

**AN INVESTIGATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JOURNALISTS
AND THEIR NEWS SOURCES: A CASE STUDY OF *THE POST*
NEWSPAPER IN ZAMBIA**

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ABSTRACT

Normative professional journalism and the need to re-evaluate the structural social context of journalism practice and its role in emerging democracies has led to the increased scrutiny of journalists and their relationship to news sources. This study conceptualises the relationship between journalists and news sources as a dual process of consensus and conflict of interests in the newsgathering practice in Zambia, an emerging democracy. The study suggests that journalists actively pursue powerful individuals in society such as those in government, pressure groups and business as news sources who have been available and suitable in the past. Journalists' view of society as bureaucratically organised and the short turn-around time of news production are among the organisational factors attributed to this tendency.

This study adopts a sociological approach to investigate the journalist-news source relationship at *The Post*, in Zambia, by factoring in the perspectives of social organisation of newswork and political economy. Whereas the social organisation perspective focuses on the organisational and occupational demands of journalists, political economy reinforces the larger context of journalist-news source interaction in a society. Additionally, the social constructivist theory, which is premised around the idea that the agenda and content of journalism production, is in part a product of non-journalistic social factors is useful in understanding the various influences on the relationship.

The study investigates the nature of the journalist-news source relationship using two diametrically opposed views – the dominant (exchange) and competitive (adversarial) paradigms. This is aimed at establishing whether the relationship is an exchange or adversarial. While the latter relationship is common in liberal democracies where the media are seen as part of elite structures with considerable power on their own, the thinking is that inequalities in resource distribution and political power generate social tensions in developing countries that require media to be carefully managed. Using qualitative semi-structured interviews and observation methods, this study establishes that while the adversarial role has an attraction for the journalists investigated, the exchange model comes closest to describing the nature of relationship they share with their news sources.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is affectionately dedicated to my son, Kizito, who has brought such joy and happiness to me. Of all names I have been called, the one I cherish most is simply “Mummy”.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

This study investigates how journalists at *The Post* newspaper in Zambia relate to their news sources during the newsgathering process. It is an examination of the relationship between journalists and their sources from the former's point of view. Various media sociologists have examined this relationship (see, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Curran, Gurevitch and Woollacott, 1982; Gans, 1979; Larsson, 2002; McNair, 1998; Reese, 2001 and Schudson, 2000) in response to the rise of debates about the norms and beliefs of professional journalistic practice and the need to re-evaluate its broader social and structural context in democracies.

Conclusions are for example that the journalist-news source relationship faces different interpretations that are at the centre of two opposing theoretical views of the socio-political functions of the media – the competitive and dominant paradigms. The theoretical polarity of these two paradigms provides the premise from which I make my own investigation into the journalist-news source relationship at *The Post*.

Those whose perspectives on the role of media are structured by the competitive (watchdog) or normative paradigm argue that, “the editorial and stylistic diversity of the media is an expression and embodiment of the intellectual freedom which characterises liberal capitalism, articulating and making possible the pluralism of politics and culture” (McNair, 1998:19). My case study's editorial guidelines support these democratic principles of media; for example, “to protect and promote the newly-emerging democratic political culture, in which the fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals are guaranteed” (*The Post*, 22/02/2005). The newspaper says it aims to achieve this through campaigning on issues that arise from its own investigations, reporting and analyses (*The Post*, 22/02/2005).

On the other hand, scholars of the dominance paradigm alternatively have asserted that, “rather than facilitating equal competition ... , the media are part of a cultural apparatus whose primary function is to maintain relations of domination and subordination between fundamentally unequal groups in society ...” (McNair, 1998:22). According to this reasoning, journalists serve not the public, but dominant, private and selfish interests of a society stratified along differences in social class, gender and ethnicity (Lerner and Schramm, 1967 and McNair, 1998). *The Post* renounces any personal influences by various powerful interests in its editorial policy guidelines. The newspaper expects to have autonomy to carry out its duties, and not distort or suppress the truth because of advertising or the personal interests of its shareholders (*The Post*, 22/02/2005).

1.1 Relevance of Literature

The insights from the aforementioned literature and as shall be articulated further in Chapter Two are mostly about media operations and functions within a larger context that is mainly based on the experiences of Western countries. These insights may not necessarily provide an adequate understanding of how journalists interact with news sources in Africa generally or at *The Post* in Zambia specifically. Nonetheless, I attempt to make a similar study of the relationship between journalists and their news sources in Zambia, by using these insights. There is scholarly research on African media phenomena that I use in this study (see for example, Chirwa, 1996; Ellis, 1996; Kupe, 2003; Kasoma, 2000, Nyamnjoh, 2000; Ogundimu, 2003 in Hyden, Leslie and Ogundimu, 2003). But it is not enough because Africa is heterogeneous with various countries at different stages of the transition to democracy. It is to this research that this study attempts to contribute.

In the absence of specific research on similar phenomena in Zambia, the theoretical arguments and debates that are used in this study are taken mostly from Western countries, where the socio-political and economic context is markedly different. I have made the assumption, that because the conditions under which media in the West and in Africa operate are different, some of the conclusions drawn from the study of one cannot be used to study the other situation. I still, however, use relevant insights from theory on which the journalist-news source relationship is based because I need to be able to test

(through my interviews and observation), some of the claims that are made about the journalist-news source relationship.

Of relevance to this study are two models the adversarial (competitive) and the exchange (collaborative) that are commonly applied to conceptualise the journalist-source relationships (see, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Larsson, 2002 and Sigal, 1973). In news production the concept of a 'news source' is an ambiguous one as it has been applied to "organisations, individuals and groups that normally feature as subjects of news reports and in some cases as informants about events they have either witnessed or made themselves" (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995:45). Such ambiguity alerts to the fact that there is a normative explanation of what a news source is and of the various ways through which journalists respond to them.

However, literature also characterises some specific aspects of the journalist-source relationship that are worth acknowledging. Firstly, the relationship is characterised as "problematic because there are no prescribed rules in advance to follow as journalists and sources interact" (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995:25). According to the adversarial model, journalists are at liberty to make their own engagements with news sources. Particularly, in the absence of explicit state control over media content in liberal democracies and the acceptance of editorial sovereignty leaves journalists liberated to choose their news sources during the news gathering process. This process results in journalists being keen to endorse the principle of discretion concerning dealings with their news sources (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995). *The Post* policy on this matter of discretion is that "confidential sources of information shall be protected" (*The Post*, 22/02/2005). Such a principle often exposes journalists to hostility, particularly by the state, as is discussed in this chapter in the section on context of study and in literature in Chapter Two.

The other common characterisation of the journalist-news source relationship is that it is deep-seated in journalists' performance during newsgathering in at least two ways. Firstly, it "[takes up] much of journalists' activities, as the news is not rooted merely in media organisational practices and professional norms, but also in the action, inaction and talk of individuals/organisations who are the sources and subjects of most news stories,

particularly political news” (Entman and Paletz, 1980 cited in Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995:25). Secondly, the relationship enmeshes journalists in a symbiotic relationship with news sources that are complicit in the news process (Gans, 1979). Although journalists often witness events first-hand and could take position as sources of news, professional ethics such as objectivity often require that journalists seek out others to validate the facts in the news (McNair, 1998). In this instance, objectivity in the news has come to mean that, “all opinions in the news must be attributed to a source... the more official and obvious the source is, the fewer questions there can be about the selection of both the opinion statements and the source...” (Lemert, 1989:73). As most media literature attests to, this requirement of objectivity in newsgathering has provided a challenge on the part of journalists in terms of how best to relate to their news sources (see, for example, Hackett, 1994; McNair, 1998 and Schudson, 2000). By pursuing and gathering suitable information for news stories, the journalists’ activities could be described primarily as well timed to accessing news sources with accurate information which is a requisite for good journalism.

Regarding coverage of news, *The Post*’s policy guidelines state in part that, “we shall select, write and present news, bearing in mind that there are almost always different views on any issue and on the interpretation of events” (*The Post*, 22/02/2005). Ironically, in this study, as the findings will illustrate, I discovered that news sources are subject to scrutiny regardless of the news production challenges but even then, they were mostly limited to the elite. As a production process, news sourcing and news selection (scrutiny) requires constant negotiation and consensus among journalists and news editors and broadly, the media institution where journalists work (Sigal, 1973). In these negotiations are guidelines such as news values that help define what fits as news and standard qualities attributed to news sources. Insofar as this study addresses the relationship between journalists and news sources, journalists’ requirement to scrutinise news sources makes it possible to perceive the relationship as a social phenomenon influenced by lived experiences of journalists and demands of their management, and explicable only within specific newsrooms.

1.1.1 A Case Study of *The Post* in Zambia

I have chosen, therefore, a case study of a newspaper in Zambia, which has on the surface, all the hallmarks of an adversarial (watchdog) attributed to a model in the Western World. While researchers have said that journalists necessarily have to be adversarial, an embodiment of the intellectual freedom, research even that referring only to Western countries shows that they are more dependent on the sources they claim to investigate (Gans, 1979; Larsson, 2002; McNair, 1998 and Schudson, 2000). I use this case study to show that far from being adversarial - an ambiguous supposition even in the Western countries - a media organisation adopts an exchange model that is not particularly ideal for democracy if indeed the democratic ideals of the media are to encourage plurality and diversity in society. In a democracy, citizens ideally need the media to provide the full range of information and ideas without embellishment so that they (the people) can make their own choices about what is good in their society.

As contained in its editorial policy, *The Post* lays claim to its commitment to democratic principles but as shall be illustrated in the findings and discussion in Chapters four, five and six the newspaper finds it difficult to live up to those expectations. Striking a balance between its mission statement such as keeping the commercial viability of the newspaper and its role of questioning the policies and actions of authority figures is not always easy as I show in my study. In so doing, I was able to assess how the journalist-news source relationship is enhanced or constrained by professional and organisational demands among others, and what outlook these interlinkages take during newsgathering activities at *The Post*.

I argue, therefore, in my study that *The Post* in Zambia has not lived up to the ideals it aspires to (and which are contained in its Editorial Policy) because of very many specific reasons. As the findings will show, when it comes to relating with their news sources, journalists at *The Post* are constrained by various values and occupational, organisational factors (such as deadlines), political and economic factors that undermine its professed democratic watchdog role. For instance, journalists at *The Post* go to the same sources every day, except in cases out of ordinary events like accidents, as is common elsewhere in the world (Molotch and Lester, 1974 cited in Schudson, 2000:13). From my own

observations and interviews based on shared understanding of what constitutes news, journalists at *The Post* and their sources made it easier for both sides to realise their intentions. For example, as findings show through their understanding of what constitutes news, sources initiated potential news through news releases, press conferences and often by telephone or coming to *The Post*'s newsroom for interviews. The intention of all these initiated news events was to ease the journalists' accessibility to their news ideas. *The Post* also initiated tactical alliances for news with some organisations such as non-governmental organisations and followed a number of routine news beats. These news beats included the police, hospitals, courts and parliament, which have long been a source of news in journalism (Sigal, 1973 and Tuchman, 1978, cited in Schudson, 2000).

1.1.2 The Case for a Critical Approach

While there could be other ways of examining the relationship between journalists and their news sources, my study takes a critical view of what Schudson (2000) describes as the sociological approach to news production. This position enables one to analyse the social contexts that define journalistic professionalism and the demands of media organisations. For this purpose, the sociological approach to news production is divided into two perspectives: the social organisation of newswork and political economy (Schudson, 2000). It is under the many facets and uses of political economy that the socio-political functions of the media - particularly the adversarial and exchange models alluded to above - are adopted for this study.

The social organisation of newswork in this study draws arguments "on social organisation, the sociology of occupations and professional ideology that takes the journalists' professed autonomy and decision-making power as the central problem in understanding the sociology of news production" (Schudson 2000:10). In so doing, the framework explores how the efforts in newsgathering by journalists at *The Post* are constrained or enhanced by both organisational routines and professional beliefs. Most importantly, the social organisation of newswork as a framework helps this study explain that "[the] source-journalist relationship is a tug of war in which sources attempt to manage the news, putting the best light on themselves, while journalists concurrently manage the source in order to extract the information they want" (Gans, 1979:117). The

framework leaves little doubt that the link between a journalist and a news source is in news production.

Because the wider structure of society is viewed as bearing ideological and capacity parameters within which journalists produce news, this study finds suitable also the political economy perspective for the reasons that, “it relates, the outcome of the news process to the wider structure of the state, the economy, and media ownership” (Schudson, 2000:26). Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) propaganda model provides an explanatory framework for understanding how media privileges domestic power interests. There is a tradition in many Third World countries that inequalities in distribution of resources and political power generate social tensions that instigate careful management of the media by the state (Lerner and Schramm, 1967). Therefore, the issue of free reign in the Third World to select news sources as a journalist pleases is tricky. Examples abound in most African countries of where it is feared that media can exacerbate ethnic and other tensions by serving as mouthpieces for divisive forces. In Rwanda, *Radio Mille Collines* is a good example of what media can do to spur “ethnic cleansing” by reproducing calls to murder, destruction and hatred (Nyamnjoh, 2000:136).

In addition to the two sociological perspectives, this study also uses the social constructivist theory, primarily, because the two perspectives, the social organisation of newswork and political economy, have their own individual limitations as tools of investigation. According to the social constructivist theory, given the mediating role of media in our lives, different factors such as news sources, media institutions, audiences, politics and economics bring different meaning to news output (McNair, 1998). Sociologists call this process a “social construction of reality” (Croteau and Hoynes, 1997:7). I will discuss, therefore, the relationship between journalists and their news sources with additional reference to social factors such as politics, economics and audiences among other. At times, these factors constrain and dictate journalists’ actions (McNair, 1998). Moreover, since the factors vary in the degree of their influence, they therefore, help me highlight some of the salient contextual features of the relationship between journalists and their news sources in Zambia.

This combined framework is coupled with the democratic media paradigm illustrated in *The Post's* editorial policy. In the ideal model of the modern capitalist liberal democracy, various scholars have arrived at rather concrete conceptions of what role the media should play (see, Altschull, 1984 cited in Hyden et al., 2003; Berger, 2000; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Kasoma, 2000; Kupe, 2003 and Manning, 2001). These scholars argue that free and independent media play an important role in maintaining the flow of information and ideas upon which citizens make many of their choices. In this liberal democratic paradigm as earlier alluded to, the media are seen to play the watchdog (or adversarial) role where journalists are expected to set themselves up against political and economic forces like government and advertisers (Berger, 2000:84).

To many scholars, however, certain aspects are important when highlighting the role of the media in a democratic society, particularly in Africa where most countries are in various stages of transition towards democracy (see, for example, Kupe, 2003 and Hyden et al., 2003). These aspects include access to media, which is limited mostly to the elite and urban centers (Kupe, 2003). Secondly, there are consequences for the media resulting from their efforts to make the political environment more open and competitive. Thirdly, there has to be a conceptualisation of democracy that fits the prevailing conditions in Africa (Ogundimu, 2003 in Hyden et al., 2003). To all these, the democratic significance of journalism and news media in modern times has been summarised by Ogundimu (2003) in what is described as “an idealist view” (in Hyden et al., 2003:212). This reflects the adversarial, watchdog and agenda setting roles (abridged as AWA) that the media are expected to play in a democratic society (Ogundimu, 2003 in Hyden et al., 2003).

An examination of *The Post's* editorial policy guidelines and the findings of this study indicate a commitment to these democratic media ideals - adversarial, watchdog, and agenda setting roles. Kasoma (2000) arrives at the same conclusion when he argues that *The Post* as a private newspaper has a fundamental link to democracy in the midst of a hostile environment as most leaders are reluctant to let the media keep them under scrutiny. However, some scholars who have written generally about Africa's democratic experiences argue that even though the political environment contains risks for the media,

it is more open today than immediately after independence from colonial rule in the early 1960s (see Ogundimu, 2003 in Hyden et al., 2003).

Of course, a more open and competitive political environment does not automatically produce democratically oriented media especially where political and economic instability continues (see, for example, Ogundimu, 2003 in Hyden et al., 2003; Lerner and Schramm, 1967). This is the reason why this study is interested in assessing the relationship between journalists and their news sources who are mostly described as ‘political elite’ (Kasoma, 2000) as the news information contained in the newspaper is related to politics. In the next section, I present the context to my study.

1.2 Context to the Study

The Post as a privately owned newspaper was founded in 1991, a period of great optimism for a free and effective media in the wake of Zambia’s transformation from one-party rule to multiparty politics (Kasoma 2000). Moreover, the circulation of 35 000 copies per week by *The Post* at inception in 1991 was remarkable in a country whose total newspaper readership was just 100 000 (Phiri, 1999). In a period of ten years, the newspaper had transformed itself into a daily, with daily rather than weekly circulation of 35 000 copies compared to 15 000 copies per day of its closest rival, the government-owned *The Times of Zambia* (Makungu, 2004). *The Post* earned recognition for espousing values such like editorial independence and public accountability, which are crucial in contributing to freedom of expression, media plurality and diversity in a country where all media were previously state-owned and controlled (Kasoma, 2000). At that stage, *The Post* was playing the role of a watchdog (Kasoma, 2000).

In contrast to the accomplishment of *The Post* to operate as a private commercial publication, Zambia’s media landscape has not transformed significantly from state control and repressive press laws even though the country shifted from one party to multiparty rule and a new government promised deregulation in 1991 (Kasoma, 2000). The Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) is the sole broadcaster, while two of Zambia’s three daily newspapers (*Daily Mail* and *Times of Zambia*) that account for almost 60 per cent of newspaper circulation Zambia remain in government hands

(Ellis, 1996). There have been numerous indications that the Zambian government is reluctant to consistently pursue its stated goal of freedom of the press (Ogundimu, 2003 in Hyden, Leslie and Ogundimu, 2003). The government has, for example, a record of harassing *The Post* in particular. It has also failed to enable genuine editorial independence for the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) and the two state-owned newspapers; and it has failed to give all political and civic stakeholders equitable access to airtime or space in government-owned media (Ellis, 1996).

By the late 1990s, the optimism about media freedom experienced in the early 1990s had begun to sour, and media organisations were collectively seen as having been unsuccessful to promote democratic values (see Phiri, 1999 and Kasoma, 2000). Confronted with the challenges of plural politics, individuals and groups with different political interests attempted to muster public opinion through the aggressive courtship of the media, including *The Post*. This prompted Kasoma (2000:84) to observe, “much of what the media publicises is prompted or inspired by politicians”.

1.3 Statement of the Problem and Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its attempt to contribute to a local understanding of the relationship between journalists and their news sources at *The Post* in Zambia. The watchdog role of the media, though adaptable to a Third World context, mainly reflects Western media predisposition (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995). Apart from the novelty of the watchdog role in developing countries like Zambia, journalists have many challenges to their newsgathering routines. They are often inappropriately prepared and educated, they face political pressures to sustain the status quo and their economic conditions are often precarious (Kasoma, 2000).

The Post does not face some of these logistical challenges as it has staff career development and a variety of resources including transportation, computers and Internet access. However, it still faces challenges to its independence with regards to the interaction of its journalists with news sources. There are such challenges as the fact that journalists at *The Post* (as others elsewhere) are said to be highly attuned to the needs of politicians and bureaucratic and government organisations (Kasoma, 2000 and Fishman,

1980 cited in Schudson, 2000). This limits their search for alternative news sources and it becomes a routine problem because of the short turn-around cycle of news production for a daily newspaper. Other challenges are occupational, such as the much-debated objectivity that makes news sources important in helping journalists validate and give authority to facts in the news (McNair, 1998).

To the extent that all this is true, the relationship between journalists and their news sources has been examined by various media sociologists from the experiences and contexts of media in Western nations (see, for example, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Curran et al., 1982; Gans, 1979 and Larsson, 2002). Yet these experiences in Western liberal democratic societies are largely adversarial at least in their manifestation. As earlier mentioned this experience is borrowed in this study mostly to provide an understanding of journalists' interaction with news sources elsewhere because very little primary research has been done in Africa.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

This study's primary objective is to investigate the type of relationship that exists between journalists and their news sources at *The Post* in Zambia. I aimed to establish whether the relationship encouraged or threatened the capacity of news reporting in the context of an emerging democracy. The study achieved this by exploring factors such as the organisational and occupational demands on journalists, and the surrounding political and economic contexts within which journalists and their news sources operate.

1.5 Research Issues and Assumptions

I initially worked from the assumption that because *The Post* is a private media organisation faced with the challenges common in emerging democracies, it does not necessarily bear the ideological imprint of an idealist view of media that reflects the adversarial, watchdog and agenda setting roles espoused by scholars such as Ogundimu (2003 in Hyden et al., 2003). This assumption is drawn from different studies and arguments on journalists' practices in independent media in African and Western contexts (see for example, Kasoma, 2000; Lerner and Schramm, 1967; Martin, 1992; Nyamnjoh, 2000 and Ogundimu, 2003 in Hyden et al., 2003). I broadly took into account

the institutional structures in which journalists operate - newsroom hierarchies, work routines, news policies, occupational ideologies such as objectivity and impartiality that journalists adhere to and the political economic cultures that impinge on and shape their actions (see Sigal, 1973 and Soloski, 1997).

To explain *The Post's* orientation to different institutions, groups and individuals, I worked also from the assumption that the journalist-news source relationship could be part of two processes. While on one hand, I assumed that this process could be “adversarial” (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Ogundimu, 2003 in Hyden et al., 2003) and motivated by media democratic ideals of media in contemporary society. On the other hand, I assumed the journalist-news source relationship at *The Post* could be one of “propaganda” (Herman and Chomsky, 1988) or what Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) refer to as an “exchange or mutually dependent (collaborative)” model motivated by economic and mutual interests.

1.6 Research Methods of this Study

In this study, I adopted the qualitative approach as a methodological path because of “its suitability for investigating particular social phenomena” (Bryman, 1988:109), such as the relationship between journalists and their source at *The Post* in Zambia. The choice of a case study was based on the premise that I would not only seek to describe in depth the journalist-news source nexus at *The Post*, but also bring out the context under investigation (Deacon, Pickering, Golding and Murdock, 1999). Through this approach, as a researcher, I could easily identify patterns of meaning that emerge ... by “continually guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses” (Geertz, 1973:20 cited in Deacon et al., 1999:7). Understood this way, I carried out this study bearing in mind that it would not form the basis for generalisation to any media found either in Africa or the Western World but only add to the understanding of journalists and news sources’ relationships in newsgathering with particular reference to *The Post*.

As a case study uses multiple sources of evidence to investigate phenomena within its own context (Wimmer and Dominic, 1994:154), I simultaneously used semi structured

in-depth interviews and observation as research techniques. Through the interviews, I was able to obtain the journalists' own conceptions of the journalist-news source relationship in the Zambian society while taking as given the role of media in democracy and work experiences in terms of how and why they select certain news sources, their perspectives and interpretations of what happens during their interaction with news sources.

Through observations, I obtained an assessment of events and processes of newsgathering that act as an interface between journalists and news sources. As Deacon et al (1999:258) have argued, "one of the strongest claims made by observation studies is about being [present], actually witnessing the events or processes being researched as it gives one an opportunity to produce independent assessments of events and processes". Through observation, I was therefore, able to scrutinise particularly the journalists' news negotiations during newsroom editorial meetings, their attitudes towards which sources to pursue and conduct towards their news sources during newsgathering activities among other. Equally, as semi-structured interviews allow non-standardisation of questions and encourage an open-ended dialogue (Deacon et al., 1999) between the interviewer and interviewee, relevant spontaneous information was gathered. This information has provided a broader scope of understanding the journalists-news sources relationship as Chapters Four and Five on findings in this study will show.

1.7 Thesis Outline

This thesis consists of seven chapters. In this chapter, I present a background and contextual sketch to the study, which also includes the research problem and its significance. I have also outlined the relevant research issues, study objectives, and methods of the study.

In Chapter Two, in reviewing the literature, I will attempt to discuss the sociological theoretical framework within which this thesis has been studied and the common arguments running through the sociological approach to news production. I present initially the conceptual arguments of the relationship between journalists and news

sources from two theoretical perspectives - social organisational of newswork and political economy - and social constructivist theory.

In the third Chapter, I outline the methods, procedures and techniques employed by the study. I explain and give justification for the selection of the research techniques used. I explain the individual elements that I have used as factors to delineate the relationship between journalists and news sources. The research problems encountered in the course of this study are also provided.

In both Chapters Four and Five, the findings are presented, illustrated and substantiated by views arising from in-depth interviews and notes recorded from the observation of the news production process. The two chapters also discuss the findings in relation to the issues raised in the literature review. In this regard, I also revisit the theoretical perspectives and literature review raised in Chapter Three.

Chapter Six raises the general implications of the findings using some of the salient findings given in Chapters Four and Five. This discussion explains the orientation of journalists at *The Post* to their news sources. This is done by comparing, contrasting, and finding meanings from the salient issues in the data obtained and the study's theoretical underpinnings.

Chapter Seven provides the conclusion of the study. It highlights the concerns raised by the study and makes recommendations in the light of the study's findings.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This review of the literature offers an examination of the relationship between journalists and their news sources, as derived from the former's organisational and social roles in society. This mapping locates the journalist-source relationship in relation to the media organisations within which news is produced and the wider societal aspects such as the prevailing political and economic influences on the journalistic output. The chapter explains and provides perspectives as to why a sociological approach is suitable to unravel the complexity of the journalist-news source relationship.

The sociological approach as a theoretical framework is factored into two perspectives, the social organisation of newswork and the political economy. The social constructivist theory buttresses the two perspectives in critiquing the positivist assumption of newsgathering and guides my discussion, that newsgathering which is the interface for the journalist-news source relationship is influenced by factors both inside and outside media organisations.

Divided into six sections, the chapter begins by outlining the sociological approach to the practice of newsgathering and how this practice informs the critique of the journalist and source relationship. The second section attempts to conceptualise news sources by looking at who or what sources are and how journalists and news sources obtain access to each other. The third section has a detailed discussion of the social organisation of newswork perspective that highlights factors such as journalists' professionalism, organisational demands and practices (such as news routines) that are critical to understanding the journalist-source relationship during news production. The fourth section expounds on the political economy perspective for the purpose of establishing the interplay between ownership of the organisation and surrounding political circumstances. From this standpoint, the chapter highlights the media's prevailing economic system that has close links to how it responds to the political circumstances. In so doing, the section discusses forms of the journalist and source relationship that have been popularised in

relation to the various perceived roles of the media in society. To furnish the context in which this study occurred, the last section describes the media in Zambia and *The Post* as a newspaper (particularly in relation to this study). In conclusion, the chapter infers that the journalist and news source relationship is one that emerges through the routinised patterned interactions typically enhanced or constrained by requirements found in the journalist and news sources' respective roles and surrounding situation in society.

2.1 A Sociological Conception of News Production

The sociological approach to news production shifts us from a conception of news production where 'news is a reality out there', to news production as a social practice that is influenced by overarching cultural practices in a society as well as the media organisations that produce it (Tuchman, 1978 cited in Schudson, 2000). News is thus defined as "an end product of a complex process which begins with a system of sorting and selecting of events and topics according to socially constructed categories" (Hall et al., 1978:53). This sociological conception of news draws upon a range of perspectives to news production that when taken together, share a critical approach to news production (Schudson, 2000). These perspectives include among other, the social of organisation of newswork and political economy.

According to the social organisation of newswork and political economy perspectives, various societal phenomena influence the practice of journalism such as economics, politics, ideology, news sources, individual journalists' attitudes, organisational practices, audience reception and changes in the news production technology (Schudson, 2000). News as a social practice embeds relationships between language, ideology, and power relations in society (McNair, 1998). This conception of news is important to this study as it provides a framework for assessing the various factors that come to wield influence on the journalist-news source relationship, type of content and the resultant style of journalism executed by journalists in the newsgathering process.

Historically, the shift of news production from a "reality out there" to a sociological conception has coincided with the development of the social constructivist theory, which according to Tuchman (1978 cited in Schudson, 2000), espouses that the agenda and

news content is part a product of non-journalistic social influences such as news sources, technology and culture among other. In so doing, the theory offers a dominant theoretical perspective from which to examine the various influences on media content as it does not see 'reality', but 'realities' that are constructed as a result of subjective understandings of the social phenomena (Schudson, 2000). Within this context, news construction is based on a number of influences such as, "one's personal, psychological, social-cultural, and organisational presuppositions" (Schudson, 2000:14). This has led scholars such as Dahlgren (1992) to argue that journalism and social practices are "mutually constitutive components" (1992:9). Journalism uses as its basis for its work occurrences in society while society equally requires information of its own happenings to carry on.

As the constructivist theory takes an interpretive approach to understanding social phenomena and construction of meanings in society there are a number of implications for the nature of the news produced from such a perspective. To start with, a news story created under such a perception is not defined as a spontaneous incidence in the world that the media discerns by surveying the world scene. Instead, as Molotch and Lester (1974, cited in Schudson, 2000:14) argue: "news provides a 'reality' for the political work by which events are constituted by those who happen to hold power". However, not all sources are as authoritative and powerful as implied by Molotch and Lester (1974), but in the end, power of one kind or another is highly instrumental, at least in the attempt to gain access (Gans, 1979).

Claims of the social constructionist theory in relation to the sociology of news production have not gone unchallenged. For example, the overall constructivist premises, emphasising that news is 'made' and not just reported by journalists, has created ambiguities from a professional perspective. This is because, when journalism is taken as a social practice under the constructivist theory, journalistic tenets such as objectivity are arguably reduced to "mere strategic rituals of self-legitimizing discourses" (Dahlgren, 1992:11). Equally, the conception of journalism as a social practice is reasonably not easy to accept especially with the claims of the occupational ideology of the independence of journalists in newsrooms to make selections of news stories outside

interferences from top management and other forces (Dahlgren, 1992). Journalists and editors alike tend to argue that they are in control of news selection. As such they downplay outside influences that usually are indirect.

Despite this criticism, the social constructivist perspective provides this study a sociological framework for cross-examining the “news as a reality out there” assumption of newsgathering. The theory’s dismissal of news as it exists ‘out there’ and that a reporter is capable of gathering it in its impartial form while interacting with news sources (Hackett 1984), provides precedent for my own investigation, particularly in examining journalists’ conduct during their interaction with their news sources. Although the theory espouses the processes of news making and relationships as subjective phenomena, it still links the news process and role relationships between journalists and their news sources to standard traditions of their interaction. Therefore, when drawing on the constructivist theory in this thesis, the individual social factors are considered (as in interpretative analyses) in understanding journalistic and source behaviour and how news is located in relation to the social influences of the society and media organisations in which it is produced. In the following section, I discuss the news production process and news sources’ complimentary role.

2.2 News Production Process as a Journalist and Source Relationship Interface

News production is viewed as a social process that is primarily an important task in journalism (Chalaby, 1998). As a process, news production revolves around journalists, their practices and the organisational sites (i.e. the newsrooms) demands. However, journalists are also enmeshed in symbolic relationships with news sources as they compliment journalists in the making of the news by provision of news information (Gans, 1979). Therefore, when referring to news production in this study, it is in view of a complex social process whereby topics and events created by sources are selected as appropriate stories or not for inclusion in the news media (McNair, 1998).

Describing journalism as a practice helps this study explain why news production as a process is an important exercise to enlighten the journalist-news source relationship. Journalism is equated to a day book that is a collective of what is happening and as a

public diary that records common life (Carey, 1993:4). It is also defined “as a set of professional practices and a form of political communication” (Dahlgren, 1992:14). This study correlates Dahlgren’s (1992) definition to Carey’s (1993) as both seem to argue that journalism as a practice is shaped by a variety of processes, conventions and ethical codes, as well as by constraints imposed by the fact that it is a complex production process requiring sophisticated organisation. The definitions primarily describe journalists’ activities, as timely herein accurate information is a requisite for journalists’ survival as newsmen and women. Journalists often pursue reliable news sources and means of gathering the quickest possible suitable information for news stories. This course of choices and actions has a number of implications, which this study takes up in subsequent sections.

2.2.1 Objectivity in News Interviews during News Production

One of the various activities attached to news production intimated above, is a news interview. As journalists rely upon information about recent important events to make personal judgments about what is or is not newsworthy, they conduct interviews with various informants – sources – to legitimate their choices (Croteau and Hoynes, 1997). For interviews have a structural orientation, uniformity characterises newsgathering from sources to the extent that some scholars have observed that interviews have contributed to journalism laying claim to the qualities of the ‘much debated’ objectivity (see McNair, 1998).

In journalism, the concept of objectivity has been invoked most avidly in liberal democratic societal approaches news production (Croteau and Hoynes, 1997; Dahlgren, 1992 and McNair, 1998). Journalists in this view should meet two requirements:

Depersonalisation [that] demands that reporters refrain from inserting into the news their own ideological or substantive evaluations of officials, ideas or groups. Balance [that] aims for neutrality. It requires that reporters present the views of legitimate spokespersons of conflicting sides in any significant dispute, and provide both sides with roughly equivalent attention (Entman, 1989 cited in McNair, 1998:69).

It would seem then that the concept of ‘objectivity’ is an ethic for journalists to authenticate information during interviews from sources for news production purposes.

This is with the central aim on the part of journalists of mobilising the trust of the sources and resultant audiences in what they are reading, hearing and seeing. The concept of objectivity, also, faces a critique that it is an ideological fiction intended to secure broad social acceptance of the dominant bourgeois world-view (McNair, 1998). As this study addresses the relationship between journalists and news sources, examining the requirements (depersonalisation and balance) of objectivity in practice gives us a picture of how news is gathered and reported.

2.2.2 News Selection during News Production

Another activity critical to news production is news selection. In reporting the news about a nation, journalists are able to choose from a large number of potential stories. What this means is that what people see in the media is an incomplete report of 'reality'. Besides the fact that it is a choice-making process, story selection is always a hurried daily process (Gans, 1979:78). Scholars such as Gans (1979), McNair (1998) and Sigal (1973) provide a number of capsule descriptions of how news is selected. The first description which is a journalist-centred approach underscore the most common claim among media scholars that news selection partly relies upon the professional news judgements of journalists and the expectations of the media organisation (see, for example, Gans, 1979 and McNair, 1998).

The second description, not favoured by some social scientists, proposes that events also determine the news selection in that a journalist reflects society occurrences to audiences (see Gans, 1979 and Hackett, 1984). The whole concept of an 'event' is problematic as "events are socially determined" (Hackett, 1984:235). With the exception of accidents or scandals, press stories are 'routine events' where acting on such events it is argued, "the media actively help to constitute reality even if it is only by amplifying and conferring legitimacy upon the structuring of social processes achieved by political and bureaucratic institutions" (Hackett, 1984:235). This event-centred approach weakened in the 1960s as media critics found then other meaningful explanations of newsmaking such as the gatekeeping process which relates news organisations to the news product (Shoemaker, 1991 and Schudson, 2000). Though still in use, the gatekeeping process has also since been over taken by the third description, the sociology of news production which is

normally factored by three perspectives, though this study as alluded to earlier applies only two of these perspectives - the social organisation of newswork and political economy.

This third description embraces as yardstick, a set of factors to explain story selection from a perspective of forces outside the media organisations. These factors that include the economy, political ideology, culture, news sources and the technology of the medium, influence journalists' actions and output (Gans, 1979:79). Collectively, but varying in degree of influence, these factors come to enhance or hinder the autonomy of journalistic practices including, as in this case, story selection. Viewed this way, these factors underwrite the creation and selection of news as the “social production of ‘reality’” (McNair, 1998:13). In this study, story selection as a hurried routine practice of journalists during news production (Gans, 1979) is used to evaluate the criteria journalists at *The Post* draw on to select news sources to use or not in news.

Although the discussion so far in this chapter only make optimistic assumptions about the roles journalists and news sources play in news production, my study does not take for granted such conjectures. The study is mindful that journalists do not make up the news but begin with what they deem as an empirically graspable external ‘reality’ at times orchestrated by sources and at times extraordinary events such as accidents and earthquakes also make news. Collectively, therefore, the viewpoints included thus far in this chapter enable this study not to naively celebrate the journalist and source relationship as a simple occurrence in the news production process. This chapter focuses, however, on how journalists at *The Post* relate to, and make use of the sources in news production given the various influences under which journalists work as noted above. The following section, therefore, attempts to review literature on news sources in order to unravel what attributes journalists look for when selecting sources and how they compliment journalists in news production.

2.2.3 The News Sources in News Production

The concept of a ‘news source’ is an ambiguous one. This concept has been applied to “organisations, individuals and groups that normally feature as subjects of news reports

and in some cases as informants about events they have either witnessed or made themselves” (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995:45). News sources are also defined, “as the people [whom] journalists constantly consult when gathering information or ‘quote’ in stories as most journalists do not actually see the original event of a story and are left to construct it from the accounts of authoritative sources” (Ettema, Witney and Wackman, 1997:40). This definition shows how news sources can influence stories which adds dimension to Blumler and Gurevitch’s (1995) definition above that describes news sources as generally informants about events. This is not to say that journalism as a profession is relegated to playing the role of assembling ‘events’ orchestrated by news sources such as political, bureaucratic power-holders and others, but that the two definitions collectively provide a workable characterisation of news sources for the purposes of this research.

Above all, the most salient feature of news sources is that they provide information as members or representatives of interest groups and larger sections of society. From this viewpoint, “journalists see sources acting as a resource of running stories, information resources for background insights, validations of ambiguous situations, drawing audiences for their output and for providing knowledgeable feedback” (Gans, 1979:81).

However, for news information on various topical issues there seems to be a heavy reliance on mostly powerful individuals such as government officials, top politicians and institutional bodies that include professional organisations, non governmental organisations, business associations and those perceived as experts. For example, a study in the USA, found that only 1 percent of news sources that made up 25 percent of those cited in stories about national security were administration (clerical) officials, against most prominently sourced national government officials particularly those in higher positions such as the president and prime minister (Hallin, Mankoff and Weddie, 1993 cited in McCullagh, 2002:66). Similarly, Kasoma (2000) in a study of the Zambian media landscape argues that much of what the media publicises is “prompted or inspired by leading politicians” (2000:84).

2.2.4 The Selection of News Sources

In view of the above definitions of news sources, there are factors that journalists consider when selecting them for news stories. The considerations include factors such as productivity, availability, reliability, suitability, authoritativeness, trustworthiness and news values among other things (Gans, 1979). All these considerations being important journalists prefer to resort to sources in official positions of authority and responsibility (Gans, 1979:130). Gans argues that news sources in official positions are assumed to be trustworthy by journalists if only because they cannot afford to lie openly; they are also more persuasive because their facts and opinions are official (1979:130).

This host of considerations when selecting news sources suggests that journalists' task of identifying news sources for news is a complicated one. This is exacerbated particularly that journalists require synergising these news source considerations to news attributes also known as news values attached to a newsworthy story (Gans, 1979). News values as several news factors – that include proximity, conflict, unexpectedness and elitism among other – enable journalists to determine the value of an event and make decisions as to whether the event is newsworthy or not (Staab, 1990).

In both cases of news source considerations and news values selections, journalists have to acquire intuitive news sense through training, peer group pressures and newsroom discipline to be able to select an account of events to present as news (McNair, 1998). In this sense, journalists produce news around their own professional values and beliefs, but these are necessarily informed by the contributions of the wide range of sources, whom as we have seen so far in this study, acquire the power to become 'definers' of journalists' reality by providing information. Further, a closer look at the definition of news values above also supports Gans' (1979) assertion that selecting news sources is complicated, given that most often news sources considerations and news values alike, are not objective qualities of events but more or less prejudiced aspects that only rest on consensus in the newsroom. In this regard, some scholars (see for example, McNair, 1998 and Staab, 1990) argue that news sources that want to gain access to the media exploit the knowledge possessed on how the media works. For example, news sources exploit the fact that journalists produce news "to strict deadlines; prefer material that conforms to

prevailing conventions of what news is (news values) and which in an increasingly competitive news market, contains those elements of drama, conflict, pathos among other that audiences expect” (McNair, 1998:154).

Although journalists can make their own judgements of what news is, the manner in which this translates into cultural control has led to the concern that news values are the clearest configuration of meaning in contemporary society (Hall, 1973, in Schudson, 2000). Therefore, some scholars argue that if news values in contemporary liberal democratic societies, can be viewed as an expression of social values, then the news values “refer to a world which is ethnocentric, elite-orientated and focused on ‘negative happening’ - good news is no news” (McNair, 1998:79). As far as this study addresses the relationship between journalists and news sources, this understanding provides a basis of how journalists and news sources gain access to each other in the midst of a magnitude of events happening around that journalists have to select from for coverage.

Further, literature suggests that apart from journalists requiring synergising news source considerations to news values attached to a newsworthy story, news source selection encapsulates journalists interrelating considerations they make (such as trustworthiness, authoritativeness, availability and productivity) “because they have one overriding aim [of] efficiency” (Gans, 1979:128). Gans puts it this way:

Reporters who have short time to gather information must ... attempt to obtain the most suitable news from the fewest number of sources as quickly and easily as possible, and with the least strain on the media organisation’s budget (1997:128).

From the above statement, news sources solve news production problems, most notably, the constraints of time, costs of gathering news and verification of information among other. I will unpack each one of these news production problems in the following section.

2.2.5 The Constraints to News Production

For news production that revolves around a news cycle of 24 hours, the constraint of time towards deadlines is viewed as “giving already ‘newsworthy’ sources greater salience for reporters because news stories derived from official sources is by characterisation reliable” (McCullagh, 2002:67). McCullagh (2002) explains that if a news editor

challenges a journalist on a story, the fact that the source is a powerful individual or organisation in society, establishes it as legitimate and the story as newsworthy. McCullagh (2002) sees news sources that have established their newsworthiness because of their high rank in the social structure dominating access to the news even if they are involved in less newsworthy events. Kasoma (2000) arrives at the same conclusion in the case of Zambia. The constraint of time in news production makes it possible to perceive the journalist-news source interaction as a hurried process that leaves very little space for intricate negotiations of the story information except in cases such as sponsored press tours and exposés. As such, sources with little newsworthy status must act defiantly such as staging a riot or public demonstration to gain the attention of the media. However, in these circumstances, reporters tend to focus on the ‘deviant’ event rather than the issue (McNair, 1998).

Scholars such as Sigal (1973:70) that espouse the importance of time in newsmaking argue that the emphasis on timeliness coupled with the need for meeting deadlines is hardly the function of economic competition for revenues any more but a convention for journalists in present day journalism. In journalism, the less recent an event, the lower are its prospects for making the news (Sigal, 1973:70). As such, there is a lot of pressure on journalists to find information and not to wait for news sources to make contact to sell a story or an idea although this is an exception.

While time has become a convention in newsgathering, considerations of cost effectiveness in gathering a news story also present journalists with a challenge to prioritise news sources who previously had supplied news information leading to news stories that are less expensive (Gans, 1979:128). Highly competitive conditions of the news market, accustoms news editors to require journalists who can come up with news stories that are publishable because resources such as news space and staff are always committed to news production. To meet such an expectation, journalists rely on news sources that are able to provide newsworthy information. Journalists’ selection of news sources, therefore, does not proceed haphazardly. In the majority cases a journalist “has a group of contacts, potential information sources developed over the years, with whom he checks on a regular basis” (Sigal, 1973:103). What the concern of news production costs

means for my own investigation, is that it provides an entry point to examine the extent to which journalists and news sources are able to maintain or not close liaisons, in this instance, for cost serving purposes on the part of the journalists. This includes the resultant inclusion or exclusion of some people or groups as sources.

Notwithstanding the significance of time and production costs discussed above, as journalists are held responsible for the accuracy of the quotes and paraphrases they use, it is also noteworthy that they minimise their vulnerability to any charges of bias by choosing the obvious and defensible sources in their stories. Therefore, “the more ‘qualified’ or reliable the source that is speaking on the topic, the less vulnerable the journalist feels about the selection of that source” (Lemert, 1989:23). ‘Qualified’ sources are predisposed most of the time to have already appeared in previous news stories (Lemert, 1989).

Overall, based on afore mentioned review, it could be argued that although news selection conventionally relies on news values such as “unexpectedness, conflict, proximity, significance, normality and timeliness” (Staab, 1990:424), it is availability, suitability and societal influence that tend to determine journalists’ selection of news stories and sources. There is an argument that follows such an assertion, “the more news values a story contains, the more newsworthy it is considered to be” (Stabb, 1990:424), yet this is not always the case as journalists by concentrating on the dominant views (elite news sources) even when they do not have the elements of newsworthiness, undermine news values (Kasoma, 2000).

News sources learn from the practices of journalism and particular newsrooms which stories are selected, which sources are used, and what representations are chosen in order to tailor their activities to media ways. Lemert (1989) elaborates on this. He argues that the sources tend to come from the nearest place to the newsroom and top bureaucratic organisations already on reporters’ beats such as the police offices, court houses, fire department, political leaders, and among other (Lemert, 1989:23). In these cases source suitability comes from institutional power or their claim to expert knowledge, that is they

meet the journalistic criteria of credibility and authoritativeness and so are able to act as what Hall (1982:62) calls ‘primary definers’.

In addition, because news as information has consequences, journalists are susceptible to pressures from news sources with power to control them and their organisations for example through police detentions or closing operations (McCullagh, 2002). News sources do not take kindly to negative news about them, however, this view according to McCullagh (2002) has been challenged primarily because it invokes the question of whether powerful news sources control the content of the media. Various scholars argue that the control of the media agenda is not routinely guaranteed to the powerful but is something for which they must compete though they have an advantage particularly that they can support news production financially or materially through bribes/favours such as transport (see, McNair, 1998 and Schlesinger, 1990). Even then, financial or material support does not routinely guarantee news sources of favourable coverage, although, it is also assumed there is permanent presence of certain forces in the power structure of news production. Schlesinger (1990:67) however, argues that this is not often the case that there is permanent presence of certain forces in the power structure of news production. Access to news by news sources fluctuate as it is constrained by the prevailing circumstances (McCullagh, 2002).

I draw on the above arguments as part of my own investigation about journalists and news sources’ relationship. Having established so, in the following section, I review the social organisation of newswork perspective (Schudson, 2000). The intention is to provide further prevailing perspectives on the relationship of journalists and their news sources. The section reviews how as an approach, the social organisation of newswork essentially links journalists to sources during news generation.

2.3 A Social Organisation of Newswork Perspective of the Journalist – News Source Relationship

The social organisation of newswork perspective finds determining factors of news production in relationships between people (Schudson, 2000). News is in this perspective a product of “[t]he interaction between two establishments, one composed of journalists

and the other of sources” (Schudson, 2000:14). In this way, the social organisation of newswork bears two theoretical outlooks. Firstly, while negotiations along organisational hierarchical lines within the newsroom determines who covers a story and what changes an editor will make in the copy filed, sources in turn disclose information primarily resulting from their own bureaucratic politics whose aim is to muster and maintain support for a particular course of action (Sigal, 1973:181). What this means for my study, is that bureaucracy, autonomy, and power relations within and outside the newsroom, are valuable factors to consider when analysing patterns of journalist-news source relationship during newsgathering. The second outlook is that, news is an output of organisational routines on both sides of the journalists and the sources. Journalists collect most of their information from routine channels such as news sources’ official proceedings, press releases and press conferences to such an extent that Sigal (1973:181) argues, “the dissemination of information through these channels has become standard procedure for most news sources”.

Together, the two social organisation of newswork theoretical outlooks, make it possible to espouse the organisational and occupational demands on journalists as critical influences on how journalists select news sources and the subsequent interaction with each other. In other words, the freedom that the journalist has in considering which sources to relate to is limited to the extent that the organisational routines (i.e. editorial processes, news beats), newsroom policies and occupational beliefs such as objectivity mentioned earlier have a bearing on journalists (Schudson, 2000). This includes how journalists choose stories to cover and subsequent interactions with news sources.

Further, it can be deduced that journalists adjust their individual principles of doing things in accordance with the requisites of the organisation. From this point of view, “news production is seen as a social manufacture of an organisational product that can be studied as any other manufactured goods” (Schudson, 2000:15). For an effective analysis of the journalists-source relationship, therefore, one needs to scrutinise not only individual journalists, but also an organisation’s habitual practices and demands. Within this context, it is argued that, “it matters little where journalists come from or who they are; they are socialised quickly into the values and routines in the daily rituals of

journalism” (Schudson, 2001:14). However, although the organisation of newswork approach does not place much interest in determining individual journalistic characteristics, it does place emphasis on the importance of knowing backgrounds of journalists as they serve in some cases as clues to the kind of influences they bring to their work (Schudson, 2000).

As far as this study addresses the relationship between journalists and news sources, the external (news sources) and internal (journalists, organisational and occupational demands) determinism of news production, reminds us that journalism can be examined from various perspectives that interconnect the internal and external aspects of a media organisation. The following sections provide more insights to understanding the journalist-source relationship during the process of news production as accounted for by the social organisation of newswork perspective. This is important to this study because, the nexus between organisational demands and professional constraints, which are predisposed towards certain structural orientations in newsgathering, are factors a journalist is aware of and ought to address in his / her work.

2.3.1 A Journalist as Professional in a Media Organisation

Journalists espouse professionalism as a personal value and at the same time as an occupational calling to which they belong (Soloski, 1997). According to Soloski (1997), adherence to professionalism by journalist tends to result in news coverage that does not threaten the status quo of the economic position of the news organisations or the overall politico-economic system in which the news organisation operates as shall be discussed later in this chapter.

Journalists’ professionalism could be examined in relation to two aspects. Firstly, setting the standards and norms of behaviour in media organisations and secondly, as a means of determining the professional reward system such as job promotions (Soloski, 1997). These two aspects put together could be viewed as the foundation of shared professional norms and the base of journalistic operations. These shared professional norms have not necessarily led to full control of journalists by media organisations because,

“professionalism provides journalists with an independent power base that can be used to thwart the interference of the management in their professional activities” (Soloski, 1997:144).

Historically, journalists generally have adopted a code of ethics also known as the ‘canons of journalism’ that include principles of sincerity, truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity and impartiality, as well as the pronouncement that news reports could be free from bias (Schudson, 1995). News accounts, therefore, have a tendency to look similar because journalists by necessity, talk to the same people, use the same formats, observe the same basic “dos and don’ts” and watch one another closely to make sure that they are not out of step with the rest of the profession (Croteau and Hoynes, 1997:107). Some scholars argue that journalists follow the same basic codes and routines because of the fact that news organisations cannot start afresh each day (see McNair, 1998 and Shoemaker 1991). At the individual level, journalists, therefore, know the strengths and weaknesses of their work and the media available for the dissemination of the news and are able to exploit both while bearing in mind their code of ethics such as objectivity. As far as this study addresses the relationship between journalists and news sources, journalists’ codes of ethics, makes it possible to perceive the relationship, as a phenomenon influenced by professional ethical factors.

At the macro organisational level, journalism draws attention to how its content is an organisational product produced under complex power that is exerted implicitly or covertly by management (Reese, 2001:181). It is often argued that management influence on journalists’ activities is not easily discernable as it is exerted in ways that are not directly noticeable in news products because open influences such as management’s, would violate the notion of journalistic ‘objectivity’ (Soloski, 1997). Instead, Soloski (1997) argues, management use tactics or rather formulate news policies and in some cases close relationships of media owners with other institutions, elite networking and common board memberships join forces to covertly influence journalistic activities during news production (Soloski, 1997).

The organisational nature of news is, therefore, determined by the interplay between what Soloski (1997:143) calls “trans-organisational control mechanisms represented by the news professionalism (which are guided by canons of journalism earlier mentioned) and intra-organisational control mechanism represented by internal news policies”. These two mechanisms reinforce each other in establishing boundaries or frameworks that journalists follow in their daily routines of making news. It is important to note, however, that the established boundaries or frameworks that journalists follow in their daily routine of making news do not replace journalistic skills, such as the ability to identify news and develop relationships with sources; the skills are enhanced. To the extent that this study examines the journalist-news source relationship, it is important to note that the frameworks created by management within which journalists should function might be broad enough. This would be intended to permit some form of creativity, although may also be narrow in the sense that journalists could be trusted to act in the interests of the news organisation they work for (Soloski, 1997). This is particularly challenging for *The Post*, bearing in mind that most of the news reporting in Zambian media is biased towards the elite (Kasoma, 2000).

In the following section, news routines are discussed especially in relation to how they validate heavy reliance on a few news sources than the promotion of investigative stories.

2.3.2 The Routines Practices of News Production for Verified news

Journalists have standard routine (habitual) operating procedures that govern much of their activities. As journalists cannot decide anew every day or week how to select the fraction of what would be included in news, they must routinise their tasks in order to make it manageable (Gans, 1979). Routines are reinforced in the daily practice of journalists to the extent that they become, according to Sigal (1973:101), “the way things are done”. The importance of routines to newsgathering take several distinct forms, apart from the need to coordinate the activities of a large number of people, routines reduce individual journalists’ subjectivity, increases efficiency and economy on staff (Sigal, 1973). As earlier discussed in the preceding section on news sources, what is routine for

journalists has become standard operating procedure for the news source as well (Sigal, 1973).

Of the distinct features of news production that impose routines on journalists, news deadlines rank high. News deadlines impose an arbitrary cut-off to newsgathering, constraining him / her to write with the information one has in hand and to hope for another day (Sigal, 1973). There is, therefore, a significant relationship between time spent on gathering a news story and the news source that is selected by a journalist for news information.

In gathering news, journalists cannot rely on legwork alone. In most instances, journalists have established routine checks with news sources – also known as news beats (Tuchman, 1978 cited in Schudson, 2000). The news beats take different forms that are both formal and informal (Tuchman, 1978). Formal news beats routine channels invoke elaborate preparations, clearance procedures and commitments of formal authority and these take several distinct forms, such as handouts and press conferences that are orchestrated by sources (Sigal, 1973). As journalists view society as bureaucratically structured and this is the very basis upon which they are able to detect events (Fishman, 1980:51 cited in Schudson, 2000). Sociologists warn that areas of regular news beats expose journalists to propaganda (Shoemaker, 1991). In each of these arguments, there is an assumption that journalists on the beat adhere to the routines of the news sources which exposes journalists to dependence not only on facilities provided for their conveniences such as travel arrangements but also the timing of disclosures of news in the sources.

Like elsewhere in the world, journalists in Zambia select their news stories from essentially bureaucratic institutions especially those that are political (Kasoma, 2000). Djokotoe (2004:15) supports Kasoma (2000) by arguing that:

In the government-owned media, the Republican President is the No.1 newsmaker. Whatever he says or does makes headline news, even when it falls short of news values.... The private media is guilty of the same excesses, except that in their case, they give editorial prominence to the political opposition or to reporters that scandalise the ruling party or embarrass it in one way or another.

Informal channels of news beats on the other hand are not necessarily initiated by sources, but by the journalists, as information obtained is mostly for background purposes (Sigal, 1973). In this case, the reporter has greater latitude for flexibility with regard to the substance and format of the story. Nonetheless, both routine channels (formal and informal), permit sources to have the advantage of setting the rules governing disclosures thereby warranting a measure of control over the information flow as alluded to above in this section. This creates an image of journalists' "subservience to the dominant ideology", as journalists professed as heavily dependent on predetermined beats and sources partly end up dismissing notions of objective and impartial work practices (Curran et al., 1982:68).

Academic discussions on autonomy of journalists as media professionals reveal other diametrically opposed conclusions. For example, a strict pluralist interpretation of journalists' dependence on the elite, would insist that journalists' claims to autonomy and their commitment to the principles of objectivity and impartiality are ultimately a means of controlling the news production process in spite of the variety of interests and influences which they may be subjected (Curran et al. 1982). Those that criticise journalists' activities and its output, often argue that "a journalist is a cog in a wheel over whose speed and direction he or she may have very little or no control" (McNair, 1998:62). Sociologists and some scholars have been obliged to acknowledge this fact (McNair, 1998). In as far this study addresses the journalists and news sources relationship, all arguments above makes it possible to determine the extent to which journalists are 'free' agents at *The Post* when interacting with news sources during newsgathering.

In the following section, therefore, this thesis looks broadly at the interaction of the media with the political and economic environment to relate my investigation of the journalists and sources relationship to the wider interests in society. The section provides, particularly, an analysis of influences of a private system of media ownership, given that *The Post* as my case study is privately owned and the surrounding political context that is seen as encroaching on journalists and sources activities in one way or another.

2.4 Political Economy and the Journalist-News Source Relationship

2.4.1 Reviewing the Perspective

In contrast to the social organisation of newswork perspective, political economy as a theoretical approach to understanding news production relates the news circuit to the structure of the state and the economy and the corporate ownership of the media organisation (Schudson, 2000:26). Whereas mainstream economics sees the economy as a separate and specialised domain, political economy is interested in the interplay between economic organisation and political, social and cultural life (Golding and Murdock, 2000). From this standpoint, the media are part of the prevailing economic system that has close links to the political system.

In addition, as a sociological approach, political economy explores the social positions people occupy, the relationships between them and struggles over meaning-production which is outside the control of journalists (Louw, 2001). This includes exploring the various ways in which the prevailing relations between media proprietors and editors or journalists and their sources structure news. The link between ownership of the news organisation and news coverage is not easy to describe as it is complicated by issues such as the growing ownership-mix of public and commercial systems (Schudson, 2000). Essentially, economics determine how far journalists can go to gather news. Cost saving measures dictate that the media concentrate their reporters where significant news often occurs because material from sources that are not seemingly credible, or which will elicit criticism and threats, requires careful and costly checking (see Croteau and Hoynes, 1997 and Sigal, 1973).

Apart from the significance of ownership in media, gaining access to the means of communicative production, according to the political economy perspective, is both a derivative of power and a means for accumulating power (Louw, 2001). The key issue here is that those with power will have an advantage in any given context over news making but this does not imprison journalists into a pre-determined outcome of what to write about, as journalists' resistance to interferences is always manifest (Louw, 2001). Nonetheless, as Murdock (1973, cited in Schudson, 2000) argues, "the basic definition of the situation that underpins the news reporting of political events very largely coincides

with the definition provided by the legitimated power holders” (2000:11). Louw (2001:3) argues in this instance that:

Each of us, internalises the particular meaning style that surrounds us, we are constituted as human beings and as members of various social groups/cultures. These meanings are resources that we use to generate our personas, to negotiate with others and to position ourselves within a social milieu.

This quotation implicitly highlights the notion that meanings are struggled over as people (journalist and sources alike) work at improving their positioning in any given social context. It is important, however, to note that the sociology of news production has been examined exclusively in capitalist societies using this perspective and does not much explain the situation in other societies like Zambia. For this reason, this study takes a critical political economy view that entails the analysis not only of the components of the product (news) but also of the surrounding conditions of the news practices (Williams, 1980, cited in Golding and Murdock, 2000). Taken this way, this critical perspective enables this study to discern specific contextual constraints that shape the lives and opportunities of actual actors – the journalists as they interact with their sources at *The Post* in Zambia.

However, there is something profound in saying that the media provides us with information about a nation and journalists are influenced by their society. In some cases, even when news sources are not necessarily known by name to journalists, they occupy well-known positions in society (McCullagh, 2002). News sources in the news as individuals who play most significant roles in national activities as alluded to above also share values and beliefs with journalists since they both come from the same social contexts in which the media exist (Schudson, 2000). Of these news sources, most often, some are assumed by journalists to be familiar names among the audiences and others may have appeared frequently in the news, and therefore, are well known to journalists (McCullagh, 2002). Where this argument gets interesting is when we focus on the quantity and quality of information that the media transmits. How much of it emanates from values and beliefs held by the society as context within which journalists operate? Some scholars maintain that journalists are helped in their practice by having the sense of external reality in society (see, Gans, 1979). We might recall, hereafter, that journalism is

a 'social construction' whose output is a manifestation of various influences such as the surrounding politics. As this study addresses the journalist-news source relationship in an emerging democratic society, a constructionist understanding (such as my study attempts) that takes politics as critical, makes it possible to perceive the relationship as explainable only within its own context regardless of possessing attributes that are applied commonly (see, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995).

The political economy perspective has faced challenges over the years. Political economy focuses on structural media issues such as ownership and surrounding political circumstances while it downplays journalists' influences, who are the main actors in newsgathering. This is a limitation for any comprehensive understanding of news as it ignores the fact that journalists often initiate the stories on their own (Schudson, 2000:10). In this regard often, political economy as a perspective has been labelled a "conspiracy theory" or a rather simple-minded notion that there is a ruling directorate of the capitalist class that dictates to editors and reporters what to run in the newspaper (Schudson, 2000:10). However, political economy goes beyond situated action to show how micro-contexts of the news production process are shaped by the general economic dynamics and the wider structures of society particularly politics (Golding and Murdock, 2000).

Golding and Murdock (2000) indicate several tasks that the political economy perspective is applied to. Important to this study, although based on a Western liberal-democratic system is the task Blumler and Gurevitch (1995:25) put political economy to use to conceptualise the relationship between journalists and sources by focussing on the wider field of their interactions - the surrounding political environment. Various other sociological literature does provide insights to this effect and considerations of how the media functions within a larger context (see for example, Curran et al., 1982 and Schlesinger, 1990). The following section is part of an attempt to review the common conceptual framework of the journalist-source relationship as espoused by various media scholars.

2.4.2 Conceptualising the Journalist-News Source Relationship

Journalists and sources obtain access to each other in a manner that makes the relationship difficult to analyse because their constituent elements are not easily isolated or disentangled as literature above attempts to show. This relationship is observed to resemble to a 'dance': "although it takes two to tango, either sources or journalists can lead but more often sources do the leading" (Gans, 1979:116). The relationship has also been described as a 'tug of war', "while sources attempt to 'manage' the news by putting the best light on themselves, journalists concurrently 'manage' the sources in order to extract the information they want" (Gans, 1979:117). These two descriptions of the relationship are neither contestable nor agreeable as journalist-source interactions are influenced by the circumstances they are applied in. The two descriptions however, take cognisance of the fact that media discourses are necessarily battled over as the discourses serve to legitimate (or de-legitimate) certain people in a society. In the case of this study it is important to take note that *Zambian* conditions where *The Post* operates entail different implications as theory is from the West. The conditions in *Zambia* could be viewed though within the limitations of established theory.

In a Western liberal-democratic system, where most of this literature is based, certain features characterise the journalist-source relationship although, to some degree, the features could be applied to emerging democracies in the Third World countries. Firstly, as was mentioned in Chapter One, the relationship in such a system has no prescribed rules in advance to follow as journalists and sources interact (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995). However, Third World media - *Zambia* inclusive - have more limitations than just a lack of authoritative rules because the watchdog (adversarial) role, which "reflects mostly an American cultural bias" (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995:27), is relatively new. The watchdog role has been met with several challenges, like those relating to inappropriately educated and prepared reporters, and a lack of funds to sustain operations (Kasoma, 2000). The watchdog media are also frustrated by the sheer volume of political pressures to sustain the status quo, such as media repressive laws, that can be considered to limit their independence in their newsgathering activities particularly those relating to obtaining information from news sources (Kasoma, 2000). The political pressures

specifically the regulatory systems are intended above all to make journalists subscribe, to the extent that they share in and recognise the legitimacy of the political culture from which they derive¹.

While, the problem of absence of prescribed rules to guide journalists and sources interaction is critical to this study, the second feature that the relationship absorbs much of journalists' activities (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995) is as significant. As argued elsewhere in this study, news is not only rooted in media organisation processes such as editorial meetings and professional norms. Journalists depend on outside events and subjects not only for information but also for verification of facts as discussed earlier in the chapter (Entman and Paletz, 1980; cited in Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995). For journalists, therefore, to carry out their news activities, nothing absorbs their time and energies than the activities and subjects outside their organisations as sources of news information. This has implications for the capacity of media in poor countries. Those who own the media organisations have a degree of discretion around policies they pursue and operating targets that they set within this context. This normally leads to concentration on issues that are assumed to capture audiences (for example the extensive coverage of politics in Zambia).

Fundamentally, the relationship between journalists and news sources faces two specific interpretations that are at the centre of opposed views of the socio-political role of the media. The different interpretations have been commonly categorised as the “adversarial and exchange models” (see, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995). Blumler and Gurevitch (1995), in a study on public communication found that utilisation of the main components of the two models (adversarial and exchange) are suitable as analytical entry points, as they provide a set of complimentary perspectives on the journalist-source relationship. The interpretations nonetheless allow intermediate positioning. The following is an account of each model and its importance as an analytical tool for my study.

¹ Introduction Chapter (one) Sections 1.1, 1.3 and Section 2.5 of this chapter on the political economy of media in Zambia discusses this issue in detail how it informs my own investigation.

2.4.2.1 The Adversarial form of Journalist-News Source Relationship

From the standpoint of the adversarial model, the relationship is seen in terms of “mutual dependence between media professionals and representatives or spokespersons [news sources] for other institutions” (Curran et al., 1982:69). The strategic advantage of the adversarial viewpoint (also known as the competitive or normative paradigm) stems from liberal democratic theory that views the mass media as a power stronghold that defines reality. In writing their news stories, journalists develop their own angles of news by scrutinising the news sources’ conduct and rhetoric, supposing that the ‘real story’ lies behind the constructed surface (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995). In so doing, “[the] media are sites of professional culture that other institutions in society must come to terms with” (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995:25).

In addition, the interaction between journalists and news sources (wider society) under the adversarial perspective is premised on the argument that while the media could be dependent on the central institutions of society for news information, these institutions are also dependent on the media for communicating their viewpoints to the public (Curran et al., 1982:69). The ensuing implication of this viewpoint is that the media’s ability to deliver a large number of audiences provides its journalists with some independent power in relation to other core power structures and individuals in society.

Therefore, journalists under this model are depicted as watchdogs comprising the fourth estate in their collective functions (McNair, 1998:19). Journalists’ main representation is in the interests of the entire society rather than the dominant groups in society (Donohue et al., 1995:115). The term ‘fourth estate’ coined by Edmund Burke, an English philosopher, in the late eighteenth century, recognises society as divided into social classes – estates – whose selfish use and abuse of power require limiting by society as a whole or by those independent voices who could take on the task of representing society in a political process (McNair, 1998:20).

The conventional account of a fourth estate is, therefore, of the traditionalist liberal thought of the democratic role of media that acts primarily as an overseer of the state. The media has the responsibility to truth as “either seen by the news sources or by

journalists themselves that would entail revealing abuses of power and at times, extends to include facilitating a general debate about the functioning of government” (Donohue et al., 1995:115). By being a watchdog of government, the media complement society’s basic requirement of providing a visible, tangible, accessible and effective check on the government, which is fundamental for democratic governance (Kasoma, 2000). In the process, journalists depend on a few sources that mostly are from the government for news because of the type of information they provide and by definition significant to playing the watchdog role despite the alleged fear of manipulation. It is comprehensible who has the upper hand in this symbolic match. More often than not, sources do the leading (Gans, 1979). “[T]he underlying postulation of depending on officials is that, in representative democracy, power has been delegated to public officials and getting the ‘official reaction’ to issues allows the media to claim meeting its responsibility of making the officials accountable to the citizens” (McCullagh, 2002:67). A presumption such as this, is contained in the editorial policies of *The Post*, as in many other media in Africa do (see Martin, 1992).

Whether as an ingenious ploy or a necessity, the tendency by the adversarial model, to use the language of news source ‘adaptation’ to the media and not the other way round, has had a powerful pull on most journalists’ imagination; Africa included (see Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Kupe, 2003 and Manning, 2001). However, as mentioned in the Introductory Chapter, and elsewhere in this chapter, several challenges constrain the full accomplishment of the watchdog role in countries such as Zambia (Kasoma, 2000). Herein, even though the adversarial viewpoint reflects mostly a Western cultural bias (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995), insofar as this study addresses the relationship between journalists and news sources, it suffices to provide hypotheses in explaining media behaviour towards the state of independently owned media such as *The Post*, in the advent of multiparty democratic politics. This is in spite of the fact that the coming of multiparty politics in Zambia has not necessarily led to major changes in the press laws.

2.4.2.2 The Exchange form of Journalist-News Source Relationship

Opposing the adversarial model, the exchange model (also known as the dominant paradigm) stems from the perception that, even when formally independent and neutral,

the mass media are essentially subordinate to society's institutionally dominant power-holders (Lerner and Schramm, 1967; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995 and Schudson, 2000). This renders the power-holder's interests and ideologies constantly reinforced in the media content (Hall, 1982 in Gurevitch et al., 1982 and McNair 1998).

The exchange model, as a variant to the adversarial model, portrays the interaction between journalists and sources as a form of social exchange (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995). Weaver and Wilhoit's study (1980, cited in Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995) on Congress and media relations, notes the following tendencies about the exchange driven relationship:

In accepting and providing tips and leads, in willingness to float 'trial balloons' and accept leaks and in various arrangements of quid pro quo, reporters and Congressmen are often tacit, if not intentional, partners in the news... 'You scratch my back and I will scratch yours' (1995:29).

From this statement, we see a replacement of the account advanced by the adversarial model by introducing the element of self-interest in the analysis of journalist-source relationships. The two sides are viewed as negotiating and adapting to their respective resources (Larsson, 2002). The exchange produces a close interaction between the journalists and the sources, in which coordination is a key notion, as evidenced in Larsson (2002) study on politicians-journalist relationship in Sweden.

Arguments that support the exchange perspective also "tend to deploy a terminology of source control and management of information by indirect or direct control and manipulation" by power holders in society (Chibnall, 1977, cited in Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995:26). Although, as it has been argued earlier in this chapter that journalists construct stories based on certain news values and professional ideologies, in this perspective, journalists' judgements about news and news sources are exercised in connection with the values of news sources they often sort for news. Media news privileging local leading power interests can best be understood with Herman and Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model that provides as an explanatory framework. Herman and Chomsky (1988:18) argue that, "[t]he media are drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity

of interest” epitomise how news is weighted towards sources. Sources turn out to be keen because they benefit from the extensive and legitimated publicity the news media provide or as they require the news media to carry out their obligations. Referring to the form and content of journalism resulting from mutual exchange between journalists and sources of information, Blumler and Gurevitch (1995:26) argue that:

[The] messages from dominant patterns of interaction between the two sides are in a sense traceable to a composite source. In fact, it would be extremely difficult to detect, within any given message, the specific contribution to its shaping that was uniquely made by either side (1995:26).

The belief that some news sources have managed to gain ‘control’ over the media has generated concerns about distortion of information and a restricted communication process. Numerous misleading front-page headlines and inaccurate reports usually followed by a retraction among other are cited for example, as reasons for the independent newspapers’ (*The Post* included) failure to emerge as strong influences in Zambia (Phiri, 1999). Explorations of this belief have ranged from sophisticated theorising, much of which associated with Marxist work on the concept of ‘ideology’, through to simplistic conspiracy theories of media control and ownership (Louw, 2001:26). The polarity of these beliefs allows sufficient space for intermediary positions but overly, the ideological conception of media has contributed to several scholars viewing the practice of journalism as a means of legitimising and maintaining social power relations (see, for example, Dahlgren, 1992 and McNair, 1998).

As this study addresses the relationship between journalists and news sources, the exchange perspective makes it possible to perceive journalists as unwilling servants of the ruling class and media owners, conspiring in deceiving the public. Instead, as those take pride in their professional standards and independence, their freedom to follow creative initiatives and in turn jealously guard against interferences from the owners and ruling class who constitute most of news sources.

In the following section, I highlight the limitations of the two models (adversarial and exchange) when investigating the journalist-news source relationship. This is important in that the two models form strongly as analytical tools in this study. Highlighting their

limitations helps me determine how best I could use them for interpretation and discussion of this study's findings.

2.4.2.2 Limitations of the Adversarial and Exchange Models

The sociology of journalism, based on the adversarial and exchange models of the journalist-news source relationship, has come under strain in recent years as it depends on what aspect of news production one wants to explain in addition to the fact that ideology in contemporary capitalism is highly contestable (McNair, 1998). The two models, adversarial and exchange, together encapsulate some limitations such as impartial focus and rivalry in contention over what relationship exists between journalists and their news sources and society in general (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995). In practice, it is argued generally that the polarity of the two models enables an intermediate standpoint that accommodates a mixture of the two in news making. The tension to remain on either side is viewed by critics as a device to maintain trust between journalists and news sources and also reassure onlookers, particularly the public, that both are fulfilling the obligations of their offices as the theory of democracy has specified them (Sigal, 1973). As *The Times* of London leader once asserted, “[if] the media had to live by disclosures, then the journalists and officials (news sources) must be at once allies and adversaries” (Sigal, 1973:85).

To capture the two models' full usefulness, analyses need to identify, therefore, the main forces and mechanisms of interaction across different societies, different political situations and periods even within the same society (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995:27). As mentioned above, the polarity of these interpretations allows ample space for intermediate positions. Still, McNair (1998) views the models that have been popularised in Western countries as functioning within the competitive adversarial paradigm. In contrast, the dominance exchange (collaborative) paradigm prevails in many transitional societies such as Zambia as inequalities in the distribution of educational resources and economic political power generate social tensions and pressure that must be carefully managed (Lerner and Schramm, 1967 and McNair, 1998).

A multifaceted connection tends to take place between journalists' relationship with their news sources and the surrounding social contexts of the organisations journalists work for, professional ideologies and the political economic environment. The two models, the adversarial and exchange despite their defects help to provide some basis for evaluating the journalist-news source relationship and that is the focus of my study. From afore literature, an argument that would therefore emerge is that, while the relationship between journalists and sources suffices for journalists to obtain available and reliable information, it also generates new problems. Some of these problems apply to the newsgathering processes in the developing world such as repression and manipulation of media. The next section will give a brief state of affairs of the political economy of the media industry in Zambia.

2.5 The Political Economy of the Press in Zambia

The political economy of media in Zambia as argued elsewhere in this study is saddled with many challenges ranging from the media historical background in terms of development and disparities in ownership between private and government media, hostile political circumstances such as existence of some repressive media laws to issues of ownership (proprietary power). In the following subsections, I contextualise these challenges as conditions under which journalists operate in Zambia and make an account of *The Post* as a newspaper operating in these circumstances in line with the interests of this study.

2.5.1 Media History and Prevailing Order

The origin of Zambia's media can be traced to the colonial era. The first two newspapers *The Livingstone Pioneer* and *Livingstone Mail*, were both established in 1906 and operated up until 1964 when Zambia gained independence from Britain. In the 54 years between 1906 and 1964 numerous other publications emerged, partly as a move away from predominantly reporting about the white settler community to addressing African issues (Makungu, 2004). These publications, which were mostly privately owned, included: *The Mutende*, *African Eagle*, *Central African Post*, *African Times*, *Zambia Times* and *The Central African Mail* (Makungu, 2004).

During the period between 1964 and 1991, the privately owned media were condensed so much in size to only one church-owned publication, *The National Mirror* (Makungu, 2004). After independence in 1964, the Zambian government nationalised all the media. The state and its leading political party seized control of *The Zambia Times* and *The Central African Mail*, which later became *The Times of Zambia* and *The Zambia Daily Mail* respectively (Chirwa, 1996). The media role after independence was redefined to promote the ‘humanist morale’ in line with the then Zambian philosophy of Humanism and the struggle for independence in other African countries. Makungu (2004) argues, therefore, that:

The press in Zambia has had the freedom to publish what it wants although after independence state officials have dictated, and in majority of cases have succeeded in telling the journalists what they should or should not publish (2004:21).

The implication of this on the media as Makungu (2004) argues was that its operations could then only be understood by considering the supreme position that the state and its party had appropriated for itself.

At the dawn of the 1990s, when Zambia was moving towards multiparty politics and economic liberalisation, the country’s media were still largely government-owned. By mid 1991, however, several tabloids such as *The Post* (then called the *Weekly Post*), *The Monitor* and *The Sun* joined *The National Mirror* as private media that were publishing alternative views from the mainstream government media (Kasoma, 2000:208). For the first time in the post-colonial era, Zambia’s media had space for editorial expression that could contribute to media freedom, journalistic professionalism, and media influence on democracy (Kasoma 2000:208).

Berger (2000)’s four broad versions of journalistic roles - liberal democratic, neo-liberal, participatory and social democratic paradigms – help us understand media influence on democracy. These paradigms according to Berger (2000) work largely in combination rather than in isolation of one another despite their differences as earlier alluded to in Chapter One. In a liberal democratic paradigm, Berger (2000:84) argues, “the media play the watchdog (or adversarial) role where journalists are expected to set themselves up

against political and economic forces like government and advertisers”. The neo-liberal paradigm depicts the media as promoting national debate by providing information that fosters bargaining, choice and compromise in the political arena (Berger, 2000:84). The value of the participatory role is that the journalists’ role encompasses the masses to actualise freedom of speech in the entire society during political tensions; the social democratic paradigm allows journalists to play the role of public steward, which serves the democratic way of life where everyone is equal in the public space (Berger, 2000:84). These paradigms, however, operate within hostile political contexts in Africa, Zambia included, where most leaders are reluctant to let the media keep them under scrutiny (Kasoma, 2000). For example, by trying to play what most journalists at *The Post* think is “their political role” (*The Post*, 22/02/2005) through engaging predominantly in writing about government officials, journalists have exposed themselves to harassment by authorities in form of police detentions and denial of access to news. As mentioned earlier in this study journalists see sources, in Zambia alike, particularly the elite acting as a resource of information, validating of ambiguous situations, audiences for their output and for providing substantive feedback. The elite include government officials, top politicians and institutional bodies that include professional organisations, non-governmental organisations, business associations and those perceived as experts including the media itself. All these share and contest the same power and operate in the same arena. The salient feature of these sources as mentioned elsewhere in this study is that they provide information as members or representatives of interest groups and larger sections of society. Since news as information has penalties in a society, journalists are at risk to pressures from these groups to control them though it is not automatically guaranteed that they would succeed.

By 1997 in Zambia the promise from the transitional period had dissipated largely because the private media were weakened and suffered from state repression. In the case of the public media, the government had ensured that journalists continue perceiving themselves more as part of the central administration than as a separate institution or profession (Phiri, 1999).

Particularly worrying state-repressive measures in Zambia, like in many African countries, include the legal clauses that merit a journalist being charged and taken to court. Colonial inspired legislation has traditionally stressed control and containment more than it has done freedom. A good case in point is the Parliamentary and Ministerial Code of Conduct and Ethics Act, which contain provisions that stifle the freedom of the press contained in Article 20 of the Zambian Constitution (Hansungule, 1995 cited in Hyden et al., 2003:65). In Zambia, journalists can easily be taken to court if they accuse ministers or parliamentarians of conduct that the latter find abusive whether the source of information is verifiable or not (Ogbondah, 2003 in Hyden et al., 2003). (See also, Chirwa, 1996). While there could be other reasons, such legal limitations could be argued to have contributed to most media in Zambia failing to emerge as a powerful and independent influence in the country's democracy. *The Post* over the years has recorded a number of its journalists that are detained and faced legal action, primarily from government (Kasoma, 2000).

Africa's democratic experience, Zambia inclusive, has been argued by some scholars that even though the political environment contains risks for the media, it is more open today than in the early 1960s post colonial period (see, for example, Ogundimu, 2003 in Hyden et al., 2003). This 'openness' of most African countries has been attributed to various factors like globalisation and donor groups' insistence on legal and other reforms aimed at abolishing restrictive press laws (Ogundimu, 2003 in Hyden et al., 2003). For example, clauses were included in the United States of America and Zambia democratic governance project of the early 1990s that demanded specific reforms in media law and practice. The project called for the removal of restrictive press laws ironically found in the Bill of rights (Ogundimu, 2003 in Hyden et al., 2003). Zambia, at present, has no Freedom of Information Act that allows access to government documents (Kantumoya, 2004), a subject that has prompted much discussion and calls for attention to legal reforms. This strained environment has not been entirely conducive for *The Post* as the next section substantiates further.

2.5.2 *The Post*: A Case Study

The Post's success since its inception in 1991 has been attributed partly to its independent editorial stance and mission statement adopted in 1999. It encourages impartiality, accuracy, fairness, balance and clarity in its news products "in the midst of a strained relationship with government its main source of its stories" (Kasoma, 2000). Others argue that many people turn to *The Post* to read about the next big national or personal scandal. Past records have included the late minister Mushota and then ministers Mandandi-Machungwa-Kalumba K2 billion scandal in 2001 (see Ellis, 1996 and *The Post*, 2005).

The strained relationship with government has not been conducive for *The Post*, but in this strained relationship, the newspaper has found favour with the public and especially the opposition parties. *The Post* is commonly seen to enable the public to debate issues and finding alternatives to dominant views, which is a 'hallmark of democracy' (Curran et al., 1982). On the other hand, *The Post*, including other independent press in Africa, has been found wanting in terms of adequately performing its adversarial or watchdog role (see, Ogundimu, 2003 in Hyden et al., 2003). Instead it would at times engage in what Kasoma (2000:46) called 'vendetta journalism'. Many African scholars that have studied the experiences of the private press argue that although the journalists know that the public is entitled to be appropriately informed, they have not succeeded in rising beyond distortions and outright falsehoods, causing ethical questions of the media (see, for example, Nyamnjoh, 2000). Journalists need to make a distinction between news reports that attack a person in a bureaucratic office, especially government, and those made about abuse of the office.

The pressures on journalists to please those for whom they work have been attributed as reasons journalists cannot report objectively on all sides of an issue in the most attentive, self-critical manner and sticking to the facts (Nyamnjoh, 2000). *The Post* repeatedly made personal attacks on public officials, especially the then-President of Zambia, Fredrick Chiluba, in the late 1990s, for what appeared then according to Kasoma (2000:47) less than honourable reasons. Overly, the political economy perspective articulates the view that the system of ownership is central to understanding of media content and through that media power. However, the perspective is broad and there are a

number of alternatives within it to the extent that there are differences in the speculation of the mechanisms through which ownership is translated into control of content. For example, Golding and Murdock (1991) reject any simple determinism of a private media's role as a key resource for the citizenship to its economic interests. These two scholars argue that it is not possible for most part to see any direct reflections of interests of owners. Nonetheless, scholars such as Gans (1979:323) argue that although in principle, journalists should share who selects the news, in the real world, we must acknowledge that the first and most claimants to a share in news selection would be advertisers [and] powerful sources that contribute to the financial side of gathering news. This has led to the argument by some media scholars that private ownership leads to a media that is limited in scope and diversity due to its economic interests.

The Post's involvement in political contestations while attempting to pursue its democratic role as a watchdog over government (Phiri, 1999), has experienced increasing pressure from various stakeholders over the years. For example, since 1991, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, its journalists have been detained, harassed and faced legal action, primarily from government, whose officials the paper is ironically heavily dependent on for news (Kasoma, 2000). The paper's co-founder, editor and managing director has also been detained and prosecuted (*The Post*, 2005). These kinds of constraints are viewed as government's effort to repress the autonomous reporting ability of *The Post* (Ellis, 1996). It is evident that government still has too much power over the independent media (Phiri, 1999).

In short, amidst the tensions about the potential role of the independent media in Zambia, as an alternative to state controlled media, *The Post* has emerged a strong competitor for local newspaper readership. In as far as this thesis is concerned with the journalist-news source relationship, *The Post's* ability to survive thus far (1991-2005) as a private newspaper in a media environment that has been seen as repressive, makes it worthy of my study. News gathered in this repressive environment encapsulates news sources' inclusion and exclusions made covertly but at times more overtly as choices in the newsgathering process by journalists rely normally on the quest to survive as a private newspaper (Nyamnjoh, 2000).

Moreover, given the afore going arguments it is difficult to simply take a position that is entirely in favour or opposed to either exchange or adversarial relationships in the Zambian society for a private newspaper without interrogating the various influences to establish the journalist-news source relationship at *The Post*. Whether or not the relationship between journalists and news sources can be seen as an evidence of the struggle for domination or competition of ideas of media discourse by either side is also the main question this study attempts to answer.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the theoretical framework that surrounds the relationship between journalists and their news sources. The chapter used the sociology of news production and the social constructivist frameworks to analyse the theories and debates around the journalist-news source relationship. The sociological approach factored in two perspectives, the social organisation of newswork and political economy, were drawn on in an attempt to unravel the complexity of the journalist-news source relationship. Whereas the social organisation of newswork brings into focus the discussion on journalists and sources in relation to concerns of occupations and professional ideologies of journalists, such as objectivity and impartiality, the political economy approach relates the discussion to the wider structure of the state, the economy, and media ownership which bear parameters within which journalists produce news. In so doing, the chapter also highlighted *The Post's* background in relation to this study's topic and the political economy of Zambian media to provide context in which journalists interact with sources during newsgathering.

This chapter has inferred, therefore, that the journalist-news source relationship has various influences. Its complexities emerge through the routinised-patterned interactions typically enhanced or constrained by requirements found in the two sides' respective roles and surrounding political/economic circumstances. The need for each other is critical but, for reasons that journalists and sources have conflicting purposes, they are periodically confounded by tension. These strains, though divisive, also bind them as each side tries to acquire the skills to manage the other. The next chapter presents the research methodology for this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This research methodology offers the examination of the relationship between journalists and their news sources as a case study at *The Post* newspaper, in Zambia. The case study is provided as a stand-alone research however contributes to the validity of associated findings. This positioning as a case study makes the findings not to be generalised beyond the one studied and the literature review on the case selected in order to only represent dimensions of that theory. The chapter outlines the research processes undertaken and perspectives are provided as reasons why a case study was suitable in this study.

Divided into seven sections, I provide the overall orientation of my study. Section one presents the qualitative methodological path taken in this case study of *The Post*. In subsections, I present the two data collecting tools adopted – in-depth interviews and observation methods. Here importance was kept in mind that not all tools relevant for case studies such as documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artefacts were practical for my study. The in-depth interviews and observation methods adopted presented different opportunities for this study because of the richness of detail, as the findings will reveal in Chapters Four and Five.

In section two the physical location of the study is provided in which the objective was to access the subjective beliefs of the journalists at *The Post* and to examine them critically in the context of a broader historical and structural analysis as presented in literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

Section three provides research techniques and procedures. The section explains the attempt made to obtain an in-depth understanding of the meanings and the situation of the relationship between the news sources and journalists as presented by the respondents who constituted the editorial staff rather than the production of a quantitative

measurement of their newsgathering activities, news sources approached and news stories.

In section four the sample size and its selection is defined. Section five provides the data processing and analysis procedures. In an attempt to improve the perception of the fairness of the findings the literature reviewed and theoretical proposition of the study were used as means of adding quality control to the case study. In section six the limitations of this methodological approach are highlighted. Thereafter a conclusion is provided.

3.1 Research Orientation: Qualitative Tradition

Lindlof (1991: 24) argues that qualitative inquiry examines the constitution of meaning in everyday phenomena, which made this research orientation particularly indispensable to my study. The methodology path taken for this study is the qualitative tradition particularly because it allows the use of adaptable techniques to understand social phenomena (Bryman, 1988:109). In so doing, I employed two qualitative methods: in-depth interviews and observation. This was done so because two or multiple approaches provide more valid results than a single method strategy (Jankowski and Wester, 1995). The data generated from both methods was constantly interpreted and contrasted to each other during the fieldwork for detection of issues emerging that required further probing or contrasting with other respondents' views and general inconsistencies. This entire exercise lessened any ambiguity in data gathered and encouraged pursuit of deeper meanings in the interviewees' responses as the field study went on. A case in point where clarity was pursued using both observation and interviews methods were on the issue of selection of news sources during editorial meetings. Just observing which news sources journalists frequently mentioned that they were going to pursue for news was not sufficient alone. I probed individual respondents to provide their own interpretations of the selection to gain more depth.

3.1.1 A Case Study Approach

This research is a qualitative (interpretivist) case study. It is designed within this approach as part of an attempt to examine the relationship between journalists and news sources at *The Post* in Zambia. As discussed in the introduction and literature chapters, this study took *The Post* as a case study to investigate the relationship of journalists and sources in the process of newsgathering in order to discover how the relationship either enhances or constrains the journalists' capacity to conduct their work. This was important in that journalists as persons whose work and lives are the substance upon which news making is conducted act as basis for my study (Seidman, 1991). Working from a case study premise was particularly important in that, as Bassegy (1999:44) has argued, "sufficient data is collected to explore significant features of the case and essentially that the study is conducted mainly in its natural context".

The case study orientation of this study is in line with Deacon et al. (1999:11) who argue that as an interpretivist researcher, one is "interested in the meanings that people mobilise to make sense of their worlds". For the purpose of this study, this allows me as a researcher a broader understanding of the phenomenon under study, through active involvement in the process of the negotiated construction of news. This is because a qualitative case study not only seeks to describe the micro aspects of the phenomenon in depth, but also brings out the issue of the context and history of the particular issue under investigation (Deacon et al., 1999:7) and through the lived experiences of those people under study. Through this orientation, I could easily as a researcher, identify patterns of meaning that emerge on a particular phenomenon by "continually guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses" (Geertz, 1973:20 cited in Deacon et al., 1999:7). Understood this way, I undertook this study bearing in mind that it would not form the basis for generalisation but only add to the understanding of journalists and news sources' relationships in newsgathering with particular reference to *The Post* and its journalists' point of view and newsgathering activities. As such, a case study is suitable for my study as its principle "aim is to capture a case in its uniqueness in order to make a theoretical point or to describe or explain it as a phenomenon" (Gomm et al., 2000:3).

Working within a case study orientation, I was able to work in a sustained period of one month from December 7, 2004 to January 7, 2005, although there were no specific theoretical underpinnings for the choice of the dates. I rather chose these dates for their convenience in terms of being able to access the physical location of the study as well as the opportunity to experience the normal news production processes.

By investigating the journalist-news source relationship from the point of view of a case study, this approach differs from other approaches previously undertaken on similar studies. Examples include a comparative study by Larsson (2002) that highlights the prerequisite of tactical manoeuvring in the journalists-politicians' (as news sources) relationship, news beats analysis of parliament (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995) and gatekeeping studies (Shoemaker, 1991).

3.2 Physical Location of the Study

Since the main objective of the study was to investigate the relationship of journalists and news sources at *The Post* in Zambia, this study was carried out at the newspaper's offices and selected surrounding news beats frequented by its journalists. The choice of physical location had to do with the specific methodological underpinnings of an observation study that requires gaining access to the physical location of the phenomenon under study. Equally, given that words, actions and experiences can only be determined in relation to the context in which they occur (Terre-Blanche and Durrheim, 1999), my gaining access to *The Post* premises for my observation study was crucial.

3.3 Research Techniques and Procedures

As indicated above, I combined two qualitative methods, in-depth interviews and observation for data collection. Whereas for the greater part of my collection of data, I used semi-structured interviews, the observation method undertaken concurrently was supplementary in investigating the journalists and news sources' relationship during the newsgathering process at *The Post*. The combination of the two qualitative methods enabled me to not only seek explanations and descriptions but also make independent assessments of the journalist-news source relationship during the newsgathering process

at *The Post*. The discussion of the two data collecting techniques and their justification to this study follows in the next three sub-sections.

3.3.1 In-depth Interviews

(i) Justifying the In-depth Interviews

Following the objectives of my study to examine the relationship between journalists and their news sources at *The Post* in Zambia, I used semi-structured, in-depth interviews to allow substantial room for the respondents based at *The Post* to express themselves more openly and for me to be able to probe for explanations. As a researcher, I “provided minimal guidance” (Deacon et al., 1999:65). In line with this interviewing practice, I worked within a loose-fitting compilation of subject matters. In so doing, I encouraged normal conversation to prevail. My encouragement of normal conversations with the individual respondents during the interviews was in line with the argument that semi-structured interviews do not allow standardisation as the interviews bear a resemblance to a normal conversation (Deacon et al., 1999:65). Therefore, as it was my intention to get detailed information on the relationship between journalists and their sources, semi-structured interviews were indispensable in producing an account of the journalists’ daily-lived work experiences and the newspaper’s expectations as an organisation. Kvale (1996:105) has noted the following about the outcomes of qualitative interviews:

It should not be forgotten that interviews are particularly suited for studying peoples’ understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding and clarifying and elaborating their own perspectives on their lived world.

In line with Kvale’s (1996) assertion above, I made every effort to make my interviews with the respondents, to be both descriptive and explanatory. As Jansen (1982:240) has noted, in-depth interviewing, “with its affinities to conversation, may be well suited to tap social agents’ perspective on the media”. He observes that spoken language remains “a primary and familiar mode of social interaction and one people habitually relate to the technological media” (Jansen, 1982: 240). The interviews obtained thus became grounds open to exploring how journalist-news source relationship is an embodiment of various influences.

(ii) In-Depth Interview Schedule (see, Appendix A: Interview Guide)

Drawing on insights emerging from the study's objectives and theoretical framework in Chapter Two, an interview schedule was developed that would guide the discussion leading to relevant information gathered for my study. Using this guide, I was able to maintain a focused and yet flexible conversation that accommodated emerging issues from the respondents.

Two editors (the managing news editor and the news editor) provided data at the management level in terms of the regulatory newsroom policies and newsgathering practices such as news routines at *The Post*. My interviews with these two editors also included questions on their general editorial expectations and interpretations of the journalists' relationship with news sources based on their experiences at *The Post* for over a period of eight years. This helped me to unravel the kind of journalist-news source relationship encouraged by management and the kinds of news stories generated at *The Post* resulting from the pertaining relationship.

I also interviewed two more editors, the deputy news editor and the training editor. In addition to those issues addressed to the managing news editor and news editor mentioned above, the training editor and deputy news editor provided other information ranging from newsroom socialisation to general editorial practices as two editors are also involved in the newsgathering process. The senior and junior journalists provided me with their perspectives on newsroom practices and expectations. I also obtained their perspectives on occupational beliefs such as objectivity and newsroom policies. Because my selection of the interviewees was a result of the fact that the said interviewees hold key positions, in relations to the news sources, I obtained information also, on how they select and made use of the news sources in newsgathering. The journalists' self-conception as journalists in Zambia at *The Post*, given the prevailing political dispensation of an emerging democracy was also probed. Collectively, I took the differences in the newsroom hierarchy as constructive to my study, since they revealed insights about the interviewees' concerns and showed the different perspectives of the journalists I was interviewing.

(iii) *Piloting of the In-Depth Interview Schedule*

In order to ensure validity and authenticity in my study, and of the in-depth interview schedule in particular, I conducted a pilot study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985:374):

Completion of the pilot study provides an opportunity to test the credibility of the inquiry with respondents at the case site. The purpose is to check accuracy but also provide evidence of trustworthiness.

I piloted the guiding interview schedule in an introductory meeting with the managing news editor and the news editor of *The Post*. A separate pilot interview exercise was conducted with one senior experienced journalist currently serving as the training editor to allow for other insights for the actual interviews. The entire exercise was useful in assessing the soundness of the questions and the length of time needed for the rest of the interviews. From the pilot study, I discovered that some of the questions scheduled did not give enough data on the topic. In some cases, questions were repetitive and the schedule of the interview was too long considering that the targeted editorial staff were still involved in their daily work. The interview schedule was, therefore, adjusted accordingly. This was significant as the benefits of piloting include increased usefulness of the interview guide (Cohen et al., 2000:260).

I used the insights gained from the pilot as basis to probe issues during the actual interviews. During the actual interviews as I could not keep the strict sequence and series of questions, I aimed at asking the most constructive questions (see *Appendix A*, for the reproduced interview guide). This drew out what Kvale (1996:84) describes as the very virtue of qualitative interviews – ability to acquire optimal responses. The interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed. The transcribed notes were supplemented by the observation part of the study findings as will be illustrated in Chapters Four and Five.

I also took a covering letter explaining the purpose and seeking permission of my research at *The Post* written by my thesis supervisor. All participating editorial staff had a chance to say no to participate in this exercise. This letter also served as surety that the data would be used for the stated purpose only (which was to conduct academic research). Through this letter, I secured appointments for interviews with the editorial

staff. All data included in this study is given by the consent of the respondents. The full letter is reproduced as *Appendix B*.

3.3.2 Observation Method

(i) Justifying the Observation Study

An observation study conducted concurrently with interviews reinforced the in-depth interviews in the one month that I spent at *The Post* newspaper in Zambia. During this period, I played the role of an observer-participant (Lindlof, 1995). My participation as an observer was therefore minimal to only the extent of attending most of the editorial meetings held in the mornings and shadowing some of the journalists on their news beats. Through this minimal participation, I gained insights into journalists' news source preferences and I had the advantage of witnessing and recording the newsgathering process, the political and economic limitations that exert influence on journalists at *The Post*. From these insights, I was particularly interested to be able to ascertain the extent to which news source considerations and the journalists' subsequent interactions with their sources affected the news selection and general news activities such as locations to find news. According to Deacon et al. (1999:258-9), observation as a method enables an opportunity to produce independent judgment of events and processes. To this effect, I was able to observe the process' requirements such as news ideas negotiations and news judgements to arrive at what constitutes news at *The Post* as particular attention during the daily morning meetings was also paid to reviewing the previous day's stories and stories lined up by various desks to tackle in the day.

All together, I was able to use the information from my observations to probe emerging issues during subsequent in-depth interviews to gain clarity. I embraced one of the strengths of observation that as a research technique it implicitly includes within itself other methods such as interviews (Elliot, 1971 cited in; Deacon et al., 1999:277).

(ii) Observational Schedule

I drew my observational plan by taking cognisance of the social constructivist theory's explanation that news does not occur in isolation but rather is an end product of social

interrelations involving various factors such as journalists themselves, news sources, and internal and external organisational structures in society (McNair, 1998; Tuchman, 1980 in Schudson, 2000). In my entire observational schedule, I constantly reminded myself of the constructivist nature of news production and, as such, was able to be a critical eyewitness documenting the activities that were taking place in the newsgathering process at *The Post*. Bearing in mind that this study is based on the views of journalists I conducted this observational study from only the journalists at *The Post*'s perspective and not of the news sources although I witnessed some interaction between the two.

The information I was looking for during the observation moments of this study ranged from the process of selection of news source, identifying types of news sources, news idea generation to news values applied. I also took note of professional ethics, interferences or not of editorial decisions by news sources, how the journalists conducted themselves generally towards news sources during newsgathering and forms of news beats. It is because of such complexities of processes that come to bear on news that studies of news production tend to adopt observation as a research method (Deacon et al., 1999:249).

For internal elements that were routine, such as editorial meetings and news beats, I intuitively believed that an independent observation would be vital in addition to the in-depth interviews. Mention is made here that various news making aspects such as intricate processes of editorial meetings where the journalists select news for the day served as focal observational factors to determine the relationship between journalists and news sources. During these meetings, I looked out for whether or not journalist drew their diary for search for news information primarily from news routines that cater for mostly the elites and not ordinary people in society. As Lemert (1989) has pointed out, despite journalists speaking in altruistic terms about the 'adversarial duty' it is precisely the powerful that have access. Based on such an argument, the journalists' interactions with news sources ought to be extended to various other actors beyond the elite to widen the scope of news sources and lessen dependence on the few. On the basis of such views, as mentioned above, during the editorial meetings I paid particular attention to the journalists drawing their news diaries. We should be reminded of Herman and

Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model here that provides the dominant explanatory framework for understanding media news privileging of domestic power interests. From this standpoint, the media and news sources are seen as exchanging their various resources (information, news space, finances, etc). The media then is viewed as acting in tandem with dominant institutions to reproduce dominant perspectives (Hall et al., 1978, and Lerner and Schramm, 1967).

Through observations, therefore, I was interested in finding out whether an adversarial or an exchange relationship exists between journalists at *The Post* and news sources and if not, to find out exactly what type of relationship existed. To do this, I took advantage of the fact that observational studies allow a flexibility of approach that permits researchers to modify their assumptions as they go along to allow for any unforeseen occurrences (Deacon et al., 1999:259). I looked at all emerging issues (both from observation and interviews) of journalists' news routines, like story generation during the editorial meetings, the news conventions such as news values and professional beliefs that underlie the choices made of news sources and news, and news sources' role including their strategies to gain access to *The Post's* news. I did not limit myself to only these aspects but continually looked out for other additional complex course of issues at play in the interaction between the journalists and their news sources during the news making process at *The Post*.

Given that the critical aspects of the social organisation of newswork are part journalistic autonomy (Schudson, 2000), the editorial meetings held daily at 8:30 a.m. enabled me observe the preferred forms of news beats and routines of the various newsroom desks at *The Post*. These desks included those of the editors (deputy news editor, special projects editor, news editor, managing editor, and editor in chief, who is also the managing director, and a share holder). I was able to witness the decision-making processes in a newsroom prior to the process of newsgathering itself. In so doing, I aimed to establish whether the relationship between journalists and news sources encouraged or threatened the editorial autonomy at *The Post* that is deemed essential in competitive media. This was significant because one of the strongest claims of observation is about being there – actually witnessing the events or processes being researched (Deacon et al., 1999: 258).

The early morning meetings were relevant furthermore because it was during this time that I looked out for elements that demonstrated and explained whether the journalists merely selected a story or an event based on its qualities (news values) or were influenced by news sources. By qualitative distinction of the mention of news sources and the event by journalists during the editorial meetings, I was able to discern the attributes used to select the story. To substantiate my observations from the editorial meetings, I sometimes also attended the informal meetings conducted in the afternoons for report-back briefings to the editors by the journalists. Through these two meetings, I examined further if journalists deliberately or not selected news values that stressed certain events and subjects such as news sources. This was significant in the context of the possibility of journalists staging interviews of news sources to obtain authenticated opinions on the stories selected. This observational inquiry was in line with Lindlof (1995:147) who sees observation as a method having strengths of allowing conclusions about a communicative action to emerge over time and Deacon et al. (1999) who believe that observational studies allow a flexible approach to understanding social phenomenon.

Except when I was engaged in an interview with a respondent, I spent time around the newsroom and visited some of the routine news beats like the Police and press conferences. In line with the theoretical framework, this was done to ascertain further, whether the two sides – journalists and their news sources were critical of or adapting their respective resources in terms of the adversarial and exchange driven relationships respectively.

3.4 The Sample Size and Selection

Because this study is a case study of *The Post*, my sampling was purposive (Deacon et al., 1999). I also used ‘snowball sampling’ in which the initial contact with an informant generates further contacts (Jensen, 1982: 239). While I appreciate that snowball sampling is mainly used where no list of institutions exists that could be used as the basis for sampling (Deacon et al., 1999), because I was saddled with the challenge of the targeted respondents still engaged in their hectic work routines towards news deadlines during my

study, I opted for this method as well. I was able to employ such a combination of methods within this context as the tradition of qualitative research does not always conform to the conventional sampling procedures but, instead, depend upon the creativity and resourcefulness of the researcher within specific guidelines (Deacon et al., 1999).

Out of the study's initially targeted 19 respondents, only 15 journalists were viable as an overall purposeful sample for this study as these were the only full-time editorial staff (reporters, newsroom managers, or editors). It was important for me to use the full-time editorial staff, as I believe that their experiences could provide more relevant and specific information that is line with the interests of my study. Of these 15 journalists, I managed to interview nine as respondents to my study as the other journalists were either on work-leave or out of station on assignments. The interviewees consisted of four editors, four senior reporters and one junior reporter. The following is the list of respondents:

- Managing News Editor: Joe Kaunda,
- News Editor: Amos Malupenga,
- Deputy News Editor: Webster Malido,
- Training Manager and Features Editor: Edem Djokotoe,
- Special Projects Journalist: Sheik Chufuwe,
- Journalist: Brighton Phiri,
- Journalist: Noel Sichelwe,
- Journalist: Speedwell Mupuchi,
- Junior Reporter: Wendy Nambule.

Let me mention here that all of the senior journalists at *The Post*, including the editors, were male with the few female journalists all junior in hierarchy and having served fewer than two years as earlier intimated. At the time of this study, only two full-time employed female junior journalists were present and only one is included in this study because the second was asked to participate but kept putting off the interview appointments. For the purpose of the study, I presumed that she had declined to be interviewed.

The implications of obtaining views from only nine respondents out of the targeted fifteen can be off set by Hansen et al. (1998) argument that, having representative samples in qualitative research may be neither necessary nor desirable, as was my case of a case study. Besides after nine interviewees chances were that an extra number of respondents might not change the overall findings that much. The object of the case study is simply to test a particular hypothesis (Hansen et al., 1998:242), such as the relationship between journalists and news sources in this case (see also Bryman, 1988).

The need for creativity, particularly after few days of observation and talking to some journalists informally, was particularly important during sample selection as the news decision-making processes at *The Post* are not necessarily vertical but horizontal. By horizontal, I mean that a journalist at the bottom of the hierarchy of the full-time editorial staff at *The Post* is able to make independent judgements of news stories with minimal or no interferences from the editors as long as it fits all conventional requirements. In this case I found it necessary to investigate the relationship between journalists and news sources from the four news editors' supervisory viewpoints as well, though the social organisation of newswork perspective that is one of the theoretical frameworks of this study does "pay more attention to reporter-official relations than the reporter-editor relations" (Schudson, 2000:14). My expansion of analysis of the relationship between journalists and news sources to include editors in this study follows scholars who argue that editors' influences are pertinent in the interaction between journalists and their news sources (Gatlin, 1980 and Hallin, 1986 cited in Schudson, 2000:14). This was particularly important, as the type of relationship that exists between a journalist and a news source had much to do with organisational demands, socialisation in the newsroom and management influences as discussed in the literature chapter.

The editor-in-chief, who is also the director and a shareholder, was approached for an interview, but he did not respond to the request. It was assumed that he declined to participate in the study. However, this does not render the findings of this study less reliable as a qualitative researcher, "frequently conducts research in a specific milieu whose representativeness is unknown and probably unknowable, so that the generalisation

of such findings is also unknown” (Bryman, 1988:100). This, however, was a notable limitation to this study as most literature points to the fact that personal ideological orientations of the media owners can influence the content of the media (see, McCullagh, 2002 and Schudson, 2000). According to McCullagh (2002:73), “[this] assumption has been positioned on the claim that most media personnel, particularly the media owners had similar social and educational backgrounds to the people that they were reporting about and this produced a conservative and pro-establishment complexion to their output” which is not the case of *The Post*’s editor-in-chief.

To get over the difficulty of the editor-in-chief, I used the snowballing technique to gather respondents. I made a point of engaging the nearest in management level, the senior editorial staff (particularly the managing editor and news editor) that ran the paper at the time of the study who I interviewed at length. There was also some contention from the managing news editor that the editorial staff would collectively supply adequate information in the in-depth interviews I conducted. If anything at all was left out, I was encouraged to factor in my observational study and follow-up on issues emerging for clarification with any respondent, as I was welcome at *The Post* premises any time of the day during my study. The managing news editor did not feel that an additional interview from the editor-in-chief was particularly necessary, as he was not directly involved in the daily news decisions or newsgathering. The managing news editor’s contention was that while the editor-in-chief was influential on policy matters, he felt that he was sufficiently high up the organisation hierarchy to respond to overall policy matters in my inquiry. Bearing in mind that one of the strengths of observation as a technique is that it implicitly includes within itself other methods such as interviewing (Deacon et al., 1999:277), I took the news managing editor’s suggestion.

3.5 Data Analysis and Procedures

Transcribing the tape-recorded information first processed the data collected from the in-depth interviews. The process of transcribing electronically recorded interviews is crucial to data processing, as there is a danger of loss, distortion and the reduction of complexity

of information (Cohen et al., 2000:281). Bearing this in mind, I transcribed all the interviews myself to gain rich insights.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest a method in qualitative data analysis that uses an analytical procedure of constant comparison. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explain that with constant comparison, each stage of data informs the successive stage until the analysis is terminated. Therefore, the use of constant comparison enabled me to identify themes and sub themes of the emerging issues from my study using both qualitative methods in-depth interviews and observation. In so doing, I came up with the categories and subcategories used to guide the reporting of findings in Chapters four and five. Although I had initially scrutinised the data from the two methods separately, constant comparison formed a basis for coding the raw data generated by the two qualitative methods I adopted for this study. Some of the significant transcribed interview responses are contained in the findings as quotations, giving detailed explanations of, and support to the themes that emerged from the data.

3.6 Limitations of Study Research Methods

As noted in some of the preceding sections, I was confronted with challenges in handling the selected qualitative data collecting methods. Despite the enthusiasm of the managing news editor over the topic of my study and his efforts towards making my research days at *The Post* hospitable, the problem of lack of time on the part of respondents in particular, had to be overcome. I had trouble with carrying out relevant in-depth interviews, because some targeted respondents did not have the time to sit and participate in the interviews, due to their busy work schedules and occasional unwillingness to participate. At the beginning, I did not understand the unwillingness of some respondents but I later discovered that *The Post* includes not less than six tertiary student interns as part of its pool of trainee reporters who at times, are elevated to positions of permanently employed junior reporters. A cross examination of the pool of junior journalists at *The Post* revealed that most of them had not served more than a year and those vying for a position or had just been employed permanently were still on probation which I presumed would have made them uncomfortable with my investigation. I presumed also that, since

I was a student researcher who was studying for a higher qualification than the interns had and had worked for a longer time in the media industry, these factors could have had a negative impact and yet insightful on my study.

Consequently, in the course of my study, my presence as a researcher and a student encouraged some targeted respondents and subdued others. However, this did not deter me. I pursued the target sample by employing the snowballing technique once more. From my analysis of the organisational structure, the number of full-time editorial staff at *The Post* is fifteen and not nineteen as I had earlier established. These nine respondents selected constituted only full-time editorial staff present during my one-month study as some were either on leave or on assignments out of town. Of the respondents target sample, only one was female and was a junior reporter.

Differences in respondents' capacity to articulate themselves during the interviews were also a challenge. It was apparent that some respondents were more eloquent in explaining exactly their experiences with news sources than others were. I employed the probing technique where respondents had not adequately answered the question. From time to time, conjectures from a previously interviewed respondent helped me to probe the next interviewee too. In this regard, the in-depth interview method appears to have limitations in obtaining unvarying depths of information. However, given that the various interviews were to be merged as explanatory and descriptive data, the in-depth interviews proved a very useful tool to use in investigating journalists and sources relationships.

The observation exercise at *The Post* was laborious because I was acting alone. This required starting research work as early as possible and ending as late as possible, so as not to miss any important information. The advantage, however, was that recording my impressions of the observable elements was more consistent. In spite of these limitations and logistical challenges, the research process was successful in terms of data collection. The data collected was relevant to my study and provided me with the comprehensive understanding of the research problem as the findings show.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed how the research methods. These were two qualitative methods, the semi-structured interviews and observation. I discussed the data collecting tools (in-depth interviews and observation) how they enabled me to gain vital insights into the research question. I also discussed how I respected the origin of the data sources to ensure ethical research considerations. The chapter also highlighted the research procedure, the physical location of the study, sample selection and size, as well as the data analysis procedure, and the difficulties that I experienced in using the two research methods selected for this study. Under data analysis, I discussed particularly how the data generated from the two research tools was analysed to provide thematic interpretations through constant comparison as a technique. The themes that emerged from the analysis are used as guide in reporting findings in Chapters Four and Five.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Using the Social Organisation of Newswork Perspective on the Journalist-News Source Relationship at *The Post* in Zambia

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I present and discuss the first part of the findings of the study, based on the social organisation of newswork as one of the two theoretical frameworks in this study. I have attempted to answer the question this study raised: how journalists at *The Post* newspaper in Zambia relate to their news sources within the newsgathering process, through the social organisation of newswork. In the process, the chapter presents findings from various respondents' perspectives that reflect factors such as occupational routines, organisational policies, professional demands and attributes of news sources among other as influential on the relationship constituted between the two – the journalists and news sources. I argue that journalists at the newspaper prefer news sources that meet certain criteria such as authoritativeness, prominence and availability among other, which draws critical attention to practices of exclusion of some groups of society and concentration on a few in the news. The number of frequency of inclusion or interaction of certain news sources against others is not presented in this study as it was outside the methodological premises provided for this study that is to assess the type of the relationship whether adversarial or collaborative. Equally all interpretations made cannot be generalised to any other media.

The data presentation and discussion corresponds with six sub-thematic sections. Names of respondents are used as permission was granted for the purposes of this study. In section one, I present findings on the types of news sources that journalists at *The Post* relate to. Section two presents findings on the organisational demands on journalists. Section three covers responses to challenges occasionally encountered by journalists when relating to news sources. In sections five and six, this chapter establishes newsroom guidelines (policy) and occupational ethical considerations that also take centre stage in the relationship. Even though the various themes listed above combine to give a clear picture as laid out in the literature review, for investigative purposes this study analysed

them individually. This chapter concludes that the journalist-news source relationship is one that emerges through the routinised patterned interactions typically enhanced or constrained by requirements found in the two sides' respective roles that encourage an exchange and not adversarial kind of interaction. The findings therefore presented in this chapter are far removed from media with adversarial tendencies of newsgathering.

4.1 The News Sources that Journalists Relate to at *The Post*

As noted in Chapter Two of this thesis, there are a number of considerations in selection of news sources for newsgathering purposes. It was established from the news source assessment that I took that journalists at *The Post* relate to government officials, non-governmental organisations (pressure groups), politicians, lawyers, business organisational spokespersons and institutional management persons, church leaders and other professionals who included analysts on various subjects. Other sources included the public in cases of accidents or staged events such as political demonstrations. Almost all the respondents spoke of sources as those in bureaucratic offices such as government, donor agencies, large business corporations and non-governmental organisations as the most commonly used in newsgathering at *The Post*. Only one respondent (Chifuwe, 17/12/2004) who is a special assignment journalist talked about multiple sourcing beyond particularly the government in newsgathering:

As a special reporter, it is quite risky looking for news and sources. Sometimes you have to deal with dangerous information and criminals (interview, 17/12/2004)

Another respondent, the training editor specified the requirement of journalists going further than normal news routines to find news sources. Djokotoe (17/12/2004) puts it this way: “every story idea that I develop, I want to find sources that are suitable for that particular story and this I teach journalists at *The Post*”.

There are various reasons respondents gave for their orientation of finding news in more institutions that are bureaucratic. For example, a continuous discovery of news events makes it so as Sichalwe (16/12/2004) one of the senior reporters illustrates:

Having established sources in these offices has its many advantages because if you build confidence it will mean that you will be able to have exclusive

information that benefits the newspaper and the nation at large (interview, 16/12/2004).

Fishman (1980 cited in Schudson, 2000) who argues that journalists view the world as bureaucratically orientated for a continuous detection of news events supports Sichelwe's statement. The consequence is that, as was also found at *The Post*, "[the] newspapers mostly reflect not a world out there but the practices of those who have power to determine the experiences of others" (Schudson, 2000:13 citing Molotch and Lester, 1974). Most sociologists argue that this is an argument most journalists find difficult to swallow due to society's popular expectations of journalism's professional performance as defenders of the truth (see Dahlgren, 1992 and McNair, 1998).

This pattern of sourcing can further be interpreted in a less gentle manner as it invokes the question of whether powerful news sources control the content of *The Post*. Gans (1979) for example, contends that in such circumstances they do. By adhering to the bureaucratized channels of newsgathering, Gans (1979) argues, journalists give the upper hand to officials (news sources) during their interaction. Similarly, Bennett (1996 cited in McCullagh, 2002:68) has developed a hypothesis on this. He argues that journalists 'index' the range of their coverage so that it is reflexive of the range of views of the political and social elite, rather than those of the general population. Journalists at *The Post*'s orientation towards authoritative sources and politics could be argued yield to officials setting the news agenda as espoused by the two scholars above (Gans, 1979 and McCullagh, 2002). This finding is substantiated further by journalists' news ideas generation and source selection discussed later in this chapter.

As this theme seeks to address the major research issue of how *The Post* journalists define categorically who has the potential to relate to them as news sources during news production, it can be argued that my findings in this section supports the notion that the concept of a "news source" is an ambiguous one (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995:45). At *The Post* as seen above a news source has been applied to mean organisations, individuals and groups that normally feature as subjects of their news reports.

Why journalists related to these particular news sources is clearer based on considerations and selections made by the journalists who are respondents in this study in the following subsection. However, a conclusive analysis of why particular news sources are involved in a symbiotic relationship with journalists is arrived at after including the interpretations from the political economy perspective in Chapter Five, which is part of the theoretical frameworks of this study.

4.1.1 Responses to Considerations made when Selecting News Sources

This study established that availability, reliability, previous suitability, prominence, authoritativeness and trustworthiness are the key considerations that journalists at *The Post* use to select news sources with whom they interact for newsgathering purposes. For example, the news editor (Malupenga, 29/12/2004), corroborating the journalists' remarks on the news source considerations in the newsgathering processes achievable at *The Post*, said:

We have to look at the subject at hand and scan through our chain of sources and find out which one would be appropriate to deal with that subject. We feel that it is not every person that can comment on everything or anything, as there are people more competent to discuss some issues and others who are not. For example, if we are talking about the constitution, we need to combine the views of experts and those who seem to have some stake in it so that we look at the issue from both sides. Nevertheless, we mainly insist on expert sources because as much as we have to equip ourselves with news information, we need to get the correct information to the public. What could be true though is that we seem to add prominence more to political slants most of the time (interview, 29/12/2004).

Evidently the news editor's statement is restrained to apply the individual news sources considerations in isolation of each other. This supports the argument that news source considerations are normally applied in an interrelated way. Gans (1979:128) alludes to an overriding aim of "efficiency", of which the news editor's (Malupenga, 29/12/2004) statement above supports, "what could be true though is that we seem to add prominence more to political slants most of the time". The news editor's inclusion of the need for correct information that reaches the public so that they make informed decisions draws out other interpretations. It underscores *The Post's* recognition of the social responsibility theory that espouses authoritative sources as traditionally limited to mainstream political, economic and social elite: elected officials and spokespersons for major interest groups

(Williams and Carpini, 2000). This matter is dealt with at length in the next chapter that bases the findings on political economy perspectives.

Further, journalists at *The Post* exercise considerations of availability, reliability and authoritativeness among other as a basis to select news sources, which does confirm the argument by some scholars that sources who have established their newsworthiness because of their high social status will dominate access to news even if they are involved in less newsworthy events (see McNair, 1998 and McCullagh, 2002). As was mentioned in the preceding section, government and politicians are among the few who the respondents mentioned as dominating as news sources for *The Post*. This paints news at *The Post* with mainly, “elite, established views” (McNair, 1998:79) an issue which was denied by the managing news editor (Kaunda, 30/12/2004). Kaunda (30/12/2004) asserted that, “we extend to even minority views when they are suitable sources of information”. Notwithstanding, the managing news editor’s assertion above others who share McNair’s (1998) view that media in contemporary Africa prefer established elite voices as credible sources (see, for example, Kasoma, 2000, Kupe, 2003 and Martin, 1992). Kupe (2003:5) observes that:

The print media, both state and privately owned tend to cater and very much be a voice for the dominant political and economic elite. To that extent, in terms of the content, they often are not pluralistic and diverse and do not represent the widest possible of views.

For the journalists at *The Post*, as elsewhere, it was found that making the choice of sources was crucial as lot of considerations had to be drawn on. My interviews with the respondents supports the assumption that journalists ascribe source considerations subjectively as news source considerations relate to a particular situation on the news market (topical issues) at a given time (see, Rosengren, 1974). Given the anxieties of news deadlines at *The Post*, for example, news sources previously found suitable have become indispensable on mostly current issues as they are fundamental to the journalists in pursuit of accomplishing their news cycles. Chifuwe (17/12/2004) noted:

As a reporter you will not be at every place at any given time so if you have sources that have confidence in you they will call you up. Sometimes we have sources who will alert you of what is going on. It is up to you as a journalist to

make a follow up and be able to get additional necessary comments (interview, 17/12/2004).

This assertion draws attention to Sigal's (1973) observation that whatever his/her assignments, a journalist has a group of contacts, potential information sources developed over the years, with whom (s)he is in touch on a regular basis. Most news in this case is not what has happened but what someone says has happened (Sigal, 1973:69). The anxieties of deadlines supports the hypothesis that, whatever the story idea or number of stories a journalist was expected to write, as long as it was not an investigative story, he or she was more likely to rely on readily available news sources as an efficient means of gathering information, in a daily publication. Journalists, who have only a short time to gather information as argued in literature chapter of this study, must attempt to obtain the most suitable news from the fewest number of sources as quickly and easily as possible.

Successive data from both observation and interviews with respondents also revealed that reliability and availability of news sources were as important to journalists at *The Post* accomplishing their daily news cycles as previously found suitable news sources. As one respondent (Malido, 22/12/2004) stated, "the advantage of having reliable news sources is that they are at your fingertips so that you are able to call them whenever you have a story idea. This simplifies my work". This assertion corresponds with Gans (1979:129) who argues, "[journalists] want reliable sources whose information requires the least amount of checking".

Furthermore, for the most part, respondents in the daily editorial meetings I attended during my study took the availability quality of news sources as crucial particularly in news-idea generation. Some respondents attest to being influenced by the news sources when deciding which story to pursue, "I take as tips for story ideas from my sources as primarily as journalists do not initiate news" (Mupuchi, 15/12/2004). As another respondent (Phiri, 15/12/2004) argues:

News sources influence our selection of stories as we do not run out of ideas when it comes to newsgathering. Sources are always there to provide you with information to get ideas from (interview, 15/12/2004).

Apart from the afore mentioned reasons, Djokotoe (17/12/2004) alluded to organisational and peer pressure in the newsroom as a reason for using predominately established news contacts from previous engagements.

Editors want results. A journalist submits the required three ideas in the morning, by afternoon you have a story. Then you are good reporter because you deliver what you promised in the morning. So if the same old sources that I have help me to do the story, then I am a good reporter. That sort of pressure breeds shortcuts. You have people calling on you because they know you rely on them and you call them, so you keep them as contacts (interview, 17/12/2004).

From the above respondents' assertions, we gather that the journalists at *The Post* cultivated news sources not only for present purposes of newsgathering but also for future interaction. News sources that had proved suitable in the past are kept close. While there could be many other reasons why previously suitable news sources are pursued at *The Post*, Malido (22/12/2004) statement above "it simplifies my work" confirms McCullagh's (2002:67) argument that "news sources solve production problems ...". The finding could also be correlated to the assertion that, journalists consider news sources' past provision of information leading to suitable stories and productivity without a lot of strain on the organisation's budget of gathering news (Gans, 1979). By implication, the journalist-news source relationship at *The Post* is influenced by factors such as journalistic deadlines, news production cost measures, news sources' availability and reliability among other discussed in this section. This section's findings also support fundamentally the hypothesis that journalists' considerations of news sources in newsgathering favour sources that are authoritative who can provide generally accepted news information. As one respondent Mupuchi (15/12/2004) stated, "there are people in society who are the authority, who are informed about the ideas that the journalists would come up with".

Mupuchi's assertion is shared by scholars who argue that either news sources become authoritative because they are experts on the subject of the story idea or because they are preferred by the readers as 'newsmakers' as they occupy positions of authority and responsibility (see for example, Gans, 1979 and Sigal, 1973). News sources in positions of formal authority are considered more trustworthy than the un- authoritative ones and, most often, the authoritative sources could have already judged the story's suitability and

made it readily available through means such as press conferences or releases (Gans, 1979). The issue noteworthy in this instance according to Gans (1979) is that journalists' need for independent decisions is eliminated though as shall be discussed in Chapter Five section three is constantly guarded against at *The Post*.

4.1.2 News Values Applied to News Sources Selection

I should note that the foregoing findings have emphasised the source considerations only, but in the production process at *The Post*, news values espoused by various scholars (see, for example, Gans, 1979; McNair, 1998 and Staab, 1990) come into play as well, along with news source selection. It was observed that journalists applied substantive time to considerations they made in terms of news values and subjects (news sources) which can be argued made their news choices ready for gathering and print. Here the journalists at *The Post* had to execute drastic measures to the extent that any news source deemed not newsworthy (news values and news sources qualities combined) at the stage of selecting news ideas was tantamount to exclusion. The news editor Malupenga (29/12/2004) illustrates:

In selection of news first of all we look at the relevance and impact on society. Also which people and institutions of society are involved. Some articles' relevance may run for years in feature form but for news, we look more onto what is happening at that time in society. In this regard, we look at proximity but we also cover international news as long as it helps our society (interview, 29/12/2004).

In this instance, the news editor Malupenga applies the prominence factor as a consideration made in conjunction with news values such as relevance, timeliness and proximity. It could be argued therefore, that a news source that bears commonly accepted attributes that are combined with newsworthiness ideals become important by satisfying one or so news values. And increase in importance for news with every additional value consideration he/she satisfies. However, as mentioned in the literature, there is an assumption that underlies the journalistic source considerations that institutional sources are automatically newsworthy (see Gans, 1979). Similarly, as was also found at *The Post*, news sources that are eager to provide information and have familiarised themselves with the values associated with news find favourable consideration by journalists. The managing news editor Kaunda (30/12/2004) put it this way, "we do appreciate our

shortcoming in resources in the newsroom as such we do accept offers of resources such as transport where [for example] we have accompanied the president on high profile summits”.

From a tug-of-war metaphorical perspective, news sources’ successful access into news is shaped by equally interrelated factors such as power, social proximity and the ability to supply suitable information (Gans, 1979). Gans’ (1979) argument is shared by McNair (1998) who observes that sources know that journalists prefer materials that conform to prevailing conventions of what is news which normally would contain those elements of conflict, drama and relevance among other, which audiences appreciate.

Furthermore, it can be argued that, in the process of selecting news sources, interrelated considerations are made, even if that process might sometimes be unconscious. Says the deputy news editor Malido (22/12/2004):

We have to look at the credibility of the source and their authenticity both in terms of whether they are qualified to talk or give particular information on an issue. We trust that the officially recognised news sources release information and append their signatures to certain information. Therefore, we look at authenticity and credibility because they are people who just want to say anything and, equally, there are people paid to say whatever they have to say. It is a thin line so we can not really tell who is who but at least these set the ideal of who we pick as sources to talk to on particular issues (interview, 22/12/2004).

All the above assertions, the news editor (Malupenga, 29/12/2004), deputy news editor’s (Malido, 22/12/2004) and others, reveal the difficulty in pinning down any specific news source consideration as the specific criterion at *The Post* for selecting and relating to a news source to obtain information. The argument by Kasoma (2000) that journalists in Zambia undermine news values by concentrating on the dominant views even when they do not have the elements of newsworthiness is disputed by the two editors’ responses above. It could be argued however that journalists at *The Post*’s news judgement support Stabb’s (1990:424) argument that “the more news values a story contains, the more newsworthy it is considered”. All of the above dimensions, however, do not necessarily undermine news values application to selection of news sources, as the various arguments form the basis on which journalists could consider sources for news flow. These

dimensions in their collective form, could act as inferences that one would also investigate the relationship between journalists and news sources particularly in the Zambian context.

4.2 Organisational Routines and Occupational Influences on the Journalist-News Source Relationship

Like all other media organisations, newsgathering at *The Post* cannot operate on a level of uncertainty, the reason being that the newspaper is produced daily on a 24-hour clock. The newspaper and the professional practice of journalism have therefore introduced elements of certainty such as routines into its news production process. These routines, as discussed in chapter two, allow the newspaper to allocate resources in a manner that ensures regular news production. In this sub-theme, I present findings by highlighting the routine procedures that impact on the journalist-news source relationship at *The Post*. I also explain why this study includes in its sample editors as respondents given that the social organisation of newswork focuses on just the journalist-news source interaction.

4.2.1 Newsroom Hierarchy as Indispensable when Analysing Journalist-News Source Relationship

Placed at the pinnacle of the newsroom hierarchy, *The Post* news editors, like in other media organisations, were in charge of the everyday journalistic routines of newsgathering and were the emblem of the newspaper's management in the newsroom. It can be argued, therefore, that the news editors were uniquely positioned to be respondents in a study such as this aimed at interrogating journalists-news sources interactions in a newspaper due to their authority to control and direct the activities of journalists. This inclusion is suggestive of journalists' engagement in self-censorship when they have an eye to please the news editor (Schudson, 2000). Others that support this assertion, such as Gans (1979:120), argue, "journalists who come up with stories that are explicitly or implicitly critical of powerful sources must provide considerable evidence to substantiate their facts, for such stories will result in an angry call from the news source and executives cannot defend journalists whose evidence is not convincing". The inclusion of the news editors intended therefore to look at the social relations of newswork from their point of view and to demonstrate editorial intervention that exists in journalists' activities, particularly those of interaction with news sources. In the following

section, I present and discuss findings on editorial meetings as a routine practice affecting the journalist-news source relationship.

4.2.2 Editorial Meetings as a Decision Making Arena at *The Post*

As noted above and elsewhere in this thesis, there are a number of routines in use for newsgathering purposes. These routines include editorial meetings. From observing the organisation of the newsgathering process at *The Post*, there was supporting data that the daily morning editorial meetings had significant influence. In these meetings, I observed that journalists and their editors not only discussed the news stories of the previous day's publication but also selected news sources and stories for the next publication. From observations, I established also that editors rarely intervened in the story ideas presented. Rare cases of editors intervening included whenever there was disagreement on the story angle as some respondents noted. "At times I consult the editor just for advice on what angle to use in the story" (Nambule, 15/12/2004). The news editor Malupenga (29/12/2004) supports Nambule's assertion by arguing that:

Where the reporter has been given enough input on how he/she intends to pursue the story, there is no need of input from the editor. Where there is need of guidance, it is provided before going out in the field and after during de-briefing (interview, 29/12/2004).

Malupenga's argument is also supported by scholars that assert autonomy for reporters in newsgathering extends so far that editors may not even know the identity of the sources their own journalists are relying on and may even refrain from asking specifics because of a lack of time as well as journalists' past performances on stories assigned (see, Sigal, 1973). One respondent (Chifuwe, 17/12/2004) further confirms this, "at times, you may not even be obliged to disclose your sources to your superiors".

Subsequent observations revealed that story selection relied heavily on newsroom conventions as every journalist seemed to know where he/she would search for the news, whom to talk to as a news source on what and when to. As Kaunda (30/12/2004) the managing news editor noted:

Every one of us knows who is doing what story and consultations are pursued in this manner. If I feel that a story is not good enough or the angle needs

adjustments then I provide suggestions accordingly but they may not be accepted all the time (interview, 30/12/2004).

Scholars such as Sigal (1973:3) that support journalists' reliance on conventions argue that "conventions are rarely subject to conscious scrutiny by journalists as they are just the way things are done, around the newsroom". Kaunda's assertion correlates with my observation that newsgathering problems encountered with news sources or news tips were discussed daily before subsequent news story ideas were drawn up for the next publication being that the newspaper is a daily publication. Resulting from this consultation process each journalist itemised three story ideas for the next day's publication according to the news desk he/she represents and resources were assigned accordingly. In this instance, writing about newsmaking, Sigal (1973:3) argues that, "consensus formation does not take place in a vacuum but within a context of shared values and inside organisational structures, both of which help to shape the result".

At the editorial meetings, I further observed that wooing editors was one of the methods news sources used to try to gain access to news and keep journalists in line who they find 'intolerable'. Notwithstanding the infrequent input from the news editors on the news ideas during the meeting, news sources still tried to influence editorial decisions by approaching those on top of the news hierarchy such as the managing director in order to gain access to news. The news editor Malupenga (29/12/2004) confirms below:

There are those news sources who think that if they go to the managing director, they will gain access and equally gain favorable coverage. These news sources have been diverted to me, as the news editor for the director does not deal with news. I am not afraid to make my own news judgment [because] they are coming from the managing director. The same applies to the journalists. They will use their own judgment about the news sources (interview, 29/12/2004).

Writing about the powerful news sources wooing journalists through the top news editors and in general, to gain access into news, Gans (1979) argues news sources have long grown accustomed to timing their activities or news statements to the media schedule and similarly journalists retain their right to choose suitable sources. As such, "news sources rarely use their power, to bully their way into news lists, [but] use their power to create suitable news" (Gans, 1979:119). From my observation of the daily exercise of

journalists at *The Post* drawing their diaries, Gans' argument that news sources have long grown accustomed to timing their activities or news statements to the media schedule is underscored. I observed during my observation study of the editorial meetings that journalists' mention of elite names of news sources they would use to get the required information for each story idea presented was vital. Mentioning which news sources would be pursued at first glance appeared normal to me as a researcher based on my personal experience as a journalist and borrowing from the argument that, for news production, the most important tool that a journalist has is his/her news sources and how one uses them to meet editorial expectations (Schudson, 2000:14). However, the consequences of such practice are not as straight forward as I presumed, as subsequent data revealed. It would appear, then, that the reporters who followed certain news beats for some time might have been affected by the expectation of the future interactions with the news source, something I discuss at length later section 4.3 of this chapter. Sigal (1973:102) explains that, "editors need reporters who can come up with stories day in day out ...while on the other hand journalists require news sources who can provide them with newsworthy information on a regular basis". As Sichelwe (16/12/2004) notes:

We do not depend on our editors. An editor just guides us on how to go about with our stories. This stimulates our thinking. We are able to think and analyse issues in line with whom we talk to and which source is suitable for what issues (interview, 16/12/2004).

Through observations at the editorial meetings, I further established that the journalists were operating under newsroom constraints such as scheduled deadlines of a 24-hour interval. Each day, the journalists were supposed to have their stories ready for editing by 3.00 p.m. Like in many other newsrooms, news at *The Post* is a perishable commodity with a 24-hour shelf-life. The time element was therefore noted as essential to the organisation of the news process at *The Post*. This means that news sources that were selected within the news production cycle, particularly within the deadline, had a higher chance of interacting with journalists than those who were not.

4.2.3 News Beats as an Interface for the Journalist-News Source Relationship

It was established both from observation and in-depth interviews that newsgathering at *The Post* is largely shaped by news beats (see Fishman, 1980 cited in Schudson, 2000)

that include local bureaucratic organisations, such as government institutions and businesses, as well as pressure groups and other organisations that act as news sources. I found that journalists at *The Post*, in their various news beats, skew their newsgathering activities towards news sources that are available at the local bureaucratic institutions such as those listed above, an observation is that supported by Kasoma (2000). This organisation of beats means that journalists get the largest share of their news from government officials (Fishman, 1980 cited in Schudson, 2000:13). “Officials in these offices meet journalistic criteria of credibility; authoritativeness; and so are able to act as ‘primary definers’ ” (Hall, 1982:62). The managing news editor Kaunda (30/12/2004) admitted to the primacy of government news sources. Kaunda (30/12/2004) illustrates:

It is because of our strength that we have managed to penetrate government institutions. We have made an impression on government sources that even if they do not want to deal with us as *The Post*, we are the most effective newspaper to get to the people even in the remote [areas].

Notwithstanding Kaunda’s assertion, data further established that the news beats solved some of the newsroom resource challenges such as the daily allocation of transport to journalists in pursuit of news information. As Kasoma (2000) has argued, private ownership of the media in Zambia has come with its own range of challenges in newsgathering and production that include a lack of funds to sustain operations.

Writing on journalist-news source relationships during news production and the production pressures that are resolved by journalists’ preference for readily available news sources, Gans (1979:122) clarifies that:

An advantage accrues to organisations that can supply newsworthy sources that are able to make themselves available to reporters at short notice, give them the time and information they need and do so at no cost to the journalists.

While this consideration provides the government and its chain of command with journalistic legitimation and has several ideological repercussions, Gans (1979) argues that it also exists for very practical reasons. Sociologists warn that bureaucratic areas of regular news beats expose journalists to propaganda (Shoemaker, 1991), as in some cases the clamour for news in these offices has prompted news sources to exact a measure of control over who accesses them (Sigal, 1973). Some news sources have been more

candid as the managing editor Kaunda reflected, “a source may demand to be dealing with particular journalists but that is where as news managers we come in” (30/12/2004).

Another respondent Djokotoe (17/12/2004) added:

Some news sources feel that they are very important [and] as such they feel they should be treated with some degree of respect. For *The Post* to send in a junior reporter to interview them is disrespectful of their position in society (interview, 17/12/2004).

However, there was a prevalence of cooperative behaviour between news sources and journalists during the beats I witnessed during my study. My observation was collaborated by Djokotoe (17/12/2004), an editor, who based his assertion on Sichalwe, one of the reporters, as an example over cooperation that takes place between journalists and news sources on a news beat. Djokotoe (17/12/2004) explains that, “Sichalwe as a reporter is assigned to the courts as a beat [and] knows his way around, the cases, the magistrates and high court judges and in this regard he knows his way out that works” (Djokotoe, 17/12/2004). In the following section, I highlight one of the challenges of gaining access to news sources on the beat system, particularly when a journalist anticipates future interaction with an eminent authoritative news source.

4.3 Anticipation of Future Interaction with a News Source as a Constraint

This study established further that the journalists at *The Post* who anticipate future interaction with a news source are motivated to withhold a news story in some instances. Journalists’ interaction with certain news sources, particularly authoritative ones, frequently results in inter-dependence of each other’s resources between the journalist and news source, though more on the part of journalists (Sigal, 1973). Even then as Sigal (1973:55) argues, “news ends up turning into a series of compromises as news sources also seek their opinions to be told”. This is not the only rationale for such a difficulty during news making. Findings discussed in this chapter suggest that news sources prominently sourced for different issues concerning their field of expertise elicited several attributes of news sources. These ranged from newsworthy aspects of authoritativeness, controversy, social proximity warranting interest among readers, national heroism or leadership, to reliability among others that attract media attention (Staab, 1990). What may need reemphasis, though, is the subjectivity of all knowledge

and the inevitability of conflict over what constitutes news, which news routines strive to reduce (Sigal, 1973). As mentioned in the literature, uncertainty about what the news is confounds journalists and their critics alike. As one respondent Mupuchi (15/12/2004) notes:

One might have personal and long-term relationship with a source on the beat but there is a danger in that because sometimes there might be a story that surrounds that source. You might tend to compromise your role (interview, 15/12/2004).

As can be deduced from Mupuchi's assertion, it is simply an unsettling experience to tell a story that maybe incriminating a news source that one must later meet face-to-face for another story break. It can, therefore, be argued as is done by Newcombs (1963 cited in Drew, 1973:18) that journalists' regular interaction with news sources leads to familiarity. According to Newcombs "increased interaction [makes] it difficult for journalists to be objective..." (1963 cited in Drew, 1973:18). Information about events comes from other people as sources, it contains the sources' own frameworks of meanings and their own interests that require protection notwithstanding the critique that news is a product of the choices of many, rendering it "consensible" (Sigal, 1973: 2). Regarded this way, we are reminded here that news is not a spontaneous incidence in the world that the media discerns upon by surveying the world scene. Instead, news provides "a 'reality' for the work, by which, events are constituted by those who happen to hold power" (Molotch and Lester, 1974 cited in Schudson, 2000:14). Like all media organisations, *The Post's* newsgathering cannot operate with high levels of unpredictability. As one of the editors noted, "there is no autonomy by journalists of where to search for news from the sources generally because there are some sources you have to deal with whether you like it or not, for example the police spokesperson" (Djokotoe, 17/12/2004). Regarded this way, *The Post's* newsgathering cannot operate with high levels of unpredictability. Djokotoe's response also reminds us that news is not a spontaneous incidence in the world that the media discerns upon by surveying the world scene. Instead, news provides as Molotch and Lester (1974 cited in Schudson, 2000:14) espoused, "a 'reality' for the work, by which, events are constituted by those who happen to hold power".

Looking at the journalist-news source relationship from the above perspectives, journalists pursue a small number of news sources on their routine news beats that have been available and suitable in the past. Others, for example Gans (1979), who disagree with this view argue that, “there are notable omissions to this such as in news exposes, for which journalists will become exceedingly active in digging out sources” (1979:116). The managing news editor’s (Kaunda, 30/12/2004) assertion below exemplifies cases in which journalists may become active in digging out alternative sources to shed additional light on the news idea:

We have established a special projects desk that covers investigative stories purely which means the journalist in charge has to have contacts with multiple news sources as the desk gathers stories that make impact in society (interview, 30/12/2004).

This draws on the sociological argument that for news production, being a multifaceted social practice (Tuchman, 1980 cited in Schudson, 2000), topics and events created by sources are selected as appropriate stories or not for inclusion in the news. It could be argued, then, that the news beats provide a basis for a dependent or collaborative relationship between journalists and news sources. The relationship is developed to meet some of the requirements of the newsgathering process as discussed elsewhere in this study. Scholars such as McCullagh (2002) and McNair (1989) support this argument in that they view the need to produce reliable accurate information and to select stories that can be processed economically and routinely as fundamental to a journalist. This has prompted a critique that journalists and political news sources have their own narrow idea of what the media should cover (Hackett, 1984 and Schudson, 2000). This means that, as journalists and news sources complement each other in making the news, what passes as a newsgathering ‘tug-of-war’ or, more precisely, a conflict of interest between journalists and news sources, then, can have significant consequences for the news content. In the following section, I present a typical example of the difficulties journalists encounter on the news beat as per the findings this study.

4.3.1 News Source Dilemma: Beat Parochialism

It was established during the study that two journalists from the sports news desk at *The Post* were confronted by a dilemma of beat parochialism while gathering their designated

news. The dilemma was sparked by the fear that they would jeopardise their relationship with a leading news source on their beat if they developed a certain news story. As has been established and interpreted in the preceding section, journalists at *The Post*'s regular reliance on authoritative news sources on their news beats coupled with the anticipation of future interaction imposed certain restrictions on the flow of information to the public. I found at *The Post* during my study that potentially good information obtained for a news story tended to be censored by journalists because they applied what Sigal (1973:44) calls "broader definitions of privacy of the news sources". This is a matter that Mupuchi (15/12/2004) for example attests to earlier in this chapter that personal and long-term relationship with a source on a beat may compromise a journalist's role. What this means in terms of the relationship between journalists and news sources is that journalists tend at times to conceal information they deem as personal, to protect the news source's integrity. Some scholars are of the view that although enduringly difficult to access news sources are few, many people or organisations who are eager to be sources will quickly become so when the news hurts them (see Gans, 1979:118). Previously and potentially suitable news sources constitute an important audience for any journalist as the feedback that the journalist gets from his/her news sources is incomparable to any other (Sigal, 1973). Sigal (1973:48) sees this kind of assimilation culminating into 'beat parochialism' in that journalists develop "vested interests in their beats" (1973:48).

This voluntary censorship is practised at *The Post* along with journalists' claim of the right of access to news sources especially government and elite sources. As one respondent (Phiri, 15/12/2004) noted, "if sanctioned then you go ahead but mostly it is only proper that you protect your source so that he/she continues providing you with the information". According to Siebert (1956:40 cited in McCullagh, 2002:86) in many cases, censorship is one form of control of the libertarian media over what is publishable as it is exercised through the "voluntary or self-righting process" and not by overt means often resented by journalists.

I pursued the case on news source dilemma during my in-depth interviews with the various respondents as follows. I wanted to know whether the journalists in charge of the beat had presented the story idea at the editorial meetings or not and how it was resolved.

The respondents I engaged over the matter confirmed so and what follows is the news editor's summarised version of what was the news story idea and why it placed the responsible journalists on the news desk in a dilemma. What follows is an account of what is alleged happened:

Since 2003, X who is both past and present a suitable news source had been living at hotel Y at public's expense. Sometimes, even when X travels outside Zambia, the hotel room is held until X returns to reoccupy it. As X is a technical executive, it had been argued that he had negotiated that his perks includes such hotel costs. This included X not inconvenienced by hotel checking ins and outs (Kaunda, 30/12/2004).

Further inquiry with the news editor Malupenga revealed further:

When X appeared to play professionally with fellow sports mates, X was said to be paid money as a player, in addition to being paid as a technical executive (interview, 29/12/2004).

Literature cites two major influences as prevailing over such a dilemma. Firstly, some scholars (see for example, McCullagh, 2002) argue, news organisations may be forced to avoid contentious and exigent issues such as this one cited above because of the risk of alienating and upsetting particular news sources. Secondly, it would be more expensive to cover subsequent stories when the relationship with reliable news sources ends, particularly when compared to the cost of routines and predictable news items (see Gans, 1979).

The work of Herman and Chomsky (1988) on manufacturing consent offers an explanatory framework for such a predicament at the newspaper during my case study. The scholars Herman and Chomsky (1988:2) argue that dependence on leading elite news sources guarantees that only 'suitable' stories and opinions get into news. Being a news source at times is, therefore, less a matter of reasoning over what is a 'good or bad' story on the part of the journalist than a matter of power to refuse access to a journalist, as has been observed by Blumler and Gurevitch (1995). Even when story ideas evoke values of newsworthiness such as impact, Herman and Chomsky add that, "some stories never make it in the newspaper" (1988:2), as was the case of the sports news idea by the close of this study at *The Post*. The fear of denial of access reduces the process of interaction

between journalists and news sources to a semi-mechanical one, connoting a sedate ordering of ideas before any real debates and decision-making over news idea takes place. As Djokotoe (17/12/2004) notes, “the journalists felt X would close the door on them if they pursued the story, which would entail losing a valuable source”. However, there are exceptions to this. Quite a common reaction in journalism, once a story idea is pronounced, is the unleashing of a competitive struggle to control the news agenda (see, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995). However, it should be argued here, as was the case at *The Post*, that it might not always be the case that journalists accomplish controlling the news agenda as more often than not, the news sources do the leading due to editorial staff and time being in short supply (Gans, 1979). Further discussion on this matter is provided in this chapter in section 4.4. But I would like to make mention here that apart from the process of self-censorship mentioned above, concentrated ownership reliant on advertising prompts journalists’ exclusion of information (Herman and Chomsky, 1988).

Arguments such as Herman and Chomsky’s (1988) could be sustained in *The Post*’s dilemma, as almost all the respondents in favour of not publishing the sports news story idea cited similar reasons such as deadline pressures aggravated ‘purportedly’ by a lack of accessible alternative suitable news sources. As the news editor Malupenga (29/12/2004) notes, “whenever a journalist would go to the physical location of where this news story was, no one wanted to state how much public money had been spent on hotel bills. Proving such allegations requires a lot of time”.

Putting into perspective, the literature in Chapter Two on the use of the news sources as a means of authenticating information during newsgathering, it can be argued that, in principle, the journalist are entitled to examine the lucrativeness of releasing or not certain information. The sports journalists in this case could be argued were, therefore, attentive to the daily deadline pressures of the newsroom in their decision on whether or not to pursue the story. In a typical scenario, the managing news editor Kaunda, (30/12/2004) in support of his news editor Malupenga’s statement above argues, “it would have been simple from the investigative point of view to pursue the story as no one makes any demands on you as a journalist”. Kaunda’s assertion could be correlated to Sigal (1973:102) argument that covering an investigative story is different from daily

news items' requirements as deadlines are oppressive. Putting out a daily newspaper story imposes a form of routine on the journalist who could work only so much to get news with the only important tool she/he has – the news sources (Dunne, 1963:41 cited in Schudson, 2000:14). As editors in the newsroom need journalists who can routinely come up with stories that merit page-one display, journalists need news sources that can provide them with newsworthy information on the same regular basis (Sigal, 1973). Djokotoe (17/12/2004) rationalised the case of the dilemma in this way:

What could have been done is that a journalist should have gone to hotel Y, ask for example how long X has stayed in a period and type of room occupied to make inferences for a story idea and equally find someone to confirm this story such as the minister of sports. This was not the case, for the journalists on the sports beat, since they have X the technical executive, as their main source for other sports news, they could not do it (interview, 17/12/2004).

Djokotoe's statement and the preceding literature (Schudson, 2000 and Sigal, 1973), suggests that the relationship between journalists and their news sources is burdened by occupational and organisational demands. But this argument is not supported by the managing news editor (Kaunda, 30/12/2004) below:

We do not have the hard facts but just speculations. Doing such a story would be unethical. It is until you get the facts that you could publish the story. We have sent reporters to get the story but they seem to be getting hitches. Probably it has to do with the kind of person they are dealing with. He is very powerful and most Zambians feel they are obliged to provide loyalty to him. Nevertheless, I do not think it extends to the newsroom of *The Post* (interview, 30/12/2004).

As noted in the interview, the story idea required journalistic skills, to verify and probe for information, and additional news sources to collaborate that information as shall be discussed later in the section on ethics in this chapter. However, as seen from the managing news editor Kaunda's (30/12/2004) statement, "he is very powerful and most Zambians feel they are obliged to provide loyalty to him". The issue of power comes in strongly as an influence according to the managing news editor.

Audiences, as in this instance, also have implications on the type of news ideas that are publishable (McCullagh, 2002). News organisations avoid controversial issues because of the risk of alienating and upsetting particular sections of the audience (McCullagh, 2002:79). However, Djokotoe (17/12/2004) observed that, "journalists keep restricting

themselves by looking at a straight line when they are sourcing news ... journalists need to cast their nets wider”.

Djokotoe’s (17/12/2004) assertion highlights the argument that journalists become careless about recognising that alternative views may exist and about digging out to include alternative views in their stories, as they are no longer dispassionate about the news source on their regular beat (Sigal, 1973). The news editor Malupenga, (29/12/2004) asserts:

We had to make a compromise, a compromise not to ensure that the story is not published but that the story is done in a manner that we protect the journalists from their predicament. In the case that X is annoyed by the story, X would be annoyed with *The Post* as a newspaper and not with the individual journalists. At that stage, we will ensure that even if X is annoyed, will not ‘punch’ holes in the story. This would mean that journalists still maintain their relationship with X even if X would want to distance from the paper. (interview, 29/12/2004)

The above assertion by the news editor shows the concern to get exclusive news information as reflecting the importance a journalist attaches to establishing and keeping contacts of news sources. The news editor attests to key news sources having a degree of discretion accorded to them, but also acknowledges clear professional limits to this. In most cases, the imperative to make such discretions by journalists has been argued imposed by the precarious news environment that journalists operate in (Sigal, 1973). For example, government news sources struggle to shape the outcome of a public policy through the media, in that the ability to get the information into news and prevent rivals from doing so earlier than the government is at once a tactic and a stake in that fight (Sigal, 1973). From this standpoint, bargaining on each side complicates the relationship between journalists and their news sources. Kantumoya (2004) argues, “if we accept that the public’s right to know is the media’s dominant mission, it follows that neglecting some ethical impediments during covering a story is justified only if its publication will be for the public good” (2004:78). The manoeuvres exercised in this example throw up some journalistic newsgathering ethical questions whose findings will be presented later in section 4.6. It is important though to note that the fact that the story idea in question drew the news editors’ attention that make up the newspaper’s management supports the hypothesis made in this study that the news organisation partly determines who is in a

position to make choices and consequently influences the content of the paper. Suffice to say that, for a study like this one, the newswork framework is well suited to understanding the broad management influences and occupational work ethics and demands on journalist-source interaction.

In the following section, the study presents the findings on the respondents' perspectives on the news pseudo-events staged by news sources to gain access to news.

4.4 Responses on News Sources' Events as a Means to Access Journalists

The news events were found in this study to be part of the tactics that news sources use to gain access into the news. It was established, however, from the interviewees that journalists at *The Post* are sensitive to their ability to get the story behind the façade of staged news events. While accepting the attractiveness of staged news events such as press conferences and field tours by news sources, some respondents expressed antagonism. According to Chifuwe (17/12/2004), "sometimes when you are on beat or requested to cover a source, if you do not look beyond just what the news source is saying, your reports become less interesting as they would not trigger debate. As a journalist, you have to look beyond the face value of the event". News sources gain an advantage in the competition over access to journalists when they are ingenious and sufficiently able to create activities that exist solely, or mainly, to be covered by the news media (Gans, 1979). While different motivations played a part in *The Post* journalists' reasons for using some staged events as news sites, Mupuchi's (15/12/2004) statement below provides some insight:

A journalist who has specifically been asked to cover an issue on the beat should cover that issue as per request but then for us at *The Post*, we do not just cover the story that is given because you have to review it as it may just be a public relations story. Therefore, you bring in other issues related to what you were originally asked to cover (interview, 15/12/2004).

We can note from the above assertion that although journalists at *The Post* may often report what has been served up to them on a platter, they also show antipathy to these staged events. It can, therefore, be argued that events staged by news sources, will not always bias a journalist's attitudes in favour of the news source. As Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) observe, "journalists have not taken the professionalised bombardment

of information lying down for they do not relish having their news choices severely narrowed by those whose activities they are supposed to cover” (1995: 210). However, as Sigal (1973) argues journalists do sometimes fall prey to tactics employed by news sources because of the overriding occupational imperative for journalists “to get the news and to get it first” (Sigal, 1973:52), I discuss this matter also in section three of Chapter Five to shade more light in relation to *The Post*.

In the following section, the study represents the findings on respondents’ perceptions on the newsroom policies at *The Post* that prescribe how journalists relate to their news sources.

4.5 Newsroom Policy on Journalist-News Source Relationship

The findings from the study show that journalists at *The Post* felt free to make their own engagements with news sources. The most common response was that there were no written policies, but just standard norms of behaviour. Berkowitz (1997:108, citing Breed, 1955) argues though that, “every newspaper has a policy, admitted or not”. Some respondents attributed this to the situation at *The Post*, which they described as ‘unique’, because it encouraged dynamism in their relationships with news sources. Below are some of the responses that show that *The Post* has no official policy:

There are no strict laid down rules in black and white. It just depends on individual reporter on how they want to relate to sources. At times you may develop personal relationship, *The Post* won’t mind as long as the source is giving you information that would help society move from one degree of development to another (Interview, Mupuchi, 15/12/2004).

Sichalwe adds:

There are no written rules except guidelines. Normally only professional relationships are encouraged, whereby you are told not to accept items like money (interview, 17/12/2004).

Phiri elaborates further:

There are no rules per se but we have standard norms of our conduct before our news sources. First, you are discouraged from being compromised by the sources because sources have their interests in given situations (interview, 15/12/2004).

The three respondents Mupuchi, Sichalwe and Phiri's responses above implicitly mean that newsroom rules on how journalists should relate to sources were unofficial. However, whether the perception of lack of a policy is a norm of a newsroom is challenged by the notion that policy frameworks are normally covertly imposed to influence journalistic activities during news production (Soloski, 1997). The news editors admitted that *The Post* had covert policies imparted to journalists through newsroom socialisation. The editors argued that the newsroom policies were not overt, but provided for what the newspaper sees as its identity and mandate towards news sources. Says the news editor Malupenga, (29/12/2004):

At *The Post* we encourage reporters to stay close to news sources, to know them at various levels – personal and professional levels. This is because you cannot report effectively people you do not understand. We want to understand people we deal with especially those news sources we consider as crucial. We want to understand their various aspects – personal lives, what they think about certain things before we can decide how we can use them. We therefore encourage reporters to cultivate that close relationship with people they deal with (interview, 29/12/2004).

Similarly, the deputy news editor Malido (22/12/2004) said:

There are no rules per se but there are in-house ethics demands that the relationship should just be source-reporter. We cannot restrict reporters from being close and personal with sources but we do ensure that it is just for professional reasons only. This is because as journalists interact on a regular basis with sources, they develop that closeness but we advise that the relationship should only be in as far as the source wants to give news and the reporter wants to get news (interview, 22/12/2004)

Because Malupenga and Malido are in supervisory positions at *The Post*, it can be argued that their comments reflect a confirmation of official newsroom policy in spite it being informal. Malido's (22/12/2004) comment above that "because journalists interact on a regular basis with sources, they develop that closeness" for example, bears connotations of journalists and the management's different interpretations of ways of relating to news sources, as mostly it is subjective given that they are not any written rules. Sichalwe below provides the most comprehensive contextual response to support Malido's comment:

Sources at times would like to give you money; you need to tell your editor so that he can know in case of trouble. The guidelines are useful; looking at our

economic environment the management is very strict on certain issues such as money. We definitely, therefore, fear to get money and not declare it in case management finds out. You would be suspended, fired or disciplined in one-way or another (interview, 17/12/2004).

Sichalwe's comment gives an indication that socio-economic factors of the lived experiences of journalists exert some influence on what relationships exists between them and news sources. This relationship is, according to Sichalwe (17/12/2004), susceptible to the desire to gain economically from news sources. There is a whiff of corruption or bribery here, but these are subjects that are beyond the scope of this study. However, when asked if they were susceptible to obtaining financial support from news sources, the journalists' responses ranged from indifference to delight that such a question could be asked because of its ethical dimensions. Phiri (15/12/2004) attests to this:

I do not usually call my sources for information only all the time but just to say hello to them at times. At times, we meet as friends. Some of them, I have improved my relationship with them to the level where it is personal. This is done to maintain my relationship with them so that if they have useful information, they may just call me up to let me know and I follow it up (interview, 15/12/2004).

Djokotoe adds:

In our work environment as journalists, how many are empowered? That has a bearing in editorial because if you come dressed in rags or you just wear one or two outfits that you just wash nearly every day and the news source sees that. One day the news source may just send to you a suit or money for you to buy something. In all fairness, you will not refuse because you need money. This is why you see certain things happening with journalists in local media houses. The minute they are found out they are fired (interview, 17/12/2004).

Furthermore, the following response during one of the interview discussions shows that although journalists are resistant to news sources influences because of their assumed professionalism, they are still susceptible to the dominant ideology of patriarchy found in the Zambian society in their relations with news sources. The stereotypical role women play in the Zambian patriarchal society is of homemakers with any woman who socialises with men being regarded as indecent. Nambule (15/12/2004) as a female journalist illustrates:

As a female reporter, you are not supposed to get too personal with [sources] where you start getting into romantic relationships that would compromise your

profession. Your relationship has to end at report-source relationship. This enables me to do my job independently (interview, 15/12/2004).

These different views illustrated above show that policy regarding the relationship between journalists and news sources at *The Post* for newsgathering purposes was not formal. The fact that Nambule's assertion, as a female journalist, had a unique connotation draws out interesting factors such as self-identification as it contrasts with the views of the male journalists above. This requires further investigation beyond the scope of my study's interests. To state more explicitly how the newsroom policy is retained at *The Post* would be difficult but this study applies the managing news editor Kaunda's (30/12/2004) assertion that:

At institutional level, we have our editorial policy that guides us in terms of the role we should play as a newspaper and that generally guides us in relationships that should exist between the institution and the outside world and basically the reporter and the sources (interview, 30/12/2004).

Berger (2000) has suggested policy frameworks such as the functional view, which focuses on harmonisation of the whole system; power view, which draws attention on management influences; participative which highlights consultative approach and the chaos view that draws disorderliness. Of these, I found as a suitable framework the chaos and participative views to explain an ad hoc media policy such as the one discernible from the respondents' responses. It can be argued, therefore, that the frameworks within which journalists are to function are broad enough to permit some form of creativity in news production at *The Post*. However, the boundaries of such an ad hoc policy can also be viewed as narrow in the sense that they set parameters where journalists could be trusted to act in the interest of the news organisation as was mentioned by the managing news editor Kaunda above. There is no need to assume that journalists will perceive any newsroom policies as constraining on their work even though the unwritten policies actually limit the way journalists write their stories and the type of stories they report on (Soloski, 1997) as substantiated further in subsequent sections.

The next sub-section therefore, presents my findings on the ethical considerations that determined journalists and news sources interaction at *The Post*.

4.6 Professional Ethical Considerations by Journalists at *The Post*

4.6.1 Objectivity as a Routine Ethical Practice in the Journalist-News Source Relationship at *The Post*

I established further from interviews the much-debated journalistic principle of objectivity largely shaped newsgathering at *The Post*. Almost all the respondents maintained that it was virtually impossible for them to ignore the requirement of objectivity and other canons of journalism in general, as the nature of newsgathering necessitates them to do so. Because journalists at *The Post* talk to routine news sources except when unexpected events occurred such as accidents and deaths, the respondents revealed that they felt obliged to be objective, as they could not afford to lose access to where news is most likely to occur. The managing news editor (Kaunda, 30/12/2004) put it this way, “even if another newspaper as a competitor had to scoop a story we are pursuing, I would have to let go if I do not have the hard facts together”. The fact that this respondent is the managing news editor helps me to interpret his response as key to defining what determines news at *The Post*.

The argument by Sigal (1973:66) that, “because [journalists] have to pick the most current information or events, objective reporting lay out procedures to follow in composing news stories” seems to be supported by journalists’ inclination noted in the above responses obtained at *The Post*. Most respondents were of the similar view, by asserting that ethics particularly that of objectivity are the only means intellectually they could rationalise what they were routinely doing in the gathering news. As Sicalwe (16/12/2004) illustrates, “we need to look at issues objectively [to] explore the issue and come up with something that would help society”.

Apart from legitimising the choices made by the journalists at *The Post*, the principle of objectivity is also used to avert outside criticism. One senior journalist (Sicalwe, 16/12/2004) explains:

In cases where there are complaints from sources that feel that I have not covered an issue the way they expected it to be covered, I have always argued that my role is that of being a journalist, that is to report issues from a professional point. Some sources want to do public relations through you but you do not need to succumb to such pressures, you just need to do your job (interview, 16/12/2004)

Sichalwe's (16/12/2004) response above is supported by Curran et al. (1982), who argue that ethical principles such as objectivity are the ultimate means of control of the news production process in spite of the variety of interests and influences to which journalists may be subjected (see also Sigal, 1973). It can be argued, therefore, that journalists covering a news story would prefer a news source that does not get in the way of the final news item, as it would amount to infringing on the personal political preferences of a journalist. In the news editorial process of weighing issues and consensus formation of what to include as news ideas in newsgathering, as was earlier discussed, addressing ethics is regarded as critical.

One point should be made about the use of the concept of objectivity by the respondents in this study before I go any further. For example, when asked what objectivity entailed practically, the managing news editor Kaunda (30/12/2004) explained this way:

If an oppositional party president releases a Christmas message to the nation, we go ahead and publish it the way it is, [but] if it does raise some contentious issues, we give other persons involved to respond, so that it is balanced (interview, 30/12/2004).

It was found that objectivity as a principle applied in newsgathering at *The Post* as explained by Kaunda (30/12/2004) the managing news editor, represents a quantitative balancing of favourable and unfavourable facts about news sources and what information to include or not in the news. This includes the completeness of coverage of alternative views in a news story. For example, in a politically controversial story according to Kaunda (30/12/2004), various views are included to create balance even if it means that dissenting voices, which are rarely covered, had to be captured.

As McNair (1998:77 citing Entman, 1989) observes, the professional ethic of objectivity guarantees elite access to the news, since it means that journalists have to interview legitimate elites on all major sides of a dispute. As was discussed earlier, journalists' definitions of who is and who is not a significant or legitimate authorised source, reinforced by the convenience of contacting some sources over others, may lead to the exclusion of voices which have something relevant to say on an issue. Due to pressure of

time towards news deadlines and the need to ultimately escape the wrath of publishing inadequately verified news, this study found that the newsgathering at *The Post* was restricted to finding attributed opinions from bureaucratic institutions, which some of the respondents argue are still gathered objectively as illustrated by the news editor Malupenga (29/12/2004) below.

If a news source has done something wrong and I have done a thorough investigation to have all the facts about it, why would I sit on the story? (interview, Malupenga, 29/12/2004).

Malupenga's assertion corresponds with Sigal (1973:183) who argues that, "[in selecting stories and sources], journalists strive to be objective, both in intent, by applying personal detachment; and in effect, by disregarding the implications of the news ...and when they can not ignore the implications they try to be fair".

While Malupenga (29/12/2004) and Sigal (1973)'s assertions may seem to be the best explanation of the situation at *The Post*, however, one respondent's experience (Djokotoe, 17/12/2004) that contrasts the two assertions may be every bit as significant. Djokotoe (17/12/2004) illustrates:

It happened that a minister who had just been transferred to another ministry was asked to comment on a story just after two days from taking office. Personally, I do not think that the minister would have been competent enough to do so. The best person to comment would have been a technocrat such as the Permanent Secretary if you (journalist) are bent on authoritative sources. However, that was not the case as the media is operating in a political environment that is dominated by a few and the journalists have been indoctrinated to think likewise (interview, 17/12/2004).

Djokotoe's (17/12/2004) assertion above supports the view earlier alluded to in this study that newsworthiness is socially constructed. Therefore, considerations made in choices of news sources are not about something that is intrinsic in an occurrence but are instead attached subjectively to journalists (for example in this case, that of prominence of the minister's position in society was attached).

It was also established from the interviews at *The Post* that the journalists are often socialised into practicing exclusion of their own personal beliefs and values as they relate

to news sources during newsgathering. When asked how much the ethical convention of objectivity broadly meant to them as journalists when relating with sources, almost all the respondents said it was the newspaper's in-house style to follow strictly the convention of objectivity when liaising with news sources. In support of the respondents' unanimous view above, the managing news editor Kaunda (30/12/2004) revealed that the newspaper had learnt the hard way to adhere to ethics:

There was a time when most of our earnings as a newspaper went to servicing lawsuits. In the past, there was a lot of carelessness on the part of the editors then. We faced quite a lot of legal suits and most cases we failed to defend. Not necessarily that the stories were false, but there was a bit of impatience on our part to publish stories without all the facts together (interview, 30/12/2004).

There are legal considerations attached to the principle of objectivity that are touched on such as libel in Kaunda's (30/12/2004) assertion above. The problem of news sources finding themselves in the news regarded as not objective or unbalanced upon editorial evaluation implicitly was attributed to the weakness of the editor in charge for that day's publication by Kaunda's response above. I found as news policy of the paper that all parties affected by a story should be given a chance to respond to whatever charges made by either the newspaper or other news sources. As the managing news editor asserted further, "when a source comes with a story, we have to have the information vindicated. We do not want to be used as a platform for personal gain by news sources" (Kaunda, 30/12/2004). Kaunda however, conceded that this was not easy to achieve:

In the event that the civil society was saying that the incumbent President is not being sincere about the constitution, before we publish their opinion, we have to get a comment from state house to respond so that the story is balanced. However, there is a tendency, even when you want to give the story to be fair and balanced, that most of the government officials would tell you to go ahead without their comments on an issue and then they would respond later (interview, 30/12/2004).

Taken as reflected in the above quote 'objectivity' as a convention is a much more difficult standard to comply with for it raises more directly the question of who qualifies as a news source. The study found that on a daily basis, journalists at *The Post* were fully aware that an ethical convention such as objectivity provided no obvious guideline for the selection of either stories or which sources could go with which story. Sigal (1973) attributes this to the convention having imposed a greater challenge in widening the

journalists' search for news beyond routine channels and official sources. Because of this challenge over the years, journalists, at *The Post* alike, have found themselves under constant attack for concentrating on spot news and elite news sources at the expense of stories and news sources that are more representative of the entire society. Whether or not journalists can be truly objective is beyond the scope of this study although scholars like Croteau and Hoynes (1997) argue it is a valuable goal. This would require a macro-micro (story-by-story) view of media operations, to see the pattern of systemic bias. Nonetheless, given that there was data supporting the tendency towards objectivity, it can be argued that journalists at *The Post* strive to live up to the convention of objectivity as defined in this chapter.

Having established the journalists' views on objectivity as a routine ethical consideration in their relationship with news sources, the following section provides news source confidentiality as another significant ethical practice found at *The Post*.

4.6.2 Confidentiality: As Routine Practice in the Journalist-News Source Relationship

The tendency among journalists not to release the name of the news source of information obtained especially through news leaks is one of the most striking aspects of the journalist-news source relationship at *The Post* that this study established by both interviews and observation. As established earlier, journalists at *The Post* follow routine news beats where news sources provide information that includes press releases and press conferences among other. In the process of some people designated as responsible for releasing information to the media such as spokespersons and officials in these routine channels, people that feel, have some information for public consumption and are not legally authorised to release information resort to news information leak (see, Sigal, 1973). It became apparent in my study that news leaks were important in news idea generation during the morning editorial meetings at *The Post*. In turn, the journalists had no objection in keeping undisclosed the sources of information that fit the description of a leak. The explanations given by some respondents for keeping news source confidentiality where necessary pointed to the dynamics of newsmaking such as

newsbreaks, deadlines, trustworthiness on their part and the need to protect news sources against any possible risks among other as reason. As Mupuchi (15/12/2004) explains:

Keeping sources' confidentiality depends on the topics you are reporting on. You may have sources in government by virtue of their positions they have information, by revealing their identity in the news, you may put them in conflict with the system (interview, 15/12/2004).

Chifuwe (17/12/2004) adds:

Confidentiality is cardinal and you keep that and sources have confidence in you, you will have all the time as a reporter. This is because some sources are scared, those that have been betrayed have risked their lives, some have lost there jobs. So you have to ensure as a journalist that you keep that confidence in you (interview, 17/12/2004).

News sources, as can be detected in Chifuwe's (17/12/2004) assertion, are regarded as allies in finding news information whose confidence is paramount. Dispensing exclusives or scoops to a journalist increases the likelihood of such amiable treatment of a news source because an exclusive story only he/she obtains, enhances a reporter's reputation among his colleagues (Sigal, 1973). Equally, as Chifuwe, Mupuchi and Sichalwe's responses above show, releasing 'confidential' information to journalists entails risk on the part of the news sources if he/she is identified as the source of the leak. Sigal (1973) asserts that the repercussions could prove undesirable on the person that leaks information such as losing employment, face imprisonment particularly those in public offices. It would appear journalists' fear of the repercussions that Sigal's (1973) assertion above has pointed out would be made against the person that leaks unauthorised information, qualifies a journalist to keep confidentiality.

In spite of this seemingly obvious reason as to why journalists at *The Post* routinely practice confidentiality in the process of newsmaking, there are other difficulties in newsmaking that make leaked information acceptable. As for some of the respondents, they related confidentiality as necessary to meeting news requirements regularly. Sichalwe (16/12/2004) illustrates:

It is very important to keep source confidentiality because we depend on our sources for our existence as a company. If you do not have sources, you cannot have news. It means that your sources will dry out and you could be fired. Confidentiality is very important because it is out of it that sources can confide in

you with information, at times as tips viable for further investigation (interview, 16/12/2004).

Apart from considerations as seen in Sichalwe's illustration, I also observed that authenticating information is a problem for journalists from the government offices that form most of the news beats in the absence of a willing official spokesperson. Journalists resort to assessment of news sources that avail themselves with information, based largely on how reliable the person proved in the past dealings as was established from some respondents. For example, Malido (22/12/2004) illustrates below how he actively scrutinises information he receives as leaks:

We value confidentiality so much. If I did not adhere to confidentiality, then I would have lost a number of sources. Some sources can give me variable information, as they are very high up there in government although it may not always be information that is suitable for news but for my own consumption or possibly trigger me to follow up (interview, 22/12/2004).

Malido (22/12/2004) adds that at times some information released may be sensitive and it is only wise to verify it further before publishing it. He explains:

Some of the things we keep them close as there is information that you can not release such as security matters. You do not benefit anything by informing society on the matter until when necessary. We do not want to be as careless as the media was in Rwanda prior and during the genocide (interview, 22/12/2004).

Kaunda (30/12/2004) concurs with Malido:

We know how influential we are as a newspaper in the country. Whatever we publish is normally taken as gospel truth. Therefore, we have to be responsible and act objectively. If it is in the interest of the public then we publish the story no matter how sensitive it is (interview, 30/12/2004).

What this means is that journalists at *The Post's* favourable treatment of leaked information as seen above gives support to news source's reasons to keep releasing information to them. As alluded to earlier in the Introduction and literature Chapters, government as the main source of information of *The Post's* news, has openly criticised and in some cases harassed journalists who accept leaked information. Apart from such measures, government has punished journalists at *The Post* by denial of admittance to news briefings, which journalists have taken as part of the setbacks of their work as watchdogs. Mupuchi (15/12/2004) illustrates below:

Confidentiality does not compromise stories or us as journalist because we have responsibility to do so. If you disclose your source and that source is fired from work because you made that disclosure we get remorseful. We currently do not have the law that gives public media and the media in general access to classified information in Zambia. Therefore, if there is a source that is willing to provide me with news, it is only right to have the responsibility to protect that source (interview, 15/12/2004).

Scholars (see, for example Chirwa, 1996 and Ogbonda, 2003 in Hyden et al., 2003) that think there should be a reduction in powers of the legislature to summon and arrest reporters and the prohibition of journalists to access certain publications share Mapuchi's (15/12/2004) argument.

4.7 Conclusion

It can be argued that the scenario presented in this chapter is far removed from media with adversarial tendencies of newsgathering. While interaction between journalists at *The Post* and their news sources prompts geographically relevant news issues intended to spark public debates, the respondents categorically spoke of being constrained by power relations, inadequate time and newsroom resources that limit alternatives of who to source for news among other. What this highlights is that the journalist-news source relationship is one that emerges through the routinised patterned interactions typically enhanced or constrained by requirements found in the two sides' respective roles that encourage an exchange and not adversarial kind of interaction. The need for each other is critical but for reasons that journalists and sources have conflicting purposes (sources seeking publicity and journalists pursuing raw information), they are periodically confounded by tension but cannot be sustained if the newspaper has to meet its precision as a daily newspaper.

In the process, the chapter has demonstrated by use of perspectives of various respondents that the relationship is a reflection of factors such as occupational routines, organisational policies, professional demands and the news sources among other. Further, through most respondents' views on the need to retain sources as contacts I was able established that an amiable relationship between journalists and their news sources is intrinsic to newsgathering at *The Post*. I established that journalists at *The Post* prefer

news sources that meet certain criteria such as authoritativeness, prominence and availability among other, which draws our attention to practices of exclusion of some groups of society and concentration on a few voices in the news at *The Post*.

In Chapter Five, I present findings obtained in line with the political economy perspective as a framework of analysis for the relationship between journalists and their news sources.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Political Economy Implications on the Journalist and News Sources Relationship at *The Post*

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents findings of my investigation of the journalist-news source relationship at *The Post* in Zambia as a case study by drawing on the political economy perspective. The findings presented therefore can not be generalised to other media whether in Western or Third World countries. Whereas Chapter Four informed this study on the internal influences at the site of news making and thereof the journalist-news source relationship obtaining at *The Post*, under the political economy perspective, my undertaking was to shed some light on the influences on the relationship that result from the structural links between the media and the wider political economic context. I interpret the findings on orientations of *The Post* to its news sources, as indicated in Chapter Two by means of two analytical models, the adversarial and exchange models that stretch across several influences (see Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995 and Larsson, 2002).

In this chapter, I attempt in section one to establish the relationship between *The Post* and news sources based on journalists' self-conception of their role in the Zambian society vis-à-vis the prevailing political situation. I examine whether or not the journalists strive to meet their watchdog role. The journalists' self-conception emerges as a factor in the relationship. In section two, I attempt to establish influences of the surrounding economic situation on the relationship between journalists at *The Post* with their news sources during the news production. The aim was to determine whether the proprietary factor specifically had significant influence on the relationship at *The Post*. In section three, I look at strategic alliances embraced at *The Post* with insurgent groups seeking to provide different sets of public information from politicians such as local non-governmental organisations and the consequential relationship thereof with these kinds of sources. Thereafter conclusions are drawn that the surrounding political economic circumstances

have a bearing on the nature of the journalist-news source relationship prevailing at *The Post*.

5.1 The Democratic Role Ideals of Media Underpinning the Relationship

5.1.1 Responses to the Watchdog Paradigm at *The Post*

An analysis of the journalist and news source relationship at *The Post* showed that influences were derived structurally from the surrounding political economic situation. The situation established at the newspaper may be peculiar in terms of how it occurs as I show later but media organisations as some scholars argue whether public or privately owned (though with appreciable differences), exist in a symbiotic relationship with their local environment, drawing on it not only for the economic sustenance but also for the news information of which their content are made (Schudson, 2000).

Before I proceed with my presentation of findings in this section, I will recall media's expected role in a democratic society earlier discussed in Chapter One as it helps buttress my argument here. Among the significant roles reckoned as ideals for media include: surveillance of the socio-political environment, reporting anything that is likely to impinge positively or negatively on the citizen, agenda setting by identifying the key issues of the day, provision of a platform for debate and holding officials accountable (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995:97). These are the suggested ideals of the functions of a media in a democracy but as the findings in Chapter Four revealed, organisational demands and occupational practices are entangled in influencing the journalists in newsgathering to the extent for example of including and excluding some as sources of news information. From my observation of the editorial meetings and analysis of the data gathered at *The Post*, there is an indication of no consistent connection of attaining any one of the dimensions of the ideals listed above because of the constraints obtaining of producing the news. This study found that getting from one dimension of the ideals to another is a complex process particularly when related to the relationship between the journalists and their news sources at *The Post*. For example Djokotoe (17/12/2004) argues that even when *The Post*'s organisational and journalists' professional demands are important in shaping how they relate to their news sources, he did not see how the

journalists could distance themselves from surveillance of the socio-political environment. Djokotoe asserts:

For *The Post* being a privately owned daily newspaper, this forms the basis of the political angles seen to saturate the newspaper in this media landscape as it strives to meet its mandate (interview, 17/12/2004).

Djokotoe's assertion above could be seen in light of his newspaper's reputation over the years as anti-government because of the type of news stories that it publishes. However, a number of things that include conforming as closely as possible to what is prevailing in society, being as open as possible on news issues within the constraints and not denying that alternative news coverage of news events may be available at the newspaper. Nonetheless, as presented in Chapter Two in order to include other alternative voices or stories, these must respond to terms pre-established by the 'primary definers' (Hall, 1982:62). Thus, the contexts of news regularly used as seen from Djokotoe's assertion above are those that are assumed to be common sense in a particular society (McCullagh, 2002:89). As other respondents further claimed, holding of elite political leaders accountable to the public was the reason they related more to news sources such as the government and produced news that was political. Mupuchi (15/12/2004) noted:

I have to inform society of things that happen in their society such as warning them of dangers – public leaders' activities, corruption, health, hunger, etc. Things that would affect them negatively, primarily developmental challenges (interview, 15/12/2004).

Scholars that argue that media accounts are grounded in the authoritative statements from accredited sources that represent the people, for example, members of parliament and ministers, support Mupuchi's assertion above (see, Hall et al., 1978). As the literature and the findings in Chapter Four also indicates, apart from solving a number of newsgathering and production problems such as verification of information, official news sources are also the means through which the media present themselves as absolving its political tasks in society. Mupuchi's (15/12/2004) assertion seem to suggest also that the structure of access between journalists and news sources necessarily protects the strategic advantages of the 'primary definers' not just initially but also subsequently for as long as they can last. As findings in Chapter Four indicate news sources have to conform to certain organisational specifications. The notion of news source selection discussed

earlier in Chapters Three and Four describe characteristics a news sources is expected to possess in order to meet the expectations of journalistic selection practice. We saw in Chapter Four that news sources need to possess attributes such as authority, ability to provide suitable information, appear to represent the group or institution such as spokespersons among other which Mupuchi is suggesting in his assertion. However, considerations of the circumstances in which events can slip the nets of official containment allowing those outside the political mainstream to become key sources are subjects of further research.

Deputy news editor Malido (22/12/2004) added that the concentration on news sources that are political is an imperative to meeting their readers' expectations and not because of the interests of the owners. He explained that news selection is done in a manner that includes finding content that appeases the readership:

The test of news for people in Zambia is political news. If you write a headline that ARVs have run out at the main hospital in the country, no much sales will be done in that day yet those are issues that affect them (interview, 22/12/2004).

Commenting on audience needs as reflected in the above assertion, Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) observe that ideally, these needs and interests should be uppermost in a democratic media system. However, the deputy news editor and other respondents' consideration of their audience fall contrarily to available research that indicates that journalists for the most part have less understanding of their audiences (see for example, McCullagh, 2002). Journalists are said to be more responsive to their own professional group and that exceeds any image they have of the public (Hagen, 1999 cited in McCullagh, 2002:84). Also journalists may wish to reach the largest possible audience, but it must be one in which has significant representation of certain minority groups, such as the rich with high disposable income (McCullagh, 2002).

The question arises though as to whether the above assertions by the journalists in this section can endure the tendency by news sources to manipulate journalists as heavy reliance on a limited number of news sources for news information suggests otherwise (see Hall et al., 1978 and Lerner and Schramm, 1967). For some scholars similarly like Lerner and Schramm above, the journalists would be seen as acting as a kind of

megaphone by which particularly authoritative news sources. “The ruling elite’s ideas are amplified and generalised across society” (Connell, 1979 cited in Currant et al., 1982:70). This issue is dealt with in later sections of this chapter. I will now attempt to provide findings on journalists’ self conception as they relate with news sources to substantiate further interpretations made in this section.

5.1.2 Journalists’ Self Role Conception as a Motivating Factor when Relating with News Sources

It has been established in this study that journalists’ self-conception of their professional role, most likely underlies their behaviour and the subsequent political outlook when relating to their news sources. This is in spite of the presence of written and unwritten editorial policies at *The Post* of how journalists should behave towards news sources. The responses offered by the respondents suggested that their role conception in the wider society formed part of their professional outlook apart from organisational news policies and professional ethics when interacting with their news sources. From my own observations and as was reinforced by the interviews, each journalist seized every opportunity to act in conformity with the picture he or she had of him/herself working at a private newspaper. For example, Sichelwe (16/12/2004) notes his self-role conception as acting responsibly to serve the audiences adequately:

I have a very important role as a journalist in society. I need to act responsibly. In other words, I need to take care of every news information with the seriousness it deserves so that it can have an impact in society (interview, 16/12/2004).

Another respondent (Nambule, 15/12/2004) cited her role definition in relation to her position as a reporter - to which journalists normatively subscribe to – as that of being an information disseminator. Similar to Sichelwe (16/12/2004), the responsibility to serve the audience as well as seen in her statement, “we collect information that educates and informs the public” is equally influential on her newsgathering activities. Phiri (15/12/2004) a senior political reporter holds a similar view: “we are the mirror of society at the same time we have to entertain and educate society”. The commonly held role conception among these respondents is that of the journalist as a participant in a communication process though marginally detached from events and reluctant to

pronounce explicit personal views as seen from Phiri's view which justifies the notion of a 'mirror'. The key issue in Phiri's statement revolves around the degree to which media are regarded as passive and not active transmitters of messages. However, as Chapter Four findings exhibited, journalists at *The Post* actively pursue news events along with news sources that are found as 'suitable' for print. They do not 'mirror' a multifaceted reality though they strive to be as truthful and objective as possible. By implication, they are not free from biases of professionals engaged in recording and reporting events in the surrounding political arena.

Scholars, such as Blumler and Gurevitch (1995), that view role anchored behaviour of journalists as shaped by relationships with and expectations of their news sources in the news production process, support journalists' reluctance to accept credit by preferring a more narrow definition of their contribution to society in terms of 'reflecting' and 'mirroring' occurrences (1995:138). What this means is that the journalists at *The Post*'s production of news is undertaken not haphazardly, but calculative of a number of factors such as news sources, what constitutes news and normative institutional demands of newsgathering.

To journalists like Mupuchi (15/12/2004), the media is the overseer of all occurrences in society. Observation and interviewing Mupuchi and many other respondents at *The Post*, established that their overseer role conception had two facets: one as an insider, and the other as an outside critic of their news sources. The journalists' adherences to both sides influenced their interaction with news sources during the newsgathering process. It was in instances like these that I observed journalists at *The Post* were consciously willing at times to either be used or not by news sources by developing tactical alliances. I will speak to this issue in the following sections.

In the interim, I would like to mention (as most respondents disclosed) that *The Post* has had also an important shift in journalists' role conception since 1991. There has been a redirection of deposition towards their news sources and the news information produced. The managing news editor (Kaunda, 30/12/2004) epitomises this shift in a statement earlier alluded to that the newspaper had learnt the hard way in the past through facing

legal cases they failed to defend as there was a bit of impatience on their part to publish stories without all the facts. Equally images provided by various scholars (see for example, Chirwa, 1996 and Phiri, 1999) of the journalists at *The Post*, have been those able to distort or provide false accounts of events particularly those by the ruling political party a matter that had landed most of them in ‘harm’s way’ of the law.

Media scholars that are of the view that government officials across Africa use the professional recklessness of the independent media to justify limitations on press freedom (see Kasoma, 2000 and others) support Kaunda’s assertion. Based on Kaunda’s (30/12/2004) assertion, *The Post* has made it a point to reduce such limitations.

The deputy news editor (Malido, 22/12/2004) argues that the newspaper has editorial policies that chaperone its determined aim to treat news sources more objectively. He said that, “in our editorial policy we have made it clear that we are going to withdraw any factually incorrect representations.”

The news editor (Malupenga, 29/12/2004) further argues that *The Post*’s commitment to democratic ideals of media anchors the journalists’ behaviour during their interaction with news sources: “We tell the journalists the objectives of cultivating such kind of relationships. In this way, we have no difficulties as we have so many people who want to stay close to the newspaper”. He elaborates below:

When we encourage reporters to stay close we are not asking them to get compromised. We want to stay close because we feel close relationships will be beneficial to us as professionals. We realise that people are reluctant to deal with people they do not understand better. In as much as we want to understand our sources better we are also giving them an opportunity to understand us (interview, 29/12/2004).

With time, this reluctance by the media to be compromised however has led in certain cases to political spin-doctors negotiating with the media to keep supposedly private affairs out of the media (Williams and Carpini, 2000:80). Although such mutual interdependence could be perceived as settling in at *The Post*, the managing news editor cited institutional policy of not favouring ‘spins’ as basis, for any journalists’ conduct at *The Post*. He argues that the journalists’ conduct in their work is enshrined in

newspaper's editorial policy as such incidences of favouring 'spins' were insignificant.

He explains:

As matter of policy we aim to protect and promote the newly-emerging democratic political culture, in which the fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals are guaranteed, through campaigning on issues that arise from our own investigations, reporting and analysis and nothing else besides this (interview, 30/12/2004).

From the above assertion, *The Post's* democratic role to question the policies and actions of the authorities and all those who wield or aspire to wield social, economic and political power over the lives of ordinary people is inferred once more. Seen this way, journalists at *The Post* as they relate with news sources can be viewed as not just acting as spectators, but as "a tribune of the people" (Sigal, 1973:77). In the context of rating the Zambia's media performance, this inference shows hereafter according to Kasoma (2000:2008) that *The Post* contributes towards press influence on democracy.

5.2 Economic Implications on the Journalist and News Source Relationship

It was established further from most of the respondents that proprietary power forcing *The Post* journalists to take particular decisions which are distinct to owners was non-existent while the sales imperative that would affect anyone who has to make money in media such as selling advertisement and cutting costs was existent. The managing news editor Kaunda (30/12/2004) captured commercial concerns vividly:

At the end of the day, we have to survive as a newspaper. Political issues seem to appeal to our readers and this has forced us to tilt towards politically inclined events (interview, 30/12/2004).

The managing news editor's assertion that the newspaper is simply a commercial entity, which should be run accordingly, reinforces the finding earlier mentioned above which suggests that *The Post* places interest in its readership when news selecting and who should be included or not in news as a source. The news editor Malupenga (29/12/2004) adding on Kaunda's (30/12/2004) sentiments infers *The Post's* choice of interacting with organisations and individuals as based on the ability at times to supply stories comparable to investigative reports and having less strain on the organisational budget as important. Malupenga put it this way:

We weigh the cost and benefit as a newspaper before undertaking any newsgathering. If there is no news, why should we send a reporter to Kasempa (extreme remote town in Zambia – *my emphasis*) when they can be useful in the newsroom? The common assistance that we get from news sources for out of town assignments is transport because we do not have adequate and in some cases appropriate transport for rural areas. However, we do explain to the news sources why we are asking for the transport so that our reporters are not compromised (interview, 29/12/2004).

In relation to the context of Malupenga's assertion, it was also established that news sources that were able to supply news without much cost to *The Post* even when they did not much influence, overcame the lack of political power. The managing news editor Kaunda (30/12/2004) attested to this, "we do not restrict ourselves to powerful sources as we extend to even to minority views when they have 'suitable' sources of information". Gans (1979:121) argues, "given journalists' insatiable appetite for the story ideas and stories, sources which are able to supply suitable news can overcome deficiencies of power". Gans (1979) is of the view that the ability to be newsworthy requires resources and skills on the part of news sources many of which goes hand in hand with other powers such economic power and are possessed by only a few. For example, the news editor Malupenga (29/12/2004) in the above statement objected to "helping publicity seekers" because of operational economic reasons despite acknowledging challenges of editorial resources such as transport when gathering news.

Generally, scholars such as McCullagh (2002) that are of the view that media organisations operate in a capitalist environment that imposes the imperative to make a profit support *The Post's* resolve towards commercial viability as a newspaper. In the following section, I discuss findings specifically on strategic alliances formed at *The Post's* organisational level between journalists and their news sources intended particularly for those outside the routine locations of news beats frequently accessed by the journalists.

5.3 Alliances in Journalist-News Source Relationship at *The Post*

The study has established, further, that journalists at the newspaper had a selected number of news sources engaged in premeditated alliances to achieve access to each

other. As was mentioned in the literature and as the findings in Chapter Four revealed, advantageous locations of access to the media are occupied by state functionaries and business elite as they are found within routine activities of gathering and dissemination of information that journalists require. Those outside these locations resort to other strategies to access the journalists. As alternative voices, McCullagh (2002) argues, they gain access but under limited sets of circumstances and with certain clear limitations of the kinds of alternative voices that they bring to the news. According to Kaunda (30/12/2004), within the competition for access to *The Post* are pressure groups that are legitimated to be news sources even when they do not enjoy the same amount of 'newsworthiness' that *The Post* seeks. Kaunda (30/12/2004) who is the managing news editor added that alliances are formulated intentionally for newsgathering purposes that widen the scope of who are included as news sources or not. *The Post's* tactical approach of modifying news sources with no much power who usually are lumped together as alternative voices of no virtual importance in most media literature to 'primacy' is illustrated below:

Our situation here is that we have certain news sources we work in partnership with ourselves [*The Post*]. For example, the fact that a local non-governmental organisation, Women for Change's principles of social justice is similar to *The Post*, we have collaborated in terms of highlighting most issues that violate this principle. However, it does not mean that whatever Women for Change utters as statements find their way into our news. We do practice news judgements all the time. The situation has come to where Woman for Change understands how we operate and what makes news in *The Post* (interview, 30/12/2004).

The news editor's assertion depicts active pursuit of access to news sources by the journalists that have less definitional characteristics of a suitable news source. This deliberate disposition to engage in tactical alliances with various groups as news sources strains the 'primary definition' outlook, which is blind to the question of news source competition created by dynamic processes of contestations in a given field of discourse (Hall et al., 1978). It was established that *The Post* takes the views of the alternative voices pre-emptively into 'primary definers' definitions as seen in the managing news editor Kaunda's (30/12/2004) insert, "we do not restrict ourselves as we extend to even to minority views when they are 'suitable' sources of information". It would appear from

this finding that the boundaries between news sources (the known and unknowns) are not always as impermeable as the charmed conception of 'primacy' implies.

On the other hand, this draws our attention to the Herman and Chomsky (1988:18) argument earlier alluded to in the study that "the media are drawn into a symbiotic relationship with powerful sources of information by economic necessity and reciprocity of interest". As the managing news editor Kaunda (30/12/2004) in the earlier statement said, "the situation has come to where Woman for Change understands how we operate and what makes news in *The Post*". For some scholars this tendency would end up reducing journalists to virtual channels of propaganda if not checked (see, Herman and Chomsky, 1988). This is because when news sources can predict which events and comments will make news, journalists are deprived of the opportunity to exercise news judgements (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995:103). Kaunda denies any loss of news judgement when he states in the same statement that, "we do practice news judgements all the time" (Kaunda, 30/12/2004). As was argued earlier, groups or individuals that are generally identified as legitimate sources of news must conform to certain organisational specifications that perhaps explain Kaunda's (30/12/2004) assertion his journalists practice news judgements all the time. Faced with demands of tactical alliances, the journalists at *The Post*, it would seem are faced with the challenge to reassert their autonomy by falling back mostly on various ground rules such as objectivity that guide the production of news as discussed in Chapter Four.

From the managing news editors' statement, journalists' fears of manipulation emanating from the deliberate partisanship with news sources are also demonstrable. The concern exhibited by the managing news editor draws attention to arguments by Blumler and Gurevitch (1995:104) that deliberate alliances introduce potentially corrosive and disturbing sets of assumptions in the newsgathering process.

The findings also revealed also that journalists at *The Post* consciously engaged in alliances with some news sources despite fears of manipulation when they were cases of disagreement within the political elite groups. As the news editor Kaunda, (30/12/2004) notes above, "Women for Change's principles of social justice are similar to *The Post*, we

have collaborated in terms of highlighting most issues that violate this principle”. Supporting views to Kaunda’s assertion as managing news editor came in several perspectives but most significant was Djokotoe’s (17/12/2004) sentiment illustrated below:

In a sense because of the playing field, *The Post* is inclined to play the political game by its own rules. This is why people in the oppositional parties and non-governmental organisations feel they can be given a voice in *The Post* unlike in the government papers. Because of this, it has created a situation where *The Post* is inevitable political even when it should not be (interview, 17/12/2004).

Those who argue that journalists functioning under tactical influences from their news sources operate under certain ground rules, that may include methods intended to justify a favored treatment of certain positions, support Djokotoe (17/12/2004) and Kaunda’s (30/12/2004) assertions (see, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; McCullagh, 2002). According to Blumler and Gurevitch (1995:69) by implication, varying attempts are made by news sources to manage the journalists’ operations through strategic actions and this includes those news sources that are non-authoritative as established in this section. The question of seeking alternative views - even if they fall into a restricted ideological range - necessarily surfaces as a matter of importance as does the recognition of the fact that official status does not necessarily ensure credibility (Schlesinger, 1978). What we have seen under this subsection is that while authoritativeness of news source may assure some news sources access to journalists, it does however, not guarantee access all the time to journalists at *The Post* as long as those without it are willing and pursuing their access concurrently. This could be explained further by the fact that the converse of partisan commitment is not political apathy or dismissal of all politics but rather an attitude of political open-mindedness and a deliberate disposition to accord an equal hearing to all viewpoints that seek access to media ‘aggressively’ (see, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995).

In the following section, I present a summary of findings on the respondents’ own perspectives that encapsulate the scope of the relationship they have with their news sources at *The Post*.

5.4 Respondents' own Perceptions of the Journalist-News Source Relationship at *The Post*

Collectively, this Chapter's findings and the literature that also formed the basis of this study establish that the nexus between the exchange (dominant) and adversarial interpretations is a contested site. Most respondents who felt the relationship was an exchange (collaborative) argued on the basis of dependence that results from the daily interaction. Nambule (15/12/2004) put it this way, "I always maintain a mutual relationship with my news sources because that is what my job relies on as a reporter".

While Nambule sees news sources as a means of verification of news information, Phiri (15/12/2004) adds that it's vital to have continuous and readily available information for news inserts. He explains:

I do not usually call my sources for information only all the time but just to say hello to them at times. This is done to maintain my relationship with them so that if they have useful information, they may just call me up to let me know and I follow it up (interview, 15/12/2004)

For respondents like Phiri, the relationship with sources is also multi-dimensional in terms that it is both formal and informal. Phiri elaborates in his response that, "at times, we meet as friends. Some of them, I have improved my relationship with them to the level where it is personal". Sichelwe (16/12/2004) supports Phiri's sentiment by stating that, "we interact at both professional and social level". Scholars who address the issue of relationships between journalists and news sources as largely formed through mutual adaptation, in which need and necessity are the primary parameters, supports all respondents' pronouncements above of the relationship as an exchange driven type (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995:34-37; Larsson, 2002:22). The news editor Malupenga (29/12/2004) elaborated however on the experiences of having a collaborative which also bears some impressions of an adversarial relationship with news sources at *The Post*. He puts it this way:

There are many examples of people we have cultivated mutual close relationships but this has not compromised us. For example, former head of state, President Chiluba, is one of our closest sources but the kind of coverage we give him is still 'objective'. In fact, his current court prosecution is because the newspaper called him a thief. As much as we called him a thief that did not stop us from cultivating a relationship with him because we believe he is a news source who has that right to be heard so that the readers make informed decisions about him. That is the

principle that we have applied in almost all the big sources that we dealt with (interview, 29/12/2004).

Malupenga's response above suggests that the collaborative and adversarial paradigms are not as exclusive at *The Post* as Blumler and Gurevitch (1995:34-37) espouses them to be. For example, those respondents that showed scepticism in the collaborative relationship tended to focus on the power dynamics between the news sources and themselves as journalists. Chifuwe (17/12/2004) who is a special assignments journalist noted the following:

The relationship with sources is adaptive and not dependent because you can only rely to some extent on your sources. This is because if you put your eggs in one basket you cannot produce a paper at the end of the day. You need to get information on your own at times. Therefore, I think it is adaptive because you can only ask from them so much of what they have and they can only give that much (interview, 17/12/2004).

The deputy news editor Malido (22/12/2004) provided a similar response:

I would not say it is collaborative, because collaborative means some one also appreciates you. Some sources do not even want to talk to you. Evidently in some cases, the relationship is collaborative, as they will call you when they have information and you will go there when you feel you want information from them (interview, 22/12/2004).

Malido's statement suggests the capacity to exchange resources between journalists at *The Post* and their news sources is constrained by guidelines pertaining to the roles either performs. He intimates that either side avoids blatant favours and explicit consent to each other that would be construed as breaching their role expectations. This is a view that Djokotoe (17/12/2004) shares:

It depends. With the oppositional political sources the relationship is collaborative. Some of them are here all the time except when they cross roads they do not come any more. For example Michael Sata and Godfrey Miyanda who are heads of political parties come in or call in to the news editor to request someone to cover them. On the other hand, government ministers or rather, sources from government do not. When they do, they come under the cover of darkness. At times, the government officials call press conferences to gain political mileage on issues. We should be wise enough not fall for these press conference invitations (interview, 17/12/2004).

Respondents such as Malido (22/12/2004) who were sceptical of the collaborative interpretation of their relationship also drew on more strong descriptions of the relationship:

Our relationship would also be defined as indifferent in that we are not going to run certain news because the usual source wants us to as mostly their interests are personal (interview, 22/12/2004).

Mupuchi (15/12/2004) supports Malido's view,

The relationship is collaborative but at times, there maybe a hostile source who does not want to talk to you but then you have information that touches on what the same source has done, in such situation you would want to confront the source to present the facts as they are. However, this does not mean getting personal but just presenting the facts as they are, 'then it is the truth that will set you free' as the bible says (interview, 15/12/2004).

Malido (22/12/2004) and Mupuchi (15/12/2004) speak more to the professional space journalists should occupy, since unlike Phiri (15/12/2004) and Sichalwe's (16/12/2004) assertions, the two favour more work-related attachments to news sources. Malido and Mupuchi's assertions show less signs of the need to establish social interactions with news sources to foster collaborative exchange of information. Malido and Mupuchi's assertions could further be collaborated with the managing news editor Kaunda's (30/12/2004) statement below that provides a synopsis of the relationship *The Post* has with government, which is its major source of news information:

Whenever government acts positively, we will cover it positively. However, where we feel that it is not acting in the interest of the Zambian people we will go ahead and expose it. We have been militant in this regard especially when you have 80% of people living in abject poverty. You have to stand up and speak out. There have been cases where government feels we have over criticised it. Therefore, our relationship with government, which is mostly our source of news information, is that of advocacy (interview, 30/12/2004).

By implication Kaunda's (30/12/2004) assertion as managing editor further affirms the concerns of political economy as a perspective where the surrounding political environment acts as a sculpting factor within which the journalists mould themselves around.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter established findings using the political economy perspective. I attempted to relate the investigation of the journalists and news sources' relationships at *The Post* to the wider structure of the state, the economy, and ownership often argued as bearing ideological parameters within which journalists produce news. Divided into four sections of sub themes, I attempted to provide journalists' responses towards the ideals attached to a watchdog media, Zambia being an emerging democracy. I attempted to establish the democratic ideals attached to media that are illustrative of the situation at *The Post*. While on this, I established journalists' self-conception, as a determining factor when relating with news sources. Further, I attempted to establish implications of external factors particularly the economic factors of newsgathering that the journalists at *The Post* took into consideration when relating to news sources that in particular support my conclusion in Chapter Four. In addition, I established alliances embraced at *The Post* that draws alternative means news sources gain access to the journalists. Thereafter, the chapter provided the scope of the relationship between journalists and their news sources according to the respondents' own point of view. In the next chapter, I provide a general discussion of my findings from both Chapters Four and Five.

CHAPTER SIX

GENERAL DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

6.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a general discussion of findings presented in Chapters Four and Five. This study examined the relationship between journalists and their news sources, as derived from organisational and social roles. The discussion highlights only the salient findings, which are embedded in the objectives and the theoretical framework of this study. For the most part, the assumption addressed by this study of whether the relationship between journalists at *The Post* and their news sources is an exchange or adversarial, is drawn upon in this discussion. The chapter starts by a discussion divided into various subsections that indicate why the journalist-news source relationship is an exchange and not adversarial as scholars such as Kasoma (2000) had earlier concluded. Thereafter, I provide a summary of my discussion. The chapter concludes that most characteristics of journalist-source relationship that underlie the exchange model are much more prevalent at *The Post* than those of the adversarial model.

6.1 Journalist-News Source Relationship as Exchange Driven at *The Post*

Even though *The Post* exhibits its watchdog role, the exchange model comes closest to describing the type of relationship its journalists have with their news sources as Chapters Four and Five have attempted to indicate. In section one, I discuss that even when essentially independent as a private newspaper journalists at *The Post* were found to be drawn into establishing relationships with their news sources through keeping databases of sources and in some cases creation of strong bonds with them particularly those that are found in their regular news beats. Section two in relation to the previous section I discuss the news routines as indispensable interface arenas between journalists and their news sources. In section three, I discuss the values and norms prescribing the journalist-news source exchange relationship. Thereafter, in section four, I discuss newsroom policies as guideline to journalists' activities and section five, journalists' future expectation of interaction with the news sources as influential in the relationship. In section six, I discuss news sources' selection considerations coinciding with news values. To close the discussion, in sections seven and eight, I discuss journalists at *The Post's*

tendency to striking bargains with news sources, depending on their respective calculations of advantage such as the need for audiences. Collectively, these factors inform my finding that the journalist-news source relationship at *The Post* is more exchange driven and not adversarial as espoused by Kasoma (2002) and others.

6.1.1 The Elite Dominating the Journalist and News Source Relationship

Even when essentially independent, journalists at *The Post* were generally found to be drawn into establishing relationships with their various news sources. By keeping a database of sources, particularly for those on regular news beats, and in some cases creating strong bonds with them, the journalists kept a steady flow of information. For many respondents on news beats and editors in the newsroom, officials were the principle sources of news and their constant critics. There are various reasons for this time-honoured relationship but most significantly, the study established from interviews that journalists' conception as patriots inclines them to put considerations of national interests ahead of those of news, economic requirements such as lessening news production costs, mutual trust and general reciprocity of interests, what Herman and Chomsky (1988) sums up as 'propaganda'. When asked to comment on selection of news sources, some respondents tended to make it difficult to understand the extent to which dependence on a few news sources established over time reaches as news editor (Malupenga, 29/12/2004) says:

We make our sources to be confident in us by assigning our best journalists so that we get the story. This is not to say that the rest are useless. We realise that all of us have different abilities but we assign our best as we realise that those sensitive sources need careful handling. If we mess them up from the word go, we risk losing them (interview, 29/12/2004).

Djokotoe (17/12/2004) adds:

There are things that you can prove as a journalist and there are others that you have no choice but let it be, as you would not want to antagonise a viable source. (Djokotoe, 17/12/2004).

The above assertions could be an indication that even though the journalists are obliged to look at many ways at once when relating with news sources, reliable and well-placed sources are particularly preoccupying and influential. The non-betrayal of the relationship

could be suggested as key. This is not to say, however, that the journalists at *The Post* are relegated to being a mere propaganda apparatus since how the interaction is shaped and produced is complicated by various factors and norms. For example, as was presented in the findings, as much as news sources act as verifiers of news that would be otherwise uncertain, the principles of good journalism remain in relation to *The Post's* news work-ways and to a large extent its watchdog philosophy.

What this means though for *The Post* according to some scholars is that, “the elite particularly politicians are highly salient to journalists as staples of running stories, information resources for background insights, and even act as audiences for their input by providing knowledgeable feedback” (see, Nimmo, 1978 cited in Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995:26) over time. The implication of the discussion above can further be appreciated in the context of other complexities and dynamics of the newsgathering discourse within *The Post* newspaper discussed below.

6.1.2 The News Routines as Indispensable Interface Sites with News Sources

Both of the research methods employed, in-depth interviews and observation, indicate that one of the reasons that journalists and news sources are caught up in an exchange - driven relationship is the routine nature of newsgathering that anchors journalists to a limited number and routine news sources. At the organisational level, the routine process of newsgathering at *The Post* that consisted of morning editorial meetings and the subsequent fieldwork at various news beats all culminated into making news sources complementary in the news making process. Therefore, while news sources as in theory can come from anywhere, in the actual news production process at *The Post*, I found their mobilisation and their access to journalists reflects the hierarchies in the Zambian society. As Djokotoe (17/12/2004), who is *The Post's* training news editor observes, “diversity in news sourcing is an issue that you would be told that there are things that you need to keep in the classroom” (Djokotoe, 17/12/2004). Ultimately, this notion has worked to embed elite sources in the news stories at *The Post*, to the extent that the deputy news editor (Malido, 22/12/2004), speaking as a newspaper reader himself said the following:

I read many newspapers personally but it is not my own paper but international news, because at times what the reporters write, I feel is not worth pursuing but is just political rhetoric (interview, 22/12/2004).

However, apart from news beats, other methods established in use for journalists and news sources interaction as the news editor Malupenga (29/12/2004) explained include, “sources coming at the offices, faxed statements, phoning-in, press conferences, public functions and journalists’ self-initiated interviews with news sources”.

While the list above of methods applied in newsgathering could be suggested as significant means of embedding the exchange driven journalist-news source relationship at *The Post*, editorials meetings are as influential. In the newsroom editorial meetings, as was demonstrated in the findings, decisions made which are mostly consensual by applying conventional newsworthy considerations turn to be based continually on access to favoured news beats - that mostly confines the journalists to the corridors of power. While earlier, this study alluded to the need to cultivate government sources and kept anonymous in some cases, the ideals of named sources render powerful sources to have instantaneous access to journalists as news sources at *The Post*. In this regard the respondents claimed to be mediating between claims and counter claims by sources and thereby provide ‘objective’ truth. Overly, journalists at *The Post* have internalised authoritative news sources as prime for their news purposes for they easily create suitable and available news, in that most of them occupy the bureaucratic routine channels that the newspaper obtains its news information. As was mentioned earlier journalists’ conception as patriots inclines them to put considerations of national interests ahead against mere selection of news. The sources with less power gain access by other means, such as in incidences cited in the findings of news leaks, deaths, accidents, civil disturbances and calculated alliances among other.

The converse practice by some news sources in these routine channels, as the findings alluded also to, is that at times they deny journalists access to information or even worse seek to interfere in the internal newsroom decisions making process, which is at times culminates to ‘news censorship’ (Sigal, 1973:54). As one respondent (Sichalwe, 16/12/2004) notes:

I have had incidences where am told the story am pursuing should either change the angle or be abandoned entirely. I would normally suspect external interference trickling down to me through management (interview, 16/12/2004).

Scholars who arrive at a similar conclusion to Sichelwe (16/12/2004) argue that journalistic autonomy is annulled by news routines and news that has direct relevance to the organisation's revenue as in some occasional moments decisions shift upwards. (see, Epstein, 1973 and Ettema et al., 1997). McManus (1995) has argued that powerful politicians, such as former U.S. presidents, Robert Reagan and Richard Nixon, long recognised the value of controlling information sources within the upper reaches of the administrations, sometimes by draconian means.

Further, news sources also generated media events intended to create contact and influence on the news content - also known as pseudo news events (Gans, 1979) such as press conferences and press tours that the journalists at *The Post* interacted with. Even though the journalists at *The Post* showed some degree of distrust towards these news events as they were deemed self-serving for those that promoted them, journalists generally attended them. This attitude did not deter news sources from staging the events to obtain publicity. To illustrate the magnitude of this practice, Malido (22/12/2004) as deputy news editor asserts that, "in most daily editorial meetings, I emphasise that I do not want to edit news that is full of nothing but political mudslinging of one politician by the other".

However, the pressures of deadlines and costs of production that were mentioned in the findings in Chapter Four, could be attributed to the tendency of journalists at *The Post* exploiting pseudo news events as avenues of news whether ideal or not. News sources that are capable of staging pseudo-events, therefore, serve as one of the most influential sources of information at *The Post* through their ability to supply information for the journalists. Collectively, news beats and media events, which *The Post* cannot help but attend, were the easiest way to obtain information and so these news avenues had to be managed carefully. As Mupuchi (15/12/2004) noted, "even if you differed with a news source, you still need to go back and explain that you were just doing your work and as days go by you relate better if the information is factual and truthful about what the person did or said".

Such assertions as Mupuchi's lay bare that the relationship between journalists and their news sources is significantly driven by each side's need to understand the other side's strategies and continually adjusting their relationship in response to the other side's next steps and ploys. By implication, it is reasonable to argue that the two sides - journalists and news sources - negotiate and adapt their respective resources. Larsson (2002) arrives at similar conclusions.

To substantiate further my assertion that the journalist-news source relationship derivable at *The Post* is closest to an exchange than it is adversarial, I highlight in the following section the various values and norms that guide the interaction.

6.1.3 Values and Norms Prescribing the Journalist-News Source Exchange Relationship at *The Post*

Certain important values and norms prescribe the close interplay between journalists at *The Post* and their news sources who mostly are suggested in this study were elite (politicians, government and other organisational officials) except in cases of accidents, deaths and public demonstrations among other. The most important being the value itself of exchange of information for media coverage. There is an implicit understanding between the journalists and their news sources of using each other's resources with the understanding that both parties will benefit by doing so. Larsson (2002) arrives at similar conclusions.

The organisation of newswork in perspective at *The Post* steers journalists towards ethical values such as objectivity for various reasons. Journalists may enjoy substantial autonomy when relating with their news sources but contained by the newsroom boundaries set within the norm of objectivity. The findings show that the consideration of objectivity in most journalists' activities is underscored by journalists' attempt to legitimate their work even when there are habits of considerations that work against it such as repeatedly selection of a few types of news sources and news beats. For example, even when journalists worked on not less than two sides of the story it was within the limits of the officials as sources. Malupenga, (29/12/2004) epitomised:

If I am going to write about you, professionally I have to get a comment from you whether I believe or not the information I have about you is correct or not. If you want to comment, you do so, and if you do not want, I will indicate so in the story (interview, 29/12/2004).

Journalists working on not less than two sides of the story are in line with notion that an objective journalist should cover both unfavourable facts about a news source as extensively as they cover the favourable facts (Drew, 1973). But as noted in Malupenga's assertion, the choices of what to write about news sources, more so authoritative and easily accessible news sources at *The Post*, is reinforced by the newspaper's news agenda of balancing of news sources. Objectivity at *The Post* is achieved by adding more news sources to a story and less a matter of covering both favourable or unfavourable facts as implied by Drew (1973). According to Malupenga (29/12/2004) this is a mark of "being above the battle in the political arena or rather a mark of professionalism". Sichalwe (16/12/2004) added, "a journalist has a role of exploring the issue with other news sources he or she is requested by a specific news source to cover so that he/she gives it balance." From my observation, however, it appeared that the journalists over compensated in an effort to be objective in that the conventional journalistic assumption that solicited news coverage is boring and therefore must be spiced with knee-jerk news value angles was evidently present in the newsroom. Malido (22/12/2004) illustrates:

In [news making] you look at ethics most of the time to guide you when gathering news and you advise the sources accordingly on what to say or what not to say because in case of a libel suite, you may be implicated as you said it yourself when actually you just quoted the source (interview, 22/12/2004).

Based on responses such as Malido's (22/12/2004) assertion and other respondents, including my own observations of newsgathering at *The Post*, it could be deduced that journalists consciously fight for objectivity over the news product to validate their work, 'as above all battles', at the same time keep all interested parties who are approached for news contented. On the other hand, given that the news sources were people with different interests wielding different amounts of power, enjoying different amounts of relationships with journalists, and actively in some cases trying to influence the content of the news, journalists' actions cannot be reduced to simple objective considerations. Nonetheless, the fact that entrenched views such as Malido's, who is the deputy news

editor, stood chance to prosper at *The Post*, could be attributed to the strong impulse to purge the newspaper of anything that might be similar to manipulation, triviality or irresponsibility as the journalists related with news sources. At *The Post*, 'balance' inside reports though does not displace the requirement by journalists for straightforwardly available newsworthy attributable news sources.

It is against such perspectives, that it could be argued playing fair or impartial with news sources is a norm at *The Post* for various reasons but significantly as this study established, to have a stable flow of information that is fundamental to its newsgathering process. Therefore, the trend towards objectivity as applied by *The Post* journalists should be considered in relation to the assumptions in Western political thought about the contributions of the press to the dynamism and strengthening of democracy. This is conceivable as data shows journalists at *The Post* were also on guard against the feared conversion into mere propaganda mouthpieces and concerned wherever possible to stamp their own news judgements.

In addition, apart from only playing fair or impartial with news sources as a precondition to obtaining information that is fundamental to news at *The Post*, my investigation established that the value of confidentiality of sources of information is as much important to the journalist-news source relationship. Some respondents argued that some government information regulatory instruments that journalists in Zambia need to contend with during newsgathering prompts this value. As mentioned earlier it was established from interviews that journalists' conception as patriots inclines them to put considerations of national interests ahead of those of news. As the managing news editor (Kaunda, 30/12/2004) noted, "most of our sources do give us a lot of sensitive information that borders around issue of security". There are exceptional cases though, as the managing news editor added, "if it is in the interest of the public then we publish the story no matter how sensitive it is while safeguarding those that would have provided the information (Kaunda/30/12/2004).

It was established in the study that sometimes an infringement on confidentiality might result in the news sources that provide the leak facing penalties such as losing their jobs.

Various scholars attest to the Zambian government invoking the General Orders Article that prevents any public officer from releasing information not yet found consumable by the public domain (See Chirwa, 1996; Ellis, 1996; Kantumoya, 2004 and Ogbondah, 2003 in Hyden et al., 2003). The perception which most scholars and journalists alike hold is that, the legal environment in Zambia makes it difficult for journalists to generally access official, particularly government documents that form part as source of information for news for the media, at *The Post* alike (see Chirwa, 1996; Ellis, 1996 and Kantumoya, 2004).

In the absence of the Freedom of Information Act in Zambia that provides the public with access to government documents (see Chirwa, 1996 and Kantumoya, 2004), journalists depend on leaks of information on documents not yet made public. This is done in an effort to expose elite (government) interests that are perceived as seeking selfish ends and are antagonistic to general public welfare as is illustrated in Kaunda's (30/12/2004) statement above. Part of the reasons could be the challenges journalists must deal with everyday, we should recall as both literature and findings show, is being able to meet the news cycle deadlines. News has to be gathered and delivered within the fastest possible time. News sources particularly the elite found in local bureaucratic institutions offer journalists the news values, watchdog values and expediency they require to gather information.

When asked how much importance as journalists they attach confidentiality to their interaction with news sources, most respondent attested that once agreed to take any news information in confidence they were willing to face any reprisal. The following response support this claim:

I offer nothing apart from confidentiality and protection because I make sure that no matter how pressed I am, I don't reveal that source to the point that I 'am willing to even go to prison for this (interview, Phiri, 15/12/2004).

Research elsewhere and Zambia in norms and values attached by journalists to their relationship with news sources demonstrates that journalists are repeatedly arrested for refusing to disclose their sources of information, particularly if a member of parliament or government minister considers that a statement made in the press accuses him/her of

impropriety (Ogbondah, 2003 in Hyden et. al., 2003). As seen from the findings what the arrests of journalists by the police means at *The Post*, is that they look out for information that is readily supportable possibly to cut back on reprisals. Various scholars have observed challenges of taking information in confidence from undisclosed sources has led journalists fall victim to the all-too-common style of journalism known as ‘the Minister said’ a practice found to hold with regards to most news media in contemporary Africa (Martin, 1992:337). Kasoma (2000) arrives at similar conclusions.

It is important to note here that although *The Post* is by no means the only press organ to have been subject to illegitimate pressure to conform to the wishes of the government or individual ministers, it has come to symbolise the failure of government to respect its earlier undertakings regarding media independence. Equally, although other media have been subjected to prosecution under laws that restrict the freedom of expression of the media, what makes the case of *The Post* unique is its editorial policy statement that explicitly assures its news sources protection:

We have a duty to maintain the highest professional and ethical standards and to defend at all times the freedom of the Press and other media to collect information and express comment and criticism ... Confidential sources of information shall be protected (*The Post*, 03/06/2004).

This policy statement has many implications but in line with most of the findings in this study, it could be argued as depicting an orientation on the part of *The Post* that connotes its relationship with news sources as not competitive (adversarial) but one that has a distinct nature of importance and perceptions of collaboration. As respondent Sichelwe notes:

For that *The Post* is an independent newspaper you would find that news sources that are viable to release reliable information but fear to go to government newspapers come to us for the purpose that maybe we could stimulate debate and at the end of the day contribute to policy formulation (interview, 16/12/2004).

The above views support my findings that norms and values such as confidentiality and objectivity, significantly contribute to a mutually constitutive relationship between journalists and their news sources at *The Post*. This is in line with Larsson (2002:27) who

argues, “there is reason to refine Blumler and Gurevitch’s (1995) exchange model particularly the idea of dominance, as the [exchange] depends on a number of factors and values such as confidentiality (trust), objectivity and behavioural standards set aside particularly among journalists and their news sources, which are preconditions for a functioning relationship.” In relation to this, the next section looks at salient findings on how the respondents viewed the newsroom policies that guide their relationship with news sources during newsgathering at *The Post*.

6.1.4 News Policies as Relevant Factors in the Exchange Relationship at *The Post*

This study’s sequence of observational and in-depth interviews points strongly towards newsroom policies that are specifically designed but not official as standard normal behaviour towards news sources during newsgathering. Though covert in the manner the policies are administered, they do influence editorial decisions of journalists at *The Post* as they interact with news sources for newsgathering. While Chapter Four highlighted that they were no written instructional rules, the editors revealed that priority had been given to the creation of a team aware of collective ethics and purposes. The extent of the newsroom policy administration was epitomised by the news editor Malupenga (29/12/2004) this way:

It is a continuous process of monitoring how these relationships are going. When we see that certain a journalist is losing his/her objectivity in covering certain issues, we switch him/her from that news desk on the premise that he/she is not seeing news anymore (interview, 29/12/2004).

Most respondents acknowledged various steps taken by management to generate certain type of behaviour and acceptance of every journalist’s views whether junior or senior in the newsroom - what some respondents termed as “an open culture at *The Post*” (for example, Sichalwe, 16/12/2004). These assertions oddly echo journalists’ occupational challenges that stress strains of unpredictability and the volatile nature of newsmaking, only a more flexible form of organisational control, less hierarchical and non-strict rules can make possible to meet. An affinity to policy views can help cement relations (Sigal, 1973). It can be argued, therefore, that newsroom policies were important in overcoming some misunderstandings between journalists and their news sources during newsgathering as *The Post* has occasionally been accused and in some cases admits to

taking sides in some controversial issues as the managing news editor and other respondents did in Chapter Five when discussing tactical alliances formation.

As further investigation established, because of the unwritten newsroom policy guidelines that journalists are supposed to abide by, it has led to the journalist-news source relationship at *The Post* interpretation to be in many ways. While some journalists claimed their relationship to news sources was strictly formal as shown in the findings, the study found the relationship is also multidimensional in the sense that it can be at various levels, not only professional but also informal. The informal relationship includes accepting invitations to private meetings, drinks, dinner, luncheons, public-gathering activities including sports activities such as golf among other. This kind of journalist-news sources interactions is not peculiar to *The Post* alone, as literature in this study revealed the journalist-news source relationship is associated with society's eccentricity because the journalists are products of the society and their values, norms, behaviours and activities are shaped and influenced by that society (see, for example, Dahlgren, 1992 and McNair, 1998). Similarly, Sigal (1973:43) has argued that, "[if] a reporter is to do his job, he must partake of partisan wrangling and cocktail chatter, not that parties yield much information: simply attending is half the job – seeing officials and being seen, making 'contacts' and being contacted". The main obstacle in this respect of journalists and news sources' interaction at *The Post* was that this lay foundation for some of the type of news that found its way or not in the news. The following section corroborates this assertion.

6.1.5 Future Expectations of Interaction as a Factor in the Exchange Relationship

The exchange type of relationship is further collaborated by the finding that respondents who anticipated meeting a news source in the future were mindful of what they wrote about the news sources just like the editors who actually were not on the actual beats and expected or had fewer chances to meet the news sources. A case in point is the 'sports news desk journalists and news source dilemma' presented as part of the findings in chapter four.

While respondents' compassion of what they wrote about the news sources who they anticipated meeting again in the future was clearly used as a means to secure access, other reasons were not fully explored. As Sichelwe (17/12/2004) notes, "having reliable relationships with sources has its many advantages because if you build confidence it will mean that you will be able to have exclusive information that benefits the newspaper". Sichelwe's statement raises to an extent the possibility that the journalists tended to write positive things about the source in an effort to ingratiate the news sources and perhaps have a favourable relationship with him/her in the future.

With journalists' renowned problems of authenticating information, Sigal (1973) has seen the need of sustaining relationships with news sources whose assessment rests to some extent on how reliable a source proved in past dealings. This assessment is not a departure from the standard considerations made in selecting news sources. Gans (1979) has stated that when little is yet known about the stories the sources relevant to them may be familiar and can be evaluated. He argues that when reporters can explicitly attribute information to a source, they do not have to worry about [validity], the assumption being that once the story is sourced, their responsibility is fulfilled, and the audiences must decide whether the source is credible (Gans, 1979:130). The journalists attempted to protect their journalistic integrity in that journalists who expect to meet a source in the future may have been making an effort to include both favourable and unfavourable information about the source, at the same time avoid misunderstandings.

Given the extent to which the future expectations of interaction with a news source restrict journalists' news judgements this study takes cognisance of the social constructivist nature of news particularly its non-positivist nature. The finding indicates that from idea generation in the newsroom editorial meetings to the actual newsgathering, the journalist-news source relationship is unpredictable without mutual respect and cultivation. As the managing news editor Kaunda (30/12/2004) rationalised,

As news managers we are aware that relationships existing between sources and journalists could be close...the advantages are that the reporter may not be aware of what is happening in society all the time. By having reliable sources, they may serve his day, as they will call upon to alert him/her (interview, 30/12/2004)

Regardless of the explanation, the tendency to write favourably about a news source would seem to be an important barrier towards impartiality. In relation to this, the next section looks at salient findings on what determined the respondents' selection of news sources that they interacted with during newsgathering at *The Post*.

6.1.6 News Sources' Selection Considerations Coinciding with News Values

Also, the achievability of upholding a relationship – whether it be for news that builds a more enlightened citizenry, satisfying audience needs and expectations, or setting apart the newspaper's issue agenda must largely depend on certain value laden considerations that are sort in the predominant interaction patterns forged between news sources and journalists. As shown in the findings most respondents associated a news source to news in its various aspects of newsworthiness aspects. The news values selection, therefore, was pursued to suit certain choices in relation to both news items and news sources. In line with this discourse, Gans (1979) attributes journalists' pursuing of news sources to suit certain news items to the interconnectedness of the two. He argues, “source considerations are applied mainly in story selection, but sources also help shape the news during story production” (Gans, 1979: 131).

As was established in Chapter Four the news sources considerations sought at *The Post* by journalists such as authoritativeness and availability do not preclude news values such as prominence, relevance, geographical, recentness, among other whether we are considering conventional news or exposés. It was therefore, observed that such a field of forces created a prospective apprehension on the part of the journalists between professional loyalties and the need to sustain a regular relationship with their news sources. Almost all the respondents alluded to following news conventions at *The Post* and the ensuing lack of time to cover extensively issues before deadlines a constraining their choices of news sources to interact with.

The following section highlights a principle of tactical alliances employed at *The Post* to capture news sources often not meeting the qualities often regarded as newsworthy.

6.1.7 Tactical Alliances with News Sources

Chapter Five's findings established that *The Post* does have an open policy to formulate tactical alliances with individuals and pressure groups that have similar beliefs to it and which serve sometimes to foist a particular line of issues. The news tactical alliances that were revealed by the managing news editor Kaunda (30/12/2004) in Chapter Five with institutions such as the Women for Change (WFC), a non-governmental organisation illustrate this. I established that the journalists regarded their interplay with the selected tactical news sources as also a response to their readers' needs, a means to act as mediators for competing political pressure groups and being advocates for social justice as the news editor asserts below:

In terms of policy, we invite as many views as possible. We are currently cultivating youths and women because we think these voices are less in the paper. We encourage reporters to collect a variety of sources' contact telephone numbers so that we are able to call upon them countrywide for comment (interview, 29/12/2004).

In contrast to the traditional exchange view of dominance by elite, the tactical relationship can be argued as beneficial to democracy as it draws in those that seldom feature as sources for news, what Gans (1979) calls the 'unknowns'. Even then McCullagh (2002) argues, these 'unknowns' feature in restrictive circumstances particularly to put a human face to emerging issues such as unemployment and statistics.

Despite the optimism of alliances between journalists and news sources illustrated above, the findings revealed also that the respondents had other different purposes for the alliances. It was found that some respondents' views supported theorists such as Herman and Chomsky (1988) who plainly share insights on the strategic advantages that political and economic power secure for news sources. For news sources that are able to afford news production tours, particularly to remote areas of Zambia, economic power acts as guarantee for inclusion in the news, at *The Post*. Certain groups or individuals gain special access by their contribution to reducing the media's costs of acquiring the news although there are exceptions as was discussed in chapter Four. The fact that these tactical news sources are not paid for the supply of information entails an implicit class bias both in terms of self-selection as information providers as long as one could cover

production costs (Sigal, 1973). In this study, therefore, an examination of tactical alliances formed as basis in assessing the way in which economic resources and geographical proximity acts as selector mechanism for journalists who they interact with as news sources, and the relationship resulting from this but does not explain decline of access.

In line with the discourse of attempting to reduce news production costs, Gans (1979) sees the media “as passive over all, as the strategic advantages in any strategic alliances between journalists and news sources lies with the news sources” (1979:119). Some respondents, however, differ in opinion from Gans’ (1979) assertion. As one respondent (Chifuwe, 17/12/2004) argued, his role as a journalist that has been specifically being requested to cover a story anywhere would, “first of all be to cover the story, but this will include covering issues beyond the requested story because that’s where the news is”. Scholars that support Gans’ (1979) view, argue that the organisations that provide subsidised information become routine news sources and have privileged access to the news. However, as some are non-routine sources they must struggle for access, and may be ignored by the arbitrary decision of the gatekeepers (Herman and Chomsky, 1988:17) as the respondent (Chifuwe, 17/12/2004) implies above. As also Sigal (1973) argues, drives of tactical alliances are structurally rooted in an ongoing struggle by both sides as a response to the dependency on each other and resultant constraints that dependency imposes. This means news sources are forever looking out for how best to voice their views as much as possible in unchallenged manner in the newspaper.

6.1.8 Audiences as an Influential factor in the Exchange Driven Relationship

To the extent that *The Post* attaches importance to its audience’s interests as alluded to in Chapter Five, has also a number of implications for the nature of relationship that exists between journalists and their news sources in terms of the news source selection by journalists. For example the deputy news editor Malido (22/12/2004) notes, “the test of news for people in Zambia is political news...our circulation evaluation has indicated that it is what our readers prefer as news”. A good example is the current case of corruption of the former President of Zambia, Chiluba, which has been extensively been covered by

The Post. However, in the light of *The Post*, while the production of news that go well with audiences has been argued by McCullagh (2002) as leading to a concentration on issues that are assumed to outrage and energise audiences, the reality that the newspaper is a commercial concern and this requires it to survive as one is also important.

Scholars that are of the view that financial difficulties have compounded the problems of news production in Africa and made newspapers even less credible as they strain to make possible every single edition, argue that admitting the sovereignty of the reader, is all the more urgent (see, for example Nyamnjoh, 2000). Commercial advertising revenue in many African countries does not account much in the running of the media (Nyamnjoh, 2000). This inevitably ingrains much more interaction among three aspects i.e. the news sources, journalists and audiences particularly those with “disposable income or considerable power over corporate spending” (McCullagh, 2002). According to McCullagh (2002), this image shapes journalists’ selection of stories and their mode of presentation of material. The deputy news editor Malido (22/12/2004) elaborates this:

We are all guided by the fact that it is not everyone who is competent to comment on everything. We go for those that are competent but we also know that there are those sources that are easier to find and those that are difficult to find (interview, 22/12/2004).

It is in this commercial concern, that the journalists at *The Post* see themselves as communicating to an audience, which wishes to be kept well informed about relevant public and political issues. One may therefore also view *The Post*’s performance concerning the selection of news sources and news stories from the point of view of the normative First World model of democracy that views the media as capitalist entities (Lavie and Lebman-Wilzig, 2003). In this First World form, commercial imperatives preside over the media rendering their main aim to maximise the audiences through catering for their interests, a case that was emphasised by the editors at *The Post*.

6.2 Summary of Discussion

The findings of this study illustrate mechanisms, norms and value considerations that propel the exchange-driven relationship between journalists and their news sources. These include creation of news source databases, selection of news routines such as

morning editorial meetings and news beats; compassion towards audience interests; professional beliefs of objectivity; repressive press laws which prompts news source confidentiality and tactical alliance formations among other. At the same time an adversarial view point is also conceivable in defining the journalist-news source relationship at *The Post* ranging from general scrutiny to a sense of responsibility to the public, to uncovering news stories that 'lie hidden below', as espoused by various scholars (see, for example, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; McNair, 1998 and Schlesinger, 1990). Journalists at *The Post* projected themselves as 'the eyes and ears' of the Zambian public while interacting with the news sources in the newsgathering process.

The selection of news stories that appeal to a reader suggests many other implications but most important is that the journalist-news source relationship is not out of conflict of interest nor unified sets of interests. In the findings, for example the common assertion among the news editors was, a source might insist on being interviewed by one of the senior reporters or editors, [they] do act in accordance with such demands because what they want is a good story (Malupenga, 29/12/2004 and Kaunda, 30/12/2004). This tactical manoeuvring could have been a reflection of many factors but of significance is that some measure of self-interest and mutual dependence enters into the dealings between the news sources and the journalists. What could ensue though is relatively loss of autonomy of decision making on the part of journalists as can be detected from the example of Malupenga (29/12/2004) and Kaunda (30/12/2004) assertion above. Although there is no rigid rule to this, I found that the some editors felt resentful towards news sources who would want to interfere in editorial decisions. Djokotoe (17/12/2004) for example confirms this claim.

Once they (news sources) begin to interfere with management issues and editorial decisions specifically on which journalist should cover whom, there are levels of compromise that result from this. When you begin to cover them by their preferences the more you become familiar with each other, which should not be encouraged (interview, 17/12/2004).

This study findings, therefore, does not preclude the fact that the professed journalistic autonomy and decision-making power that the social organisation of newswork and adversarial perspective takes as central is fragile. By news reporting of surrounding

events largely coinciding with the definitions provided by the local ‘legitimated’ power holders, compounds the vulnerability of autonomy of decision-making by journalists in their newsroom at *The Post*. My assertion hinges more on the ideas advanced in literature and assertions above of Editors Kaunda (30/12/2004) and Malupenga (29/12/2004) that seem to ascertain that both journalists and news sources have reason and resources to exchange and that this exchange is the means by which each side is appreciative of their relationship.

From the above viewpoint, it can be argued that, journalists at *The Post* and their news sources could not prolong adversarial positions. The managing news editor epitomised this, “we have no permanent friends and no permanent enemies... Our role is just to report issues the way they are” (Kaunda, 30/12/2004). However, as was shown in the findings in Chapter Four, there are exceptions to this. A case in point is the case of former president Chiluba on corruption. Even then, this finding is in line with Blumler and Gurevitch (1995:29) who argue that, mutually adversarial positions can not be sustained except in a limited way, within clearly defined and mutually respected boundaries that would not erode the very basis of the relationship.

6.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a general discussion of the findings from the examination of the relationship between journalists and news sources using *The Post* as case study. The chapter highlighted the interplay obligating both the journalists and news sources to trade (exchange) resources (information and comments for favourable, or any coverage). Whereas the journalists require verifiable information for their news stories from news sources, news sources commonly seek access to the journalists to expose their opinions or actions in the newspaper. This makes the relationship to serve purpose on both sides.

Further, I have attempted to show that organisational and occupational demands of the journalists are what partly shape the relationship and news herein produced. *The Post* newspaper in Zambia works within a framework where news sources are subjects judged for their newsworthiness that include their authority, credibility, availability and so on.

This finding takes cognisance of the fact that media discourses are necessarily battled over because they serve to legitimate or de-legitimate hierarchies of positions in society.

The study has also explored the relationship between journalists and news sources as responsive also to the structure of the surrounding political and economic system.

Overly by drawing on the social constructivist theory, various influences on the relationship between journalists and their sources were constructed to provide an understanding of the social phenomena based on a number of factors such as journalists' personal, political-economic and organisational presuppositions. Findings in this regard have revealed that the relationship is exchange-driven, as the journalists at *The Post* cannot sustain an adversarial relationship even within pursuance of democratic media ideals although exceptional cases exists such as with former president Chiluba on the case of corruption.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

7.0 Introduction

This Chapter collates the salient issues that came out of the study. The study explored the relationship between journalists and news sources at *The Post* in Zambia. It examined the prevailing relationship, particularly how its formation is influenced internally by organisational and occupational demands such as news routines, news policies, journalism ethics, and externally by political and economic realities.

Section one of this chapter covers the main arguments from the various chapters in the study. Section two makes recommendations for areas of further research on the journalist-news source relationship. Section three concludes the study.

7.1 Main Arguments in the Study

In the study, I discovered that to an extent, the relationship between journalists and news sources is rooted in organisational and political economic realities. I examined the complex ways through which journalists use news routines as part of own ongoing attempts to interact with news sources. I also examined how the political economic factors played a part in creating a relationship that places emphasis on the notion of exchange in the news routines taken. I have highlighted how the organisational and occupational demands as well as the surrounding environment of politics and economic factors have created a limited base for *The Post* journalists to obtain news sources whom they can relate with in *Zambian society*.

Chapter One of this study provides highlights of what the study's objectives and significance are.

Chapter Two covered the theoretical considerations underlying the study. The chapter also presented the context within which the study was to be undertaken by looking at the history of media in *Zambia* and how *The Post* fits the profile as my interest of study for this thesis. The study findings on the relationship were discussed under the social

organisation of news work and the political economy. Each was constituted into various thematic issues in order to illustrate the intricate ways through which journalists and their news sources interacted.

In order to explore the organisational and political economic influences, I justified the use of qualitative research methods, observation, and in-depth interviews as basis for an interpretative understanding, in Chapter 3. The interviews made me appreciate the complex manner in which journalists are attracted to a limited number of news sources and how the information they appropriate from these sources keeps them reliant. Through observations, I was able to understand the editorial process and how news sources' newsworthiness attributes were considered in the news at *The Post*.

In Chapter Four, under the social organisational perspective, six thematic issues that were highlighted included who the news sources are that journalists at *The Post* relate to; organisational and occupational demands; constraints that are sometimes encountered by journalists when relating to news sources. This section factored in a case example 'The sports desk journalists and news source dilemma' where professionalism is compromised by news production challenges such as mutual trust and cost.

In Chapter Five, under the political economy perspective, issues highlighted included respondents' viewpoints on the democratic paradigm, as Zambia is an emerging democracy. Within this theme, the study revealed journalists at *The Post*'s self-conception against the democratic ideals. The chapter also attempted to reveal the various implications of external factors such as politics and economics; strategic alliances embraced by *The Post* that demonstrated contestation towards gaining access to each other (journalists and news sources).

In both Chapters Four and Five on the findings, the respondents' responses reveal that the journalists cannot function without having close contacts with news sources. This goes a long way in contributing to an understanding that journalists in liberal democratic systems can only thrive in their work by accepting that as witnesses of power holders whose opinions they constantly sought, they can only be effective if they closely

associated with the power bastions they seek. The spirit of the journalists-news source relationship is placed against the challenges of the most familiar conventions of news production and democratic ideals.

7.2 Areas for Future Research

While my study was exploratory in many ways, it has, in my view, opened up a few useful areas for further inquiry. Further research on this topic should take a micro approach and look at the two perspectives (social organisation of news work and political economy) individually in order to provide deeper insight into how they influence the relationship in the context of journalists experiences and as professionals residing in a Third World country. Other areas of research could look at the total interaction by paying attention to both news sources and journalists' points of view. This study focussed only on the journalists' point of view as persons whose work and lives are substance upon which news making is conducted.

Evidently, the concentration on established news beats such as courts and government offices points to the understanding that the news sources are instrumental in timely gathering of news and the need for journalists to bond with the news source in these beats. This raises a range of ethical and professional issues such as compliance to objectivity, confidentiality, editorial policies to keep in check acceptable behaviour of journalists as they relate with news sources; and economics of scale competences on who, when and what to cover for journalists, among other. These all require new approaches to journalism education and training in workplaces in the context of change articulated in lifelong learning discourses in relation to Third or Western World dispositions. This would enlighten how journalists could be true to a number of claims they make about their institutional roles in their society and their professional practices as they relate with news sources.

Another issue of the relationship that needs further research is how some of the journalists are able to survive a personal relationship with news sources, which has become one of the reasons that journalists are called mouthpieces of certain individuals or institutions in society. The data shows that the relationship is prone to certain

compromises although commonly guarded against. Along with this was the assumption carried in this study that a non-adversarial relationship was anti-democratic. There is need to go into qualitative assessments of the content to ascertain such assumptions.

Reasons have been attributed to the conclusion drawn that of an exchange driven relationship at *The Post*, but there are likely to be other factors not included given that the newspaper still strives to meet its democratic ideals. Therefore, the insights obtained from this study are provided as stand-alone findings however contribute to the validity of associated findings and could be used as basis for additional research to expand on understanding of the subject of this study.

7.3 Conclusion

In so far as this study addresses the question whether the relationship between journalists and news sources is adversarial or an exchange, a more critical analysis on the findings and discussion in relation to the theoretical framework provided for the case reveals that this is a complex issue. The study raises a range of ethical and professional issues in the sociology of news production, including the role of journalists in building democracy. There appears that the watchdog (adversarial) model has a pull on the journalists at *The Post*, but the exchange (dominance) model comes closest to describing the sort of relationship they have with their news sources. The journalist-news source relationship in my case study is influenced by various factors explainable largely within its particular context such as organisational demands of deadlines, resource allocation and occupational ethics. Equally, since news has political connotations and because journalists choose the news in response to source power, they are inadvertently part of the surrounding political process.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide: Journalists

- Q1. How would you best describe your role as a journalist in society at *The Post*?
- Q2. Whom significantly do you prefer as news sources during newsgathering?
- Q3. What considerations do you make when selecting news sources for your stories?
- Q4. What are your forms of contact with your sources during newsgathering?
- Q5. Who originates the following between you and your sources
- a. The news story idea?
 - b. Initial contact?
- Q6. What are the rules laid down by *The Post* for your interaction with your news sources?
- Q7. How useful are the are the rules?
- Q8. What values do you apply in selection of stories as newsworthy among daily events/occurrences?
- Q9. What fundamental principles of journalism do you include in your practice as a journalist when relating to news sources?
- Q10. Do you have established relationships with news sources?
- a. What are the merits of having any relationship with the sources?
 - b. What are the demerits of having any relationship with the sources?
 - c. Do you get together socially with your news sources?
 - d. How often?
 - e. How would you describe the relevance of such social interaction with news sources?
 - f. To what extent has your source relationship met your original expectations?
- Q11. Do you share your sources with your fellow journalists in the newsroom?
- Q12. How important is it for you to keep source confidentiality?

- Q13. Is there room for the ‘right of reply’ to articles deemed libellous?
- Q14. What, in your opinion, is the role of a journalist who is specifically requested by the source to cover an issue?
- Q15. How often do you feel rushed or pressed for attention by news sources?
- Q16. At what point do you seek advice or get advice from your editor over your story?
- Q17. Overall, how would you best describe your relationship with your sources?

Interview Guide: News Editors

- Q1. How do you perceive your role as a journalist at *The Post*?
- Q2. Are there any challenges to this effect of your role as *The Post* in society?
- Q3. At an institutional level, which news sources significantly meet the daily expectations of the newsroom?
- Q4. What are the normal considerations that are encouraged to select news sources at *The Post*?
- Q5. Which are the encouraged forms of obtaining information by *The Post*?
- Q6. Which values do you apply in selection of stories as newsworthy?
- Q7. What, in your opinion, is the role of a reporter when specifically requested for by a news source (s) to cover a news story?
- Q8. In view of your editorial policy to represent plurality and diversity in your news, how does your choice of sources, especially politicians, affect your editorial policy?
- Q9. At what point do reporters/editors seek advice or get advice from you over their story/sources?
- Q10. How do you treat different individuals, groups and institutions or probably your usual sources, when they are involved in conflict or scandal that could be related in news-story form?
- Q11. What are the merits and non-merits of having any relationships with the sources at *The Post*?

- Q12. At an institutional level, what factors regulate the reporter-source relationship?
- Q13. Is the 'right of reply' a sufficient excuse to libel or relentless attack on people?
- Q14. How would you best describe the overall relationship between *The Post* and the sources used in the news stories?

APPENDIX B: STUDY INTRODUCTORY LETTER

07/12/2004

The Director,
The Post Limited,
P/Bag E352, Lusaka, Zambia.

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: Thesis Study Introductory Letter – An Investigation of the Relationship between Journalists and their News Sources at *The Post* Newspaper in Zambia

Jacqueline M. Kabeta, an MA student at the Department of Journalism & Media Studies, Rhodes University, is carrying out a research study to gauge the journalist-news source relationship at *The Post* as well as the views and needs of the journalists who cover the news and deal with these sources.

You are kindly requested to take part in this research study. The research has no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life but your participation is voluntary. While there are no possible personal benefits from taking part in this study, however, there is the intrinsic content that you might feel for contributing to research that might one day have a positive and useful impact on *The Post*, as well as the media in Zambia and Africa generally.

Research records will be kept confidential unless you authorise their release, or if the records are required to be released by law (i.e., court subpoena). Your records will be used for this research purpose only and at the end of the study, they will be destroyed.

If you have any questions that cannot be answered by the researcher, please contact the undersigned at the Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Rhodes University # 94, Grahamstown, 6140, South Africa. Phones: +27 (46) 603-8336/7; Fax: +27 (46) 622-8447 during the week. Email: s.kyazze@ru.ac.za

Your help would be highly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Simwogerere Kyazze - SUPERVISOR