CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

For many people, comedy is an outlet to vent out frustrations and concerns against social, political and economic ills. The primary function of comedy is to induce laughter by amusing and entertaining the audience whilst portraying targeted social institutions and persons as corrupt; ridiculing them through satirizing, parodying and poking fun at their vices. In the Zimbabwean context, ordinary people or subalterns have resorted to comedy to raise awareness on the socio-economic and political challenges that they face. Political satire has provided comic relief to many Zimbabweans but above all, it has innovative ways of 'speaking truth to power', (Monro, 2015:2).

This study explores the extent to which comedy has been used as an avenue of speaking truth to power in the socio- economic political crisis in Zimbabwe. This is done by analyzing online comedy (video skits) by Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastor in light of the ongoing socio economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe and how these have attempted at providing a voice against authority. This is against the monopoly of all forms of mainstream or traditional media by ZANU-PF leaving the ordinary people to resort to comedy in passively resisting authority as the state has little or no power over online media.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Upon independence in 1980, the ZANU PF government enjoyed political dominance in the country. The collapse of the Zimbabwean economy post-2000, due to a number of factors, saw a rise in poverty and unemployment. To curtail demonstrations and resistance the government enacted various laws among which it was criminal to "speak ill of the constitutionally elected government' and also "insulting the person of the "President" and any action prejudicing him was regarded criminal (Criminal Law Codification Act). The mainstream media consequent to the terms of licence would self-censure and avoid deliberating on the sensitive issues hurting the Zimbabwean population. Thus comedy through online media platforms provides an outlet for Zimbabweans tired of their woes to laugh about their problems and also as a unifying tool, to soften the minds and hearts of the people of Zimbabwe.

Comedy as an avenue for speaking truth to power. Bustop TV, Comic Pastor and Zimbabwe's socio-economic political crisis

The deteriorating economic and political conditions in Zimbabwe post-2000 saw the country being marred by series of demonstrations leading to the birth of a strong political opposition to ZANU-PF. To perpetuate its hegemony the ZANU-PF government employed several ideological state apparatuses for continued dominance. Several media laws were enacted to reign in the media enabling the ruling government to keep the fourth arm of the state in check. Introduction of laws such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA, 2002) the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA, 2001) among others granted the privilege of access to the media to the elite and the powerful, leaving the subalterns without a voice. Habermas (1989) considers the public sphere as a space where people would assembly freely for rationale debates which would culminate in a consensus for public affairs. The advent of social media thus provides the Habermasian public sphere where people would deliberate their ideas without fear or favor. In a regulated and repressive society the social media became the freest space for discussion where people hide behind anonymity to air their views and also with the government having little control over the social space it has remained a free for all platforms.

The continued economic crisis gave MDC positive political mileage and popularity with the people hoping their coming into power would bring an end to their suffering. This saw the MDC in a near electoral win in the 2008 harmonised elections, (Laakso, 2003). A Government of National Unity (GNU) was formed which intended to ensure both political parties come and work together in a grant coalition. The GNU survived from 2009 until the 2013 harmonized elections which saw ZANU PF winning resoundingly. The post 2013 election era was characterized by a decline in social amenities, economic performance and political performance. The declining economy and visible cases of poor governance practices among other vices led to the emergence of hostile groups which relied on online social media as a tool for challenging ZANU PF hegemony.

Political activists, ZANU PF critics and even the government in Zimbabwe have taken advantage and are resorting to the use of social media platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp and Facebook to air their views and mobilise support. The period between 2003 to date experienced a rise in online communications in Africa and beyond. In Zimbabwe Baba Jukwa became a popular through posting secret information about events happening in the

state house and closed door meetings on Facebook. His intentions were deemed causal to despondency and social unrest in Zimbabwe, leading to the arrest of those suspected of being the faces behind Baba Jukwa, (Chibuwe & Ureke 2016).

Anti-Mugabe groups such as *#This flag* movement and *Tajamuka/Sesijikisile* emerged and deployed online social media platforms to challenge ZANU PF hegemony. This also saw comedy shows such as Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastor joining in the race to 'say the unsayable'. Through comedy they challenged the status quo to tackle social vices such as corruption, poverty and human rights abuse. These social movements alleged that the corporate damage being caused by the Mugabe regime needed urgent attention.

Ulea (2002) define comedy as a dramatic genre that portrays the main characters through actors gifted with limited and powerless potential. Generally, comedy refers to the professional entertainment consisting of jokes and sketches intended to make audiences laugh. This makes the subject very broad and opens to multiple interpretations. To close all other meanings, this study refers to Ulea (2002)'s definition of comedy as any literary work which is humorous, parodical and satiric but with the intention to subvert, ridicules and critique authority. Focus is on the literary genres designed to ridicule and satirise problematic human behavior portraying amusing situations featuring ordinary people in ordinary situations with fun and humour to induce laughter. The literary work is characterised by political and personal satire directed against objects of popular dislike, masquerading as foolishness so as to attack some prevailing insincerity and hypocrisy. Thus the context of the study is premised on works limited to ridicule, parody and satire directed to authority for the purpose of correcting social vices by poking fun at human error albeit in a serious manner.

Comedy is used as a social corrective in the political and social; (Peifer 2015; Goldman 2013; Seguel et al 2017; McGowan 2014; Obadare 2009; Waller 2006; Olaniyan 2015; Willems 2010 & 2011). In the Eurocentric perspective parody humour and humour disparagement are used to discredit politicians with the implications on the trust by the electorate. In Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular, humour, satire and jokes are used as a form of resistance against authority. In the Eurocentric context the mainstream media are relatively accommodative of ordinary people's concerns. In Africa, the elite and powerful have absolute priviledge in the media hence the oppressed resort to the unofficial means of communication,

that is the vulgar and the grotesque, (Mbembe 2001, Willems 2010). It is also suggested that civil society (another platform where governments are kept in check) embraces comedy in their fight for civil and human rights in Africa, (Obadare 2009).

In Zimbabwe, cartoons and comic strips have been used as an alternative voice in the interpretation of the socio economic and political crisis. The authorities have been challenged in their officialdom and due to their excessive power they have maintained their dominance on the subalterns. This study focuses on online videos as an alternative, where other forms of resistance have failed. Mainstream media, that is print and broadcast have been used through film, drama, cartoons and caricature but have been constrained by several factors, chief among them their political economy. The media have been compromised, from being the fourth arm of state to being a lapdog due to various economic and political factors in their operation, Herman& Chomsky (2002).

Bus Stop TV is a youth run Zimbabwean media house established in 2014, founded and directed by Lucki Aaron, a photo journalist as P.O Box. It has an online television channel linked to Facebook, Instagram and Youtube. The comic outfit is famous for its satirical skits that comment on the political, economic and social issues affecting the Zimbabwean society. The group rebranded to Bus Stop TV in 2016 with the new brand featuring characters such as Sharon Chideu (Maggie), Samantha Kureya (Gonyeti) and Prosper Ngomashi (Comic Pastor). Comic Pastor is a renowned master of ceremony –cum-comedian who rose to fame after the skit *Shamhu* went viral in 2015, and later joined P.O Box in late 2015.

The name Bus Stop TV was chosen symbolically because "a bus stop is that one place in our communities that brings people from all walks of life, providing a platform for interaction and discussion about political issues", (The Herald, 2016). Social media platforms thus act as the bus stop where people from all walks of life come together and deliberate on topical issues. The productions touch on current affairs in a humorous way, delivering doses of laughter through videos shared on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and also in animation formats, (Daily news, 2016).

The study analyses the following videos, *Pastor and his wives, 2,2million jobs, Mbudzi, Bond notes, New toy for Gonyeti, Solidarity March. Pastor and his wives* is a parody about Vice

President Mphoko's stay at the Rainbow Towers presidential suit for over two years claiming the house government bought for him was not up to the required security standards. *2.2 million jobs* is a satire on how the ZANU PF government have managed to fulfill its election promise of employment creation and economic development. *Bond notes* is a comic skit about the introduction of the bond note which was aimed of easing the cash shortages following the liquidity crunch experienced in the country. The news was met with mixed reactions to the extent of people having a diarrhea fever. *Mbudzi* is centred on the proposal by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education that schools accept non-monetary forms of payment due to the liquidity crunch. *New toy for Gonyeti* is about the birthday present President Robert Mugabe received from his cabinet. *Solidarity march* is a comic video about how the masses ignorantly partake in political issues they have no idea of.

The phrase 'speaking truth to power' originates from Greek word parrhesia. Papadimos& Murray (2008) define parrhesia as not just free speech but a duty to speak in situations where one's speech carries certain risks to one's reputation or life. Foucault (1963) defines parrhesia as courage to face danger resulting from speaking the truth. It is a form of criticism either towards another or towards oneself. It occurs in a situation where the speaker or confessor of truth is in a position of inferiority with respect to the one addressed the one with whom he speaks.

Foucault (1991) argues that power is everywhere diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and truth. He challenges the idea that power is wielded by people or groups by way of episodic or sovereign acts of domination or coercion (Foucault 1998: 63). Power is fluid and can move from one pocket to the other, it permeates the pockets of the other. He views power in the positive, being able to produce reality, domains of objects and rituals of truth contrary to the negative notion that power excludes, represses, masks and conceals (Foucault 1991:194).

1.3 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The study explores how comedy has been used as an avenue of speaking truth to power on Zimbabwe's socio-economic and political crisis between 2016 and 2017. The study focuses on Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastor.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There is a significant body of literature on the media and political discourse in Zimbabwe (Chari: 2009; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2010; Mabweazara and Sterlitz: 2009). These studies show how the audience participates in governance issues. Chari (2009) argues that social media has now become critical as a public sphere. However, such a point is refuted by Mabweazara and Sterlitz (2009) who contends that print media still holds power and remains critical in the public sphere. On the other hand, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2010) asserts that violence has been used as an important tool in organising Zimbabweans. This gave birth to the rise of social movements leading to growth of social media (Chari, 2009). Willems (2010) argues that during the Zimbabwean crisis the absence of physical protest should not be equated to the absence of resistance but as evidence that the ordinary Zimbabweans had resorted to the use of humour and rumour as an avenue for challenging the state. She however argues that not only do comic strips and political cartoons address those in power; they provide a platform for the subjects of power to mock their own vulnerability in their subjugation (Willems 2011).

In this light, this study seeks to add to the body of knowledge on how comedy has been used to speak truth to power in Zimbabwe's socio-economic political crisis. Special attention is on the role comedians have played in disseminating information particularly focusing on online videos. The study notes that there is an increasing use of social media platforms for political activism worldwide in general and Zimbabwe in particular. Further notice is given to the fact that little research has been done in Zimbabwe on the use online motion pictures in political activism. As such the research explores the use of comedy particularly Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastor in challenging the socio economic political crisis in 2016-2017 in Zimbabwe.

Specific attention is given to the role played by comedians in embracing audience's desires and the possibility of the media in a different arena for public discourse leading to the reshaping of the public sphere. This brought a paradigm shift from the top-down approach provided by the mainstream media where the elite have privileged access to a media hijacked by political and commercial forces, (Chibuwe & Ureke 2016:3).

1.5 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are:

- To explore how comedy has been used to speak truth to power in selected videos and skits from Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastor.

- To describe the dominant themes in the videos and skits in light of the 2016-17 socio-economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe.

- To explain the factors influencing the use of comedy to speak truth to power.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

Main Research Question

- How has Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastor employed comedy in speaking truth to power in the 2016-17 socio economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe?

Sub- Research Questions

- What are the dominant themes in the videos and skits in light of the 2016-17 socio economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe?

- What are the factors influencing the use of comedy to 'speak truth to power?

1.7 DELIMITATIONS

The scope of the study stretches from July 2016 to December 2017 when there were heightened online social media discussions on socio-economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe following a series of anti-government demonstrations. The study analyses the following videos, *Pastor and his wives, 2,2million jobs, Mbudzi, Bond notes, New toy for Gonyeti, Solidarity March.* Although there are many videos and skits from Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastor concerning the socio-economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe, the study does not go beyond the end of Operation Restore Legacy which ended on 18 December 2017. This is due to the fact that the period beyond marks the beginning of a different dispensation led by Emmerson Mnangagwa hence the crisis in question was during the Mugabe era.

1.8 LIMITATIONS

There are also methodological and theoretical limitations to the study. There was need for the study to include interviews of the comedians but due to their unavailability the study could not employ interviews. There are various theories one can apply to the study but this study is

limited to two broad theories. However, this study makes use of the available methodologies and theories to come up with well researched information. The methodological and theoretical limitations will not compromise the findings of the research.

1.9 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The study consists of 6 distinct chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study and gives the background to the study. Chapter 2 consists of literature review and theoretical framework. Chapter 3 focuses on methodology, unit of analysis, sampling techniques and data collection methods. Chapter 4 comprises of organisational analysis and political economy. Chapter 5 present data gathered qualitatively, analysis and discussions. Chapter 6 summarises, passes recommendations and concludes the study.

1.10 CONCLUSION

Chapter one introduces the research topic being studied providing the introduction, background of the study, statement of the problem, significance of the study with limitations and delimitations. The next chapter presents Literature Review and Theoretical Framework of the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0   INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents review of literature related to the research topic. A thematic approach is used to discuss the literature. This chapter also discusses the theories of Knowledge, power and discourse and the "Aesthetics of [Carni] vulgarity (author's invention)" as the theoretical framework of the research.

There is abundant literature on the use of comedy in speaking truth to power. Some of these studies mention comedy in political theatre and film as a tool for social change (Ravengai 2010, Lavrinienko, 2015). Some focus on newspaper political cartoons and comic strips (Willems (2011); while others focus on comedy as a form of popular culture (defined as an arena where hegemony is contested (Storey, 2008, Willems, 2010) and on political jokes speaking truth to power, (Willems, 2010; Mbembe, 2001). Obadare (2009) mulls the idea of incorporating comedy in civil society in their bid to challenge the state on human and civil rights. This study thus seeks to fill the knowledge gap by focusing on online videos and skits and exploring how they have been used to challenge power.

2.1. POLITICAL THEATRE AND FILM FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Political theatre and film has been used as a tool for social change in both developed and developing countries, (Ravengai, 2010; Hassan, 2017; Goldman, 2013). Hassan (2017) argues that ordinary people through arts and performances have the ability to impart their feelings and ideas on the socio-political and economic issues so as to change lives in society. Theatre and film gives a voice to the silenced as it helps on raising awareness about realities of injustice and oppression while helping the oppressed to express their sense of self. Political theatre ventures on political issues and provokes thinking and participation by audience in the controversies and forms of action emergent from the theatre works, (Lavrinienko, 2010). In Zimbabwe, Ravengai (2010) posits that theatre thrives at telling stories about society through images. He argues that the ZANU-PF administration monopolised the rights to access of images of the past thus resulting in the creation of texts that imitate the official version of

history. They allowed plays that toed the official versions of history to be published and performed. Those excluded from the official narrative thus sought to project themselves through unofficial means resulting in their plays banned, censored and politically controlled.

Comedy as a performance can be used as a social corrective used to reframe situations and critiquing social injustice, dealing with taboo and controversial topics and broadening the social perspective, (Goldman (2013). It can also afford the public the opportunity to talk back, to be heard and not only to hear (Chibuwe & Ureke, 2016).   The reviewed literature focused on how political theatre and film has been used as a social corrective. This research is premised on how comedy as a performance can be used for societal good. It also focuses not on the mainstream media platforms studied by the previous researches but on the digital platforms which are characterised by global access and autonomy from authority hence the relevance of the literature under review.

2.1.2 PARODY AND DISPARAGEMENT HUMOUR AS EMPOWERMENT OF THE SUBALTERN

Some studies (Peifer 2015; Seguel et al 2017) examine how parody and disparagement influence perception in politics. Parody is believe to serve a double role (Bhaktin, 1981) presented in two competing voice, of the presenter and the represented. Disparagement humour refers to remarks that provoke amusement through denigrating, derogating and belittling a target which belongs to the dominant class in society; be it a person, social group or political ideologies, (Zillmann, 1983, Ferguson and Ford, 1983). The study focuses on how Bustop TV actors represent reality with regards to the socio-economic and political happenings in Zimbabwe. They mimic the 'actual person' so much that by just looking at the videos one within a Zimbabwean context can tell the people involved and the issues under discussion. The study focuses on the ability of the cast to wear characters, ignoring the status and power of the subjects of ridicule, as they discuss the social and political issues.

In parody and disparagement humour the oppressed feel powerful when they point out the shortcomings, mistakes and flaws of the politically powerful thereby feeling victorious and superior, (Feinberg, 1978; Gruner, 1978). Superiority to the target manifest through enjoyment of the parody by the performer and the audience and the laughter derogates the target. The one imitating should copy aspects of the imitated, the powerful are disarmed and the subaltern wields the power to mock the elite. Comedians are powerful on stage as their

voices command a following in a performance through their ability to provoke an audience and induce laughter through sensitive and sometimes emotional issues as is the case of Bustop TV productions. In this regard, Bustop TV crew and the audience cease to be the weak, they assume the position of authority and the once powerful (ZANU PF and the political elite) are left at the mercy of the former weak (the comedians and the suffering masses. Bustop TV and the suffering majority of Zimbabweans assume the role of authority as they ridicule the architects of their suffering thus exchange of roles in the sites of social power.

The targeted audience of parody and disparagement humour belong in the 'inferior' social class thus they join the comedians in enjoying the power to mock or ridicule authority. By laughing at the jokes the masses assume their power, they own and control the narrative and they understand the socioeconomic and political crisis through their own understanding and not as dictated by the dominant social class. In most African societies mainstream media have been monopolised by the rich and powerful, they stand for the interest of the politically and economically powerful leaving the poor deprived of divergent views.

The reviewed literature studied parody and disparagement from a Eurocentric perspective and this study explores parody and disparagement from an African perspective in general and Zimbabwe in particular. Thus online comedy provides an opportunity for the suppressed voices to be heard, to challenge the oppressor hence the scope of this study.

2.1.3 POPULAR CULTURE, POLITICAL JOKES AND HUMOUR AS FORMS OF RESISTANCE AND SUBVERSION OF AUTHORITY

In this study popular culture is defined as intellectual and artistic activities deliberately set to win the favour of the people; made by the people for the people and emanating mostly from the 'inferior' social classes seeking to signify and produce meaning, (Storey, 2008). Gramsci (2009:75) view popular culture as a platform of struggle between the resistance of the subordinate groups and the forces operating in the interest of dominant groups. It is a terrain of power exchange and negotiation between the dominant and the dominated. These informal media, usually defined as popular culture in terms of its opposition to power, provide an arena where hegemony is continuously contested (Storey, 2000). Popular culture is a political practice that examines the construction of power relations constituting forms of everyday

life, (Turner, 1996) which manifests in the context of this study, through political jokes, humour and cartoons and comic strips.

This study explores how Zimbabweans in a crisis deviated from the expected dramatic confrontations in relation to the prevailing socioeconomic and political crisis. Unlike in the Orange Revolution in Ukraine where violent protest in the streets became the order of the day, Zimbabweans under the Mugabe regime resorted to non-violent forms of protests as resistance and subversion to authority (Willems, 2010). Willems (2010) argue that the absence of physical protest should not translate to absence of resistance. Popular culture was adopted which became everyday form of resistance in challenging the state in Zimbabwe. Contrary to the norm of violence, Zimbabweans resorted to the enduring forms of resisted constantly present in behaviours, traditions and consciousness of the subordinate (Hayes & Prakash 1991).

Due to restrictive high costs and lack of access to print media and alternative broadcasters, Zimbabweans resorted to popular and informal media to express and spread the dissenting voices. A number of websites emerged challenging the official views on the crisis. These pavement radios defined as popular and unofficial discussion of forums of current affairs provided an alternative voice to the other. (Ellis 1989). The practice of jokes and distribution thereof itself defied government attempts to monopolise and dominate the public sphere thereby promoting democratic engagement and participation, the focus of this study.

Humour creates a disrespectful public sphere (Ibrahim 1998) especially where all conventional avenues of sociability have been closed. Where urgency is denied humour becomes a vehicle of obtaining political participation and challenging official meaning. Ordinary people use humour to critique the state and to cope with the rigours of everyday life (Obadare 2009; 245). Some critics argue that humour has become a simple preserve for the subalterns. Mbembe posits that humour and ridicule does not violate to commandment's material base although it may demystify or try to erode its supposed legitimacy, (Mbembe, 2010). Obadare (2009:244) regards humour as a means to get back at and resist the power elite and dominant power class While the assertion might be true that humour does not disrupt the dominant base, it does trouble the commandment otherwise for instance in

Zimbabwe, why would former Vice President Mphoko leave his hotel residence after the comic skits and the protests?

Bustop TV employs humorous skits in their discussion of the socio economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe. They speak of 'taboo' issues in a not so serious manner which enables them to deliberate on emotionally charged topics with little damage to society. Their skits have a bare it all characteristic where there are no sacred cows to be spared on deliberations. Issues covered include corruption, human rights violations and the deteriorating economic conditions in the country. Although the literature reviewed covered performances on traditional media and physical platforms this study explores how humour on virtual platforms can be used for deliberating on the socio economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe.

Cartoons and comic strips have also been used effectively as hidden scripts, referring to subtle, implicit forms of critique against those in power(Willems 2011;128) he further argue that laughter helps the subjects reflect, mocking their own powerlessness and lack of agency in the face of an immutable system (:141). Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastor as comic outlets can be likened to Kenyan comedian group named the *Redykyulass Generation* whose satire could be seen as a form of 'self- reflexive laughter', the kind of humour that entails laughing at oneself, at one's weaknesses, vices and flaws and posing thought provoking questions one their role in the entrenchment of the repressive regime (Musila (2010).

Hammett (2011) posits that political cartoons capture complex social and political issues acknowledging and resisting power relations. They are used symbolically to generate identities and propagate ideologies. Mbembe (2010:109) sates that ordinary people detect state power in the realm of ridicule and they render it powerless. In Zimbabwe, the Daily News ran a comic strip *Chikwama* which enabled its readers to cope with tragic events of everyday life. An analysis of *Chikwama* shows how media texts are embedded in broader social discourses, (Willems, 2011). The study explores how online comedy can thus be used to complement the other forms of resistance in everyday life as a way of challenging authority.

Political jokes emerged as social movement media to provide alternative interpretations of the Zimbabwean crisis, (Willems, 2010). Ordinary Zimbabweans, through the production political jokes were able to debate on socioeconomic and political issues and bring matters of

concern up for discussion thus they were empowered to communicate far from the ruling elite dominated public sphere, (Barber 1987; 3. Through the production of forms of popular culture, ordinary Zimbabweans were thus able to debate issues and bring matters of concern.

Political satire has provided comic relief to many Zimbabweans and it is through its innovativeness that the common man has a vehicle of speaking truth to power, poking fun at the powerful and mocking the politicians and their vice. Willem (2011) argues that laughter does not only target the powerful but provides an avenue for those subjected to enable them cope with the events unfolding around them, (126). Whether manifesting in the mainstream or new media political satire seeks to fulfill the role of "hidden scripts" which includes the discourse that thrives beyond the direct observation of the power holders (Scott 1990). Hidden scripts thus defined as subtle, implicit forms of critique against those in power (Willem 2011, 128).

Jokes serve as a double function, a tool for subordinate classes to mock the state and its assets and also themselves. The subordinate classes ridicule authority and their shortcomings. They also ridicule themselves for allowing authority to continue suppressing them. An example is a skit by Bustop TV about the solidarity march held by ZANU PF youth after the former first lady assaulted a teenage girl in South Africa. Most of the people did not even know why they were marching.

Jokes are generally meant to explore the socio-political and economic degradation in the country. Most of the jokes in Zimbabwe are in vernacular which is generally seen as the language of the streets, of the powerless and excluded who own them (Obadare2009). Popular media such as music, videos and comics have been used as alternative media where citizens either receive information on political affairs or contest political elites as forms of resistance against those in power. (Willems 2011:147).

2.1.4 COMEDY AS FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Comedy as an exercise of the freedom of expression arguably lead to societal progress since it is through its ability to expose the unsayable truths; empowering and promoting public opinion, (Chibuwe & Ureke 2016:5). It is due to lack of freedom in society that has seen the rise of satire; where truth has been spoken the opposite way so as to sidestep censorship, flak and possible arrest (Esarey& Qiang 2008). Mkundu (2015) asserts that the advent of the internet by-passed censorship, allowing the production and distribution of content without censorship by the government in Zimbabwe. Chibuwe and Ureke (2016) concur, hailing

social media as liberative in the context of political repression providing a possibility of democratisation of the political space.

Castells (2007) argues that the rise of mass self-communication over the internet gave birth to insurgent politics and social movements enabling them a more decisive intervention in new communication space. Through comedy, the public is afforded an opportunity to talk back, to be heard and not only to hear (Chibuwe & Ureke, 2016). Bakhtin (1984) posits that laughter represents an unsanctioned and rebellious means of expression, a freedom in the midst of restriction. Obadare (2009) adds that laughter serves a variety of functions for the oppressed; as vengeance, coping mechanisms, a means to self-escape and subversion, (243-4). In today's digital world the subaltern can talk back to the powerful through forum such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter.

Overally, the reviewed literature has shown how the subalterns resorted to alternative forms of communication in resisting dominance and challenging authority. Comic strips and cartoons of newspapers have been studied (Willems, 2011); comedy on television and theatre have also been explored as a form of resistance (Musila, 2010). Political jokes on popular media (word of mouth/radio trotoirs) have been explored (Ellis, 1989) as avenues for speaking truth to power. This research seeks to fill the information gap by providing an analysis of how these forms of resistance can be used to challenge authority but not on traditional media platforms but virtual sphere. It is also important to note that the dynamics of traditional and social media differ hence the thrust of this research how online comedy can be used to challenge authority.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study largely borrows from one broad theory and a triangulation of two theories, that is the theory of power , knowledge and discourse and a combination of Aesthetics of Vulgarity and the Carnivalisque, which in this study will be referred to as the 'Aesthetics of the Carnivulgarity'.

2.2.1 POWER, KNOWLEDGE AND DISCOURSE
The researcher utilizes Michael Foucault's power, knowledge and discourse concept. According to Foucault (1980) discourse is defined as a group of statements that provide a

language for talking, how knowledge is represented. Discourse produces the objects of knowledge and it shapes and influences what should and what should not be done. It governs what should be discussed and the behaviour limiting and restricting conduct in relation to knowledge construction. Thus discourse governs the sayable and the thinkable and restricts the opposite, (Foucault, 1980). During the Mugabe regime talking ill about ZANU PF and its administration as a political failure was a transgression. What was permissible was talking about how the revolutionary party brought the country to independence and how Zimbabweans were to guard their hard won freedom jealously, shutting out any other contesting discourses.

Foucault (1980) asserts that being time-based different discourses always rise to overtake the existing ones and produce new concepts on power and authority. This is evident in the shift from the ordinary people relying on the mainstream/ traditional media for information to the embracing of social media (new media technologies). There is a paradigm shift from the audience being consumers and media as producers to the 'pronsumer' concept where the audience is both producers and consumers. It can also be argued that discourse transmits and produces power and at the same time undermines and exposes it. Looking at the digital media environment one can argue that online publication of *The Herald* can be viewed as producing power but at the same time, Bust Stop TV operating on the same platform exposes and undermines power through comedy.

Foucault advances a different conception of power, contrary to the Marxist belief that power is unidirectional and radiates in a single direction, which is from top to bottom. He also refutes the Marxist view that power is held within an individual group or special source that is dominant (usually state and the ruling class). Power is fluid and omnipresent (not because of uniformity but that it comes from everywhere), it circulates permeating from one's pocket to another thus it cannot be monopolised by one centre but can be deployed everywhere (Foucault, 1980:9). In the context of this study there is an interchange of power between the comedian and their audiences (as the oppressed) and the politically powerful (oppressor). As mentioned above the ability of the subaltern to identify weaknesses in authority and manage to laugh about it means they disarm the powerful and wield the power in their hands hence power is fluid and does not belong to an individual group or class in society.

The state of powerlessness is not permanent, the 'oppressor' and 'oppressed' positions are not fixed but interchanged between the two. Mbembe (2001) argues that both dominant and the dominated are pacified; at one point they rob each other of the power and are rendered useless. This suggests that power relations permeates all levels of social existence and are found operating at every site of social life. Through comedy, the oppressed and the oppressor have an opportunity of looking into their own weaknesses and laugh at them. At this point they are both weak and vulnerable. In the day to day business of governance the subalterns are the weak and those who wield political power are the powerful but when the subaltern resort to comedy they become powerful and the subject of ridicule become the weak.

Foucault dismisses the notion that power represses, destroys, conceals and subjects. He argues that knowledge is a form of power which liberates, constructs and unmasks. He argues that power does not only repress what it seeks to control; it produces things, induces pleasure and produces discourse, (Foucault 1980: 119). This is true to this study, where one can argue that the decision by the oppressed to resort to comedy comes after being empowered through the knowledge of their oppression. It is also their ability to assess the failure of other forms of resistance and also to choose comedy as an alternative that one can attribute to the power of knowledge hence the positive effect of power.

2.2.2 AESTHETICS OF THE 'CARNIVULGARITY'.

This theory is a triangulation of Mikhail Bhaktin's Carnivarlisque and Achille Mbembe's Aesthetics of Vulgarity. Mbembe (2001) writes of a 'post colony' which he defines as societies emerging from the experience of colonialism and characterized by the violence which colonial relationship involves. In a post colony there are systems of signs, ways of representing discourse which are created. Identities are multiplied, transformed and circulated and there is political improvisation, lack of proportion and segregation. Political machines have monopoly over violence and thus the post colony is a stage where issues of subjection effects and discipline are contested. One can argue that it is in the post-colonial context that the carnivarlisque is employed.

The concept of the carnival is a platform created to subvert and liberate the ideologies of the dominant class through humour and chaos. Bhaktin (1984) posits that the carnival is derived from the medieval festivals of ancient times, where 'sub- deacons of the cathedral mocked the sacred ceremonies releasing the natural 'hooligan' beneath the church garments. Bhaktin

(1987) likens literary works and satire to the carnival where he argues that the carnival affects all people in partaking in the behaviours and rituals hence everyone becomes an active participant in the carnival.

This theory is relevant in the study because the background within which they were posited have similarities to the Zimbabwean context. Mbembe' Aesthetics of vulgarity is based on experiences from Cameroon and the sub Saharan Africa which Zimbabwe falls within. Zimbabwe has a history of colonialism thus bears the same characteristics with the countries Mbembe focuses on. Bhaktin's theory was based on the European context but the characteristics of the carnival can be related to the prevailing contestations of power in Zimbabwe. Comedy, in the scope of this study, acts as a carnival where the subaltern can speak truth to power. It is important to note that in the context of this study the carnival refers to occasions of protest or subversion initiated by the ordinary people to challenge authority; or occasions or platforms created by authority to glorify itself which are later hijacked by the subaltern and turned into platforms of bringing the state into mockery and ridicule.

In a post colony dominant class seeks to achieve legitimacy and hegemony through creation of master codes of practice that becomes the discourse of the day translating meaning in society. The meanings are turned into official language, instilled into the people and integrated into people's consciousness as ideology. It is forbidden for one to challenge the meaning of produced official symbols and narratives. To ensure they are engraved into the people the state uses ideological and cultural discourses; failure of these it resorts to violence hence the assertion that the state has monopoly over violence, these are referred as ideological state apparatus(that is the church, school, media and family) and repressive state apparatus (police, judiciary, army and intelligence), (Althuser, 1970).

Bringing political consciousness into being is not enough, the commandment is concerned about making the consciousness effective. Focus is on how the produced meanings of the world are ordered, the types of institutions used to achieve such and the knowledge, norms and practices structuring this new common sense (Mbembe, 2001). Thus conflict emanates following the use of visual imagery and discourse with regards to the issues of domination and subordination, thus power contestations ensue. One can argue that the rise of comedy as an alternative for speaking truth to power is a result of the need by the dominated to create

parallel meaning of knowledge from that offered by the authorities thus using visual imagery and discourses that propel their discourse which is against the official discourse.

The aesthetics of vulgarity are concerned with the obscene and the grotesque located in the 'non-official' cultures, that are essential to all systems of domination and means through which those systems are confirmed and deconstructed, (Mbembe, 2001). Bhaktin (1987) argues that non official cultures overturn and defile official values in carnivalistic activities. He claims that the grotesque and the obscene are the provinces of the ordinary people. He further adds that as a means of resistance to domination and as refuge from it, obscenity and the grotesque are imitations that undermine the powers that be by showing how vulnerable officialdom is, turning it into a subject of mockery. Thus comedy has provided such where officialdom has been disempowered and ridiculed by the common people.

In the modern carnival in Europe, rules and regulations were temporary suspended and reversed. Ideas and truths are tested and contested and all demand equal dialogue status. It was a time where the participants were autonomous of the state and the church; laws are suspended. There is relativity of prevailing truths and authorities characterized by 'inside out logic of shift from top to bottom and numerous imitations and humiliations, (Bhaktin 1984:11). The world is presented as its gay form, with hesitant laughter which is mocking and deriding. The carnival laughter proclaims and denies, conceals and recovers as characterised by the masking and unmasking, (Bhaktin 1984:12).

In the carnival, social hierarchies of everyday life are transgressed and overturned by the normally suppressed voices and energies. Roles are exchanged and opposites mingled; fools become the wise, the kings become beggars and fantasies are turned into facts. Sacrilegious events occur without punishment and serious rituals are mimicked, for example the transfer of feudal rights and selection of a king and queen to preside a banquet for laughter's sake. During the carnival, life is subject only to its laws, celebrating temporary freedoms and suspending all hierarchical precedence, (Bhaktin 1984:10). Mbembe (2001) concurs that for shorter and longer periods of time social discourse elude control, (105). He gives an example of how Togolese would caricature the metaphors meant to glorify state powers into their own meaning under cover of the official slogans. In Zimbabwe, ordinary people would change lyrics for common songs in order to suit their messages of disgruntlement. In comedy

laughter defeats social status, everyone is supposed to just laugh regardless of who they are in society.

A carnivalistic sense of the world is characterized by familiar and free interaction between people. Bhaktin (1987) posits that carnivals do not distinguish between actors and spectators, all are participants. A special form of free and familiar contact reign among people usually divided by barriers of class, property, profession and age. According to Bhaktin (1984), during medieval time priests, deacons, state and congregants would gather to duplicate official church business revealing the natural behaviour hidden under church cloths.He adds that subjects and the authority mingle on deployments by the state and also on their deployment for fun (104). In this study comedy can be likened to a carnival as it provides a platform of multi-class interaction; the comedians, the elite (sometimes mentioned as subjects of mockery) and the common people who are the audiences.

The study focuses on Mbembe's view that when the official channels of communication are closed by the ruling class the subject resort to the grotesque and the obscene as a way of challenging officialdom (Mbembe, 2001, 103). It also looks at Bhaktin (1984)'s concept of the carnival a platform created to subvert and challenge authority through the use of humour and chaos, (Bhaktin, 1987). In the context of the study, the government restricted the traditional forms of communication for use by the political and the elite hence the ordinary people have resorted to comedy to speak the unsayable. They make use of the media, (social media in this context) which is reserved for the elite and hijack it to ridicule and undermine official discourse as an escape from domination. The free exit and free entry in social media helps free interaction and the anonymity offered by social media can be symbolically analysed as the mask worn by participants in the carnival. Mbembe (2010) concurs, claiming that the obscene and grotesque are the provinces of the ordinary but in this context are made to manifest through materials used in the ceremonial displays by the state. Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastor uses online television channels to broadcast their comic works as they do not have access to traditional television as dictated by the commandment. Their works are inspired by the agendas set by the powers that be which they question to expose the vices of the powerful.

2.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter looked at the available literature, sources of the literature and how the literature adds to the research. The chapter analysed the Power, Knowledge and Discourse and the "Aesthetics of the Carnivulgarity" theories and how these theories are relevant to the study. Literature was reviewed thematically qualifying the reviewed literature into the context of the study. The next chapter presents research methods and methodologies.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and discusses research methods and methodology. It provides a detailed account on the research approach, research design, sampling techniques and research instruments.

3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

The research is qualitative in nature as it seeks to explore how comedy is used to speak truth to power. Qualitative research methodology has been used by the researcher because the information it gathers is comprehensive enough to give an original analysis about the study at hand. Gunter (2000) contends that qualitative research methods focus primarily on verbally articulated researches. This is relevant to the research as it is informed by statements made through videos and skits by Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastor. Gunter (2000) submits to it that reality is shaped by society hence qualitative research is not interested in generalising things but looks at the deeper understanding of any phenomenon. This approach applies well to the study because it leaves room for common sense and data obtained is textual hence it is easy to analyse.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is a set of strategies or structures the research will follow, serving as a guide in the analysis and collection of data (Churchill, 1999). The study makes use of a case study research design because the data is examined is specifically for Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastor videos and skits. Stake (2010) defines a case study as the exact thing under study, with the researcher having all the room to study the subject in detail which in turn produces an accurate finding. It provides the platform for setting research objectives to be fulfilled and research questions to be answered in the research process. The main purpose of this study is to carry out an explanatory case study analysis of videos by Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastor in challenging authority. The study is descriptive in nature and interrogates the contemporary phenomenon paying particular attention to Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastor. Creswell (2003) states that qualitative researches purposefully select participants, cites documents that best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question. The study will adopt the multiple case designs to enhance the robustness of the findings and to avoid too much generalization hence this study will select videos to serve as case study upon which the study is premised.

3.3 POPULATION

Population can be defined as total membership of a defined class of people, objects or events relevant to the research study and of interest to the researcher (O'Leary, 2004). For this research, five videos by Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastor were used as the population from which information is drawn to meet the demands of the research.

3.4 SAMPLING METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

A sample is defined as a subset or portion of the larger group or population (Keyton, 2001). It is said to be a representative of the population that leads to conclusions that are approximately the same as those that one would reach by studying the entire population. In this research, the total sample is the selected videos and skits by Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastor.

3.4.1 PURPOSIVE SAMPLING
The research employs the non-probability purposive sampling technique which is higly suitable for qualitative studies such as this one. Purposive sampling refers to a case that has been selected with a 'purpose' meaning it is for a specific purpose and relevantly meets the demands of the research questions in the study. Purposive sampling is used in selecting five

videos from Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastors which specifically is about the socio-economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe. The aim of the research is to purposively analyse the videos and explain how they address issues related to the study. The researcher viewed YouTube videos by Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastor specifically those of the areas of interest because the comedians have several videos hence the need to watch those relevant to the study.

3.5 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Abawi (2013) define data collection as a way of putting together information needed for the study to meets its objective. It is a procedure of assembling and assessing information which enable one to answer substantial queries and systematically evaluate the information. Information was gathered most of which was used for the research.

3.5.1 ARCHIVAL COLLECTION

Archives can be defined as materials created or received by a person, organisation, public or private in the conduct of their affairs and preserved because of enduring value contained in the information they contain. The research employed archival collection method because the videos under study were recorded and uploaded on online platforms and thus are not original documents. This study is based on electronic databases that are websites hence archival collection of data is relevant to the study. In this case, the research will use digital archives of the Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastor videos because they are readily available for use defeating the information availability challenge often faced by researchers.

3.6 METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is when all data that has been collected is evaluated and meaning created. Marshall and Rossman (1999) define data analysis as the process of using critical analysis and logical reasoning in the examination of provided data so as to come out with a conclusion and create meaning for the research. During data analysis all information is put together, facts grouped thematically for creation of meaning. In this study, videos will be watched and only those statements that are relevant to the context of the study will be used. The research employed critical discourse analysis, thematic analysis and semiotic analysis.

3.6.1 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Critical discourse analysis is concerned with the production, distribution and consumption of media texts,(Fairclough (1989). In this study, texts, images and videos area analysed in the study. Van Dijk (1998) suggest that in the field were texts, speech, domination and abuse of power is concerned, critical discourse analysis be used. The study is premised on the issues of domination and power contestations between the ruled and the rulers hence critical discourse analysis is applicable. Texts in critical discourse analysis can be in form of written or spoken; videos combine texts and images in their analysis of the discourse at hand.

In the context of the study the research analyses how the text was produced, that is who originated the message and with what intensions. Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastor use texts images and videos on YouTube which ridiculed how the ZANU PF government was governing the affairs of the country. Satire and parody are used comically to speak truth to power hence critical discourse analysis is appropriate.

It is through critical discourse analysis that the researcher is able to analyse why the comedians chose social media and in the form of comic videos in challenging authority instead of using the traditional media. In comedy, dialogue established and maintained power and critical discourse analysis show how dialogue provided a platform of self-introspection for the dominant and the dominated in the context of Zimbabwe's socio-economic, political crisis. Critical discourse analysis allowed the researcher to understand beyond the polysemic nature of the text and helped in arriving at the meaning making process. Interpretation of the data is made in accordance to theories used. It explores how names, pictures and words are used to answer the questions.

3.6.2 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis is central and significant in qualitative research defined as organisation of data into themes for use in a particular research, (Braun &Clarke, 2006) through vigilant reading and re-reading of texts, (Rice & Ezzy, 1998). This research employed thematic analysis in reading the texts and arriving at the meaning making process. Themes help in analysing important data to a research hence data in this research will be analysed in themes. Videos in this were chosen due to their ability of meeting the demands of the research. Information gathered will be analysed thematically in form of watching the videos,

identifying possible themes comparing and contrasting themes and building theoretical models in which to premise the research. The themes include corruption, political intolerance, unemployment and economic regression. These themes are largely focused on the circumstances leading to the employment of comedy as an avenue for speaking truth to power in the socio-economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe. The themes identified answers the main research question and the sub-research questions answering the demands of the research.

3.6.3 SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

Semiotics is defined as the science of signs, what constitutes a sign and laws governing it. Danesi (2004) posits that signs are accumulated meanings that previous generations have captured, preserved and passed on in the form of signs and meanings of which is derived based on the cultural background of the interpreter. Signs include the study of body language, art forms, rhetoric discourse, visual communications media, gestures, clothing and artifacts which are invented and adopted by human beings to produce meaning. Semiotic analysis is thus the ability of the research to analyse and interpret signs for the purpose of enriching the finding of the research. This study involves visual communication, body language and rhetoric discourse in videos by Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastor hence semiotic analysis is relevant. The researcher had to be able to interpret rhetoric and also translate body language in an attempt to analyse the text. It should however be noted that the signs and symbols used by Bus Stop TV and Comic pastor can be understood by the people with a Zimbabwean background or who are vested in the socio-economic political happening in Zimbabwe. It is the availability of background information that one can identify humour, ridicule, satire in Bus Stop TV and Comic Pastor.

3.7 DATA PRESENTATION

 Data is presented thematically in a narrative format.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics refer to the moral guidelines of doing anything. In research these can be methods, practices or observations that can be used to determine the manner one conducts themselves during research. Punch (2011) asserts that ethics play a pivotal role in research as they constitute how one conducts themselves when collecting information. Plagiarism is one

ethical concern that many researchers have violated but in this case, all information used is acknowledged and cited properly so as to produce good and quality academic product.

3.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the methodologies used by the research in the collection, interpretation and presentation of data for the research. The next chapter discusses the political economy of Bustop TV.

CHAPTER 4: POLITICAL ECONOMY OF BUSTOP TV

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the political economy of Bustop TV, the comedy outlet under study. Focus is on the ownership structure, organisational objectives, mission statements, vision, core values, editorial policy, advertisers and the key talents. The chapter also focuses on the distribution and consumption of the produced media products.

 To counter the growing criticism from the people post 2000 the Zimbabwean government enacted laws to curtail civil and political liberties such as freedom of expression and information. Laws such as the Broadcasting Services Act (20010, Access to Information Protection of Privacy Act (2002) and the Public Order and Security Act meant to neutralise the public and private media as spaces of civic engagement and public debate. New information technologies thus brought about new counter-hegemonic spaces enhancing the people's right to communicate, (Moyo, 2011).

The rise in internet penetration and changing face of digital growth saw the rise of online televisions in Zimbabwe, (Mwenje, 2015). The internet penetration pattern thus presented

huge opportunities for media players to leverage the wider, targeted and cost optimal online channels to cater for the internet savvy Zimbabweans. This was also consequent of the deteriorating standards perpetuated by Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation's continued dominance over broadcasting leaving the Zimbabwean populace at the mercy of pay TV or DSTV for decent entertainment (Gambanga, 2016). Local producers faced challenges in the distribution of independently produced television content thus resorting to online distribution due to the contrast of their ideological thrust and that of ZBC. Thus internet provides a central distribution platform to cater for the rising online content consumption patterns.

4.2 ABOUT BUSTOP TV

Bustop TV was established in 2014 as P.O Box TV as a youth run Zimbabwean media house by three co-founders, Lucky Aaroni, Roland Lunga and Admire Kuzhangazhira. In 2015 two P.O Box co-founders broke away to form P.O Box Reloaded leaving Lucky Aaroni with the outfit. To avoid confusion, P.O Box rebranded into Bustop TV in 2016 and this saw new members joining the outfit, the likes of Sharon Chideu (Maggie), Samantha Kureya (Gonyeti) and later Prosper Ngomashi (Comic Pastor).

 The name Bustop TV is embedded in symbolism. Given the fact that the outfit in online, social media thus becomes the 'bustop' where different people from all walks of life converge, interacting and discussing about political and social issues. Most of Bustop TV productions touch on current and topical issues in society through humour and doses of laughter are aired as videos on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. They do not have a vision statement as a comedy outfit and neither does the founder seem to know its importance.

Bustop TV thus operates without formal organisational core values therefore lack a yardstick to measure their progression on organisational values and culture. On their Facebook page, Bustop TV mentions what they do on services; duration of which service is rendered and undisclosed amount for services sought. In 2015, the group P.O Box TV split due to disagreements on how to share proceeds realized from their social media platforms. Aaroni (2018) reiterated that there was lack co-ordination as some as some members would upload skits without consulting him as per the norm.

4.3 POLITICAL ECONOMY OF BUSTOP TV

Political economy is concerned with the ownership and control patterns of organisations and how capital interests influence the creation, production, distribution and consumption of the media texts. Wasko (2014) argues that political economy aims at understanding the power relations behind the production, distribution and consumption of resources. According to the classical political economy concept media are driven by the motives of profit generation and wealth creation and its ideologies are inclined to their capital interests. This concept can be used in the study of Bustop TV whose main objective is the generation of revenue through online viewership although they create content that is relevant to the socio economic and political needs of society

The advent of digital media due to new information technologies has brought changes in the production and distribution of media content, (Gwekerere, 2016). New digital spheres are highly interactive providing the media and audience with room for interaction thus a paradigm shift from a producing media and audiences to a 'pronsumeristic' media where both are consumers and producers. This facilitates the sharing of divergent ideas for the benefit of society as social media or online platforms provide more voices contributing in pertinent matters concerning political discourses and the socioeconomic aspects encountered in everyday life.

Golding and Murdock (1997) discuss the role of the media creation and distribution of symbolic and cultural resources such as identities, language and institutions of social life. Bustop TV packages and distributes content usually in vernacular (Shona) which identifies with a part of Zimbabwean society hence their ability to deliberate on expected norms and identities within the Zimbabwean society. The media are also major edifices in the economic and political fabric of society by providing advertising which connects the world of production to that of consumption. Bustop TV provides brand placements for corporates and non-governmental organisations and its members are characters in the commercial skits which are produced as advertisements. As argued by Golding and Murdock (1997) critical political economy is centered on the distributional consequences of cultural products and meaning-making. Bustop TV caters for online audiences in the virtual world where distance is not a barrier to interaction with media texts. The consequence is the involvement of the common person in the deliberations about the socioeconomic and political crisis in Zimbabwe which is not provided for by mainstream media.

This section of the study examines the power relations in the production, distribution and consumption of media texts by Bustop TV. Golding and Murdock (1997) posit that the mass media are industrial and commercial organisations which produce commodities for profit and this is evident in Bustop TV as they create, produce and distribute brand placements products on their digital platforms. The advertisement's ultimate goal is generation of income by the outfit and the companies involved under the guise of informing society. There is a danger that media content created by the comic outfit might be altered to perpetuate the ideologies of the commercial entities against the societal good. Golding and Murdock (1997) further argue that advertising is the principal economic base for both press and commercial television. For one to access Bustop TV videos on YouTube one first views a pop up advertisement after which one will have access to their intended video. The outfit thus benefits from the returns obtained from such video advertisements. Bustop TV also produces specific advertisements for corporate companies in form of skits hence advertisements are backbone of the media. Although the comic outfit delivers their popular messages to society their interaction with capital compromises their productions and their watchdog role in society.

Wasko (2014) argues that political economy identifies and condemns those who control media and communication resources. The relationship between media power and sites of power in society influences the notions of pluralism, free enterprise and competition. In Zimbabwe, government has control over media and media laws were enacted to regulate media as a business and social institution. Although Bustop TV is an online platform which doesn't need to register in terms of AIPPA (2002), their crew are resident in Zimbabwe and they are bound on exercise self-censorship to avoid skirmishes with authorities. An example is when Bustop TV crew were barred from covering ZANU PF Bindura rally as they stood accused by ZANU PF supporters of undermining the then first lady after the Afriforum skit.

During the socioeconomic and political crisis in Zimbabwe online comedy became the preferred media of communication due to its autonomy from government control. Mainstream television did not provide a discursive forum for deliberation of the socio economic and political issues because the issues in concern were critiquing government conduct and policies. Bustop TV is a privately owned online media establishment and being online does not fall under the restrictive media laws governing the operations of media in Zimbabwe especially in term of licensing which arm twist media organisations to follow the

dictates of its term to avoid loss of licence. Bustop TV sought to educate and entertain society on the socioeconomic and political issues in Zimbabwe and in so doing making profit in the process.

The aspect of political economy in this research is centered around the production and distribution of information focusing on the socio-economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe. power struggles between the publicly controlled mainstream media and online social media in owning the narratives on issues of power and governance are rampant. Although the government has little control over social media (online) platforms those pro-government took it upon them to act on behalf of and control the operations of the comic outfit. Online videos have a wider reach (distribution) including those around and outside Zimbabwe who converge in the virtual community thus appraising the world on what is obtaining in the country. The growing viewership base translates to economic gain for the comic outfit in terms of advertising and monetization. Although profit is realized by the outfit there is provision of discursive platforms for the subalterns hence the distribution and consumption of media and communication resources.

Funding is defined as any form of financial aid that is given by an external stakeholder. According to Aaroni (2018) members of the Bustop TV outfit had to fund their own operations before they started attracting revenue from the corporate world. The outfit now realises funds from brand placements and advertisements flighted by and on their social media platforms. Also, their channels on social media platforms have been monetized to increase their cash flows. Monetisation is a concept where an uploader (owner of the channel) authorises the presence of advertisements on their videos and YouTube charges advertisers for these and share the fees with the uploader based on views of videos. Most of its advertisers are non-governmental organisations, private companies, and human rights groups. Due to the sensitivity of its production changes in the political sphere might pose challenges on the operation and survival of the comic outfit and it is dependent on advertisers who also have their own interests to protect.

4.4 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF BUSTOP TV

Bustop TV as an outfit comprises of Lucky Aaroni, a trained filmmaker from the Zimbabwe Film and Television School of Southern Africa (ZIFTESSA). He is a founder and producer

and the outfits taps in his film and television production experience. He oversees the overall operations of the Harare based organisation. Silvia Makwindidza is in charge of marketing and administration with a background of media and public relations. Dereck Nzwiyakwi is the script writer responsible for crystalising the concepts into screenplay format due to his theatre background. The outfit's cast consists of Sharon Chideu (Maggie) with a film and television production expertise from ZIFTESSA, Samantha Kureya (Gonyeti), a screen actor and stand-up comedian and Prosper Ngomashi (Comic Pastor).Comic Pastor came to fame after the video *Shamhu* went viral on Whatsapp and Facebook in Zimbabwe in 2015. He is now part of the Bustop TV comic outfit as an actor.

4.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the organizational structure and political economy of Bustop TV where ownership and control, historical background, funding was discussed. The next chapter focuses on data analysis and presentation.

CHAPTER 5: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and analyses findings of the study. Data collected from the selected videos and comic skits by Bustop TV and Comic Pastor during the socioeconomic and political crisis in Zimbabwe during 2016-17 is presented and analysed. The findings on how comedy is an avenue of speaking truth to power are presented thematically.

5.1 SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER THROUGH COMEDY

The research found out that comedy has been used as an avenue of speaking truth to power as illustrated in some cases in a latent way where deeper reading of the skits is required within a Zimbabwean discursive context. These skits provided a platform for the subalterns to speak and laugh about the prevailing socioeconomic and political crisis in Zimbabwe. The

prevailing economic crisis has not been articulated enough in the mainstream media hence Bustop TV provided an alternative platform to discuss issues to do with unemployment (in *2,2 million jobs)*, economic regression(in *Mbudzi*) and the monetary policies obtaining in the country (*in Bond notes*).

Thus Bustop TV as an online media outlet has no 'sacred cows' when it comes to the deliberation of issues in Zimbabwe, for example, in the media it would not be spelt out that Mugabe is incapable of ruling because of his age. However, Bustop TV through their video *New Toy for Gonyeti* shows that the massage chair present was paradoxically were telling the world and Robert Mugabe that he was old and cannot work without the aid of a massage chair. They largely use the spoken words and gestures to provide a hook to their jokes.

Bustop TV exposes government policy failure and in a way attributes this as a cause of the suffering of the majority of Zimbabweans. Bustop TV tackles how politicians impose laws at the same time breaking the laws. For example, statutory instrument *64* of 2016 forbade the importation of certain commodities in Zimbabwe as a drive to support local industries. On his birthday, Robert Mugabe appeared on national television munching **Lays** potato crisps, a product of South Africa. In *New Toy for Gonyeti*, Bustop TV dramatizes Robert Mugabe's birthday celebrations where Gonyeti appears sitting on a high standing fancy chair decorated with balloons eating potato crisps. Bustop TV tries to show that even the President had no faith in the locally manufactured alternative crisps but would impose the ordinary Zimbabweans to consume them.

5.2 CORRUPTION, RENEGENCE TO POLITICAL PROMISE AND THE ECONOMIC CRISIS IN ZIMBABWE.

The research found out there are themes recurring in the comic videos by Bustop TV on the socioeconomic and political situation in Zimbabwe. Some of the themes are dominant and clear on the surface whilst some require a deeper reading.

Bustop TV goes at length at speaking about corruption as evident in *Pastor and his wives* through the portrayal of a pastor who squander church money for his personal benefit. Nye (1967:419) defines corruption as a behaviour which deviates from the normal duties of public roles because of private financial or status gains. This includes behaviours such as bribery nepotism and misappropriation of public resources for private use. Bureaucrats in Zimbabwe have turned public office into money generating machines (Tizor, 2009). Moyo (2014) argue

that the prevalence of corruption in Zimbabwe is a consequence of a lack of political will to address the problem due to the fact that the top political elite are perceived the primary beneficiaries of corruption as shown by the video.

 The research found that *Pastor and his wives* provide a voice through which speaks of their concerns over the conduct of the political elite. The skit metaphorically reflects on the discourses of entitlement where ZANU PF politicians claim they are liberators of the country hence they should enjoy the priviledges.

Comic Pastor says:

> ndakatambura zvikuru kuvaka church………(Maggie)… imagine ndaienda kugomo kunonamata ndisina ma cosmetics….inguva yedu yekufara (*l suffered for this church….imagine going to prayer mountains without my cosmetics…it is our time to enjoy the fruit of our prayers.*

According to a report in *The Standard* newspaper, Mphoko claims the house government bought him was too cheap and not fit for presidium status arguing he sacrificed his life in the liberation struggle hence he should enjoy comfort today. Through comedy, the common people can voice against such conducts and ridicule them hence speaking truth to power.

The findings of the research show how the powerful use the state through the repressive state apparatus to perpetuate their continued domination and exploitation of the weak, as alluded by Althuser's Repressive State Apparatus phenomenon. In *Pastors and his wives* the pastor says,

> ndipe fon yangu ndingoti one word kuti huyai mundibvisirewo vanhu ava

> *(give me my phone, all l need is one word to the police and they will come to disperse these people(demonstrators).*

This shows that transgression of the official discourse (which in this case was Mphoko's stay in the hotel) through demonstrations would be meted with heavy violence from the state since the state has monopoly over violence, (Weber, 1919).

The study found out that the unfulfilment to political promises might have culminated into the socio-economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe. During 2013 election manifesto launch, ZANU PF promised to create 2.2 million jobs and provide support to industries for the development of the country. The comedians employs inuendos and paradoxes in their comic works perhaps as a way of delivering their messages and at the same time protecting themselves against any form of reprisal. This is evident when asked to comment in *2.2 million jobs*, Comic pastor said;

> ma youth vakubika bronco vega ….basa rekugadzira maspike anoshandiswa nepolice ….uye mavendor azara pese mutown….ese mabasa iwayo akabva kuhurumende (*the youth are brewing their own illicit beer….spike manufacturing is now a booming industry… and these vendors you see everywhere in town…these are jobs created by government..*

Connotatively the comedian meant there was nothing done in terms of employment creation thereby translation to further economic deterioration and hardships for the Zimbabweans masses. Thus language has been used by the comedians so as to voice their concern.

5.3 DISCUSSIONS

In the comic skit *Mbudzi*, Comic Pastor speaks of how his niece had been given a goat to pay fees and two days later a duck was being demanded payment for stationery.

> takapa Shama mbudzi yake yekubhadhara fees… headmaster vazofona vachida dhadharema bhuku (*we gave Shama goat to pay fees ….the headmaster then called demanding a duck for books).*

This is manifestation of economic deterioration when the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, due to the liquidity crunch experienced in the country, instructed schools to accept non-monetary forms of payment as fees in the form of livestock.

Images are manipulated to tell a story. In *Bond notes*, Gonyeti and Maggie compete to use the toilet after hearing news about the introduction of a new currency. Panic is shown on the close-up shot on Maggie and Gonyeti as they ask Comic Pastor about bond notes. There is use on non-verbal communication; humour is displayed through body language, wide shots of an almost defecating big- bodied Gonyeti showing how the economic crisis could reduce people into mere savages. These issues under discussion are of sensitive nature but comedy manages to simplify and lighten them for discussion.

The age issue of President Mugabe is deliberated in *New Toy for Gonyeti*. A low angle shot of Gonyeti on a fancy rocking chair decorated by with balloons and in deep slumber is shown. The low angle shot produces a giant figure out of Gonyeti and the chair in question is high standing semiotically translating to the power wielded by Robert Mugabe as well as the value of the chair in question. It also symbolises the levels of political desperation where the whole cabinet us alleged to have converged to present the massage chair as a present. The massage chair concept can be analysed to translate that the cabinet was telling Robert Mugabe that he was unfit to rule due to his age. Thus findings of the research suggest Bustop TV as an alternative sphere where discourses interact.

It should be noted that comedy can be used as therapy where even the weak and oppressed can use it to reflect on their own weaknesses and how they have allowed their continued domination by the politically and economically powerful. Close up shots of confused-looking demonstrators holding placards are used. Willems (2010) alludes that comedy is an everyday from of resistance and a coping mechanism evident in Bustop TV comic skits where ordinary Zimbabweans laugh at themselves. In the Afriforum video participants of the march have no idea why they are marching and they carry placard they have no idea about what they mean. They would denounce the Afriforum but asked on what it was one participant claimed it had something to do with Gutu youths.

5.4 BROADENING THE PUBLIC SPHERE THROUGH COMEDY?

Findings of the research show that digital platforms such as YouTube give account holders monopoly and control over their own accounts. Bustop TV, through their online channel controls the narrative on what to discuss and who initiates the discussions on their digital platforms. It is arguable that the comic outfit's content is designed to meet the information demands of society autonomous from economic and political forces. Findings of the study

suggest that their content is inspired by happenings in the social, economic and political environment in Zimbabwe thus Bustop TV has the power to tell their own story according to their own perspective. Media content from Bustop TV is free from the gate keeping processes dominant in the mainstream media thus democratisation of the public sphere.

On the contrary, no media text is innocent; it reflects the influence of the political and economic forces behind its creation and distribution. Findings of the study show that most if not all advertisers on Bustop TV are civic organisations, non-governmental organisations and human rights groups. One thus can argue that Bustop TV follow the ideological beliefs of its advertisers whose relationship with the government are adversarial. Their critical stance against government and its policies might not be influenced by the need to serve the society but a survival tactic to scratch the back of their advertisers since advertisements are the life line of any media organisation.

Bustop TV's comic skits are dominated by discourses of corruption, bad governance, economic regression which are not prevalent in mainstream media. Being on the virtual sphere Bustop TV and their audiences enjoys limited barriers of entry such as free entry and free exit thus one only need to log on to Facebook or YouTube to distribute and access the content respectively. However findings of the study also reveal that the comic outfit as demanded by YouTube policy has monopoly or autonomous control over what is posted on their social media platforms hence the audience cannot lead the discussions but follow their agenda thus narrowing the public sphere.

Due to the prevailing economic conditions in Zimbabwe there exists an information divide between the haves and the have nots, the urban and the rural folk. The cost of data in Zimbabwe is beyond the reach of many thus prohibiting every Zimbabwean and 'netizen' to partake in the discussions thus the public sphere is narrowed. Moreso, most of the rural folk despite possession of the technological devices to access the online platforms power (lack of electricity) prohibits them from following the narrative due to the high demand for power by the smart phones.

The study identifies technological development and lack thereof as factors influencing the expansion and shrinking of the public sphere through comedy. Mainstream media in Zimbabwe have a defined distribution channel which can be used alternatively in every part of the country. The mediums of disseminating mainstream media products (newspaper,

television and radio sets) are readily available and affordable as compared to that of online media (new information devices such as laptops and smart phones. Having these devices is not enough , there is need for internet connection unlike for mainstream media where one can only need an aerial for broadcast yet for online one needs data or WiFi. One can argue that due to the rise of information communication technologies in Zimbabwe a public sphere through comedy is broadened. On the other hand, lack of access to the internet and the high cost of data and devices such as laptops in the prevailing economic condition shrink the public sphere.

As founded by the study, Bustop TV's advertisers are mostly civic organisations, human rights organisations, non-governmental organisations and private companies. Their productions are mainly centred on the operations of government of government in the socioeconomic and political sphere. Ideally in a public sphere the voice of government should be heard but the study found out that government is silenced in Bustop TV. One can thus argue that their critical stance against the government and ZANU PF is highly likely to be a manifestation of the influence advertisers on the creation, production, distribution and consumption of media texts. This resonates with the theoretical framework of the political economy of the media where according to Herman and Chomsky (1988) advertisers have become the later day licensing authorities of the media.

Comedy through the use of inuendos and figurative speech guarantees freedom of speech and expression without reprisal hence one can freely express themselves without fear. The study found out that the inuendos were used and meaning making was left in the hands of the audience based primarily on how vested the audience were on the socioeconomic and political issues in question. The comic outfit makes reference to Vice President Mphoko's stay at the hotel on government expense in *Pastor and his wives* but without further implicating themselves but leaving the audience to make their own deductions. With reference to the high unemployment situation in Zimbabwe only individuals privy to the economic environment would understand the pot hole filling, spike manufacturing and bronco brewing mentioned in 2,2 million jobs. Thus comedy has been used to speak truth to power and also a platform where a public sphere can be attainable.

Bustop TV employs the "Aesthetics of the Carnivulgarity" in their speaking truth to power. They use humour, the grotesque and obscene when articulating on the socioeconomic issues as was in the Bhaktian carnivalisque and Mbembe's aesthetics of vulgarity. They make use of

the vulgar words like *mamad* (which rhymes with murmured) which means to defecate in reference to the continued suffering of the Zimbabwean people in *Pastor and his wife*. They also use the word *mboko* a Shona word which literary means moron to both refer to the masses (demonstrators) and the Vice President in *Pastor and his wives*. Mbembe argues that there was abuse of official language where there is separation of words and phrases from their conventional meanings using them in another sense. Bustop TV refers to vice President Mphoko as Vice President Mboko as he would be called by some non-Ndebele speaking people (innocently) and those ridiculing his appointment to the presidium.

The research found that comedy is contextualised, meaning that those privy to the socioeconomic and political happenings obtaining in Zimbabwe are able to get the intended reading meant by the comedian. The studies focuses on an online media outlet whose audiences might not be Zimbabweans but are on the virtual sphere hence they might not understand what the comedians are trying to put across. This means that there is segregation of other non-Zimbabweans on the virtual sphere hence the public sphere concept is threatened. For instance, only those with the 2008 hyper-inflation background are able to understand the comic skit *Bond notes*. Findings of the research reveal how language can be considered as a factor influencing the broadening or narrowing of a public sphere through comedy. Bustop TV outfit uses Shona in their skits hence caters for those who understand thus excluding all other members of society threatening the attainment of the public sphere.

Bustop TV has managed to highlight the socioeconomic and political crisis in the country but in a subtle and not so direct way. Sarcasm is employed and deeper reading of the text is required for understanding the issues at hand. In *New toy for Gonyeti* sarcasm is used with reference to President Robert Mugabe's overseas medical treatment trips where Comic Pastor ne advises Gonyeti against eating too much of *Lays* or she will end up in Singapore (President Mugabe left the country for Singapore a day after his birthday celebration in 2017). In Bond notes, Comic Pastor says;

> ndakatonzwa kuti vamwe vaitsvaga nzvimbo vakanzi vakasauya nehanga havaiwani (*we hear some parents looking for vacancies for their children were told to bring gunea fowls as payment).*

The study also shows how signs have been used in conveying messages on the socioeconomic and political issues in Zimbabwe. The video *New toy for Gonyeti* is laden

with meaning. A sleeping Gonyeti, sitted on a high elevated chair decorated with balloons at a party, in *New Toy for Gonyeti* symbolises how Robert Mugabe had become a sleeping president with reports claiming he would sleep even in meetings. Due to his age, at one point he denounced his own party whilst doing the party slogan symbolised by how Gonyeti wakes an open palm when waking up (which is synonymous with the opposition MDC party) and quickly clinches her fist (ZANU PF symbols). The *Lays* potato crisps represent the President's desire for foreign things; he goes to his annual leave and medical treatment in Asia. They are also symbolic to power, how Mugabe although as weak and old he still would not want to relinquish power symbolised by his tight grip on the packet despite the fact that he is in deep slumber and smiling upon realising he still had hold of it (he was still in charge). In *2,2 million jobs* a wide shot of an non active garment factory is used to portray the economic failure in the country.

5.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter analysed findings extracted from the analysis of videos from archives of YouTube using critical discourse analysis and thematic analysis. The findings were influenced greatly by the use of the virtual sphere and the encoding and decoding meaning making process. Thematic analysis was used to unpack the meanings derived from the videos by Bustop TV in the socioeconomic and political crisis in Zimbabwe. The next chapter concludes and makes recommendations.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter concludes the research and proposes recommendation for future studies.

6.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Comedy was used as an arena for deliberations on the prevailing crisis in the country. Bustop TV used comedy to challenge authority, as a copying mechanism for the oppressed and also as a reflective platform for self-introspection by the masses. Language and images were manipulated to provide the hooks for the comic skits and videos by Bustop TV and Comic Pastor. This study appreciates that previous studies indeed focused on form of resistance which comedy is a part of. However, it seeks to explore how online media – comedy could be used where mainstream media had not yielded the desired results.

Findings of the study show that comedy has been used as an avenue of speaking truth to power with regards to sensitive issues. It worked as an alternative public sphere free from direct control of those in power as well as providing therapy to the masses through laughter as well as lightening the deep economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe.

Failure by the ZANU PF government to fulfil its election promises as well as policy inconsistency is among several factors leading to economic deterioration in the country. The mainstream media has been made inaccessible to the ordinary people by the economically and politically powerful thus leading to the use of comedy (online) as an alternative public sphere.

The study noted that comedy tried to broaden the public sphere in Zimbabwe. Although the comic outfit was free from government influence there are other forces, the study found that the interaction between the comic outfit and market forces had a potential of threatening media autonomy from any external forces thus bearing an effect on the media content. It should not go without mention that unlike mainstream media, social online media was without government control hence media freedom to perform its watchdog role in society. It is in this light that the concept of comedy as an avenue of speaking truth to power was discussed.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The study focused on comedy, on online media platform, as an empowerment to the subalterns to confront the ruling elite on socioeconomic and political issues in Zimbabwe. The comic outfit under study used vernacular (Shona) which excludes other Zimbabwean non-Shona speaking as well as other citizens of the virtual sphere thus threatening the

attainment of a public sphere. It is recommended that online television networks make use of English which is universal so as to include everyone in the discussions hence broadening in the public sphere.

Social media is an evolving phenomenon hence there is need for research on the use of popular culture in power contestations between the dominant classes of society and the oppressed. This will go a long way in contributing in the existing knowledge on how online media should be embraced for societal good.

6.3 AREAS FOR FUTURE STUDY

Future studies should explore how rationale can be achieved through interaction on social media platforms.

6.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter summarised findings of the study and made recommendations for future study.

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APPENDICES