

CHAPTER THREE

Literature Review

3.0. Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I have discussed the economic and socio-political context of the study. I have stated the significance of Lusaka for this research, and delineated the media landscape of Zambia. I also gave background information on Muvi TV station. This chapter presents the literature review surrounding debates on tabloids, tabloid TV, tabloidisation and tabloid journalism, locating the study in the field of media and cultural studies. I will review and evaluate various theoretical debates and frameworks to ascertain the rapid rise in popularity of Muvi TV's tabloidised main evening news among Lusaka viewers, particularly the working class.

This chapter is divided into four sections. I will first give brief genealogies and define the concepts – “tabloid”, “tabloid TV”, and “tabloidisation”. This section will define these concepts in order to understand the phenomenon to which Muvi TV news arguably conforms and contributes to its popularity. The second section will highlight the normative debates surrounding these phenomena. It highlights criticisms against tabloidisation but also bring to the fore the cultural salience and facets of popular tabloid media, to which Muvi TV arguably belongs. These salient issues include the “ritual function” and the potential to serve as “carnavalesque” sites for resistance against cultural and political hegemony. The chapter also explores literature defining popular tabloid media's role in constituting imagined communities, as well as the ways in which the melodramatic appeal of tabloid media may inform a particular understanding of political news. The third section will discuss theoretical perspectives (relating to audience theories, which will be elaborated at the beginning of in Chapter four) on the ways in which politics are framed in popular media, such as Muvi TV. These perspectives will provide a framework within which the study will later analyse the meanings that viewers gain from Muvi TV news, how these meanings resonate with their everyday lives and contribute to particular political views. The main aim of this section will be to delineate the political significance of popular tabloid media such as registering of audiences' disillusionment with formal politics; serve as platforms on which ordinary people can engage, debate and contest with the power bloc; have their voices heard; and foster democracy by keeping the powerful accountable. These theoretical perspectives will inform

this study's analysis of how Muvi TV's tabloidised news may enable its news audience to engage in their civic duties. The following section will first discuss the definitions of "tabloid", "tabloid TV" and "tabloidisation" as found in the literature. Brief genealogies of these terms will be given and some of the ambiguities associated with these terms explored.

3.1. "Tabloid", "tabloid TV" and "tabloidisation"

Several scholars have pointed to the ambiguity associated with the terms tabloid, tabloid TV and tabloidisation (Biressi & Nunn 2008: 7; Morton 2009: 5; Sparks 2000: 10; Turner 1999: 60; Conboy 2006: 212; McNair 2000: 4; Gripsrud 2000: 38). Succinctly, tabloid refers to a particular *format*; tabloid TV denotes a *genre* of television; and tabloidisation refers to a *process* associated with the lowering of standards of forms of media (Bird 1992: 8, 2009: 41; Gripsrud 2000: 37; Conboy 2006: 212). These will be used as working definitions for the study. This section endeavours to define these terms in detail which will later be used in the analysis to locate and understand Muvi TV (tabloidised) news and its appeal particularly to the working class majority.

3.1.1. Tabloids: a brief genealogy

The genealogy of tabloids is traced back to the 1830s in the United States (U.S.) beginning with the penny press (Thussu 2007: 17; Sparks 2000: 18; Schudson 1978: 23). For instance, the copies of Benjamin Day's *Sun*, established in New York in 1833, sold for one penny when all other newspapers were sold for six cents (Thussu 2007: 17). The paper is said to have originated the concept of human-interest news with its extensive coverage of "scandalous tales of sin, the immoral antics of the upper class, and humorous tales of mishaps of all kinds", crime and police news (Örnebring & Jönsson 2004: 287-288; Thussu 2007: 17). With its "bettering influence on issues of great importance to the poor and disenfranchised in the society of its time", the *Sun* mainly appealed to the rising American working classes (Örnebring & Jönsson 2004: 290).

Further, the decline in journalistic standards (attributed to tabloidisation) is associated with "yellow journalism", which was a result of the period of competition between Pulitzer and Hearst (Örnebring & Jönsson 2004: 289; Bird 1992: 16; Thussu 2007: 17; Conboy 2002: 56). It brought about a significant set of shifts in typographical layout such as: screaming

headlines written either in red or black for attention grabbing; and stories written in the readers colloquial speech patterns with a conversational tone (Conboy 2006: 5). This made tabloids to be more precise, simple, direct, lively and more consistently populist in tone. As such, these textual and style of language shifts, made the papers to be more attractive, easily and quickly digestible. The yellow journalism epitomised everything that “good”, acceptable, and professional journalism is not, as it largely reflected sensationalist and scandalous reporting, often characterised by staged events or half-truths (Thussu 2007: 17).

In London, the “new journalism” carried some of the characteristics of its counterpart “yellow journalism” in the U.S. in the 1880s (Sparks 2000: 19; Conboy 2002: 93- 101). For instance, the *Pall Mall Gazette* considered as the forerunner of “new journalism” in the London press, was characterised by a lighter approach and dramatisation of news, especially crime (Örnebring & Jönsson 2004: 290). Its sub-editor W.T Stead piqued the readers’ interest and curiosity by using drastic, sensational and even lurid headlines (Conboy 2002: 96; Örnebring & Jönsson 2004: 290). This “new” journalism demonstrated “a shift away from parliamentary and political news to sport, gossip, crime and sex” (Wiener 1988: 54, qtd., in Sparks 2000: 19). This brief historical overview will be used later in this chapter to illustrate the correlation between the characterisation of tabloids and that of the tabloid TV genre.

3.1.2. Tabloid: definition

The term “tabloid” is ambiguous. It is originally derived from the word “tablet”, and a number of scholars point out to the lack of consensus with regard to its meaning (Biressi & Nunn 2008: 7; Bird 1992: 8; Morton 2009: 5; Sparks 2000: 10; Gripsrud 2000: 37). In the strictest sense, it refers to a format, a newspaper half-sized to that of a standard broadsheet (Bird 2009: 40; Gripsrud 2000: 37; Sparks 2000: 10). However as Bird (2009: 40) asserts, the term has over the years broadened from this definition to refer to the presentation and style of news (tabloid journalism) which is formulaic in kind, personalised and sensationalised (subsequent sections will discuss tabloid journalism further). This style of news has colourful narratives and is distinct from what is perceived as traditional, standard, and “objective” styles of journalism (Bird 2009: 40). In this regard, the term is quiet often used in a derogatory and pejorative sense, which has led to a number of debates and scholarly writings on the perceived “lament”, “crisis”, threat or even “moral panic” in response to what is

perceived as the “tabloidisation” of contemporary media culture (Biressi & Nunn 2008: 7; Zelizer 2009: 7; see Langer 1998; Turner 2010). The next section focuses on this.

3.1.3. Tabloidisation: definition

Like tabloid, several scholars have also indicated the lack of consensus on what “tabloidisation” clearly means (Bird 2009: 41; Sparks 2000: 12; Turner 1999: 60; Conboy 2006: 212; McNair 2000: 4; Gripsrud 2000: 34; Dahlgren 2009: 153). Serazio (2009: 13) asserts that it “represents something of a ‘shape shifter bugaboo’ referring to many things all at once and seemingly threatening from equally all angles”. Bird (2009: 39) points out that the problem with the term which achieved wide currency since the 1980s, is that “like ‘obscenity’, everyone seems to recognise it when they see it, but no one really agrees what it is”. In this vein, Gripsrud (2000: 34) posits that tabloidisation is itself a “tabloid term, more of a journalistic buzzword than a scholarly concept”. Like the term “tabloid”, it is often used pejoratively, thus, it is a process that connotes decay, particularly, a lowering of journalistic standards that ultimately undermines the ideal functions of mass media in liberal democracies (Zelizer 2009: 7; Gripsrud 2000: 34; Gans 2009: 17; Bird 2009: 41). With its association with trivialisation, it is also referred to as the deterioration of the informational and intellectual content of the news media (Örnebring & Jönsson 2004: 283). As such, it is seen as an inexorable-move toward the tabloid-style by “real” journalism, thus described as an “indecent, unrepressed, wanton form of journalism” (Serazio 2009: 13; Zelizer 2009: 7). For others, tabloidisation denotes a “dumbing down” of media content, the refinement of a commercialised journalism which prioritises the desires of advertisers to reach large audiences above all other concerns (Conboy 2006: 206; Turner 2004: 76; Esser 1999: 292).

Despite the ambiguity of the term, some scholars such as McLachlan and Golding (2000: 76-77), Sparks (2000: 10), Bird (2009: 41), and Gripsrud (2000: 37) have delineated some of the main characteristics attributed to tabloidisation. For instance, McLachlan and Golding (2000: 76-77) propose an integrative examination of tabloidisation that incorporates different levels of analysis – range, form and style. First, *range* is traditionally understood as a variation in terms of contents, including less space devoted to information and less attention to “hard” and foreign news with an emphasis on entertainment-led values (See Sparks 2000: 10; Uribe & Gunter 2004: 390). Thus, there is a perceived increased trivialisation of the news media, both

in print (tabloids) and broadcast (tabloid TV genre), were entertainment news such as celebrity lifestyles and gossip, and human-interest stories have become the bedrock of news media crowding out “serious” news (Bird 2009: 41). Second, *form* refers to the use of more simplistic formats, traditionally measured as increased visuals and decreased text and a personal mode of address in the print tabloid media (see Bird 2009: 41). In the tabloid TV genre, as will be discussed in detail later in this chapter, there is greater emphasis on eye catching, fast-paced, dramatised visuals, shorter sound bites and shorter scripts. Finally *style* denotes an increased personalisation in the coverage of news which is attributable to both print tabloids and tabloid TV genres. Style coupled with form has resulted in writing techniques in both mediums, which have moved away from longer, analytical writing or scripting, to shorter, punchier sentences, in a more narrative, personalised, rather than analytical mode (Bird 2009: 41). Gans (2009: 24) refers to these attributes as “audience incentives” that are tailored to capture and retain the curiosity of those with no time for lengthy, in-depth analyses (see also Morton 2009: 6). In addition, it can be seen that the tabloid TV genre and tabloids are often associated with their appeal to the “lowest common denominator”, the “ordinary” people, particularly, the working class (Glynn 2000: 6). In summary, Franklin (1997: 13) uses “newszak” to describe the tabloidisation of the news media in which,

Entertainment has superseded the provision of information; human-interest has supplanted the public interest; measured judgement has succumbed to sensationalism; the trivial has triumphed over the weighty; the intimate relationships of celebrities from soap operas, the world of sport or the royal family are judged more “newsworthy” than the reporting of significant issues and events of international consequence.

Furthermore, instead of tabloidisation, Gans (2009: 17) repositions it with a more constructive and less derogatory term – popularisation – understood as shifts in format and content, not only restricted to media, but a common social process that occurs in different spheres of society, with the ability to strengthen the news media and bolster civic information and thus democracy, instead of diminishing it and depoliticising the news media audience.

The next section focuses on outlining a brief genealogy of the tabloid TV genre.

3.1.4. The genealogy of the tabloid television genre

In the U.S., the development of “tabloid TV” genre is often associated with the success of the supermarket tabloids in the 1980s (Bird 1998: 34, 1992: 67). With an overwhelming audience response to the U.S tabloids’ offerings of human-interest stories, celebrity gossip and lifestyle advice, U.S tabloid TV shows such as *A Current Affair*, *American Journal*, *Inside Edition*, *Extra*, flourished (Bird 1998: 34; Calabrese 2000: 45). Bird (1998: 34) argues that the issue of tabloidisation is most stridently debated in the field of television news, as news merges into talk shows and “reality” programming (see also Dahlgren 1995: 47-62). In the late 1980s, tabloid TV shows began competing vigorously with local and network news. In response, the major TV networks – ABC, NBC, and CBS – moved progressively into the tabloid genre, with its emphasis on human-interest, celebrity, scandal, and crime (Calabrese 2000: 45; Bird 1998: 34). The local news evolved into a popular hybrid of traditional hard news and gossipy chat, with an emphasis on the charisma and image of newscasters (Dahlgren 1995: 48). It further launched co-hosts who engaged in informal and humorous chitchat among themselves (as is the case with Muvi TV newscasters), elaborated weather reports and increased human-interest stories (Calabrese 2000: 45; Bird 1998: 34; Dahlgren 1995: 48). Bird (1998: 42) notes that American local TV news has hitherto remained a “litany of unconnected, usually violent images, often of events that have no immediate relevance to the region in which they are shown....”

Further, the success of the “TV versions of supermarket tabloids” is also attributed to changes in the technological and regulatory conditions (Bird 1998: 42). Glynn (2000: 27) partly points to Murdoch as an apt figure and pioneer of the tabloidisation of U.S journalism, particularly in television, and in part, the growth of independent broadcasting stations under Reaganism deregulation policies. The appearance of cable TV and VCRs coupled with the widespread of deregulation policies, led to an intense competitive media environment, leading television news at the mercy of ratings as never before (Calabrese 2000: 45; Bird 1998: 34). In this vein, Calabrese (2000: 48-49) outlines some of the recent technological innovations in local TV news production that are aimed at enhancing stations’ competitive strategies (some of which also relate to the case of Muvi TV news) as follows:

Increasingly, local reporters are sent great distances, and at great expense to their stations, to gather on-site reports. Typically, the coverage lacks any depth of analysis

and perspective and suffers from the worst symptoms of parachute journalism. The greatest demand is for live shots; fast pace, new venues – market forces have led to a speeded-up style of reporting. Stories are told with fast visual pace, ever-shorter sound bites, and increased use of computer graphics. Because so little information can be transmitted in shorter clips and bites, reporters must be more interpretive and more emotive than they once were. Also, any local news stations have similar hotlines or routinely use amateur video footage. Particularly bizarre, shocking, or legitimately newsworthy footage may be shown on local stations across the country.

This scenario bears resemblance with the changes in Sweden's broadcasting landscape. In his analysis of the tabloidisation of the Swedish broadcasting media, particularly television, Dahlgren (1995: 55) argues that "tele-tabloids" such as *Altuellt* (the main evening newscast on Channel One) has increased dramatically the number of visual cuts and sound bites, which in turn has reduced the average time for each news item. Considerable attention is paid to the decor of the studio, with quality video graphics, and a new personal style on the part of the news anchor (Dahlgren 1995: 55). Further, Sweden's TV4's evening main news *Nyheter* has a "relaxed and personal style, with the reporters' role enhanced; its language is a bit more vernacular, the visuals more audacious, and the dramaturgy somewhat less predictable" (Dahlgren 1995: 60). Despite being tabloidised, Dahlgren (1995: 60) praises *Nyheter* in that it offers ways of coping with daily life, and has a more friendly tone than many of the more sensationalist and lurid tabloid news found elsewhere. He asserts that it heavily personalises its news stories, thus "giving political stories concrete human faces" (Dahlgren 1995: 60).

In view of this brief tabloid TV genre history, scholars such as Ehrlich (1996: 3) argue that the tabloid format and a practice of tabloid-style of sensationalism in the news media and the human fascination with human-interest, crime, sex, and gossip transcend time and place. However, this media imperialistic notion has been challenged by some ethnographic research which point to the "glocalisation" of the tabloid genre (see Wasserman 2010: 44-57; Thusu 2007: 20-25). As such, the nature of the tabloid TV genre in northern industrialised countries is not entirely identical to those manifested in Africa. Even though there may be some similarities, the genre tends to be localised and adapted to suit local tastes and preferences of a particular social context. For instance, whereas the American tabloid TV genre is epitomised by a plethora of celebrity (in the entertainment industry) news, gossip and scandals, in Zambia, where celebrities are not taken seriously, and thus rarely given such prominence, the genre largely privileges melodramatic tales and micro-politics of everyday

life (such as poor water and sanitation, poor waste management, among others) that largely affect the working class majority.

In Africa (particularly Southern Africa), the tabloid TV news genre can be considered as a recent phenomenon emanating in the late 1990s. This may be attributed to the continued dominance of state/public television media, harsh competition for advertising revenue, and unfavourable regulatory media environments that would allow for the establishment of private free-to-air TV services, among others. For instance, South Africa's only private free-to-air TV station – *e.tv*, was launched in 1998. The TV station is said to carry a “plethora of low popular culture items” such the satirical *Late Night News* with Loyiso Gola (which presents current affairs – political, social, economic – in a mockery manner), “imported wrestling shows, *Walker, Texas Ranger*, soft porn and action movies” (Duncan & Glenn 2010: 59; Duncan 2009: 70). It is said to have brought a “new vitality and informality to television news”, and largely appeals to young black South Africans (ibid.). Its use of direct English and informality is said to resonate with its audience, thus accounting for its popularity (ibid.).

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the most popular local private TV stations *Mirador TV* and *Molière TV* were established in 2006 (Frère 2011: 192). Frère (2011: 195) argues that the popularity and wide success of local/community news on *Molière TV* is owed to the fact that they are seen as reflecting the daily lives and concerns of Kinshasans (of the lower class), particularly everyday life on the streets of Kinshasa, though often at the expense of professional journalistic ethics. She asserts that *Molière TV* is both populist and popular. It shows lurid pictures of dead bodies and displays victims of rape and murder on its news. Some of the victims are later assisted by members of the community, as such, it has convinced Kinshasan viewers that presenting their daily problems publicly on TV could help solve them (Frère 2011: 196). This is a case where the TV station is viewed as the “most reliable Congolese media in the field of advocacy” (ibid.).

In Zambia, the tabloid TV genre is introduced in the television broadcasting industry with the launching of Muvi TV station on the airwaves in 2004. This will be discussed in detail later in the paper, to show how its main evening news which is broadcast at 18:30 pm is tabloidised in nature. It gives preference to a lot of local human-interest news stories on

topics such as crime, drug trafficking, traffic accidents, scandals, riots/staged protests, rape, defilement, sports, and entertainment. The next section endeavours to define “tabloid TV”.

3.1.5. Tabloid TV definition

“Tabloid television” or “tele-tabloids” are seen as the result of the tabloidisation of television programmes particularly the news media (Langer 1998; Dahlgren 1995). Glynn (2000: 6) asserts it is the “electronic descendant of the déclassé tabloid newspapers...” In line with this, Byerly (2007: 44) asserts that contemporary tabloid TV stems from a longer standing tradition of tabloid’s approach to privilege an informal communicative style, with its emphasis on personalities, style, storytelling skills and spectacles in order to attract and entertain the audience for commercial gains (see also Thussu 2007: 3). Ehrlich (1996: 8) also asserts that tabloid TV’s sensational story titles, lurid scripting, and heavy reliance on the visual motifs are equivalent to the screaming headlines, flowery and emotive writing, and shocking photos of the tabloid newspapers.

However, Biressi and Nunn (2008: 2) contend that contemporary tabloid TV “naturally have their own distinctive characteristics which owe less to the tabloid press and more to developing technologies, commercial pressures, globalising imperatives and changes in social attitudes”. In the same vein, Glynn (2000: 162-163) outlines various ways in which print tabloids and tabloid TV genres differ, focusing more on their formal properties, such as: tabloid TV is endowed with a semiotic richness that the print lack; it also has hypervisibilisation (the advantage of the visual image) in contrast to its print counterparts; and it exploits the “sense of liveness and participatory immediacy” (such as through text messaging), which is less in the print form.

Further, “trash TV” is sometimes synonymously used to denote tabloid TV by its critics, mostly the elite (Gripsrud 2000: 39; Bird 1992: 107). However, Gripsrud (2000: 39) contends that the latter is used in a much broader way than the former. He asserts that “trash TV” such as professional wrestling shows, and reality shows such as the *Jerry Springer* show, *inter alia*, have in common a “degree of shock aesthetics, or a particular pronounced sensationalism”, and thus the two are not the same. This confusion points to the lack of a clear definition of tabloid TV, but as a form of popular media, Glynn (2000: 2) asserts,

It entails a variety of intertwined discursive formations that occupy a mobile space where journalism and popular culture intersect. It includes a highly mixed bag of typical forms, thematic concerns, image repertoires, tones of voice, and narrative patterns, many of which are traditional for television but have been reworked in specific and sometimes striking ways.

The tabloid TV genre also further extends and applies to television news programmes, such as Muvi TV news. Succinctly, tabloid TV news is what Langer (1998) has categorised as the “other news”. It comprises of all kinds of news such as human-interest stories of various kinds, earthquakes, traffic accidents, and fires, not directly related to politics, central social issues, and the economy (Langer 1998: 7-9). Though he has not included crime news (Langer 1998: 33), however, it can be argued that it is also part of the “other news”. This is because crime is seen as a “staple ingredient of tabloid news”, which is about the “daily reconstruction of moral sensibilities on a personal and even private plane” (Grabe 1997: 926; Gripsrud 2000: 38). Gripsrud (2000: 38) asserts that this negatively, defined “residual category” even though consisting of both “hard” and “soft” news which provides vital social information, nonetheless; provide material that is less important from an informational point of view. For Dahlgren (1995: 62) however, “there is not a difference in *kind*, only one of degree, between tabloid news and the more traditional news formats”.

Further, tabloid TV news entails what is perceived as a “too close inter-discursive relationship of ‘serious’ news, current affairs and entertainment discourses, both as juxtaposition, as a mode of address, and as a reversal of traditional agenda priorities” (Branston 1993: 351; see also Glynn 2000: 7-8).

Having outlined the background to the denotative and connotative references attached to tabloid, tabloid TV and tabloidisation, the next section endeavours to conceptualise “tabloid journalism”. The journalism profession has been labelled as the culprit for the tabloidisation of the news media.

3.1.6. Conceptualising tabloid journalism

Tabloid journalism is not perceived as a new phenomenon, and carries with it some of the negative connotations attributed to tabloid TV/tabloids as shown in the discussion above (Hartley 1996: 43; Glynn 2000: 229; Örnebring & Jönsson 2004: 283). Even though tabloid journalism may be popular, its status as “real” journalism is often questioned, and thus it is

often expurgated as a kind of journalistic “other”, a third journalistic form that falls outside of both “quality” and “alternative” designations (Langer 1998: 8; Wasserman 2010: 28). Fiske (1992: 48) points to the difficulty in clearly stating the defining characteristics of tabloid journalism in that its:

Subject matter is generally that produced at the intersection between public and private: its style is sensational, sometimes sceptical, and sometimes moralistically earnest; its tone is populist; its modality fluidly denies any stylistic difference between fiction and documentary, between news and entertainment.

In the American context, Kitch (2009: 29) describes contemporary tabloid journalism as predominantly “saturated with tears and trauma”, meant to shock and provoke strong emotional responses among the news media audience. She asserts that these kinds of stories such as war deaths, disasters, dreadful accidents, and shocking murders, elicit “sympathy and outrage, sorrow and moralising”, exist at the intersection of hard news and poignant features, found in both elite as well tabloid TV news media (2009: 30).

Further, like tabloid TV, tabloid journalism is sometimes synonymously referred to as “bad” or “trash” journalism by its (elite) critics. For instance, Ehrlich (1996: 19) chides that tabloid journalism is “muckraking not as a means toward a higher end, but as a means unto itself, with the occasional piece of ‘real’ news, served up to help mask the pungent odour of its main stock in trade”. However, Gripsrud (2000: 40) provides a useful parameter within which to distinguish this genre in that, within the field of popular journalism falls the subcategory “tabloid”, which also contains the subcategory “trash” as the lowest point of the popular. Consequently, he asserts that tabloid journalism can sometimes be perceived as useful and relevant popular journalism, while trash with its antithetical stance towards the professional ethos of journalism, “may at best be brutal entertainment” (ibid.).

The theorisation of journalism as constituting a “continuum” ranging from one axis of concentration on private spheres of life (such as scandals, sports, and entertainment), to another on public life issues (such as politics, economics, and society), provide ways of salvaging tabloid journalism from completely being expurgated as “bad” or “trash” journalism (Sparks 2000: 10-12; see also Eide 1997: 177-180, Eide & Knight 1999: 522-530). It shows the blurry boundaries that exist between tabloid journalism and “serious” journalism, making it difficult to distinguish the two (Sparks 2000: 12). And thus, it

illustrates how binary oppositions of “good” and “bad” journalism yield less in accounting for, and categorising various forms of popular journalism (Sparks 2000: 12; Wasserman 2010: 78). Sparks (2000: 12) observes that “serious” journalism scores high on the “public” axis, while tabloid journalism scores high on the “private” axis (2000: 12). He however asserts that there are relatively few newspapers (and television news programmes), that can be located entirely at the “serious” or entirely tabloid ends of the continuum: even serious papers (and TV news programmes) have at least some sports and entertainment, while most tabloids cover public matters albeit in a sensational manner (Sparks 2000: 16).

In this regard, drawing on Eide’s (1997: 177-180) notion of “service journalism”, Steenveld and Strelitz (2010: 531, 534-536) suggest that tabloid journalism should be understood as “a hybrid bundle of texts which exist along a continuum ranging from ‘trash’ to service journalism”. The latter refers to the way the news media provide their audiences with “news you can use”, that is, information, advice and help about the problems of everyday life (particularly grievances and risks) (Eide 1997: 177; Eide & Knight 1999: 522). As such, Steenveld and Strelitz (2010: 535) assert that tabloid journalism is a “complex genre which should not be seen as a singular entity, but rather as part of a continuum of public communication that reflects ordinary people’s very different life worlds” or the “micro-politics” of everyday life in contemporary society (See Fiske 1989b: 56-57). As service journalism, tabloid journalism can contribute to the “functioning of a democratic polity through the promotion of social critique of government policies and issues of public concern ... albeit at an individual level” (Steenveld & Strelitz 2010: 543). Muvi TVs’ main news, while “tabloidised” in content and approach, can be understood as having this political significance in its focus on news stories that mostly affect its working class audience. These include stories on poor delivery of services like drainage, sewerage and water reticulation by local governments, which are presented in a lurid and personalised way.

The focus of the next section is the discussion of some of the normative debates surrounding the phenomena which will later be used in the analysis to understand the socio-cultural significance of Muvi TV news.

3.2. Normative debates on tabloid TV/tabloidisation

From an elitist perspective, popular media such as tabloids/tabloid TV are castigated for pandering to the “lowest common denominator”, as the lowest form of media culture, a profane besmirching of a “serious” and “objective” press (Conboy 2006: 6). Such perspectives emanate largely from critical theorists who contend that tabloid journalism eschews the mission of public edification and “Enlightenment” (Glynn 2000: 7). It is apparently often perceived as ignoring issues of official political issues and government policy making in favour of superficial political scandals. It is chastised for lowering the standards of public discourse, thereby, perceived as a threat to democracy as it depoliticises and breeds cynicism amongst the news media audience (Örnebring & Jönsson 2004: 283) (these arguments will be discussed in detail in the next section). Further, speaking from a critical political economic perspective, Ehrlich (1996: 2) asserts that tabloid media evidently exist because they make money in a highly commercialised media environment. Others contend that tabloid TV is “politically cynical and morally conservative”, as it emphasises “the corruption, self-interest, and greed of the politically powerful and the upper class, while simultaneously promoting traditional religious, blue-collar values” (Grabe 1997: 941).

However, a number of scholars largely from the cultural studies tradition such as Fiske (1992), Bird (2009), and Hartley (1999) provide a more nuanced but critical position of looking at tabloid journalism, from an ethnographic point of view (see also Örnebring & Jönsson 2004; Biressi & Nunn 2008; Sparks 2000; Gripsrud 2000). For instance, Örnebring and Jönsson (2004: 293) assert that tabloid journalism, both in its worst excesses and in its most subversive moments, represent the failure of other societal institutions, such as traditional mainstream news media outlets and political organisations, to address adequately issues of vital concern to ordinary members of the public. For example, writing on Bulawayo’s popular tabloid newspaper *uMthunywa*, Mabweazara and Strelitz (2009: 129) assert that its popularity is “symptomatic of a deeper social malaise in Bulawayo and Matebeleland at large – precisely the alienation experienced by the readers”. They argue that the paper deals with issues that resonate with the daily lives of its readers that have hitherto remained marginalised from mainstream media discourses (*ibid.*). Thus, considering the current diverse media landscape, as Dahlgren (2009: 155) assert, tabloid journalism can address and incorporate segments of society often marginalised and excluded by “highbrow

formats and discursive registers”. He further asserts that tabloid journalism can “engage, evoke, and provoke, serving as catalysts for discussion and debate” (ibid.). And thus, by positioning itself in different ways as an alternative to the issues, forms and audiences of the journalistic mainstream, Örnebring and Jönsson (2004: 283) argue that it can be seen as serving the public good far much better than journalism considered more professional. It is for this reason that they contend that the standards and values by which contemporary journalism is judged needs to be reassessed to take into account the possibility and potential of tabloid journalism to expand public discourse (Örnebring & Jönsson 2004: 294).

Furthermore, popular tabloid media is seen as “both liberating and inclusive, encouraging scepticism and rebellion against authoritarian systems” (Johansson 2007: 42). Örnebring and Jönsson (2004: 294) envisage that the 21st century is fundamentally faced with a political problem where large groups of disenfranchised people such as the working-class do not feel included in the body politic. In addition, this group of people do not feel that their issues and concerns are addressed by traditional political institutions or the prestige news and media outlets. In this regard, Fiske (1989b: 117) observes that the popularity of tabloid news is “evidence of the extent of dissatisfaction in a society, particularly among those who feel powerless to change their situation”.

Speaking from an ethnographic and anthropological perspective, Bird (2009: 42) also views contemporary tabloids as “unimaginable outside other historical and cultural phenomena”. She asserts that certain attributes of tabloidisation such as narrative mode of writing that engage the senses and emotions of the audience, resemble oral or folklore culture (Bird 2009: 44). Subsequently, it allows them to interrogate morality, explore values and connect with others, thus constituting an “imagined community” (Anderson 1991). An “imagined community” according to Anderson (1991: 37) was enabled by printed texts read by citizens of various demographics and backgrounds, with a sense of a common and shared identity, that is, of belonging to a common entity, the nation, with common interests and language.

In line with the above, stories that eulogise the everyday experiences of the people tend to affirm, and serve the “communication ritual function” highlighted by Carey (1989) where collective identities are affirmed, and beliefs are upheld in a society. Gripsrud (2000: 285) asserts that as “ritual forms of communication”, tabloid news media “reproduce and instil in

all (their) members a sense of community and identity, of shared conditions, values, and understandings". In this way, Gripsrud (2000: 297) argues that tabloid journalism can subsequently provide the audience with what Bird (1998: 48) describes as "news we can use". This refers to how popular tabloid news can provide existential, moral help, and support in the daily struggles of the viewers to cope with an everyday life marked by the uncertainties characteristic of modernity (Gripsrud 2000: 297). This explains part of tabloid news' success and popularity among disfranchised members of the public, as it tends to side with them, striving towards developmental goals, expose wrongdoing and propagate social justice (Wasserman 2010: 73).

Scholars like Bird (2009) argue that a move which makes news more accessible, and relevant to the daily lives of the people, does not necessarily equate with a decline in news media standards or the commercial imperative of the news media organisations (Bird 2009: 42; Steenveld & Strelitz 2010: 544). In the same vein, Dahlgren (2009: 154) asserts that the elements of storytelling, sensation, trivialisation, emotionalism and personalisation often lamentably used as feature tropes of tabloidisation, are not problematic *per se*. He asserts that the focus should instead be on the ideological implications or the moral of the story, that news story frames offers, taking into account the context of prevailing political issues or atmosphere. For instance, the popularity of tabloids in South Africa is partly attributed to the alienation felt by largely the low-income groups such as the working-class from formal politics (Steenveld & Strelitz 2010: 542; Wasserman 2010: 71).

Further, drawing on Bakhtin's (1984) notion of the carnival and the carnivalesque, scholars such as Wasserman (2010: 72), Fiske (1989b: 81), Bird (1998: 35), Langer (1998: 160) have pointed out that tabloid news media's highly personalised, overtly subjective approach may be read as a means of resistance against authority. According to Bakhtin (1984: 7-9), the carnival was characterised by laughter, by excessiveness, by bad taste and offensiveness, by the spectacular and by degradation. These characteristics of the carnival culture are said to be typical of tabloid media, especially of tabloid journalism/tabloid TV news, with its connection with "disreputable popular tastes for melodrama, scandal, sexual intrigue" *inter alia* (Glynn 2000: 15). Fiske (1989b: 84) asserts that in line with the spectacular which "exaggerates the visible, magnifies and foregrounds the surface appearance, and refuses meaning or depth", tabloid news, with its mocking, ironic, irreverent style, is actually

subversive, allowing the “people” to challenge the hegemony of the “power bloc” (see also Langer 1998: 160; Wasserman 2010: 72). However, Bird (1998: 35) expresses scepticism whether this carnivalesque reading of tabloid style is actually typical of most consumers of tabloid TV news, arguing that she does not perceive tabloid consumption as essentially subversive or transgressive. She argues that the audiences are active, selective readers, who approach all kinds of news with the unstated questions such as what they will gain from the news, and how this news relates to them, and so on (Bird 1998: 35; see also Wieten 1998: 110). Still, scholars such as Wasserman (2010: 30) argue that tabloid media can open up the possibility for a counter-hegemonic discourse to emerge at the point of consumption, when readers/viewers engage with tabloid news and read it in such a way as against the grain of official narratives and dominant meanings. For Fiske (1989b: 101), the “carnival may not always be disruptive, but the elements of disruption are always there”. He further asserts that “it may not always be progressive or liberating, but the potential for progressiveness and liberation is always present” (see also Dahlgren 1998: 94).

Another carnivalesque characteristic of popular tabloid media which may account for their popularity is in the kind of language employed. This is done in a “systematic way to build a composite version of the vocabulary and style of their ideal average reader” (Conboy 2002: 162). This form of language largely departs from official, standard language, and thus enabling various oral cultures to find resonances between it and their own speech patterns, and to find pleasures in relating the two (Fiske 1989b: 106-107; Conboy 2002: 170, 2006: 13; Ehrlich 1996: 10). For instance, a number of scholars such as Wasserman (2010: 128) and Mabwezara and Strelitz (2009: 129) have shown how print tabloids in Africa, particularly in South Africa and Zimbabwe, respectively, capitalise on the use of vernacular, colloquialism and a simplified English language which mirrors the ordinary people’s idioms. Wasserman (2010: 128) found that language (Afrikaans) played a determining factor in consuming tabloid papers amongst (Afrikaans) readers. Similarly, Mabwezara and Strelitz (2009: 129) observe that the vernacular language (IsiNdebele) used in the tabloid newspaper, uMthunywa, influenced the reader’s attraction and sharpened the tabloid form of the paper.

Although the scholars mentioned in the above discussion provide a nuanced understanding of tabloid journalism, they do not rule out the possibility of legitimately critiquing tabloid journalism or out rightly imply an uncritical celebration of popular preferences (Steenveld &

Strelitz 2010: 544; Wasserman 2010: 75). For instance, concerns have been expressed with the focus of tabloid journalism on sensationalism in that: stories such as on violent crimes and deadly accidents and murders are presented as unanticipated exceptions rather than foreseeable consequences of chronic social and political problems, they seduce the audience with the notion that “feeling fixes everything” while obscuring and eliding causes and details; context is sacrificed at the expense of emotion, patriotism is employed in order to foreclose serious public discussion of social and political upheavals (Kitch 2009: 36; Serazio 2009: 14; see also Morton 2009: 9). Wasserman (2010: 86, 111-116) points out that tabloids can play a negative social and political role by engaging in reactionary politics, such as xenophobia, hate speech, and other stereotypical attitudes, as well as the individualisation and sensationalising of popular disillusionment to the point of defining tension and resistance (see Kaarsholm & James 2000: 196). Subsequently, Steenveld and Strelitz (2010: 544) argue against an uncritical celebration of tabloid media, and points to the need to understand how they have come about, and what dimension of the social structure they either challenge or help hold in place.

The following section discusses the relationship between popular media (such as tabloids/tabloid TV genres), politics and democracy. This will be used later in the analysis chapter to establish the political significance of Muvi TV news.

3.3. Popular media, politics and democracy

In contemporary liberal democracies, the mass media system is said to play a central role in the interactions between the state or the ruling government and the society (Dahlgren 1995: 2; Klein 2000: 177). The media act as a discursive space and a conduit through which both the “input” and the “output” of the political system are delivered (Dahlgren 1995: 2). The perceived role of the media in liberal democracies in most African countries, such as Zambia, have their own socio-political specificities which can be traced back to the epochs of political independence from colonial rule and the democratic dispensation. For instance, in Zambia (like many other African countries) after independence in 1964, the media – especially broadcasting – was seen as an essential and critical component in fostering national development, unity and the promotion of national culture and identity (see also Willems 2011: 47; Article 19 2003: 10; Ogola 2011: 125). This saw a situation in which state media

monopolies such as ZNBC TV and radio, were formed by government. Control of the broadcast industry was justified partly on such grounds, and in part, due to the scarcity of airwave frequencies (a justification which has now been overcome by technological developments such as digitalisation and convergence). These monopolies largely served the political interests and agendas of the ruling government, a trend which has hitherto remained the same (Phiri 2010: 136; Makungu 2004: 5).

The era of liberal democracy and plural politics in the early 1990s brought about key liberal policies such as, free and fair elections; existence of multiple political parties; respect for human rights such as freedom of speech, association and press; and the liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation policies, which were propagated and seen as critical for the well functioning of a “healthy” democracy (Jere 2010: 149; Phiri 2010: 138; Willems 2011: 47). The role of the state is seen as fostering and creating an enabling environment in which various media can flourish (thus creating diversity and plurality in media which advance democratic ideals) and turn formerly state media (such as ZNBC) into public service broadcasters (Phiri 2010: 140). The media are supposed to be a “watchdog” guarding against public office/funds abuse and hold government officials accountable, thus acting as a “fourth estate” (see Makungu 2004: 1). Thus this ideal role of the media is often assessed based on the extent to which media-state relations in African countries such as Zambia, have met the key principles of the liberal democratic model (Willems 2011: 47). The media are supposed to serve as conduits and are critical in the social construction of political public opinion and particularly, television is regarded as one of the most contested and popular provider of public information due to its political appeal to the ruling élite (Frère 2011: 190; Thusu 2007: 2; Dahlgren 1998: 90; Papacharissi 2009: vii).

The elitist notions of the ideal functions of journalism in liberal democracies, emanate from the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School and Habermas’ notion of the “public sphere” in which rational deliberations of public issues and formation of public opinion is supposed to be formed (Habermas 1989: 22-24). Thus this school of thought argues that rationality is lost as popular media such as tabloids/tabloid TV increasingly dominates popular consciousness, offering only a “consumerist culture to satisfy false, commodified desires” (Livingstone & Lunt 1994: 14). Further, from a critical political economy point of view, this is seen as a result of the commercialisation and the deregulation of the media, which nurtures tabloid

media in which audiences are largely addressed as consumers instead of citizens (Teer-Tomaselli 1996). By addressing audiences as consumers, popular media is said to cause public cynicism, as the audience sees no need in contributing to the macro political sphere when they can sort out their issues by purchasing goods or services (Chibita 2011: 274). In this regard, critical political economists argue for a public service media whose central credo is that broadcasting is publicly owned or regulated so that it serves the public good rather than private and commercial gains (Curran & Seaton 1991: 471).

In contrast, the liberal pluralists argue against this view in that a public service approach is unresponsive to popular demand and sidelines the majority of the “ordinary” people. It is dominated by the minority cultural and political elite and vulnerable to government pressure and interference as it relies on state-sponsored privileges or state funding (Curran & Seaton 1991: 460). ZNBC has been castigated on such grounds in that it largely serves the interests of the ruling government, whereas Muvi TV is seen as catering for the working class and serving their geo-sociological publics much better than ZNBC (Banda 2009: 61-62). Thus the liberal pluralists argue for a free market approach in which media is supposed to serve the interests of the people at large (who exercise sovereignty control), preventing market dominance and sustaining competition by breaking (state media) monopolies. However, critical political economists have criticised liberal pluralism for putting too much faith in the free market approach. They argue that the commercialisation of the media leads to concentration, conglomeration, more entertainment aimed at profit making, and therefore less diversity and debate (Golding & Murdock 2000: 73; See Herman & McChesney 1999; McNair 2000; Mosco 2009).

Further, it is envisaged that an informed citizenry who can make rational decisions on the basis of the kinds of information available, especially in the realm of politics, is required for the well functioning of democracy (Livingstone & Lunt 1994: 10). Journalism is seen as critical in this regard as it plays the role of dissemination of information relevant for the public to make informed political and economic decisions (Steenveld & Strelitz 2010: 540-541; Wasserman 2010: 63). Thus the widespread concerns about popular tabloid media’s culture infiltration of the media, most especially the news media, as it diverts people’s attention from “serious” matters to “non-serious” issues that are irrelevant to making one a politically informed citizen (Langer 1998: 2; Wasserman 2011: 2). Sparks (2000: 28)

therefore points to the limitations of tabloid media discourses for political participation, arguing that:

It is not simply that tabloids and tabloidisation constitute a threat to an existing democracy; rather they make its practical functioning an impossibility because they are unable to provide the audience with the kinds of knowledge that are essential to the exercise of their rights as citizens.

It can be said that the critics of tabloid journalism often draw on the ideal functions of journalism in a democracy as stated above (Steenveld & Strelitz 2010: 540-541).

In view of the above discussion, many of the concerns expressed about the influence of tabloidisation on the news media are grounded in a conventional and long-standing hostility to popular culture (Turner 1999: 63). Tabloids and/or tabloid TV genres are understood as a form of popular culture because they offer popular meanings and pleasures (Fiske 1989b: 126; Glynn 2000: 9-10; Wasserman 2010: 14, 47). Popular meanings are constructed out of the relevancies between them and everyday life characterised by social pressure and struggles (Fiske 1989b: 25, 1989a: 3). Popular pleasures are derived from the production of these meanings by the “people who are subordinated, from the power to produce them” (ibid.). The manifestation of popular culture is seen in tabloid media’s reflection and eulogising of ordinary people’s everyday lived experiences. It is said to “simultaneously defamiliarise the ordinary and banalise the exotic” (Glynn 2000: 7).

In the African context, the tabloid TV genre, perceived as one of the forms of popular culture manifested through music, television, and theatre is regarded as vital and critical in societies (Wasserman 2010: 47). This is because most governments are still reluctant in relinquishing their control over mainstream state media and turn them into public service media, a situation which is seen as a “distant ideal”, and “not a working reality” (Raboy 1996: 22; see Chibita 2011: 273). The state media, sometimes referred to as public service broadcasters are very crucial for the survival of the political elite, as they are a medium through which governments (party in power) propagate their policies and are used as a platform to counter criticism from other media (Ndlela 2007: 69; Heuva *et al* 2004: 114). Thus they are seen as mostly accessible and catering for the minority political elite. In addition, the highly commercialised private media are said to focus more on the economically elite who are considered profitable and seen as targets by many advertisers (Willems 2011: 50). For instance, South Africa’s

private free-to-air TV station, *e.tv*, targets the audience which falls in the LSM 5.5 cutting out the majority of the ordinary people with low incomes who fall under lower LSMs² (Duncan & Glenn 2010: 54). Thus, popular culture and media such as tabloids/tabloid TV genres are perceived as vital conduits through which the ordinary people have sought to engage, debate and contest the power bloc (Willems 2011: 48; see also Kaarsholm & James 2000: 195). Chibita (2011: 272) also acknowledges the political importance of popular media as spaces for political contestation, allowing alternative voices to be heard as well as holding rulers and powerful members of society accountable. In this regard for instance, Willems (2011: 55) notes that during the economic crisis in Zimbabwe, Zimbabweans had restricted access to alternative views of the economic crisis apart from the mainstream media. Thus they resorted to expressing themselves through a range of popular and informal media necessitated by new media technologies such as the internet and mobile phones which were also used to circulate dissenting voices. Further, Mano (2011: 92) also argues that musicians through their popular music are able to articulate political and non-political matters in ways that resonate with the everyday life concerns of many Africans. Thus “popular music plays a journalistic role by communicating messages and meanings, often of a political nature, that are not fully represented in the mainstream mass media” (Mano 2011: 93).

Because of their association with the state, formal mainstream media enjoys minimal legitimacy among citizens (Willems 2011: 50; Duncan & Glenn 2010: 52; Frère 2011: 189). In Zambia for instance, ZNBC is largely perceived as a state propaganda machinery, thus majority of the ordinary people (as will be shown in the analysis chapter) are sceptical about any news about government, even though it may be positive (Phiri 2010: 147; Banda 2009: 45). Muvi TV’s tabloidised news is attached with “greater believability” by the ordinary people as it is perceived to be politically neutral and transparent (Banda 2009: 65). Similarly, DRC’s public TV broadcaster, RTNC, is seen as unattractive by the ordinary people as it is associated with the ruling party, giving it extensive coverage (Frère 2011: 189).

² “South African audiences are defined according to a market segmentation tool called the Living Standards Measure (LSM). This segments the South African market according to people’s living standards, using criteria such as salary levels, degrees of urbanisation, and ownership of cars and major appliances. LSM 10 is the highest, and LSM 1 the lowest. South African audiences are skewed towards the lower LSMs” (Duncan & Glenn 2010: 297).

Other scholars largely writing from the cultural studies perspective have shown that popular media such as tabloids can perform a positive role in a democracy. For instance, in his ethnographic research on South African tabloids, Wasserman (2010: 86) points out several potential political roles that they play, roles that were confirmed by his respondents. He asserts that tabloids,

Provide an alternative public sphere where citizenship and democratic politics are debated and negotiated on other terms; can resist the exclusion of certain groups from mediated public discourse and contribute to “media citizenship”; can assist their readers in coping with life in a democratic society; fosters democracy by keeping the powerful accountable; and provide their readers with guidance in terms of participating in formal political processes. (Wasserman 2010: 86)

Mabweazara and Strelitz (2009: 119-121) also found that the Zimbabwean tabloid uMthunywa constitutes an alternative sphere of resistance for the people of Matebeleland against hegemonic discourses represented in the mainstream media. Thus evidently, one of the political functions of tabloid media is to “create an alternative space where readers can validate their identities as citizens, engage in debate, and confront social, political, and economic hierarchies even through emotion and sensational narratives” (Wasserman 2010: 91; see also Hermes 1998: 160). Thus, these most reviled aspects of tabloid media can serve to “draw historically subordinated members of the public into the realm of the political in a way that formal political debates and mainstream formal media are unable to” (Wasserman 2010: 91). It can also register audience’s disillusionment with formal politics (Wasserman 2010: 141; Strelitz & Steenveld 2005: 266; Bird 1998: 47). As such, Sparks (1988: 216) argues, the political and economic power in a stable democracy is so far removed from the everyday lives of the ordinary people such as the working-class, consequently, they have no interest in monitoring it in the mainstream media (such as ZNBC), hence their turn to popular tabloid media (as exemplified by Muvi TV).

Further, tabloid media are seen to be very selective in their inclusion of political or wider public information. As indicated above, they are said to eschew the coverage of “traditional” macro-politics, paying more attention to the “micro” politics that are relevant to the daily lives of the working class. This is also because “politics” in tabloid media is understood as the negotiations of asymmetrical power relations of everyday life rather than the policies, procedures, and rituals associated with formal politics (Wasserman 2010: 91; Fiske 1989b:

56). In this regard, in their findings on a South African tabloid newspaper, the *Daily Sun*, Steenveld and Strelitz (2010: 542) argue that

Even though the tabloid covered stories which deal with issues traditionally defined as “political”, it focused more on their micro rather than macro aspects – for example, blocked drains, taxi wars, food price increases, and the failure to deliver government-provided housing.

Thus tabloid media are said to cover “traditional” politics when it fits in with the wider patterns of their coverage or when it concerns major issues which can be covered in sensational and personalised manner (Conboy 2006: 10).

The perception of tabloid media as vital components in democratising the public sphere, has led to several scholars such as Gripsrud (2000), Dahlgren (1995, 1998) and Livingstone and Lunt (1994) to propagate for the broadening of what the terms “democracy” and “citizenship” entail (see also Wasserman 2011: 3; Willems 2011: 46; Steenveld & Strelitz 2010: 544). For instance, Dahlgren (1998: 91) argues that democracy is not only about official politics, but also has to do with the “norms and horizons of everyday life and culture” which the tabloid media tend to address more effectively than the mainstream media (see also Livingstone & Lunt 1994: 10). In the same vein, Gripsrud (2000: 44) asserts that democracy includes “cultural life; various forms of reflection on existential matters or the human condition; the formation, maintenance, deconstruction, and reformation of identities; and so on”. Relating to the African context, Willems (2011: 46) proposes a radical view of “democracy as dissensus” as this will enable to account for alternative and popular forms of media such as tabloid genres as means through which citizens in Africa receive information on political issues or contest power elites. Further, for a democratic culture to thrive, Dahlgren (1995: xii) asserts that citizenship must become an “integrated element of the self”. He therefore argues that it must be understood not just as a formal or legal category, but also as a “dimension of people’s composite identities” such as identity formation, personal identification, and emotional evaluation, *inter alia*, thus constituting “one of a number of subject positions that people can negotiate and assume in given situations” (Dahlgren 1998: 92; see also Hermes 1998: 160). In the same vein, Steenveld and Strelitz (2010: 544) suggest the broadening of the sphere of politics and an understanding of citizenship to include those aspects of life formerly categorized as “private”, domains which relate to the ordinary

people's experiences and mostly addressed by the tabloid media genres. Therefore, as Chibita (2011: 277) contends, there is need for a:

Clear differentiation of what kind of citizenship (and by what means) tabloid media can engender, and how this can be harnessed to maximise a diversity of voices and representations in the popular media in the Africa context.

3.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reviewed literature concerning theoretical arguments and normative debates on the cultural and political salience of popular tabloid media. In doing so, I have provided the theoretical basis and rationale on which the rapid rise in popularity of Muvi TV news amongst Lusaka's working class can be examined. I began by conceptualising tabloid as a format, tabloid TV/tabloid journalism as a genre which extends to other media forms through the process of tabloidisation. This discussion highlighted the generic tropes associated with the style-form-content of tabloidised news (such as expressed by Muvi TV news) such as sensationalism, personalisation, a focus on human-interest news, "micro" politics than "serious" political news, in accounting for its popularity amongst the ordinary people. I then discussed the normative debates on tabloid news genre in order to comprehend its social and cultural significance. This was followed by a discussion on the relationship between popular media, politics and democracy, to understand the political significance of tabloid TV news genre. The main thrust of this study is to investigate the popularity of Muvi TV main evening news amongst the working class in Lusaka, by examining the meanings viewers gain at the point of consumption, how these meanings resonate with their everyday lives, and the news' political significance in Zambia's democracy.

Having discussed and delineated the theoretical rationale, the next chapter discusses the methodology and the methods used to collect data for the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Research Methodology

4.0. Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the theoretical underpinnings of the study, which inform the study's findings discussed later in Chapter five. This chapter highlights the research design and procedure implemented in the study. It also discusses the sampling procedures employed. It first discusses reception analysis, which is underpinned by a qualitative approach. This primarily informs the study's methodological framework. The chapter briefly delineates the historical development of audience studies in an attempt to situate the emergence of reception analysis. The chapter later discusses the choice of a qualitative approach to the study, taking into consideration the epistemological and methodological issues. It then discusses the overall research design and the data collection methods employed. It also delineates the limitations of the study and the data analysis procedure.

4.1. The development of reception analysis

Reception research is understood primarily as an “empirical study of the social production of meaning in people’s encounter with media discourses” (Schröder et al. 2003: 147). Meanings are determined socially, that is, they are generated as the socially and contextualised decoder engages with a media text (Fiske 1987: 80). This is in line with the study’s aim of examining the meaning making processes of Muvi TV news viewers, and how the meanings derived from its content are appropriated in their everyday lives. As indicated earlier in Chapter one, reception research is predicated upon the qualitative approach, which ultimately informs this study (Jensen 1988: 4). Reception analysis stems largely from a combination of three main historical audience research traditions – effects research, uses and gratifications research and cultural studies – which will be discussed in subsequent discussions with an effort to situate this study within its methodological framework. These research traditions are briefly discussed in order to give a historical overview of the emergence of reception analysis.

4.1.1. Effects research: Passive audience

Mass communication research, in which the mass audience was perceived as primarily passive, thus being vulnerable, malleable and hence controllable by mass media output, arose

in the early 20th century in the United States of America (USA) and Europe (Biressi & Nunn 2008: 282; see also McQuail 1997: 17; Fourie 2007: 232). The mass media was seen as a potential danger, wielding so much power to control and have effects – moral, political and economic – on the mass audience (Silverstone 1990: 173). The assumption was that the mass media could affect an audience in some direct or measureable ways. As such, McQuail (1997: 17) notes, early mass communication research mostly focused on the effects of the mass media on the mass audience, with an emphasis on potential harm, especially on children and young people.

Traditionally, “effects research” entailed an exposure of randomly selected groups of individuals to various brief, and experimental media outputs with a view to comparing particular group responses (Livingstone 1998b: 15). As such, this approach was purely experimental, in which causal claims were tested and established via controlled exposure and random group allocation (ibid.). In short, the orientation of effects research can be summarised by asking, “what the media do to audiences”, thus assuming textual power over audiences (Schröder et al. 2003: 35; Strelitz 2000: 37). This tradition rooted in mass society theory emanated in the 1920s, in an environment in which there was a growing concern with the media’s social and political role in the democratic process and in ensuring commercial viability and effectiveness of multinational business entities (Schröder et al. 2003: 35). It also emerged amid concerns and interests in how the media helped in facilitating the political propaganda, particularly of the Soviet Union and Germany (Nazi) during the post-war period (O’Sullivan et al. 1994: 168; Biressi & Nunn 2008: 282). As such, the assumption of a passive and malleable audience had been incorporated into the methods and procedures used to measure and analyse mass audiences and public opinion (Nightingale & Ross 2003: 5). Such research was metaphorically labelled as the “hypodermic needle” and “magic bullet” theories. The media was seen to have direct and immediate effects by “injecting” messages, particularly certain ideas, values and attitudes, directly into their completely defenceless and helpless media recipients (Ang 1990: 157). However, after the 1990s other theories arose such as the “two-step flow” theory of media influence (developed by Katz & Lazarsfeld 1955) dating back from the 1940-1950s and the “agenda-setting” powers of the media, questioning this perspective (Curran & Liebes 1998: 14-16). In the former, the assumption was that media effects are not that direct in influence and impact, but are thus mediated by opinion leaders (see also Fourie 2007: 234-235). In the latter, it was assumed that the media

only sets the pace and range of what to think about, and not telling the audience what to think (see Schröder et al. 2003: 36).

In light of the above, television audience study emerged out of this concept of a mass audience, which was seen as passive. Press and Livingstone (2006: 177) notes that audience members were surveyed, subjects of experiments, treated as atomised, homogenous, vulnerable and exploited members of a mass group. Further, this passive characterisation of the audience was also prominent in the broad Marxist tradition, particularly the Frankfurt School theorists, who assumed the audience as “cultural dupes”, due to their dependence on, and vulnerability to, the play of ideological forces of mass media culture/outputs (Silverstone 1990: 177; Kellner 1995: 29; see also Strelitz 2000: 37). They asserted that the mass audience were helpless victims of manipulation and exploitation by “capitalist media devoted to purveying the loss of any sense of class identity and solidarity” (McQuail 1997: 12; see Bennett 1982: 44). However, due to their primary focus on media effects, these effect research theories could not account for the audience members’ active sense-making process of media outputs (Nightingale & Ross 2003: 5). And this gave impetus to the development of new perspectives that stressed “audience power over media text”, thus assuming an active audience (Strelitz 2000: 37). This is the focus of the next discussion.

4.1.2. Uses and gratification: active audience

The concept and the perception of an “active audience” emanated with the introduction of the “uses and gratifications” (U&G) research in 1950s by Blumer and Katz (1974) (Silverstone 1990: 177; Livingstone 1998: 238). The U&G research is frequently summarised by asking not what media do to audiences, but what audiences do with media (Jensen 2002: 142; Curran & Liebes 1998: 16; Morley 1992: 51). This tradition’s primary premise was the audience’s orientation toward media. As such, its main emphasis is on the “social origins of the media gratifications and on the wider social functions of media” such as information relay, personal identity reinforcement, social integration and interaction, and entertainment (McQuail 1997: 18; Ang 1990: 159; Fourie 2007: 236). In the same vein, Ang (1990: 159) notes that people tend to use the media, with an expectation to derive some gratifications from doing so. She asserts that “these gratifications are assumed to be related to the satisfaction of social and psychological needs experienced by the individual” (ibid.). Further, Morley (1992: 51) notes

that the approach highlighted that different members of the mass media audience may use and interpret media outputs in different ways than those intended by the producers, and other members of the audience. It thus focused on patterns of media exposure and on the gratifications people derived from appropriating various media materials and outputs (Pitout 2009: 391). As such, this perspective stressed the role of the audience in the construction of meaning. The audience was seen as active in their choices of media output, as opposed to a mass of passive, atomised and helpless individuals.

Despite the various shortcomings of uses and gratification theory as pointed out by scholars such as Morley (1992: 52-53), Livingstone (1998: 15) and Schröder et al. (2003: 39), the theory nonetheless importantly highlighted the fact that media recipients are active and not passive in appropriating media contents/outputs for personal uses and gratifications. This laid the background for the development of reception research in the cultural studies strand with a focus on the ways people interpret and make sense of media outputs within the context of everyday life. As such, reception analysis as developed in this strand made a new departure in studying in-depth the actual interpretive processes through which “media discourses are assimilated to the discourses and cultural practices of audiences” (Jensen 1991: 139). This is the focus of the next section.

4.1.3. Cultural studies: Reception research

Media reception is one of the important projects developed within cultural studies. As indicated earlier, reception analysis is primarily the study of how people make sense of their media experiences as part of their everyday lived experiences and realities (Dahlgren 1992: 5). Thus, reception within cultural studies tradition is seen as an active sense-making process. People are neither perceived as homogenous, nor passive recipients, cultural dupes of media outputs/contents. Rather, within one’s horizons of everyday lived experiences, they are actively involved in interpreting the world and their place in it (Dahlgren 1992: 12). Thus, cultural studies emphasises the definitional and interpretive power of the audience in relation to media outputs. Hallin (1998: 164) notes that reception analysis has discredited simplistic notions of a one-way flow of cultural influence from the media to the recipients.

Further, Nightingale and Ross (2003: 5) note that the cultural turn in audience research had been prompted by earlier calls for the theorisation of popular culture as a context for audience

studies. As such, reception research emphasised the social agency of members of the popular classes, previously deemed as cultural dupes in effects research (Hallin 1998: 164). As such, Schröder et al. notes that,

The same desire to give voice to the perspective of ordinary people underlines the emergence of qualitative reception research of the media within cultural studies. Here the objective was to explore what people do with the media, but – contrary to uses and gratifications research – in a manner that emphasised the signifying processes surrounding the nexus of media and everyday life, and that related these meanings closely to the historical, political and social context in which media consumption takes place. (2003: 42)

In light of the above insights, the foundation of reception analysis is associated with the development of Cultural Studies at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in the 1970s. Of particular importance, is Stuart Hall's seminal work on the "encoding/decoding" model (1982) which heralds the shift from media texts towards the reader as the site of meaning production, embedded in a particular social-historical context. This largely draws on a "culturalist" perspective, according to which media audience's signification and interpretation of media texts can only be understood in relation to their prevailing social context and lived experiences (see McQuail 1997: 19; Strelitz 2000: 42). As such, Hall's model aim is holistic as it tries to highlight that mass communication is a complex, non-linear sense-making process (Hall 1980: 128). It posits that a media text by no means constitutes a fixed structure of meaning, rather it is a "volatile phenomenon resulting from the codes at the disposal of both the producers and the recipients of the text, all of which are steeped in a sea of social meanings and ideologies" (Schröder et al. 2003: 128).

Further, Hall (1980: 134-135) asserts that a media text has an inscribed connotative/hegemonic meaning, that is, a *preferred reading*, produced by the hegemonic framework governing mass media production routines. This *preferred reading* aims at what Thompson (1990: 58-59) refers to as "meaning in the service of power", that is, "they promote socio-central taken-for-granted meanings that serve the interests of the dominant social groups" (Schröder et al. 2003: 128). This aspect highlights the fact that the interpretive or the signification process is embedded in socially structured contexts and processes. These contexts and processes exhibit "systematic asymmetries of power, with regards to the distribution of, and access to, resources of various kinds" including the media (Thompson 1990: 58-59; see Hall 1980: 134). In relation to this, Hall suggests three hypothetical

“decoding positions” from which a television discourse/media text can be interpreted by the consumers/receivers: dominant, negotiated and oppositional (1980: 134-138). The *dominant* reading occurs when a viewer takes the inferred/connoted meaning at face value, and is therefore ideologically dominated by the encoded *preferred* meaning. Within the *negotiated* reading, a viewer exhibits some ambivalence towards the reading of the text, thus, they can accept parts of the media message, while rejecting or opposing some parts of it. The viewer can also make sense of a media text contrary to that *preferred*, rather “within some alternative framework of reference” (Hall 1980: 138). As indicated in Chapter two, Halls’ model will be used later in Chapter five to understand people’s meaning making processes with regard to their appropriation of Muvi TV main evening news.

As can be seen from the above discussion, Hall’s model focused on the nexus between the audience and the text, within a particular context. His approach critically informed by semiotics, emphasises the reading of the text from an audience perspective (see Hall 1980: 133). Most importantly, his model emphasises that the signification process, is influenced by ones socio-historical background and the context of consumption. In addition, it highlights the fact that media texts or “symbolic forms” (Thompson 1990: 59) such as Muvi TV news have no fixed meaning, but are polysemic in nature, that is, they have multiple potential meanings (see Fiske 1987: 15).

Further, Hall’s model heralded the basic conceptual and theoretical framework upon which a number of audience reception studies in the 1980s were based. Some of these remarkable empirical works include Morley’s (1980) *Nationwide* audience study, Radway’s *Reading the Romance* (1984) and Ang’s *Watching Dallas* (1985) (see Livingstone 1998: 242; Jensen 1991: 138). Despite some of the criticisms levelled against Hall’s model as highlighted by scholars such as Morley (1992: 118), the model has been instrumental in laying the foundation for reception studies. The following section summarises some of the essential assumptions of reception analysis.

4.1.4. Reception analysis: summary of its fundamental premises

As pointed out in the preceding discussion, one of the basic tenets of reception analysis is the fact that the encoding (by media producers) and the decoding (by media receivers) of media texts is embedded in specific social and cultural contexts. As such meaning is never inferred

from the media onto the audiences, but is constructed according to the “communicative repertoires” of the media encoders, and interpreted according to the “interpretive repertoires” of the decoders/receivers (Jensen 2002: 167). The range of interpretive repertoires of the receivers draws largely from their own lived experiences, the media text at hand, as well as the particular social context of media use (ibid.). In light of this, reception research is advantageous as it provides an interactive link between text, audience and context (Livingstone 1998: 247; see Press & Livingstone 2006: 176). Jensen (1988: 3) asserts that reception analysis “combines a qualitative approach to media as texts, producing and circulating meaning in society, with an empirical interest in the recipients as co-producers of meaning”. Its main assumption is that the “central locus of analysis is the *interface* between the medium and audience” (ibid: 4). As such, media texts and the decoders are “complementary elements of one area of inquiry which thus addresses both the discursive and the social aspects of communication” (Jensen 1991: 135).

As can be seen from the foregoing discussion, the main aim of reception research is to understand and find out how people make sense of particular media products/contents such as the news, in a contextualised manner. In this study, I focused on Muvi TV’s tabloidised main evening news in order to ascertain how, primarily the working class majority makes sense of this news genre. The approach aimed at elucidating the appropriation of this news into the everyday lived experiences and realities of the viewers. Livingstone (1998: 240) asserts that reception studies “have made *visible* an audience which has hitherto been devalued, marginalised and presumed about in policy and theory” (emphasis in original). In this case, this study is dealing with an audience which has hitherto been marginalised from mainstream TV discourses such as that of ZNBC (see Chapter two). The next section focuses on the research design and procedure implemented.

4.2. Research design and procedure

4.2.1. Choice of research methodology: Qualitative Research

As indicated earlier, this study is principally based on audience reception analysis which is predicated upon the qualitative approach. In line with reception analysis, the development of qualitative research was strongly influenced by the need to understand the meanings that people attach to their own lived realities and experiences, taking cognisance of the social context (Ritchie & Lewis 2003: 22). Thus, qualitative methodology emphasises

contextualised audience study, using qualitative research techniques to collect empirical data derived from the conceptual frameworks of the respondents (Morley 1992: 185). One of its central motifs is that it is concerned with the way in which people being studied understand and interpret their social reality (Bryman 1988: 8). Thus, it emphasises and takes as its departure point the “emic” or “actor”/“insider” perspective on social action (Babbie & Mouton 2001: 270; Bryman 1984: 77). This position takes cognisance of the fact that individuals are continuously engaged in a sense making or an interpretation process of their everyday lived experiences and realities.

Based on this background, the qualitative methodology was considered suitable for this study, as its main focus is the interface and relationship between Muvi TV and its viewers, in terms of reception or consumption of its output (main evening news), and the lived-experiences/realities of its viewers. As Morley and Silverstone (1991: 148) assert,

The media in general, are an integral part of the everyday lives of the people, so that the process of viewing (beyond the immediate moment of consumption) is extended into a longer process of conversation and social dialogue through which media materials are digested. (See also Press & Livingstone 2006: 179)

As such, the manner in which individuals appropriate and make sense of media content such as Muvi TV main evening news, is largely determined by the “identities and communicative repertoires they are socialised into as a result of their membership of a particular community in the course of their life history” (Schröder et al. 2003: 5). Further, qualitative approach allows a researcher to explore the ways that people make sense of their social worlds (Deacon et al. 2009: 5). As such, this interpretive approach is much more fluid and flexible and thus enabled me to talk to the respondents at length about how they see themselves and the world, in relation to their appropriation of Muvi TV news content.

Further, Bryman (1988: 5) notes that the aims, purposes and goals of research ultimately determine the research techniques that are employed during the research process (see also Silverman 2010: 135). I thus drew on qualitative methods – qualitative thematic/content analysis, focus groups, and individual in-depth interviews – that enabled me to get in-depth understanding and insights into what draws or attracts people to *Muvi* TV, particularly its main evening news. Subsequent discussion will elaborate on these research methods. The following part discusses the key philosophical and methodological issues taken into consideration in the choice of the qualitative research.

4.2.2. Key philosophical and methodological issues

4.2.2.1. Philosophical issues

Key philosophical issues regarding the choice of methodology relate to ontology and epistemology. The former is concerned with the “nature of the social world and what can be known about it”, that is, the commonsensical assumptions about some social reality (Ritchie & Lewis 2003: 23; Höjjer 2008: 276). As such, Ritchie and Lewis (2003: 11) note that a key ontological debate concerns “whether there is a captive social reality and how it should be constructed”. They point out that there are two main positions associated with this: objectivism and constructivism. The former is an ontological position that implies that social phenomena and their meanings exist independently of social actors (Bryman 2001: 16). This position is associated with quantitative research which views social reality as “objective” and “out there” independent, which can thus be captured by an objective, distanced and value-free researcher (*ibid.*). In contrast, constructivism is an ontological position associated with qualitative enquiry. It asserts that the social actors are consistently engaged in generating and constructing the social phenomena and their meanings (Bryman 2001: 18). Thus this position posits that reality is a product of social processes. That is, it is socially constructed by the individuals involved in the research situation (Creswell 1994: 6). Consequently, a qualitative researcher views the social world as “governed by normative expectations and shared understandings, hence the laws that govern it are not immutable” (Ritchie & Lewis 2003: 23).

Epistemology is concerned with the “nature of knowledge and how it can be acquired” and the relationship between the researcher and the subject/object of research (Ritchie & Lewis 2003: 23; Creswell 1994: 6). Bryman (1984: 75, 2001: 19) writes that it primarily deals with the question of what is or should be regarded as acceptable knowledge. The main epistemological positions are positivism and interpretivism/phenomenology. Positivism is associated with quantitative research. This position views natural sciences’ techniques as being appropriate for social and cultural research. As such, Ritchie and Lewis (2003: 22) note that positivism postulates, “it is possible to carry out an independent, objective and value free social research”. Based on these assumptions, positivism is “nomothetic”, that is, “it seeks to establish general law-like findings which can be deemed to hold irrespective of time and place” (Bryman 1988: 100; see also Neuman 2006: 84). As such, it aims at establishing explanations of universal applicability (Lindlof 1995: 23; Babbie & Mouton 2001: 272). In

light of this, researchers tend to be objective in assessing a situation in order to be able to infer findings to larger or universal populations.

In contrast, interpretivism is associated with qualitative research. It thus contends the use of natural science's methods for social research. This is because the position posits that the "social world is not governed by regularities that hold law-like properties" (Ritchie & Lewis 2003). Consequently, it tends to be "ideographic", that is, it is concerned with "locating its findings in specific time-periods and locales", thus primarily interested in "understanding a particular and specific event or case within its own context" (Bryman 1988: 100; Babbie & Mouton 2001: 272; see also Neuman 2006: 91). Based on these assumptions, interpretivism requires that researchers interact with those they are studying. Thus the researcher tries to minimise the distance between them and those being researched so as to explore and understand the social world through the participants' own perspectives (that is, the "emic perspective", see Babbie & Mouton 2001: 270-271) and understand social behaviour in its context. Thus, this philosophical root (phenomenology) of qualitative approach is cardinal for this study as it aims, and emphasises gaining an understanding of how Muvi TV viewers are engaged in a creative process of sense/meaning making of their social (life) worlds in relation to the appropriation of the news. The next section discusses the methodological issues.

4.2.2.2. Methodological issues

The philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research discussed above, have led to the questioning of key methodological issues, that is, the generalisability, validity and the reliability of its findings. As such, it is important to highlight that perspectives on these issues are strongly influenced by the epistemological and ontological orientations of a researcher (Seale 1999, qtd. in Ritchie & Lewis 2003: 262). First, the issue of generalisation is concerned with whether one can draw wider inferences from the findings of a particular study (Ritchie & Lewis 2003: 262; Ang 1996: 71). In qualitative research, the concern is not with the application of findings to larger or universal populations or settings beyond the particular sample and context of the study, as is the case in quantitative inquiry (Bryman 1988: 123). The concern is rather with developing a theory from the conclusions or findings that not only makes sense of a particular or single study, but also shows how the same procedure or theory when utilised in another context can lead to different findings (Maxwell 1992: 293, qtd., in Strelitz 2005: 66). Thus, Ang (1996: 71) notes that the primary focus is on understanding

particulars rather than universal generalisations. In light of this, the qualitative researcher normally takes an inductive approach, that is, rather than beginning with existing research hypotheses or theories (as is the case with quantitative research), he/she builds “second-order constructs, a hypothesis and ultimately a theory” based on the contextually derived empirical data in order to make sense of it (Babbie & Mouton 2001: 273; see Spicer 2004: 295). In this sense, unlike quantitative study which focuses on quantitative descriptions, that is, counting and quantifying patterns of behaviour, qualitative research aims at generating an in-depth, detailed description and understanding of social behaviour in particular contexts. As will be reiterated later in this chapter, this study does not aim at generating universal inferences.

Further, the epistemological basis of qualitative research raises concerns about the issues of validity and reliability, particularly whether these concepts initially developed in the natural sciences “have any value in determining the quality or sustainability of qualitative findings” (Babbie & Mouton 2001: 277). Generally, reliability or transferability is understood to concern the “replicability of research findings and whether or not they would be the same if another study, using the same or similar methods was undertaken” (ibid.; see also Neuman 2006: 196). From a positivist’s view, the overall aim of scientific inquiry is understood as developing statistical generalisations about the “relations between social facts that establish basis connections of cause and effect” (Deacon et al. 2007: 4). In contrast, qualitative research is not concerned with systematic and universal generalisations, but that all empirical social behaviour and activities are defined by the specific contexts in which they occur.

Further, validity of research findings is generally understood to refer to the “correctness” or “precision” of a research reading (Ritchie & Lewis 2003: 273). There are two dimensions to the concept of validity – internal and external validity (ibid.). The latter refers to the extent to which the “abstract constructs or postulates generated, refined or tested are applicable to other groups within the population or to other contexts or settings” (LeCompte & Goetz 1982; Lincoln & Guba 1985, qtd. in Ritchie & Lewis 2003: 273). The former is concerned with the use of “multiple streams of information converging within a particular study to construct an account of a complex investigatory theme” (Lull 1990: 19). Internal validity is what is paramount in qualitative research because the primary objective of qualitative research is not to assure that “analytical accounts produced about that which is being researched can readily be generalised to other groups or settings, but to explain well the

phenomena, subjects, and contexts at hand” (Lull 1990: 20). Thus the main concern is with “situated social action and *theoretical representativeness*, not with lawful behaviour or statistical representativeness” (ibid.) (own emphasis). In light of this, Ritchie and Lewis (2003: 270) assert that in their broadest conception, “reliability meaning sustainable and validity meaning well grounded will have relevance for qualitative research since they help to define the strength of the data” (see also Schröder et al. 2003: 147-148; Neuman 2006: 196). Further, Maxwell argues that validity can also be established if one applies the concept primarily to accounts, not to methods. Thus,

The applicability of the concept of validity ... does not depend on the existence of some absolute truth or reality to which an account can be compared, but only on the fact that there exists ways of assessing accounts that do not depend entirely on features of the account itself, but in some way relate to those things that the account claims to be about. (Maxwell 1992: 283, qtd., in Strelitz 2005: 65)

Based on the preceding discussion, the main concern of this study is the generalisability of the findings to theoretical propositions, rather than to universal populations (see Babbie & Mouton 2001: 277; Lindloff 1995: 23; Hansen et al. 1998: 242; Bryman 1988: 123).

The next section discusses data collection methods employed in this study – qualitative thematic/content analysis, focus groups and in-depth individual interviews.

4.3. Research methods and sampling

As highlighted in Chapter one, the study employed a three-stage design – first the qualitative thematic/content analysis, followed by focus groups and then in-depth individual interviews. This is discussed in the next section.

4.3.1. Qualitative thematic/content analysis

In line with reception study’s concern of carrying out an empirical comparative analysis of audience and media discourses, I firstly carried out an exploratory textual analysis of Muvi TV and ZNBC main evening news using qualitative thematic/content analysis (see Press & Livingstone 2006: 179; Schröder et al. 2003: 126). By definition, content analysis is a quantitative method for the “objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Berelson 1952: 18, qtd., in Hansen et al. 1998: 94; see also Neuman 2006: 322). According to Hansen et al. (1998: 95) the purpose of the method is

to identify and count the frequency of particular traits of a media text so as to deduce and establish certain causal relationships between variables and their wider social significance (see also Deacon et al. 2007: 119). In contrast, adopting an interpretive/constructivist perspective, in qualitative thematic/content analysis the researcher examines the larger context of the encoding and circulation of media texts by the media producers and its reception by the viewers (Neuman 2006: 323). In this light, qualitative thematic/content analysis as a technique goes beyond examining the manifest contents or surface structures of a media text, by attempting to unearth its latent/implicit messages or the “deep structural readings” (Wigston 2009: 5; Berg 1998: 226; see also Altheide 1996: 31-42). That is, it largely deals with “the forms and antecedent-consequent patterns of form” rather than the “duration and frequency of form” (Smith 1975: 218, qtd., in Berg 1998: 224). In so doing, the method aims at producing in-depth descriptions of how “meaning is organised and inscribed in media texts rather than statistical maps of their basic contents” (Deacon et al. 2007: 21). Most importantly, media texts are thus treated as constitutive of various social meanings which are situated in particular social contexts.

In this study, I abstained from undertaking a detailed textual analysis of Muvi TV news. Instead, I undertook the analysis in order to familiarise myself with the news sufficiently to be able to pursue the cultural and political research objectives that motivate the study. This was done as Schröder et al. (2003: 126) notes, in order to avoid meeting the respondents with a preconceived and expedient depth-analysis which would “impede a truly phenomenological exploration of the informant’s lifeworld-based experience”. As such, qualitative thematic/content analysis was also rudimentary used in this study in order to ascertain and provide an overview of the kinds/varieties of stories/themes, their style and content Muvi TV main evening news covers, as opposed to ZNBC. This material was essential to set the backdrop for subsequent analysis of what draws the audience to Muvi TV station’s news. It also served the purpose of preparing me sufficiently for the role of a moderator in focus group and individual in-depth interviews.

The sampling frame for qualitative thematic/content analysis constituted 40 main evening news bulletins for both Muvi TV and ZNBC monitored from 20 December 2010 to 27 January 2011. This time frame had nothing significant in particular, but was deemed convenient, due to the limitation of resources. Further, to systematically sample the news

bulletins from the 40 for this study, I used a simple selective random sampling strategy in which news bulletins for the first one whole week of the sampling frame were chosen, followed by a “rolling” or composite week, that is, Monday of one week, Tuesday of the following week, Wednesday of the following week, and so on (See Hansen et al. 1998: 103; Deacon et al. 2007: 122). And so 14 bulletins were sampled and considered as adequate and manageable for this study. Hansen et al. (1998: 103) asserts that this sampling strategy is advantageous as it allows the researcher to obtain a representative sample of television coverage in relation to the aims of the research.

Further, having established and been acquainted with Muvi TV news content, in order to examine the nexus between this news and its audience, I employed two other qualitative techniques – focus groups and individual in-depth interviews. Using these techniques, the respondents were able to verbalise their experience of the news, thus allowing me to collect in-depth data descriptions on how they appropriate media meanings and incorporate them into their everyday lives. This is the focus of the two subsequent sections.

4.3.2. Focus group interviews

Focus groups are often employed in communication research as a means of analysing media audiences’ meanings and ways of understanding, thus are particularly closely associated with reception analysis (Stewart & Shamdasani 1990: 12; Lunt & Livingstone 1996: 79). A focus group is understood as bringing small groups of people to discuss a research issue identified by a researcher (Lunt & Livingstone 1996: 80; Fontana & Frey 1994: 365). These group interviews are understood as a “simulation of routine, but relatively inaccessible communicative contexts that can help in discovering the processes by which meaning is socially constructed through everyday talk” (Lunt & Livingstone 1996: 85). Further, scholars have exhibited variations with regard to the number of people to comprise a focus group. For instance, Stewart and Shamdasani (1990: 10) state that the contemporary focus group interview generally involves eight to twelve individuals. This study however follows Hansen’s et al. (1998: 270) suggestion that the optimum size is between five and nine respondents. Further, Lunt and Livingstone (1996: 83) assert that the number of groups to be used is dependent on the aims of the research and the availability of resources. They point to the rule of the thumb that holds, “...one should continue to run new groups until the last group has nothing new to add, merely repeats previous contributions” (1996: 83). A number of

researchers have also pointed out that homogenous groups are more suitable and enabling for discussion, as participants feel more comfortable with each other than in heterogeneous groups (Lunt & Livingstone 1996: 82; Morley 1980: 26; Strelitz 2005: 73).

Based on the foregoing insights, I thus used three focus groups. By the time I was conducting the third group interview, respondents were repeating the same contributions from the previous groups. The respondents were selected from three Lusaka urban residential areas: N'gombe compound, Chipata compound and Kabanana site and service (see Chapter two for the relevance of these areas), using "snowballing" and "convenience" sampling. Subsequent discussion will elaborate on these sampling methods. In total there were 18 respondents, comprising of eight females and ten males. They consisted of homogenous group members from the working class majority and some middle class aspirants. The age ranged from 20 to 45 years, as this group can be considered to be more economically and politically active. In addition, as discussed above in Chapter two, the working class largely make up the majority viewers of Muvi TV main news. These viewers are at the receiving end of poor local government service delivery such as poor drainages, sewage, water and sanitation, poor roads and waste management and high crime rate, among others. In addition, this audience seemingly has different political inclinations than that of ZNBC (as evidenced by the fact that the ruling party presidency has over the last elections lost in the capital city) (see SAPA 2007).

Two focus group interviews from Chipata and Kabanana were conducted towards the end of the textual analysis on 25th and 27th January 2011, respectively. The last group interview was carried out on 30th January 2011 after the textual analysis had been completed. These focus group interviews lasted between an hour and an hour and twenty minutes. Further, all four individual interviews were conducted after the focus groups, and lasted about 30 to 45 minutes.

With regard to the sampling method/selection, qualitative research is associated with non-probability sampling, in which units are deliberately selected to reflect particular features of individuals or groups within the sampled population (Ritchie & Lewis 2003: 78). In this study, the main feature of the population was the working class community (see Chapter two for the relevance of this social group) who constitute the majority of Muvi TV viewership. Further, Ritchie and Lewis (2003: 78) writes that the sample is not intended to be statistically

representative and the chances of selection for each unit are unknown. Based on these insights, participants for this study were selected based on two non-probability sampling methods: snow balling and convenience. The former entails that initial contacts suggest further people whom the researcher approaches, and the latter involves selection of samples through expediency, chance and opportunity (Deacon et al. 2007: 53-56). As pointed out earlier, participants for this study constituted members of the marginalised working class from mainstream media (ZNBC) discourse based on their inability to speak English and their low levels of education (see Banda 2009: 62, 65). I got initial contacts of this social group through church groups, who further suggested and identified other people to approach (according to the snowball method). I also “chanced” upon participants who presented “unexpected but potentially rich research opportunities, and formed natural clusters of groups or individuals in market places” such as hair salons and barbershops found in these residential areas (a convenience sample) (Deacon et al. 2007: 56). In total, the sample size was 18.

Further, informed consent, privacy and confidentiality were of priority concern in this study (See Ali & Kelly 2004: 119-121; Fontana & Frey 1994: 372; Seale 2004: 119-120). I first approached potential respondents to offer consent by signing a consent form (see Appendix B) after explaining to them what the research entailed, and their input in it. The form included information regarding the research and how the data derived would be used, that is, solely for academic purposes. With regard to privacy and confidentiality, as stated earlier, the identity of the respondents will be protected by not including their real names in the analysis chapter.

As regards the interview setting, I chose a place which was most convenient and neutral for me and the respondents. I thus used a church building in Chipata compound, a community centre in Kabanana and a lodge conference room in N’gombe. This follows suggestions that the interview setting must be informal to stimulate and facilitate group conversation, and balanced between the needs of the researcher and those of the respondents (Lunt & Livingstone 1996: 82).

Further, before proceeding with the group interviews, I developed a discussion/interview schedule (see Appendix A) which had a list of key points and questions I checked off discreetly, though not rigidly. These key questions were constructed in line with the research objectives of the study highlighted in Chapter one. The questions were posed in IchiNyanja or IchiBemba translation. As will be stated in subsequent sections, most of the responses

were in these vernacular languages but are presented in English in the thesis. From the outset of each discussion, I asked for permission to record the discussions using a digital audio recorder. In order to ensure easy recognition and during transcription, whenever a respondent wanted to voice out their contribution, I invited them to do so while mentioning their name. This in turn aided in distinguishing the contributions, and particularly voices of the respondents. However, due to the study's commitment to privacy, respondent's names are replaced with letters in the analysis chapter.

The focus group interviews technique allowed me to gain a more detailed understanding of how Muvi TV audiences actually use the TV stations' content (main evening news) in contexts of their everyday lives. Focus groups are advantageous in that they produce rich qualitative material or data expressed in the respondents' own words and context (Lunt & Livingstone 1996: 96). And thus, respondents were able to verbalise their experiences of Muvi TV tabloidised main evening news. Schröder et al. (2003: 125) asserts that the technique enables a researcher to gain insight into the "social production of meaning as participants negotiate their readings of media material in an environment with strong consensual constraints". I also took advantage of the flexibility and the "synergetic effect of the group setting" (Stewart & Shamdasani 1990: 16). This effect necessitates the generation and production of data or ideas that might not arise or be unearthed in individual interviews.

Further, Stewart and Shamdasani observe that focus groups allow the researcher to interact directly with the respondents, thus providing opportunities for the clarification of responses, for follow-up questions, and for the probing of responses (1990: 16). They also note that respondents can qualify responses or give contingent answers to questions. Also, the general aura of the focus group setting encourages the level of rapport and participation. As such, the group setting aides "spontaneity and creates a more naturalistic and socially contextually environment" (Ritchie & Lewis 2003: 197; Fontana & Frey 1994: 365).

Criticisms levelled against focus groups include the interaction of respondents with one another and with the researcher, which Stewart and Shamdasani (1990: 17) assert has two undesirable effects. First, the responses from members of the group are dependent on one another, which restrict the generalisability of results. Second, the results obtained in a focus group may be biased by a very dominant or opinionated member. Thus, more reserved group members may be hesitant to talk (Lunt & Livingstone 1996: 89). In light of this, my role as a

moderator included: to ensure that the discussion remained focused on the issue at hand, while eliciting a wide range of contributions; monitor a complex social interaction; encourage contributions; manage disruptions and other problematic group dynamics (Lunt & Livingstone 1996: 82).

Another concern is that the group members may not be representative of a larger population, because of “both the small numbers and the idiosyncratic nature of the group discussion” (Stewart & Shamdasani 1990: 12). However, as pointed out above, it is important to reiterate that the critical issue in this study is the generalisability of the research to theoretical propositions, rather than to universal populations (see Hansen et al. 1998: 242; Lindloff 1995: 23). Overall, the open response format of focus groups provide an opportunity to obtain large and in-depth amounts of data in the respondents’ own words, thus suggesting new research issues which were followed up using in-depth individual interviews.

4.3.3. In-depth individual interviews

Focus group interviews suggested new themes and issues which I then followed up using in-depth individual interviews. Individual in-depth interviews provide an opportunity for detailed investigation and an in-depth understanding of people’s personal perspectives on the social phenomena under investigation (Ritchie & Lewis 2003: 36). It is understood as a form of conversation (Lindlof 1995: 5). Newcomb (1991: 101) notes that the primary strength of interviewing as a method is its “capacity to range over multiple perspectives on a given topic”. The in-depth format thus permits the researcher to explore fully all the factors that underpin participants’ answers: reasons, feelings, opinions and beliefs (Ritchie & Lewis 2003: 141). Schröder et al. (2003: 143) asserts that it is a “vehicle for bringing forward the media-induced meanings of the informants’ life world”.

In this study, I conducted in-depth interviews with four participants (two females and two males) selected from the focus group interviews respondents. Selection was based on the most enthusiastic and ardent viewers of Muvi TV news as they fervently voiced strong opinions about the news. In doing so, I further probed issues surrounding the political significance, and their preference for this news. Overall, the decision to conduct in-depth individual interviews was made to uncover in-depth insights into the interface between Muvi TV news and its consumption, based on the social context.

All the interviews both group and individual followed a combination of semi-structured and unstructured questions (see Fontana & Frey 1994: 365-366). These questions were tailored based on those developed by Bird (1998: 36) and Wasserman (2010: 127-128). The structure of questions allows sufficient flexibility to permit topics to be covered in the order most suited to the interviewee, and to allow responses to be fully probed and explored (Ritchie & Lewis 2003: 141). It also enables the researcher to be responsive to relevant issues raised spontaneously by the interviewee (Deacon et al. 2007: 67; Bryman 1984: 78). The next section discusses the data analysis procedure employed.

4.4. Data analysis procedure

Using the techniques discussed in the preceding discussion, data was collected primarily in the form of interviews. However, these in-depth interviews were not considered as finished accounts of the audiences' experience of Muvi TV news (see Jensen 1988: 4). As such, these were first transcribed, and those in IchiNyanja or IchiBemba were translated into English. This data was interpreted and analysed further (the focus of Chapter five) in relation to the theoretical framework and considerations discussed in Chapter three. As suggested by Jensen (1991: 139), the "meaning of the constitutive elements of audience discourses were interpreted with constant reference to context, both that of the media discourses in question and the broad social context of historical circumstances". In doing this, I used thematic coding as the mode of analysis (see Neuman 2006: 461; Jensen 1982: 251). In line with the constructivist perspective, this approach is a "loosely inductive categorisation of interview extracts with reference to various concepts, headings or themes" (Jensen 1982: 247). As such, the process comprises "the comparing, contrasting and abstracting of the constitutive elements of meaning" (Neuman 2006: 460). I thus identified subsets and sequences of data which are related thematically or structurally and which were singled out for detailed analysis, shedding more light on the research questions of this study (see Jensen 2002: 241; Neuman 2006: 459). The data is written in narrative form, with a significant use of quotations to show the major findings of the study.

4.5. Limitations of the study

One of the problems I faced was scepticism from some of the members of the focus groups who knew that I was a ZNBC figure (employee) as indicated in Chapter one. They thought I

was investigating Muvi TV on behalf of the corporation. I thus emphasised from the beginning that this was purely academic as stated in the consent form (see Appendix B). Another limitation was that of language. Nyanja was mostly used in the focus group interviews. I can be able to understand a conversation in this vernacular, but cannot accurately articulate myself in it. Being more fluent in Bemba, which is also understood by most respondents, I thus capitalised on mixing the two vernaculars. However, were I could not communicate clearly in Nyanja; there was one or two members of the group who would help in translating. Further, this limitation posed a problem of losing the exact reading of what was said. Thus, I tried to avoid this during transcription by maintaining the sense of meaning which emerged during the conversations.

Another kind of limitation regards the small number of respondents used in this research, which may have some implications on drawing wider inferences from the findings to larger populations. However, in this qualitative research, the concern is not with the application of findings to larger or universal populations or settings beyond this particular sample and context of the study, as is the case in quantitative inquiry (Bryman 1988: 123). The concern is rather with developing findings that not only makes sense of this particular study, but also shows how the same procedure or theory when utilised in another context can lead to different findings (Maxwell 1992: 293, qtd., in Strelitz 2005: 66). Thus, Ang (1996: 71) notes that the primary focus is on understanding particulars rather than universal generalisations.

4.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have mapped out the research design and procedure employed in the study. The chapter discussed reception analysis, which is underpinned by the qualitative approach, the mainstay of this study. Drawing on this approach, the chapter delineates the three-stage design – qualitative thematic content analysis, focus groups, and then individual in-depth interviews – employed in the study, in order to facilitate the empirical comparative analysis of Muvi TV tabloidised news discourses with those of its audience members. The chapter also outlined the sampling procedures implemented in the study. It stated some of the limitations encountered during the fieldwork. The next chapter presents and analyses the findings of the research, informed by the theoretical underpinnings delineated in Chapter three.

CHAPTER FIVE

Presentation and Analysis of Findings

5.0. Introduction

The previous chapter has delineated the methodology and methods employed in this study. This chapter presents and discusses the research findings. The findings and the analysis are informed by the theoretical and literature review discussed in Chapters three and four. These findings are derived from a combination of the qualitative textual analysis of Muvi TV main evening news and the in-depth interviews (both focus groups and individual) conducted with the respondents. The chapter first presents data from the textual analysis, followed by findings from in-depth interviews. The data will be interpreted and presented in collaboration with verbatim quotations derived from the interviews. These are discussed simultaneously under three major themes based on the goals and objectives of the study. The thematic concerns are not demarcated clearly, and thus will tend to overlap. But for analytic and clarity reasons, they are delineated separately to address the following research questions:

- What attracts the viewers to Muvi TV news as compared to ZNBC news?
- What meanings do these viewers obtain from Muvi TVs' main evening news? How do these meanings resonate with their everyday lived experiences?
- What is the political significance of this news which claims to tackle "serious" social, political and economic issues?
- Does the information provided by Muvi TVs' arguably tabloidised news enable the public to exercise their civic duties?

The next section presents data from the qualitative thematic analysis of sampled main evening news bulletins for Muvi TV and ZNBC.

5.1. Textual analysis findings: A brief overview

This section presents findings from the qualitative thematic analysis of selected main evening news bulletins of both Muvi TV and ZNBC. Out of a population of 40 main evening news bulletins for both TV stations between the period of 20 December 2010 to 27 January 2011, 14 bulletins were sampled and selected for this study. To do this, a simple random sampling method was used as discussed in Chapter four. I then identified the types of stories (such as

hard news, soft news – human-interest – see Lehman-Wilzig & Seletzky 2010: 38, Patterson 2000: 4), and the main themes (such as crime, abortions, accidents, robberies – see Langer 1998: 7-9) in these bulletins and attempted to unearth their “deep structural” organisation (Berg 1998: 226).

The main aim of the textual analysis is to highlight and establish that Muvi TV news is an example of the tabloid TV genre as described in the literature. Its main purpose is to provide information about the texts (particularly, Muvi TV main evening news) to be used in the analysis of audience reception. As such, from the analysis the main features that emerged border around main types of stories and prevalent themes in them; narrative structure of stories; language use; and main sources in the stories, among others.

In addition, as pointed out in Chapter four, this analysis aided in familiarising myself as a researcher with the text sufficiently enough to pursue the socio-cultural and political objectives that motivate the study. It also aimed at preparing me for the role of an interview facilitator in subsequent methods (focus groups and individual in-depth interviews).

5.1.1. ZNBC main evening news

The textual analysis of ZNBC main evening news indicated that the news gives prominence to political stories as compared to Muvi TV news. However, it emerged that the bulk of these stories traditionally defined as “hard news” is primarily a forum for the ruling party and parliamentary protocols. Predominantly, there is hefty coverage of the ruling party activities. In particular, the stories are quite bland accounts of various project launches and donations by the president, vice president, or ministers; and ruling party ministerial/presidential tours, among others. For instance, one notes the following news items on donations by the first lady and the president running simultaneously in the same bulletin on 22 December 2010: First lady Thandiwe Banda donates agricultural machinery worth over ninety thousand United States Dollars to farmers in Kazungula district; President Banda has donated an assortment of goods and five million Kwacha cash to a Kabompo couple that recently appealed for assistance to raise their triplets.

In view of the above, prominence is given to the promotion of the activities of the ruling government however mundane or inconsequential for the public, masquerading as

national/public issues. For instance, political defections by members of the opposition parties to the ruling party were prominent in the sampled bulletins for 22 and 26 December 2010 and for 14 and 18 January 2011. In addition, for instance the first seven news stories on ZNBC main evening news bulletins on 21 December 2010 is comprised of the president and vice president's tour to Mongu for a one-day working visit, during which the party held a provincial conference. This trend characterises all the other bulletins in that ruling party officials (and issues) and other economically and socially empowered members of society are given prominence. As such, themes that appeal to the working class community are rarely covered. Prominence is given to "hard news" stories and discourses that implicitly appeal to the (ideal) elite viewers and are thus distanced from the everyday lived experiences of the working class. Coupled with this, is that English dominates ZNBC main evening news. This further sidelines those members of society, who have low levels of education and thus have the inability to comprehend the official language.

Nonetheless, the analysis also showed that ZNBC does serve its public service mandate by covering national political (such as government/ministerial appointments, policy changes *inter alia*) and socio-economic (economic and development investment agreements, infrastructure developments or disasters, *inter alia*) events. For instance, one notes the following stories: Government has approved 15 billion Kwacha for women empowerment programmes in the 2011 budget (20 December 2010); Government has temporarily closed the Chavuma pontoon in North Western Province because of rising water levels on the Zambezi River; Government has constructed a dam at a cost of 6 hundred million Kwacha in Chavuma District (21 December 2010); and the Zambia Development Agency -ZDA- has approved an expansion plan for Mulyashi Mine in Luanshya. However, such events tend to be politicised in that they are overshadowed by ruling party officials, and used as campaign platform gimmicks.

5.1.2. Muvi TV main evening news

5.1.2.1. Coverage of micro instead of formal politics

As compared to ZNBC news, there is a low proportion of formal political news coverage on Muvi TV news in the sampled news bulletins. This is interesting as the period under investigation was one during which the president and vice president made several tours to

various parts of the country, one in which the president visited the embattled Mongu town on the Barotse Royal Establishment (BRE)³ issue. ZNBC news gave considerable coverage to the latter, whilst Muvi TV news had no news item on it. Ostensibly, it can be argued that Muvi TV seldom covers formal politics. Micro-politics of everyday life make the bulk of its news. These include human-interest stories on topics such as crime, abortions, accidents, sewer leakages, robberies, street vending, among others. These stories, as will be shown in subsequent discussions, do have a political significance.

Further, as discussed in Chapter three, tabloid TV news media are very selective in their inclusion of political or wider public information. They include such stories only when they fit in with their style, content and form of coverage or when it concerns major issues which can be covered in a sensational and personalised manner (Conboy 2006: 10). For instance, on 22 December 2010, ZNBC news ran a story on the Zambia Electricity Supply Corporation's (ZESCO) optimistic reduction in load shedding in the country once the Kariba North Bank hydropower station project is completed. This was echoed by the company's managing director during a cocktail event. In contrast, on the same day, Muvi TV news ran a story on complaints by residents in one of the townships in Lusaka on power load shedding, whilst appealing for relief on ZESCO penalty fees at the same time. One further notes another story on ZNBC news on "government's intention to see that every Zambian has access to improved water and sanitation by 2030" (26 December 2010). The news story comprised of a mini-documentary on government's plan to initiate projects aimed at increasing water supply and sanitation in the country. In contrast, on the same day, Muvi TV news ran a story on poor water and sanitation in a particular compound. In particular, framed in a more sensational and personalised manner, the story carried repulsive video images of sewer leakages with residents venting their sense of neglect by local government. This item did not run on ZNBC news. As discussed in Chapter three, such a personalised approach is one of the key features of tabloid news, which seemingly debases the seriousness of "hard" news. As will be

³ A section of society in Zambia's Western Province town, Mongu, formed a movement, calling on the restoration of the BRE agreement of 1964 in the constitution. One of the demands by the Movement was to have the province seceded. This culminated into protests during the commemoration of the country's Independence Day on 24 October 2010. The protests saw the loss of two lives. See the following website for more information on the Zambia Independence Act of 1964 and the agreement relating to Barotseland: <http://www.statutelaw.gov.uk/content.aspx?LegType=All+Primary&PageNumber=65&NavFrom=2&parentActiveTextDocId=1169314&ActiveTextDocId=1169314&filesize=16478>

discussed later, such stories have a political implication and tend to resonate with the viewer's everyday experiences.

5.1.2.2. Ordinary people as main actors

It emerged from the textual analysis of Muvi TV main news that ordinary people, particularly the working class community are depicted as main actors. They are presented as victims of various tragedies, misfortunes and service delivery system inefficiencies on the news. This is a hallmark of tabloid TV news, which privileges micro-politics of everyday life as discussed in Chapter three (see Fiske 1989b: 56-57; Steenveld & Strelitz 2010: 542; Wasserman 2010: 91). Subsequent sections will discuss this further. As actors, the ordinary people mostly feature in *vox populi* (*vox pop*) video sound bites expressing their emotional discontentment towards the power bloc or lamenting over issues that pertain to their daily struggles. Their voices tend to be given more prominence in news items. An example of such is a story in which the Chinese ambassador to Zambia was quoted in the news script by the newscaster, defending China from perceptions that it is responsible for various counterfeit products that have flooded the Zambian market (Muvi TV news, 22 December 2010). The story was not accompanied by visual inserts or the sound bite of the ambassador; instead, it only had *vox pop* visual sound bites of ordinary people on the streets (the consumers). In these video clips, the people were venting their displeasure about cheap and lack of quality counterfeit products, which they allegedly associated with Chinese imports.

Another story includes one in which an ordinary person living with HIV/AIDS, was quoted as the main authority, appealing and urging the ministry of health to assess the availability of ARVs in stock in clinics and hospitals (Muvi TV news, 18 January 2011). He alleged that for some time, the clinic where he gets these drugs had a shortage. The news story showed this person lamenting on how he was going to survive, whilst making an emotional appeal for government to intervene. There was no confirmation from the clinic or any health authority on this shortage. This highlights a feature which tabloid news is chastised for, that is, abrogating the "professional" journalistic practice of quoting credible and authoritative sources, and counterchecking of facts, among others (see Steenveld & Strelitz 2010: 542). In contrast to the dominance of elite news sources on ZNBC main news, Muvi TV news privileges ordinary people's voices and those members of society and organisations (such as

Non-Governmental Organisations – NGOs) that purportedly stand and speak for the marginalised in community (see Glynn 2000: 7).

5.1.2.3. Language use

In terms of language use, Muvi TV news is characterised by its frequent use of melodramatic aesthetic and flowery language in its headline teasers, which speaks to its tabloidised nature as outlined in Chapter three (see Ehrlich 1996: 8). Unlike on ZNBC news, these teasers are constantly scrolled on the TV screen for the duration of the news bulletin to attract and retain the attention of the viewers. For instance, one notes the following (italicised) flowery headline teasers on Muvi TV news, “sewer *engulfs* Garden compound” (26 December 2010), “*bouncy baby* picked from pit latrine” (22 December 2010). These stories were not shown on ZNBC news. As compared to Muvi TV, ZNBC news tends to be conservative in its language use in the headline teasers. In contrast, as can be seen from the examples given above, Muvi TV news tends to use sensationalised vocabulary in its teasers arguably to attract the attention of the viewers. This trend characterises most of its human-interest stories, accompanied by lurid imagery as will be discussed later. In relation to the tabloidisation of the news media, this feature (use of melodrama and ornate vocabulary) finds resonance in a phrase recently coined in newsrooms across TV channels in India, “compelling TV”, referring to the view that the “story, its packaging or the visuals have to be attention grabbing and simply compelling” (Thussu 2007: 103).

Further, on Muvi TV, generally the use of English in its news items is simplified and more direct, with a sparingly mix of colloquialisms. As will be shown later, respondents attested to this simplicity and conversational tone. This style speaks to Muvi TV news’ tabloid nature as discussed in Chapter three (Conboy 2002: 170, 2006: 13; Fiske 1989b: 106-107; Wasserman 2010: 128). However, this is not the case for ZNBCs’ English dominated main news, which seldom includes voices of the ordinary people in vernacular. On Muvi TV news for example, in one of the stories, “windfall tax” was referred to as “ninchekeleko” a Nyanja/Bemba pidgin meaning a “favour in form of monetary terms” which finds resonance in the idioms of the ordinary people’s street talk vocabulary (4 January 2011). This jargon is generally used by the working class community such as the callboys and taxi conductors. For instance, it is used to ask for a token of appreciation when they help a person to carry a heavy bag from one

point to the other, or when they clean someone's car. They also use the term when they are asking for monetary help from people. It can be argued that the use of demotic and colloquial vocabulary by Muvi TV news renders it to be populist in tone. Coupled with this, the sound bites of the ordinary people are presented in their original form, that is, in vernacular (Nyanja and Bemba predominantly), without any English narration or translation. This feature corresponds with Conboy's (2006: 11) point that in appropriating the idioms of the ordinary people tabloid news has managed to produce a "marketable combination of social class and language". Muvi TV news thus appeals to the section of the public with English comprehension problems, particularly, the working class (see Gans 2009: 23).

5.1.2.4. Visual emphasis

Most of the visuals of human-interest stories on Muvi TV news have "heightened emotionality" (Glynn 2000: 7), characterised by lurid pictures especially of victims of accidents, crime or disasters. Stories about tragedies are often accompanied by explicit pictures of dead bodies or injured people, warning sensitive viewers in advance before televising such. For instance, the news on Muvi TV showed gruesome pictures of a man who burnt himself for unknown reasons on 20 December 2010. The following day, Muvi TV news' announcement that the man had died was accompanied by a repeat of the same grisly pictures. Another example is a story in which a ten-year-old girl was constantly beaten by her guardian and was later rescued by the neighbours (22 December 2010). The news showed the burns and sores of the girl whilst she was naked. These stories did not run on ZNBC. Further on the same day, unlike on ZNBC news which did not show the pictures, Muvi TV news showed lurid pictures of three members of a family who died in a road traffic accident. One viewer (respondent) said he was piqued by this particular news bulletin and likened it to watching a horror movie. This is because the first three news items were all on tragedies and accompanied by shocking pictures of victims. As outlined in Chapter three, this is one of the feature tropes of tabloid TV news (see Frère 2011: 196). Tabloid TV news is said to rely on eye-catching visuals tailored to capture and retain the curiosity of the viewers (see Calabrese 2000: 48-49). As will be shown later, viewers decode these lurid pictures in different ways.

Another interesting feature of Muvi TV news which emerged from the textual analysis is that the news seldom broadcasts international news on its main evening news

bulletin. The news thus largely focuses on local issues. Overall, as compared to ZNBC, prominence is given to human-interest stories derived from topics such as crime, drug trafficking, traffic accidents, scandals, riots/staged protests, rape and defilement, abortion, poor water and sanitation, among others. A bulk of these stories finds resonance in everyday mundane life events and struggles. For instance, one notes the following story as a good example in comparison to ZNBC's item on the same topic. ZNBC news run a news item on an event in which the minister of local government was commissioning the opening of an ablution block at a particular market in Central Province. In the video clip, the minister who is also an member of parliament (MP) in that area, said government has embarked on the construction of two hundred and fifty pit latrines in that area. In contrast, Muvi TV showed a news story on a particular residential area on the Copperbelt Province in which residents were complaining over lack of toilets and water in their compound for more than three years (25 December 2010). The story had video clips of residents venting out their discontentment and sense of neglect by the local government and their area MP. Thus, it can be argued that Muvi TV brings to light the inefficiencies of local government service delivery, which are elided from mainstream media (ZNBC). This aspect accounts for its popularity among the working class, as they are able to relate with such discourses that hinge on their everyday lived experiences. It highlights the micro-politics of everyday life that Muvi TV news capitalises on. In addition, as shown in Chapter three, its style is sensational, personalised, "sometimes moralistically earnest; its tone is populist", and its modality is fluid (Fiske 1992: 48).

Overall, the heft coverage of human-interest stories, use of melodrama and flowery language in its headline teasers, heightened emotive and lurid video inserts of tragedy victims, and the inclusion of vernacular languages and colloquialism gives Muvi TV news the characteristic of a tabloid TV news genre or as an epitome of the tabloidisation of television news. This is in line with the definitions of tabloid TV news given by Glynn (2000: 7-8), Dahlgren (1995: 54), Langer (1998: 7-9) as discussed in Chapter three. For instance, Glynn (2000: 7-8) describes tabloid TV news that its "images are often stark, raw, unprettified, and unsanitised ... among its favourite themes are the ubiquity of victimisation...." For Langer (1998: 7-9) it comprises of human-interest stories of various kinds such as traffic accidents, and fires, issues not directly related to politics, central social issues, and the economy.

The next section discusses findings drawing on in-depth audience interviews – both focus groups and individual. The section first presents reasons behind viewers' preference and choice for this news. It later discusses the socio-political significance of the news by elucidating the meanings that viewers derive from the news, and how these resonate with their everyday lived experiences.

5.2. Audience interviews findings

As indicated in Chapter four, I conducted three focus group interviews with a total number of 18 respondents (eight females and ten males), particularly, the working class. They were particularly chosen for this study because they constitute the main audience viewership of Muvi TV news, and largely, are at the receiving end of bland local government service delivery. The respondents were selected using snowball and convenience-sampling methods (see Chapter four). The focus group interviews were followed by individual in-depth interviews with four respondents (two females and two males). As discussed in Chapter four, the actual names of the respondents have been withheld. Instead, they will be anonymised using letters that do not correspond with their real names (See Ali & Kelly 2004: 119-121; Fontana & Frey 1994: 372). In addition, most of the interview responses were in Nyanja and Bemba. These were translated (keeping in mind the actual meaning of the respondent's views) and are thus presented in subsequent sections in English.

5.2.1. Viewers' news media preference and choice

This section aims at elucidating what attracts the viewers to Muvi TV news as compared to other print and broadcast news media, in particular ZNBC. It discusses the viewers' content preference and consumption patterns in relation to the broader socio-political context of reception highlighted in Chapter two. The issues to be raised in the section will further be discussed in subsequent sections.

From the in-depth interviews conducted with Muvi TV news viewers, it was revealed that the viewers actively consume and choose the news and the media, as discussed in Chapter four (Bird 1992: 35). Their preference and choice is broadly spurred and shaped by their individual relationship with the socio-political order (see Chapter two). As will be shown in subsequent discussion, this is influenced by their context of reception which is

embedded into their cultural and lived experiences and circumstances. The respondents expressed varied characteristics of media preference, but unanimously and fervently said they loyally watch Muvi TV news as compared to other news media outlets, including ZNBC. The following responses clearly articulate this:

T1: I watch Muvi TV only. ZNBC is too much of Rupiah Banda (the President) and his MMD (ruling political party) officials.

C1: ...Muvi TV news televises the whole truth. That's why I prefer to watch them as compared to ZNBC.

Asked to explain more about what the respondent meant by the fact that Muvi TV televises the whole truth, he asserts:

C2: Muvi TV news is not censored. They show and reveal everything on any news story what has happened. On ZNBC, it is obvious that they censor their news when you compare with Muvi TV news. For instance, the time Sata (Oppositional political Leader) was tear-gassed at the Drug Enforcement Commission premises (DEC), they (Muvi TV news) showed everything that happened...while on ZNBC they censored it.

M1: The problem with ZNBC is that it is too political. In most cases they have a hidden agenda; they don't want people to know what is exactly happening in the country. Sometimes you even loose direction because most of the times they only talk about political things about Rupiah and his government....

These responses clearly indicate that the viewers trust Muvi TV's tabloidised main news more than that of the (professional) state broadcaster, ZNBC, to provide them with detailed and uncensored news. This may be attributed to the fact that Muvi TV news provides the viewers with arguably reliable information as it reflects their everyday lived experiences and circumstances. This in a way, as will be argued later, keeps them informed and helps them to negotiate and navigate through their daily struggles.

Further, the responses above also indicate the respondent's total scepticism towards ZNBC as a source of (political) news. This may be attributed to the fact that the viewers have a different political inclination to that of ZNBC, compounded by the social and political malaise expressed towards the ruling party government (as will be shown subsequently). The respondents perceived ZNBC main news as secretive and censored for the sole purpose of portraying a good and favourable image of the ruling elite. Thus the viewers, particularly the working class, opt to turn to Muvi TV's tabloidised main news which carries more credibility

in terms of believability and proximity to their daily lives. This finds resonance in Fiske's assertion that tabloid journalism "produces a believing subject" (1992: 49).

Further, with its particular style and content, the consumption of tabloid TV news discourses is perceived as being subversive or transgressive (see Bird 1992: 35). It allows the viewers to counter and contest hegemonic discourses found in mainstream media such as ZNBC. As such, ZNBC main news' political expediency prevents the development of news as a socio-cultural form upon which tabloid news draws, making it relevant to the lives of the ordinary people (see Machin & Papatheoderou 2002: 33). This resonates with Glynn's assertion that mainstream or "professional" journalism (such as ZNBC) contains information that does not reflect the everyday lives of the ordinary people, as the "power bloc has maximal control over the forms of knowledge considered appropriate to it" (2000: 10). He further asserts that the "power bloc has an interest in producing forms of news that support its cultural authority" (ibid: 20). For instance, this is clearly articulated in the following responses:

B1: I prefer Muvi TV news because it often airs what affects us. But ZNBC talks about a lot of issues so much that, you will just be seated idle in front of a TV set not knowing what they are talking about.

A1: ZNBC likes the national and international news; local news comes occasionally. But usually it's on things that you can't even relate nor understand.

D1: ...yes, but when you watch Muvi TV news things are easy to understand and we can identify ourselves with most of the issues they cover.

As attributed to earlier, these responses also point to how popular tabloidised news content on Muvi TV addresses and represents those issues and concerns that affect their viewership's life-worlds, and thus tends to create a robust rapport and loyalty. As such, the viewers entrust Muvi TV news to represent their issues and concerns adequately, as compared to ZNBC whose news content is perceived as far distanced from their day-to-day livelihoods.

One respondent however, said he occasionally watches the news on ZNBC, but *cautiously*, with the purpose of getting information on what else is happening in the country at a macro level. This finds resonance in Fiske's (1989a: 187) assertion that viewers may watch the news out of a "vague moral sense" as they need to know what else is happening in the world, but if it lacks relevance to their everyday life-worlds, "it will be watched half-heartedly..." As such, **J1**, 30, a kiosk attendant (attending night school – secondary level) asserts:

I mostly watch Muvi TV, but when I want to know what is happening in the country in terms of major political or economic decisions, sometimes I watch ZNBC. Thus, both are important to me to some extent. When you look at Muvi TV news it contains a lot of community and local news in Lusaka, then ZNBC covers wider national issues. That is why when I want to know what is happening nationwide; I sometimes balance it up with ZNBC news but with a cautious and selective mind, because of its government propaganda nature.

Such a response indicates that the viewer is not passive but active in their selection and decoding of the news especially on ZNBC. As will be shown later, the viewers' interpretation of ZNBC news is mostly oppositional. This may be attributed to the fact that this news is largely associated with "them", the ruling elite, who are against "us" the people (see Fiske, 1989b: 28). It is thus perceived as governments' propaganda platform, and so the working class do not feel that their issues and concerns are addressed on ZNBC.

5.2.2. Formulaic news presentation

Again, one of the major factors at play in the viewers' preference for Muvi TV news is the kind of content – human-interest stories – it privileges and repeats almost on a daily or weekly basis. As indicated above, such stories ultimately resonate with the viewer's everyday lived experiences and circumstances. Tabloid TV news is reviled for giving prominence to this distinctive type of content, as it sidelines "serious" news critical for an informed citizenry (see Sparks 1992: 38; Bird 1992: 8; Wasserman 2010: 28). The repetition of themes that pertain to human-interest stories makes Muvi TV news to be very formulaic in nature, and thus predictable (Bird 1992: 39). As such, the same mix of story types and themes is repeated almost on a daily or weekly basis. For instance, the news programme televised items on inefficiencies with regard to sewer and sanitation in various compounds and townships almost on a daily basis: "blocked drainages in Mtendere" (23 December 2010); "Masaiti villagers complain over lack of toilets" (25 December 2010); "sewer engulfs garden compound" (26 December 2010). In addition, stories on threats to everyday life often recur frequently as well. These include crime stories such as robberies, rape, physical assaults, among others. In this manner, as attributed to earlier, it can be argued that Muvi TV news establishes a robust bond and rapport with its viewers who feel that their issues are represented and addressed more efficiently than other media institutions or even relevant institutions/authorities. As discussed in Chapter three, it is in this way that tabloid TV news

genre is said to resonate with, and be of relevance to the everyday lived realities and circumstances of the working class community (see Conboy 2006: 9).

In relation to the above, another important aspect of Muvi TV news is the fact that its stories bear the characteristic of “residually oral tradition rooted in folk narrative” which are largely drawn from squatter camps, townships and compounds (Bird 1992: 3, 2009: 44). For instance, one of the respondents, **A2**, describes the manner in which the news is “entertaining and very narrative”. He states, “they (Muvi TV) present a story chronologically outlining what happened from the beginning to the end...sometimes some news items are presented like folklores”. The following news story narrated by another respondent is a good example:

J2: ...there was a story in Misisi compound where some guys were going for work early in the morning, and then a dog at one of the houses in that area started barking at them. They picked some stones and threw at it, and accidentally a stone hit the gate and the owners came out and accused the guys of being thieves. Then people came out and brutally murdered them, Muvi TV was even showing people with huge stones throwing at the guys. Someone was trying to rescue them, but then was threatened to be stoned as well. So you can see that Misisi is indeed a violent place, they like taking the law in their hands which is not good. So the story really touched me because those guys were innocent.

This response indicates how viewers experience tabloidised Muvi TV news content, that is, in a narrative manner. This implies that, the way the news is presented – in an emotionally intense narrative style – strikes a chord with the way folklore narratives are represented. As such, it can be argued that Muvi TV news tends to affirm the experiences of the viewer’s everyday lives in a manner that is different from that of ZNBC. ZNBC news tends to be conservative and thus follows the pyramid structure (the “who”, “what”, “when”, “where” and “how”) associated with quality and professional journalism. However, ethnographic news audience research by scholars such as Bird (1998: 37) indicate that viewers tend to have difficulties in following and remembering news items structured in this manner (see also Glynn 2000: 105). This can also be said of Muvi TV viewers, who assert that ZNBC main news tends to be confusing (see respondents’ views – **M1 & B1**).

Consequently, in contrast to tabloid news critics, Bird (1998: 37) points out that the narrative style of storytelling in the news, is not a bad thing in itself. Citing Rayfield (1972), she asserts that viewers are able to recall stories that have “chronological narratives, with a clear structure, a moral point, and vivid imagery” (Bird 1998: 37). During the interviews, Muvi TV

news viewers referred to, and recalled entirely human-interest stories that occurred before and during the period of study. These stories were recalled in terms of the social change they brought about. For instance one respondent, **F1**, recalled a story that ran during the period of study, on a protest about delayed payment of salaries by casual workers from a certain company. He narrates that:

There was a protest by Gabtam workers, for lack of wage payments for about three months. The company tried to disperse them, but they stood their ground demanding for their money. When the owners heard that the workers had gone to Muvi TV, they quickly later responded to the demands of the people and paid their salaries.

Another respondent, **E1**, recalled a story that ran before the period of study about the tragic death of two children. She remarks that:

There was a story in which two children drowned by strong currents in drainage because our bridge was washed away by heavy rains here in Ngombe. Muvi TV news crew quickly came to cover the incident and showed it on the news. Because of this, the fixing of the bridge is in the process now.

As can be seen from these examples, stories that the viewers were able to recall were of greater proximity to their everyday lives. It can be argued that the viewers express a level of trust in Muvi TV news to help instigate social change and development in their areas. This finds resonance in Fiske's (1989b: 126) assertion that the popularity of tabloidised news is evidence of the extent of dissatisfaction towards the power bloc, "particularly among those who feel powerless to change their situation". Thus, in contrast to ZNBC news, Muvi TV news viewers perceived its news as having the potential to positively impact and bring change to their everyday lived experiences.

5.2.3. Language simplicity and colloquialism

It emerged from the interviews that the kind of language used in the news is also a contributing factor for the viewers' preference of Muvi TV news. As indicated above, the respondents pointed out that the English used is simple, direct and easy to understand. This finds resonance in Eide and Knight's (1999: 527) assertion that "structurally, tabloid journalism generally adopts a demotic or vernacular mode of address which simulates the language and idioms of everyday life" of the ordinary publics (see also Conboy 2002: 162; Fiske 1989b: 106). This is articulated in the following interview excerpts:

Y1: ...we understand the English very well. It is simple and straightforward. The inclusion of Nyanja or other languages by those they interview in the communities or streets also contributes to understanding the stories very well, because not everyone has been to school.

G1: ... their English is not very hard to understand. Even us who never went very far in our studies just did primary school; we are able to understand.

Conboy (2006: 212) asserts that this style of language use lies within the traditions of popular media genres of the working class entertainment. He therefore argues that in this way, it tends to debase serious issues and foreground the carnival and the colloquial (ibid.). It is this feature as highlighted in Chapter three, which critics assert is used by tabloid media owners for commercial expediency. However, one can argue that Muvi TV caters for the hitherto marginalised voices from the mainstream media (such as ZNBC) based on their inability to comprehend and articulate themselves in English, the official language which dominates ZNBC main evening news (see Machin & Papatheoderou 2002: 37). In the same vein, referring to popular media in Africa, Chibita (2011: 272) applauds tabloid media's flexibility in the usage of indigenous languages and familiar idioms in their contents. In this study, respondents echoed that Muvi TV is very accommodative, by allowing people to express themselves in vernacular, predominantly Nyanja. This is the language widely spoken by the working class in their daily lives as indicated in Chapter two. The following interview extracts express these views:

S1: I like what Muvi TV news does, even an illiterate person is given chance to speak out and to voice out their views. ...I like the way they mix people's voices including vernacular, because not everybody understands English or has had an opportunity to go to school to learn how to speak English, so they tend to accommodate such.

J3: ...even us who speak a bit of English aren't that good at it, as we sometimes add a bit of vernacular. So for one to communicate effectively, you have to be free with the language that you want to speak, what matters at the end of the day is that people get the news.

N1: ... the English they use on the news is simple, and it's good that they include people who can only speak Nyanja or Bemba; on ZNBC you won't see such.

This feature makes popular tabloid media such as Muvi TV to be more easily accessible by those members of society with low levels of education as compared to the mainstream media, such as ZNBC. It can be argued that the working class majority tend to be alienated from

ZNBC's English dominated news discourses based on their inability to speak and comprehend this official language (see Banda 2009: 65).

5.2.4. Lurid visual imagery

Another factor that emerged from the interviews is that the viewers prefer Muvi TV due to its pictorial or visual emphasis as evidenced in the textual analysis findings above. This feature distinguishes tabloid TV news genre from tabloid (print) newspapers as highlighted in Chapter three. In particular, tabloid TV news' "...capacity for moving images...and performative signification" enables it to "produce hyperrealistic effects..." (Glynn 2000: 162). The visuals have heightened emotionality, and lurid with regard to accidents, disasters or crime victims. Subsequently, tabloid media critics assert that the visual/pictorial emphasis over verbal articulation and analysis of the (tabloid TV) news aims primarily to "engage media publics emotionally, with private enjoyment and pleasure" (Machin & Papatheoderou 2002: 37). However, Muvi TV viewers perceived the news' visual imagery emphasis as a way of catering for people who cannot articulate the spoken word, and thus deduce meanings just by seeing the visuals. They also asserted that a story with visuals carried more weight in terms of believability. These sentiments are echoed in the following interview excerpts:

B2: [H]ow can you narrate the story to others if you don't verify by seeing the pictures?

K1: ... some people just words they may not understand, but when they see the video pictures they will know what the story is all about and understand it.

L1: ...pictures are good enough to tell the story especially for the elderly who don't understand any English, and the deaf.

Again, the visual emphasis over verbal articulation on Muvi TV news (which is less on ZNBC news) can be seen as a way of accommodating and catering the hitherto marginalised members of society from mainstream media. In contrast, ZNBC news is heavily characterised by the ruling and economically elite "talking heads" and event speeches.

In addition, the viewers unanimously pointed out that the showing of lurid visual imageries of tragedies on the news is fine. One of the respondents, **F2**, for instance, asserts, "it's important to show pictures, so that we know the consequences for our actions. The picture is also proof enough on stories that are intriguing". As indicated in Chapter three, writing on one of DRC's

tabloidised TV station, *Molière TV*, Frère (2011: 196) also notes that through showing of lurid pictures of dead bodies, displaying victims of rape and murder, the TV station had convinced Kinshasan viewers that presenting their daily problems publicly on TV could help solve them. However, even though Muvi TV viewers attested to deriving pleasure from watching lurid pictures, they did not justify the showing of naked victims of tragedies. One notes the following sentiments:

F3: It's okay for them to show us sensitive pictures, but even if they warn beforehand, sometimes they err by showing private parts of victims. It's not right for them to do so. For instance, there was a girl who was burnt on her private part by her step guardians for being disobedient, and then they showed it. On this one, they were not supposed to do that. Women's bodies are supposed to be respected, for example, even when a mad woman passes naked, people try by all means to cover them or cloth them.

M2: ...on accidents it's okay, but not on showing peoples private parts even if they are victims of violence or accidents. There was a man who committed suicide on a power line, he got burnt, and they showed him half naked, which is not good.

One can argue that these views of the respondents indicate that the viewers actively decode tabloid content as opposed to the critics' characterisation of such audience as gullible and passive. In addition, the respondents' views also express a morally and socially conservative stance, a point I shall elaborate further in subsequent sections.

5.2.5. Choice of news medium

The viewers expressed various tendencies towards the choice of news medium – TV, print and radio. Even though this was not the focus of this study, the respondents attached various attributes to the three main types of news mediums. The internet was said to be a farfetched dream, as they cannot afford the service either on mobile phones or internet cafes (mainly located in the town centre). There is generally low penetration of internet access in Zambia due to the high cost of maintenance (see Murthy & Hussain 2010: 15). Debates are currently widespread about the viability of mobile phones as giving access to a “public sphericule” (Gitlin 1998: 169). For instance, Wasserman (2011: 1) argues that mobile phones

Do not only transmit political information needed for rational deliberation in the public sphere, but also transgresses cultural and social borders and hierarchies in the way they refashion identities and create informal economies and communicative networks.

The respondents in this study indicated that maintaining mobile phones is very expensive (see also Montez 2010: 7). As such, accessing information through the mobile phone internet is most unlikely. However, a few of them indicated that they sometimes use their phones to send a Short Message Service (SMS) to Muvi TV about their views on certain news stories (especially human-interest stories). The TV station broadcasts its SMS number during the live broadcast of the news bulletin, inviting viewers to comment on any news item. In addition, the respondents said if anything happens in their community, they immediately send an SMS to Muvi TV, who responds by arriving on the scene promptly. For instance, one of respondents, **X1**, remarks an incident in which he participated by texting Muvi TV over an accident. He narrates that:

There was an accident on Ngwerere turn-off involving a truck carrying asbestos. I was with my friends when I quickly text Muvi TV. Shortly, I saw Muvi TV news crew arriving at the scene even before the police did. The incident happened around 18hrs, but I was shocked and happy at the same time to see the news item on their 18:30 news bulletin.

As indicated earlier, this response points to how viewers trust Muvi TV to address and represent their issues more adequately than ZNBC or relevant public authorities. This bears resemblance to Wasserman's findings on South African tabloids, on how their readers trust tabloid newspapers instead of relevant public institutions such as the police, courts or government (2010: 139). He asserts that tabloid readers would rather call these newspapers over incidences and occurrences in their communities, instead of relevant authorities (ibid.).

Further, in Zambia, there are no vernacular print media to cater for the less or uneducated citizenry. There are only three daily print newspapers published in English. Two of them are state owned – *The Times of Zambia (Sunday Times)* and *The Daily Mail* – and the other is a commercial and private owned paper – *The Post* (see Debeljak 2010: 9; Murthy & Hussain 2010: 17). And thus, for the majority of the working class community, relying on newspapers as a source of information is improbable, as most of them can hardly read any English. But the respondents highlighted that they at times peruse through *The Post* (a popular, daily elite tabloid newspaper) for pleasure. They likened the style of coverage of this newspaper to that of Muvi TV news. For instance, **B3**, a casual bricklayer points out that:

Even though I don't know English very well, I sometimes have a look at *The Post*. It's also expensive and so I just chance it along the way. They also speak like Muvi TV.

Though I mostly focus on pages where there are talking about jobs and usually get attracted to headlines that relate to me.

D2: ...even though I can hardly read it, I also occasionally peruse through “The Post” especially the Friday/weekend edition. There are a lot of entertainment stories in it. And like Muvi TV on politics, they tell the truth and present the facts.

From the above interview extracts, even though the viewers have English comprehension and reading inadequacies due to their low levels of education, they confirmed that they derive pleasure by just watching the (sensationalised) pictures of the elite tabloid *Post* newspaper’s weekend edition. This edition is generally characterised by a lot of entertainment content.

Radio stations are predominant in Zambia’s media landscape. There are approximately 30 radio stations in Zambia widely spread in all the nine provinces. They range from state, commercial, religious, community and foreign radio (see Murthy & Hussain 2010: 40). Surprisingly, even though radio is said to be the main source of information for many ordinary citizens (see Murthy & Hussain 2010: 10, 14), the respondents said they primarily used it for entertainment purposes. This is articulated in the following interview excerpts:

B4: ...sometimes I listen to *Radio Phoenix* (private commercial radio) for the news, though mostly, I tune into radio stations to listen to Zambian music.

D3: ...as for radio, I usually tune into various stations to listen to music, especially when am just resting or relaxing.

Again, this view of radio as a form and source of entertainment can be attributed to the fact that most radio news programmes (except on community radios which are mostly in the outskirts of Lusaka), are dominated by English (see Murthy & Hussain 2010: 30-32). There is no news broadcast in vernacular on private radio commercial stations in Lusaka, a situation which further alienates the working class, and thus their reliance on this media as a source of pleasure and entertainment instead. However, only ZNBC Radio One broadcasts news in seven official vernacular languages at different intervals (see Murthy & Hussain 2010: 30). But again, this news is purely a replica of ZNBC TV news version and so the viewers perceive it in the same light as they do ZNBC TV news.

Although the television medium is considered as expensive (see Murthy & Hussain 2010: 26) the respondents who do not have electricity and/or own a TV set in their homes pointed out that they watch Muvi TV at the neighbour’s or friend’s house, at salons, barbershops, and

bars/taverns. As will be shown later, it can be argued that in this manner, the TV stations' news facilitates the socialisation/social mobility of its viewership.

5.2.6. Television programming

Even though it was not part of the study's focus, it emerged from the interviews that apart from Muvi TV main news, the rest of the TV stations' programming contributes to the viewers' attraction to Muvi TV station. The overall TV programming of Muvi TV constitutes a syndicate of Brazilian and Mexican novellas, Bollyhood and Philippine soaps. Aside from this, the TV station boasts of 65 percent local programming comprising of local dramas (such as *Banja, Mwine Mushi*), reality TV shows (music – kids star, talent – dance, real life – *Ready for Marriage*), talk shows (Morning rise breakfast show) amongst others. This corresponds to De Bens' (1998: 32) assertion that the overall TV programming and programme schedules in particular, play a role as one of the decisive element for viewers' loyalty to a TV station. He asserts that they not only give an "identity to a channel, they also stimulate fixed viewer habits as they create a kind of bond between viewer and channel" (1998: 33). In the same vein, Dahlgren (1992: 11) asserts that it is important to understand that the experience of TV news cannot be totally isolated from the experience of television generally. He writes that news programmes are part of the overall TV programme flow and scheduling, and thus are intertwined with the culture of the viewer's overall relationship with the television medium. As such, Muvi TV (local) programming can be considered as one of the contributing factors to the viewer's (particularly the working class) attraction, as such programmes largely draw from the idioms of the ordinary people's everyday lived experiences. One of the respondents, N2, attests to this by remarking that Muvi TV is "a total package on its own".

As can be seen from the above data analysis so far, it is evident that Muvi TV news' heavy reliance on human-interest stories, amongst others, is what attracts the viewers, particularly the working class majority. The TV station's populist tone renders it to be popular as well (Fiske 1992: 48). It draws on familiar idioms and personal narratives that reflect the everyday life-worlds of the ordinary publics. As Dahlgren (1995: 60) asserts, tabloid TV news "offers a world which is much more anchored within the horizons of

everyday life and its universe of experience”. As such, this makes it to be easily accessible and thus facilitates identification and involvement from the viewers.

The next section delineates the meanings that viewers derive from Muvi TV news, and how these meanings resonate with their everyday lived realities.

5.3. Viewers’ decoding of Muvi TV main evening news

This section delineates the meanings that viewers derive from Muvi TV news, and how these meanings resonate with their lived experiences and realities. It generally speaks to the socio-cultural significance of the news. It can be argued that, Muvi TV’s tabloidised news presents its audiences with a “sense-making system”, in which issues are perceived as only interesting and relevant as far as they affect the everyday lived experiences and conditions of the viewers (Gripsrud 1992: 88).

As indicated earlier, Muvi TV news viewers are not passive, but active decoders of the content. The consumption of popular culture such as the tabloid TV genre, involves an “active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures within a social system” (Fiske 1989b: 23). Drawing on Halls’ decoding model (see Chapter four), it emerged from the interviews that loyal viewers are more amenable to a *preferred reading* of the news. They perceived the news as being out-rightly truthful and trustworthy. For instance, the following responses points to this:

T2: Muvi TV news reveals the truth on controversial political issues, and they are transparent. But ZNBC hides certain information when it comes to such.

X2: Muvi TV news stands for the truth. Even when newsreaders are presenting the news bulletin, they seem motivated because they know they are speaking the truth....

This outright belief can be attributed to the fact that Muvi TV news tends to resonate with the viewers’ lived experiences, and is thus of greater relevance as compared to ZNBC. The responses also indicate a level of trust in Muvi TV news to provide them with facts and social reality as it is. The viewers draw on their lived realities and circumstances to make sense of, and establish the truthfulness of the news.

For stories that are not accompanied with visual imageries, the respondents expressed a *negotiated reading*. In light of this, Dahlgren (1992: 12) asserts that even though viewers may

only apprehend some part of the informational content, they still make meaning of what they see. “K2”, 26, a kiosk attendant thus asserts:

[F]or instance, that story were there was a girl who allegedly had worms coming out of her private part because she slept with a rich, married elderly man, that was just a rumour. There was no interview with the girl to prove it was true. Of course we know that these young girls like going for sugar daddies for money, but this story was probably just taken from the internet, and used to scare young girls who go after such.

From this response, it can be argued that the viewers establish the credibility of a news story based on whether it is supported by video imagery or not. Stories (such as the one presented above) which are perceived to be fabricated, are thus read in a playful and entertainment manner by the viewers. Wasserman (2010: 142) asserts that such a reading provide its decoders a sense of empowerment.

Further, most viewers expressed an *oppositional reading* especially against the grain of the *dominant reading* inferred in ZNBC news items. Among other things, this can be attributed to the lack of visual imagery (more of talking heads) in most of its news items. As indicated earlier, this is also compounded by the political malaise and disillusionment expressed by the viewers towards the power bloc. ZNBC is seen as an advocate for the ruling elite, whilst Muvi TV is perceived to be of the people. This is articulated in the following excerpt:

Y2: On ZNBC news, they hide certain information so you wouldn't know exactly the truth about certain issues. All they present is the good that Rupiah is seemingly doing and not how people are suffering in certain areas. They do so because they fear that he may be hated by the people. In other words ZNBC news is used as a tool through which Rupiah is portrayed as a good person, working for the people, meanwhile, which is not the case.

This response indicates a popular scepticism towards the ruling elite and mainstream media discourses. Such discourses are perceived as far removed from their daily experiences, and thus their turn to news media discourses on Muvi TV that is of relevance to them.

5.3.1. “News we can use”

As delineated above, most viewers expressed an inclination towards human-interest stories as they reflected their daily lives. Tabloid news critics consider such stories as trivia, and thus distract the audiences from important issues critical for an informed citizenry. However, as Bird (1998: 48) points out, such news provides what she describes as “news we can use” and

is regarded by their audiences as important information (see Chapter three; see also Bird 1992: 104). This is to say that for instance, Muvi TV's tabloidised news stories is relevant to its viewers' lives as it provides information on ways of tackling and coping with their daily socio-cultural and economic struggles, in a society which is becoming increasingly polarised between the rich and the poor. This is articulated in the following interviews:

D4: ...for example, we had floods recently which washed away our bridge, and Muvi TV showed it on its news. My son uses the bridge so at least I was fore warned that the road was now impassable. Hence, I made sure I looked for transport money for my son to use a mini-bus on another route.

K3: ...for instance, stories on compounds where there are outbreaks of cholera, or thugs, you will be able to know and learn that for instance in Mtendere Township there are a lot of thugs. So when I go there I don't have to walk at night, and when you go to Kanyama you are told there is cholera, so you will know how to safeguard yourself from contracting the disease... So Muvi TV news alerts us on violet areas and peaceful areas, so that if you want to find a house for rent, you will know where to go.

In view of the above, it can be argued that it is in this manner Muvi TV news can be said to performing and practicing what Eide (1997: 177) describes as service journalism. As discussed in Chapter three, service journalism entails the way in which tabloid news media provide their audiences with information, advice and help about the problems of everyday life (Eide 1997: 177; Eide & Knight 1999: 522). For instance, one respondent asserts that:

N3: Muvi TV news is very educative on many issues. For instance on floods, we get informed that there will be floods. Therefore, you will know what to do to prepare yourself. But for others in other places they will know that no matter what they do to their house, there is no way they'll evade the floods.

Subsequently, while tabloidised in content and approach, Muvi TV news can be understood as having this political significance in its focus on news stories that mostly affect its working class audience. In particular, these stories mainly hinge on poor local government service delivery such as drainage, sewerage, water reticulation, and high cost of living, which are presented in a lurid and personalised way. Such content is often elided from ZNBC news.

5.3.2. The “carnavalesque” and micro-politics of everyday life

It emerged from the interviews that the viewers derive pleasure and entertainment from the textual content of Muvi TV news. In contrast to what tabloid news critics label as sensational, scandalous or offensive, human-interest stories were paradoxically characterised by the

viewers as interesting, funny, entertaining, educational, and informational (see Bird 1992: 114). Some viewers compared the entertainment and educational value of Muvi TV news with a local drama, *Banja*, and Nigerian movies. These movies tend to draw on banal events and issues that resonate with the viewer's daily lives. The following personal interview extracts highlights this:

X3: On news, the way they implement it, it's very entertaining. When they read a news item, it is followed by a video clip and I like it that way, maybe that's why even many other people like Muvi TV news...some of the clips tend to be funny.

H1: ...I like to be entertained. ZNBC news tends to be boring, but Muvi TV news is more entertaining and interesting.

T3: ...It (Muvi TV news) is just like the way Nigerian love stories are, they relate to us, no wonder people like them, because they relate to an African environment, the way we Africans relate to love and other life issues.

As indicated in Chapter three, the tabloid news genre is often chastised for aiming at entertaining the audience with its sensationalised stories, ultimately for commercial expediency (see Sparks 2000: 28). However, as Wasserman (2010: 91) asserts, entertainment and pleasure can “serve to draw historically subordinated publics into the realm of the political in a way that formal political debates are unable to”. By the same token, Fiske (1989b: 49) points out that popular pleasures arise from the “social allegiances formed by subordinated people; they are bottom-up and thus must exist in some relationship of opposition” to the power bloc. In line with the spectacular, it is in this manner that Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1984: 7-9) is invoked in perceiving tabloid journalism as “a means of resistance against authority”, a disregard for authority, or inverting/counter hegemonic discourses (Wasserman 2010: 72; see Biressi & Nunn 2008: 101; Glynn 2000: 142; Eide & Knight 1999: 527). Significantly, this takes place in that the pleasures of micro-politics are that of decoding meanings that resonate with the viewers' everyday lived experiences and realities in a more direct and practical manner (Fiske 1989b: 57). In light of this, there was a sense of dissatisfaction and disdain amongst Muvi TV viewers towards mainstream media (ZNBC) discourses and the power bloc in general. This is articulated in the following interview excerpts:

M3: ...am fed up with the current government, am seeing a lot of people graduating from universities and ending up on the streets because there are no jobs. Government is not doing enough to create jobs.

S2: ...some stories make us feel angry especially towards government and the council who grab street vendor's merchandise, which in a way entrenches poverty. Instead, they should be thinking of ways to create more jobs or constructing convenient and better places for people to sell their merchandise.

Even though it is argued that the carnivalesque reading of tabloid news by the viewers/readers only helps them to vent their discontentment towards the power bloc without having any social or political action, it can be contended that this reading not only serves as a form of resistance to hegemonic and dominant discourses, it does instigate social change as indicated above (see responses **F1** & **D4**). In addition, the political implication of such responses is that the viewers feel neglected and alienated by the power bloc. As attributed to earlier, discourses on such micro-politics are elided from mainstream media (ZNBC) discourses. Another respondent further reiterates that:

E2: ...if the government sees that there are more street vendors, it should realise that there are no jobs. So they should instead create more industries which will create jobs for the people. In this country we do have a lot of wealth, but the only problem is that those people in higher positions are the ones that enjoy the wealth. They hinder the money from trickling down to us.

It can be argued that it is because of this prominence given to stories on micro-politics of everyday life that the viewers opt to Muvi TV news as an alternative. The news can be seen as providing a different way of looking at the world and ones place it. Its stories are of greater proximity to their daily lives.

5.3.3. "Social utility functions"

Melodramatic or sensational news stories serve "a social utility function" of helping members of a community to gauge what is and what is not morally acceptable (Stevens 1985, qtd. in Uribe & Gunter 2007: 208). As such, in contrast to what critics view popular tabloid news stories as morally outraged, Muvi TV viewers pointed out that the news teaches and educates them on how to be good neighbours and be of good morals. It thus reinforces certain beliefs on various socio-cultural issues (see Bird 1992: 121). Crime stories that show the punishment and the consequences for various perpetrators of violent acts were cited in this case:

C3: ...they (Muvi TV news) show how thieves are jailed or how people in our compounds like taking the law into their hands. So if you are thief or a witch, you will definitely fear for your life and stop such deviant acts. They also make us to be aware and know more about HIV/AIDS. We get to see infected people being interviewed on

the news, on how they are coping with life. You definitely wouldn't want to be in their shoes, so you can't go on leading a promiscuous life.

As alluded to earlier, such responses express a social and moral conservative trait by both the TV station's news and the viewers. As indicated in Chapter three, Grabe (1997: 941) castigates tabloid television news on such grounds. She asserts that even though the news represents threats to everyday life for example, they simultaneously promote and instil traditional social and moral values amongst the viewers. However, Glynn (2000: 6) states that stories on threats to everyday life tend to speak to "widely frustrated desires for some secure measure of control over one's own circumstances and conditions of existence". For instance, one also notes the following interview response:

D5: ...there was a story in which a child fell in a ditch at the UNZA grounds, the fire brigade came and failed to retrieve the baby. So they took a small boy tied him with a rope, and lowered him into the hole to get the baby, and he manage to pull the trapped baby. It showed and taught me a lesson that when something bad happens to someone even though they are not your relative, you need to help them, because you wouldn't know what may happen to your children in the near future, and people can come to your rescue.

This response indicates Muvi TV news' moralising nature, which in way aims at instilling a sense of *ubuntu* in its viewers. It thus points to the news' conservative portrayal of an ideal social cohesion.

Another social utility function served by Muvi TV news stories includes facilitation of the socialisation and interaction processes amongst its viewers in the community (see Wasserman 2010: 39). As indicated earlier, the viewers watch the news in places such as saloons, barbershops, and taverns, among others. In light of this, as compared to print tabloids, "part of TV's appeal can be phatic", that is "it can be used to maintain and strengthen social relationships" (Fiske 1989b: 153). As earlier alluded to, Fiske (1989b: 49) asserts that popular "pleasures arise from the social allegiances formed by subordinated members of society". Largely the content of discussion in the spaces in which Muvi TV news is watched, centre on human-interest stories. These focus on threats to everyday life, the bizarre stories, how to tackle everyday struggles, amongst others. This is echoed in the following excerpts:

H2: ...if your friend doesn't watch news or didn't watch news, especially on accidents, thieves and sexual immorality, you get to share. But most of the times we discuss issues as they come.

J4: ...for me, I think it depends what kind of friends and people I'm with at a particular time. But mostly, the talk is mostly on local news. For example, the story about a girl who was born with two sexual parts, we were discussing it with my friends at church, even referring to bible scriptures that talk about such things happening in the last days.

In the same vein, Bird (1998: 44) asserts that human-interest news stories of various kinds such as scandals and trivial tales do provide an "entry point to everyday discussions of morality, boundaries, and appropriate behaviour". As such, the conversations that viewers have in various spaces about such news stories tend to unite people, and "given them common topics of conversation in a world in which common ties" are diminishing (ibid: 44; see also Wasserman 2010: 136; Fiske 1989a: 189).

5.3.4. Creation of an "imagined community"

In relation to the above, another aspect that emerged from the data is that Muvi TV news helps in creating an "imagined community" (Anderson 1991; see Chapter three). The viewers felt attached to other communities as they could identify themselves with problems and other issues aired from such communities. Such problems border around issues such as inefficient local council/government service delivery, which include poor water and sanitation, bad roads, garbage collection, amongst others. Hermes (2006: 37) asserts that if popular culture such as tabloid media is able to invoke a sense of belonging or a shared social imaginary among people, "we are, in effect, considering popular culture as a public sphere, in which democracy is at work". By the same token, Dahlgren (1992: 17) asserts that some "subjective sense of community", is a prerequisite to the functioning of publics and citizenship at large (see also Dahlgren 1995: 146). The following interview excerpts resonate with these points:

Z1: ...issues that happen in our compounds and in other communities, is what is covered on Muvi TV news. So in this way, we get attached to other communities because they pass through similar situations like ours on issues such as poor drainages, poor roads and the like...we are all Zambians, "*one Zambia one nation*" (slogan used by first republican president Dr. Kenneth Kaunda to promote unity amongst approximately 73 languages in Zambia).

J5: ...Muvi TV will show the terrible conditions under which other people, just like us, are surviving in other compounds. Sometimes they show that the city council has displaced street vendors, and those affected will actually be crying, lamenting on how they will take care of their families. Now just imagine, somebody relies on the income they get from selling tomatoes to send their children to school, and then the council should come and grab their merchandise, it touches our hearts so much that you feel

pity. And it gets you thinking of how to get out of this poverty that has hit us so much....

The sense of “belonging”, “shared identity” or “collectivism” expressed in the responses above is in tandem with the ritual function of communication as discussed in Chapter three. This function aims at the “maintenance of society in time”, not only the act of imparting or transmitting information, but the “representation of shared beliefs” (Curran 1989: 18). Tabloid journalism as exemplified by Muvi TV news is said to score high on this ritual perspective. In this way, it is said to primarily provide the meaning-making machinery for the viewers/readers, on dealing and coping with their everyday lived “existential and social matters” (Gripsrud 2000: 42).

As can be seen from the discussion above, Muvi TV news viewers actively decode the content of the news. Ultimately, they pointed out that the news relates to, and reflects their daily-lived experiences and realities. This finds resonance in Fiske’s (1989b: 185) assertion that in order to encourage a diversity of people to watch, remember and reminisce over its events, “TV news must meet the key criteria of popular taste, those of relevance and pleasurable productivity”.

The next section discusses the political significance of Muvi TV main evening news *vis-a-vis* criticisms levelled against tabloidisation.

5.4. Political significance of Muvi TV main evening news.

This section discusses the political significance of Muvi TV’s tabloidised main evening news in light of the criticisms levelled against tabloid TV news genre as delineated in Chapter three. Succinctly, tabloidised news has been chastised for depoliticising the public by causing cynicism, and lowering the standards of rational public discourse. By its focus on trivia matters, it is said to sideline critical information that is necessary for an informed body polity.

So far, this chapter has endeavoured to establish why viewers tend to opt for Muvi TV news as an alternative to mainstream media, ZNBC. It has established that the former broadcasts news issues that are relevant and of greater proximity to their everyday lived experiences. Such issues also help them to cope and tackle their daily struggles. These issues are mainly

micro-politics of everyday life such as lack of proper water and sanitation, poor roads, garbage collection, among others. Subsequent sections further elaborate on these findings.

5.4.1. Alienation from mainstream politics and media

As pointed out earlier, Muvi TV news viewers expressed a sense of marginalisation from formal politics, various developmental programmes and mainstream media discourses. Such an inclination borders around the viewers' relationship with the broader political formation as highlighted in Chapter two. In particular, the viewers expressed a sense of political disillusionment towards the power bloc or the ruling party, which has been in power for the past 20 years of democracy. This finds resonance in what Steenveld and Strelitz (2010: 541) assert that the popularity of tabloid media depicts a particular kind of relationship between the ruling elite and the working class majority, and not necessarily the media itself. As such, they assert that the popularity of such media can partly be attributed to the sense of alienation from mainstream politics and development in general, by the subordinated members of society (ibid; see also Fiske 1989b: 117). In view of this, the following responses from the respondents clearly reflect this point:

K3: ...you see, Rupiah Banda's party have been in power since 1991, and nothing much has changed, except things are just worsening for us, and getting better for the political leaders and their families. They are able to send their children to good schools in the country, even overseas. So there is no need to pay attention because you know that nothing will change at the end of the day.

M4: You know, Zambian politics is really letting us down. Am sure other countries ridicule our politics. These politicians...all they do now, is character assassination and insulting each other, instead of focusing on the interests of the people who voted them into office. Those in offices are only interested in enriching themselves forgetting about their promises to the people who put them in power. This is not supposed to be the case. In terms of character, as leaders they should lead by example. They should stop insulting each other and channel their energies to bringing development to the communities.... Although democracy is there, only a few have benefited from it.... The way these politicians handle their politics, not taking our interests into account and so on, it's like democracy doesn't even exist.

As indicated in Chapter three, these sentiments find resonance in Spark's (1988: 216) assertion that the political and socio-economic power in a stable democracy is so far removed from the everyday lived experiences and realities of the ordinary people such as the working-class. Consequently, they have no interest in monitoring it in the mainstream media (such as

ZNBC), hence their turn to popular tabloid media (as exemplified by Muvi TV). As indicated earlier, Muvi TV news viewers expressed chronic fatigue towards ZNBC main news discourses which are hitherto removed and distanced from their lived experiences and realities, especially on macro political issues (see Steenveld & Strelitz 2010: 542; Wasserman 2010: 140). Particularly, the state media's main news, now referred to as "MMD/Rupiah news" is perceived as the ruling government's propaganda machinery (see Chapter two). And so, the viewers prefer Muvi TV news as an alternative. For instance one respondent remarks:

G2: ...there is a huge difference between Muvi TV and ZNBC news. The problem with ZNBC is that they only talk about the good things that government does, they don't criticise government even when it has erred. But on *Muvi* they disclose all the information whether good or bad. Also, *Muvi* covers a lot of stories on things that are happening in our communities, but ZNBC news the first headlines and most news stories are just on Rupiah Banda. That is why I prefer Muvi TV news.

This bears semblance to Frère's (2011: 202) finding that the interest expressed by the ordinary members of society in Kinshasa in popular forms of media demonstrate "their dissatisfaction towards 'politiciens'/'dogs' and elitist news programmes on elite mainstream media". This also corresponds with Conboy's (2006: 13) view that tabloid media have shown that there is a:

Receptive audience for stories which demonstrate directly or indirectly a disrespect for those in certain positions of social authority, reinforcing the sense of distance between the powerful in society and those excluded from these circles.

Further, the sense of alienation from mainstream politics and development was also reflected in some of the viewer's lack of partisan interest in formal politics upon which ZNBC news capitalises. For instance, one of the respondents echoes:

L2: ...I don't have a political party I belong to. I am neutral like Muvi TV. This is because, politicians have got too much lies, and they are all liars. They have no truth in them. But, I do vote for someone not based on what political party they belong, but whether they can deliver or not....

Hence, the viewers prefer Muvi TV news which in contrast to ZNBC news taps into the micro-politics of everyday life. This finds resonance in Fiske's (1992: 60) assertion that we should not be surprised,

If the energies of the people are directed more towards the micro-politics of everyday life than to the macro-politics of socio-economic structures, for it is in these micro-politics that popular control is most effectively exercised.

The lack of partisan politics expressed by L2 does not mean that the viewers are apolitical. Rather, it can be perceived as the viewer's sense of distrust towards the power bloc and alienation from mainstream politics. In addition, it can be seen as the viewer's "disillusionment related to elite agenda setting by mainstream media" such as ZNBC (Wasserman 2010: 141).

5.4.2. An informed citizenry

It emerged from the interviews that tabloidised Muvi TV news fulfils the political function of equipping its viewers to be better citizens. Muvi TV viewers unanimously asserted that the news helps them to keep their leaders in-check, to know their character, and whether they can deliver or not. In this way, they are able to make informed decisions regarding which leaders to vote for during elections. This is echoed in the following:

T4: Muvi TV news on that, it's very good. To me they are doing a very good job. For instance, they followed our MP concerning the protection of a sewer dam in which a person who was HIV positive allegedly committed suicide by throwing himself in it. Because we don't have a physical audience with our MPs and counsellors, Muvi TV thus actually shows what our MPs are doing or not doing, their good and bad sides, thus making us to know our MPs better. So that even when get to vote in these upcoming elections, we will know who to vote for. So Muvi TV is my number one on this.

Y3: ...yes, it (Muvi TV news) teaches me on knowing these leaders well. There is a Bemba saying which states that "wanya wanya tateka ichalo" (an undecided person cannot be a leader). Also, you can't rule by threats and insults. Sata (opposition party leader) is such a person for instance. During one of his campaigns, he once said, "I will bring electricity into your houses so that you can clearly and properly look for your lice". So I know that this man has bad-mouthed language even though he does seem promising in terms of leadership. But, he should lead by example as a leader.

This finding is in contrast to what critics contend that tabloidised news debases issues critical for an informed citizenry. It can be argued that Muvi TV news' personalised coverage of poor local government service delivery, among other things, is able to show the viewers the connections between their everyday lives and the larger social and political world.

5.4.3. Accessible and participatory forum

It emerged from the interviews that Muvi TV news offers a platform for the working class viewers to engage with the ruling elite. It is perceived as a platform upon which they are freely invited to participate and engage in various public discourses (see Wasserman 2010: 85; Chibita 2011: 271; Wilems 2011: 57). This is done in that the marginalised members of society are able to seek audience with the relevant authorities on various issues that primarily affect their everyday lives. As such, the viewers are able to air their discontentment with the power bloc on various issues of everyday life. This is evidenced in the following response:

M5: ...For instance, here in Kabanana, the community came together at one time and went to Muvi TV and complained about our poor roads, lack of water and that we don't have an audience with our MP. After that it was televised on the news, the MP, Lusaka City Council came, and people voiced out their concerns. Thereafter, at least the main road was graded....

As attributed to earlier, this response indicate the viewers trust in Muvi TV to instigate social change, and thus it is viewed as reliable in addressing their concerns as compared to ZNBC.

In addition, Muvi TV station is seen as being friendly and an advocate by the viewers. The viewers instil trust in the TV station to help bring to light their daily struggles in the mediated public space. This is shown in these responses:

Z2: ... at our workplaces a lot of things happen. So if you've got problems and you want to be heard, mainly when you call Muvi TV news, they promptly come to listen to your problems and they televise them on the news. They really help in solving problems such as delayed salary payments, poor working conditions and so on.

Y4: ...for instance, there was a news story about a company which didn't provide its casual workers protective clothes. After the workers were shown complaining on Muvi TV news, it was later televised that they were given the protective clothes. I felt good that at least their issue was addressed.

As indicated earlier, discourses on the daily struggles of the working class are absent from mainstream media (ZNBC). As such, it can be argued that Muvi TV news constitutes an alternative mediated public sphere where citizenship and democratic politics are debated and negotiated on other terms (see Wasserman 2010: 91). This finds resonance in Örnebring's view that tabloid media constitutes an alternative public sphere by offering ordinary people with an opportunity to talk about their everyday life issues in the public space (2006: 862).

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the findings to the main thrust of this study – investigating the popularity of Muvi TV's tabloidised main evening news. It focused on presenting and discussing the findings to the aims and objectives of the study as outlined in Chapter one. Particularly, it firstly presented the data findings of the qualitative thematic analysis of Muvi TV news in comparison to that of ZNBC main news. It emerged that Muvi TV news largely focuses on micro-politics of everyday life, in particular, human-interest stories, unlike the heavy reliance on (ruling elite) political news on ZNBC. Muvi TV news sparingly covers traditionally defined formal political issues albeit at an individual level. Ultimately it eulogises the everyday lived experiences of the working class who make-up the majority of its viewers.

The chapter then discussed the socio-cultural significance of the news, focusing on the meanings that viewers obtain from its content, and how these resonate with their everyday lives. It was established that the viewers actively decode Muvi TV news which is said to be of greater relevance and proximity to their daily lives as compared to ZNBC news. In particular, it offers ways of coping with their daily struggles and challenges. It also caters for hitherto marginalised voices (such as the working class), discourses and issues from mainstream media. It thus offers a mediated public space in which the ordinary are able to engage and present various issues of their everyday life. In addition, it was established that despite its personalised approach, Muvi TV news plays a political significance by helping its viewers keep the power bloc accountable, and making informed decision with regard to which leader to vote for.

The next chapter concludes the study.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

6.0. Introduction

The previous chapter presented and discussed the research findings. The findings were interpreted using theoretical underpinnings discussed in Chapters three and four. This chapter concludes the study.

6.1. Summary

The main purpose of the study was to examine the rapid rise in popularity of a Zambian television station, Muvi TV, particularly its main evening news, among the working class community in Lusaka. This working class audience constitute the majority of its viewership. The study aimed at investigating the reasons behind their attraction to the TV station's tabloid TV news genre as compared to mainstream news media, particularly, the state broadcaster, ZNBC. The primary interest was to find out what meanings viewers derive from Muvi TV news content, and how these meanings are appropriated into their lived experiences and circumstances. Generally, the study aimed at establishing the socio-political significance of Muvi TV news, which privileges human-interest stories, with a focus on micro-politics of everyday life. The main research questions are outlined and discussed subsequently.

In this study, I first gave a brief overview of the study in Chapter one. I then discussed the broader context within which the study is conducted in Chapter two. I highlighted the Zambian television broadcast media landscape to provide the backdrop within which Muvi TV station emerges as a popular tabloid media. I also outlined the socio-political descriptions of Lusaka, the scope of study, to locate the political significance of Muvi TV news.

In Chapter three, I discussed literature on theoretical debates and perspectives surrounding the interface between popular tabloid media, democracy and everyday life. This literature review informed this study. In particular, the literature focussed on normative debates on tabloids, tabloid TV and tabloidisation in order to elucidate the socio-cultural and political significance of tabloid TV news genre such as Muvi TV news. In carrying out this investigation, the study drew on reception analysis, rooted in the qualitative approach. Thus, Chapter four discussed the qualitative research methodology and techniques I employed to

unearth the viewers' perspectives on Muvi TV news. The study employed a three-stage design – qualitative thematic/content analysis, focus groups and in-depth individual interviews. Drawing on the theoretical debates and perspectives discussed in Chapter three, the data (from qualitative thematic analysis, focus groups and in-depth individual interviews) was analysed, interpreted and presented in Chapter five. The analysis endeavoured to answer the research questions as follows:

6.1.1. Viewers' news media preference

The first research question was what attracts the viewers to Muvi TV news as compared to ZNBC news? The findings to this question are established in Chapter five under Sections 5.2.1 to 5.2.6. In particular, the findings indicate that the viewers' news media preference and choice of Muvi TV news over ZNBC news is due to the fact that the former presents its news in a formulaic manner. That is, it repeats the narratives on micro-politics of everyday life issues and concerns which are elided from ZNBC news. These issues resonate with the viewers' daily experiences. Muvi TV news is also characterised by the use of simple and direct English language in a conversational manner, thus catering for the working class who have low levels of education. Coupled with this, the news also capitalises on the use of colloquialism which resonates with ordinary people's idioms and includes original video sound bites in vernacular (Nyanja and Bemba predominantly) without any English narration or translation. In addition, the news also emphasises the visual imagery over verbal articulation. In this manner, it can be argued that it caters for the uneducated who cannot deduce meanings by the spoken word. The visuals also add to the credibility of news stories.

6.1.2. Viewers decoding of Muvi TV main evening news

The second set of research questions, "what meanings do these viewers obtain from Muvi TVs' main evening news? How do these meanings resonate with their everyday lived experiences?" were addressed in Chapter five under sections 5.3 to 5.3.4. The findings indicate that Muvi TV news accentuates micro-politics (such as poor water and sanitation, poor roads and garbage collection) and threats to everyday life (floods, thieves, diseases, among others) which have hitherto been marginalised from mainstream media such as ZNBC. The working class community are able to identify and relate to issues, hence its popularity amongst this social group. At the same time, the news provides information and

advice on how to cope and navigate through their daily struggles. In addition, the news plays various social utility functions such as the facilitation of the socialisation and interaction processes; propagates and instils an ideal social cohesion; creation of an imagined community; and performs a ritual function of communication. Generally, the news paradoxically provides pleasure and entertainment, and educates and informs the audience.

6.1.3. The socio-cultural and political significance of Muvi TV news

The last set of research question was, “what is the political significance of this news which claims to tackle “serious” social, political and economic issues? Does the information provided by Muvi TVs’ arguably tabloidised news enable the public to exercise their civic duties?” These were addressed in Chapter five under sections 5.4 to 5.4.3. It was established that Muvi TV news provides an alternative mediated public space in which media discourses (relevant to the working class) and voices hitherto marginalised from mainstream media (ZNBC) are featured and given prominence. It also offers a platform upon which the ordinary members of society such as the working class can seek audience with those in positions of power. As such, it can be argued that the TV station offers what can be viewed as the foundation for the Habermasian public sphere, with regard to accessibility and participatory. In addition, the political significance of Muvi TV news includes its practice of service journalism with a focus on the coverage of the ineptness of local government service delivery to the compounds and communities. It also does perform a political function of keeping the ruling elite accountable to the public, albeit at an individual level. Thus, it can be argued that Muvi TV’s tabloidised main news does perform the envisaged canonical political function of journalism (in relation to the rational public sphere) albeit at an individual level.

6.2. A brief overview of the textual analysis

Overall, the prominence given to the coverage of human-interest stories, use of melodrama and flowery language in its headline teasers, heightened emotive and lurid video inserts of tragedy victims, and the inclusion of vernacular languages and colloquialism gives Muvi TV news the characteristic of a tabloid TV news genre or as an epitome of the tabloidisation of television news. This is in contrast to ZNBC’s news which is said to be presented in a more “professional” manner.

6.3. Conclusion

In view of the findings, this thesis makes an important contribution to African Media Studies given the current shortage of research on audience reception in Africa. In particular, it contributes to the understanding of tabloid TV news genre in an African context such as Zambia. This reception analysis also enhances insights into audiences' interactions with and uses of this news genre. It largely contributes to the study of tabloid news, vis-a-vis identity and identity politics in the African context, thus adding to the body of knowledge dealing with media, politics and meaning making in Zambia. However, further research may bring to light the extent to which popular journalism may increasingly be an avenue for the contestation of dominant political discourses in African countries.

However, I take cognisance of the limitations of the study due to a small limited sample used. This affects the generalisation or drawing wider inferences from the findings to larger populations. However, as reiterated above, in this qualitative research, the concern is not with the application of findings to larger or universal populations or settings beyond this particular sample and context of the study, as is the case in quantitative inquiry (Bryman 1988: 123). The concern is rather with developing findings that not only makes sense of this particular study, but also shows how the same procedure or theory when utilised in another context can lead to different findings (Maxwell 1992: 293, qtd., in Strelitz 2005: 66). Thus, this research takes the stance expressed by Ang (1996: 71) that the primary focus is on understanding particulars rather than universal generalisations.

This chapter has given a summary of the entire study. This study has generally contributed to the ongoing debates on the socio-political efficacy of popular tabloid media and genres, particularly to an African context. The study has established that popular tabloid TV news genre such as Muvi TV news performs a social and political function albeit in different ways as those of journalism considered acceptable and professional.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Focus group interview guide

Investigating the popularity of the Zambian television station Muvi TV: A reception study of Lusaka viewers.

1. Introduction and welcoming respondents

I would like to welcome all of you, and thank you for coming. My name is Loisa Mbatha, I will be the moderator for the interview. I am a student of Journalism at Rhodes University in South Africa. This research study is a partial academic requirement for the award of a master's degree in journalism and media studies.

2. Ethics and ground rules

The purpose of this study is to understand the popularity of Muvi TV in Lusaka. So, I would like to discuss this with you particularly on Muvi TV's main evening news, how you make sense of it and how it relates to your daily lives. The information you will give will help me understand why people in Lusaka are attracted to Muvi TV than other TV stations. This discussion and the information which will come from it, is confidential and will only be used by me for the purpose of this study and will only be previewed to my supervisor. In the final product, I will not use any of your real names for the sake of your privacy and confidentiality.

I will be recording this discussion on an audio tape device, so that I can be able to easily refer to it later.

I have come to listen to you on what you think about Muvi TV news. And so I will be asking questions, each one of you is welcome to contribute whatever comes to your mind regarding the questions. Do not feel intimidated by anyone here, and there are no wrong and right answers in this discussion, anything you will say is very valuable, negative or positive. And please whatever will be discussed should end within here, let us respect each other when one is talking and even after the interview we should respect each other's privacy.

The discussion will take about an hour. Any other questions or clarifications before we begin?

3. Questions

3.1. Popularity of Muvi TV/main evening news as opposed to ZNBC/main evening news amongst viewers in Lusaka, particularly the working class.

- Do you watch Muvi TV?

- How often do you watch it and where?
- Do you watch ZNBC or any other TV station? How often?
- Do you watch Muvi TV main news? How often?
- Do you watch any other main news, such as on ZNBC?
- Which one of the two, do you prefer to watch, and why?
- What factors influence your choice of preference?
- Is there anything you do not like about Muvi TV news, and why?
- What is it about Muvi TV news that you like?

3.2. Types of stories and content covered on Muvi TV news that are popular.

- What kind of stories do you like on Muvi TV news? And why?
- What recent news stories on Muvi TV main news can you remember that impressed you the most?
- What do you think of the language used on Muvi TV news?

3.3. Meanings that viewers obtain from Muvi TV main news, and how they relate to their social position and everyday experience.

- How does watching Muvi TV news make you think about your daily life?
- The stories that it covers, how do you relate to them?
- Has Muvi TV news helped you in your daily life? If so, what information did you use or what information do you use?
- After watching Muvi TV news, how do you feel (happy, relaxed, concerned, angry, etc. and why?

3.3.1. The political and cultural significance of Muvi TV's main news.

- Do any news stories on Muvi TV teach you on things such as voter and civic education, holding your MPs or Councillors accountable, or anything to do with civic engagement?
- What kind of news stories/information is this?
- Compared to ZNBC main news, what do you think of the way Muvi TV covers political and economic news?
- Some people say Muvi TV news is bad, without morals by showing things such as dead bodies, injured people, dead foetuses, among others, what do you think?
- Do you watch Muvi TV news alone, if not, with whom?
- Do you discuss any news stories on Muvi TV with anyone else, and what kind of stories do you talk about?

4. Concluding the interview: Is there anything I have left out that you would like to point out relating to Muvi TV news?

Thank you very much for the information you have given me, and for sparing your time to come for this interview. If I need any clarification on anything, can I contact you? Once the final report is done, would you like to have a look at it? For any further information about the study, or if you would like to discuss this project further, you can contact me on
or my supervisor on.....

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Investigating the popularity of the Zambian television station Muvi TV: A reception study of Lusaka viewers.

This study is being conducted by Loisa Mbatha, supervised by Prof. Herman Wasserman from the Department of Journalism and media Studies, at Rhodes University. The main purpose is to understand the popularity of Muvi TV amongst Lusaka viewers. The research is a partial academic requirement for the award of a masters degree in journalism and media studies.

The research will involve your participation in a group interview of six other people, and will take about an hour. As the moderator, I will be asking questions, and you will be invited to give any response. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You have the option to opt out of the interview/focus group if you feel uncomfortable. There are no direct benefits to you, but your participation is likely to help me find out more about Muvi TV, particularly how news stories covered on its main news relate to your daily lives. However, I will give you an amount of K10, 000 each for your time, and travel expense.

Information that will arise from this interview will remain confidential, and will only be reported as group data with no identifying information such as names. The information will only be used by me, for the purpose of this academic study.

Participant’s consent: I have been invited to participate in this research about Muvi TV’s popularity in Lusaka. I have read and understood the information provided in this form/or it has been read to me. I consent voluntarily to participate in this study.

Name of Participant _____
Signature of Participant _____
Date _____

Information about yourself:

- What you do.....
- Your qualifications.....
- Where you live.....
- Age group.....
- Marital status.....
- Sex.....
- How many children.....
- Contact number.....