Audience interpretation of the representation of violence and gangsterism in South African television, a case study of *Uzalo*

By

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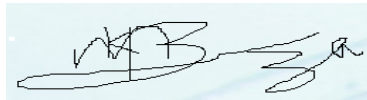
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DECLARATION – PLAGIARISM

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ABSTRACT

Uzalo: Blood is Forever was launched in 2015 and by the end of September 2018 *Uzalo* became the most popular South African television production with 10.2 million viewers each night. *Uzalo*'s narrative is largely driven by gangsterism and as such relies on violence and crime to achieve its objective. A unique achievement of *Uzalo* is its portrayal of a gangster in a township setting on prime-time television, this study explores how this is not mutually exclusive from its dominance of television viewer ratings. This study was, therefore, conducted to ascertain why violent stories are popular with audiences and how the portrayal of violence, through *Uzalo*'s characters, resonates with its viewers in the township of KwaMashu and central Durban. Furthermore, the study investigates the audience's interpretation of how accurate *Uzalo* is in its depiction of the township setting. *Uzalo* is considered to belong to the telenovela genre. This study outlined the construct of that genre but also drew on comparisons from outside the genre, both locally and internationally. A qualitative research methodology was adopted and data was collected through four focus groups, two in KwaMashu and two in central Durban. Thematic analysis organises the data which is then interpreted through the lens of narrative theory and the concepts related to 'the active audience'. The study found that *Uzalo* is premised on binary oppositions which are expressed through the inner conflict of its characters who constantly grapple with the moral boundaries of good and bad. These individual accounts play out under the broader disequilibrium of two babies being swapped at birth and nurtured in obverse circumstances to their nature. Furthermore, this study considered whether the audience perceives the depicted violence as realistic or unrealistic and also highlighted similarities and differences of the audiences' perception of violence in a township setting. These interpretations were varied and found to be informed by the audience's location (township and/or CBD) and experience (cultural beliefs, age and past experiences).

Keywords: South African television, KwaMashu, township, gangster, *Uzalo: Blood is Forever*

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CBD – Central Business District

CCMS – Centre for Communication, Media and Society

EE – Entertainment Education

INK – Inanda, Ntuzuma and KwaMashu

KZN – KwaZulu-Natal

SABC – South African Broadcasting Corporation

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

South African television has seen a pragmatic shift in broadcast content, particularly in terms of genre choice within the isiZulu language. Prior to democratic dispensation in 1994, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) focused on drama and comedy programmes such as *Kwakhala Nyonini, Ifa lakwaMthethwa* and *Sgudi Snaysi*. However, the post-apartheid era has seen a whirlwind of change in television programming and it has propelled the growth of the local telenovela genre on most television platforms, including SABC 1, eTV and DStv (Mzansi Magic). In the SABC's 1994 *Annual Report,* the erstwhile chairperson, Dr Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri, indicated that the SABC "commits itself to increasing South African drama productions" (*SABC Annual Report*, 1994: 7; Tager, 1997). In promotion of more local content on all SABC platforms (radio and television), the former SABC Chief Operations Officer (COO) Hlaudi Motsoeneng (2016) said to stakeholders at The Playhouse, in Durban, "I stand here very proud about the success of *Uzalo*, this is my project that I first commissioned as a pilot but today it is competing with the best".

Uzalo: Blood is Forever, is an SABC 1 telenovela that was first broadcast in February 2015 and is in its third season, it airs Mondays – Fridays at the lucrative 20:30 to 21:00 time slots. *Uzalo* is premised on two rival families, the Xulus, led by gangster Muzi Xulu, known as Gxabhashe (played by Mpumelelo Bhulose) and the Mdletshes, led by a pastor Melusi Mdletshe (played by Bheki Mkhwane). Although the second season saw the households being headed by their respective matriarchs, most of the discussion in this study centres on season one, where the focus is on gangsterism with Gxabhashe as the key gangster. *Uzalo* is filmed in KwaMashu, a township in Durban notorious for car hijackings, taxi violence and political killings (CrimeStats, 2016). As such, much of the narrative is depicted through violent characters and scenes. In a country riddled with violence, one may think that people would not want to watch it on their screens, however, since the inception of *Generations* in 1994, no other television programme has ever eclipsed it until the arrival of *Uzalo*. In June 2017, *Uzalo* had 9.1 million viewers each night (Ferreira, 2017). The burning question that prompted this research is how and why audiences residing in KwaMashu and the larger Durban area relate to these violent images and narratives enough to encourage them to keep watching *Uzalo*.

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This study focuses on an audience's reception to the violence presented in the *Uzalo.* The study is interested in the theme of violence, as portrayed through gangsterism, and the ways in which the audience interprets these themes. It is hoped that a close examination of *Uzalo* will reveal insights into the mediation of violence in contemporary South African television and the audience's interpretation of such.

Purpose of the study

In the context of South African television, *Uzalo* has done something rare by popularising a township setting in a primetime programme. The setting in any telenovela, including *Uzalo,* may lead audiences to identify with characters as the sense of reality and fiction interact, blurring lived times and narrated times (Tufte, 2003; and De Lopes, 2009). This may be especially true for the residents in KwaMashu who share a close proximity to the setting in which the narrative is shot.

This study investigates how residents of KwaMashu and those who reside outside of it, particularly in Durban Central Business District (CBD), interpret crime/violence in *Uzalo* and the reasons for their particular interpretation. The purpose of these two groups, is to set up a comparison between the people in KwaMashu and those beyond it; seeking similarities and differences in their reading of the violence portrayed.

A common theme of films that locate black people and masculinity within a township is the representation of gang cultures, usually within the gangster genre (Glaser, 1998). In reality, the violence in KwaMashu emanates from a range of socio-economic factors which are aggravated by divisive politics. Furthermore, the hostels in KwaMashu are synonymous with violence, as are the taxi businesses whose turf wars are notoriously brutal affairs. In 2018, one hundred and twenty-eight people were killed, 1015 drug related cases were opened and 103 car hijacking cases were reported in KwaMashu (CrimeStats, 2018). Thus, the ways in which violence and gangsterism are interpreted by contemporary television audiences is a pertinent issue of investigation, making *Uzalo* a prime case study.

The objective of this study is to provide an insight into what *Uzalo* reveals about the reception of violence in contemporary South African television and audience interpretation of such. This is achievable by exploring:

- How violence is represented (driven by the character of gangsters) in South African television, with *Uzalo* as case study. This will be established in this study via literature review. Previous studies will be reviewed in order to compare (South African) television and film narratives that include violence through gangsterism.
    - In what ways can *Uzalo* be considered a i) telenovela and or ii) soap opera and / or a gangster genre?
    - How has 'the township' been portrayed?
- The audience's interpretation of the representation of violence and gangsterism in *Uzalo* by both residents and non-residents of KwaMashu.
- The similarities and differences of these interpretations as influenced by residential context.

The study seeks to address the aforementioned objectives through the use of theories and analytical strategies that are included in narratology (Propp, 1968; Newcomb, 2004; Bal, 1997; Kozloff, 2000; Levi-Strauss, 1963; 1967) and active audience studies (Ang, 1985; 1991; Barker, 2000; Geraghty, 1991a/b; Hall, 1980; Morley, 1992; Nightingale, 2004, Tager 1997; 2010).

Background and location of the study

The opening sequence is indicative of the narrative's background and premise. It depicts one little boy, followed by footsteps and then an older boy, intercut by red and grey visuals and accompanied by voices singing "amany'amadoda ayaphumelela, amany'amadoda awaphumeleli," which means that some men are prosperous and successful whilst others are not. *Uzalo's* name is written in red with a font stylised to emulate blood which reinforces *Uzalo's* slogan; *blood is forever.* SABC 1 describes *Uzalo* as a provocative, bold and authentic narrative that tells a story of two family dynasties, Xulu and Mdletshe, with two young men who carry their family hopes and legacies (SABC 1, 2015). The *Uzalo* storyline commences with two new born baby boys accidentally being switched at Queen Anne hospital in February 1990 (Ferreira, 2015; Zuma-Ncube, 2015).

Uzalo has been labelled both a telenovela and soap opera: both telenovelas and soap operas are serial melodramatic genres pitched to popular audiences and in both motions provide the basis of the spectacle (Acosta-Alzuru, 2008). *Uzalo* is built on the basis of intrigue, whereby the audience observes the odyssey and challenges that are manifested through conflict in family,

money, love and dynasty (Martinez, 2010). Nevertheless, there are important differences between telenovelas and soap operas (Acosta-Alzuru, 2008). Soap operas never end but telenovelas mainly rely on ratings for their life span. In essence, telenovelas have about 120 episodes, making it longer than a series which have 15 episodes and shorter than a soap opera as it is not limited to episodes (Mkhwanazi, 2015; Adalian, 2015). *Uzalo* has both characteristics. Ultimately over the course of time, *Uzalo* can be described primarily as a telenovela because of its limited number of episodes, at this juncture it is in its third season and usually soap operas do work within the format of seasons (Mkhwanazi, 2015). The term 'telenovela' is thus preferred in this study, but the above explanation was added in order to explain why other sources may refer to the telenovela as soap opera.

Uzalo is produced by Stained Glass Productions and was conceptualised by Gugu Zuma-Ncube, producer Dr Duma KaNdlovu and Pepsi Pokane who identified a gap for a Nguni-language telenovela. Previous interviews have been conducted with the *Uzalo* producers and crew, within the broader research project, "Representing and consuming the local: Exploring the production and reception of *Uzalo,* KwaMashu" led by Dr. Lauren Dyll, Prof. Ruth Teer-Tomaselli and Dr Gibson from The Centre for Communication, Media and Society (CCMS) This Masters study is part of this wider project.

Uzalo Executive Producer, Mmamitse Thibedi (interview, 26 Aug 2015), explains that KwaMashu, as a developing township, makes for an attractive television production and it is "one of the bigger townships and that's why we chose to set it in KwaMashu and also KwaMashu is more accessible in terms of geographically with the industry, where we set up the studio and where we set up our exterior locations are within a very close range". Many of these interviews reveal that the producers and crew believe KwaMashu itself to be a character within *Uzalo* and that it is specificity woven into the story, making it unique. They describe KwaMashu as a vibrant and diverse geographic community, with very poor people as well as much wealthier people all living in one township and acknowledge it for "being famous as one of the most violent townships at some point. [Stained Glass Productions] try to take it to that level where crime…the way we tell it and portray it, we go all out so that it's real. We have an audience and we need to take them through a journey" (Shaft Morapane; interview, 26 August 2015).

As the study focuses on issues of audience reception and identification, it was of utmost importance to sample participants both from within KwaMashu where the narrative is set, and from the greater Durban area which often features in *Uzalo*. The responses from both participants will be compared so that differences and similarities are established. The locality of *Uzalo* within KwaZulu-Natal allows for an exploration of "local or regional issues and problems located in recognisable 'real' places" (Barker, 1999: 54).

KwaMashu has been grouped with its neighbouring townships Inanda and Ntuzuma, together they are referred to as INK (Inanda, Ntuzuma and KwaMashu) by the eThekwini Municipality. Collectively, the INK area is home to approximately 500 000 people. According to Census (2011), the population of KwaMashu is estimated to 175 663. Stained Glass Productions has converted a massive warehouse in the Riverhorse Valley precinct (north of Durban) into a studio and set – much of which is based on actual properties in KwaMashu, like the church and pastor's home.

KwaMashu, located 20kms north of Durban CBD, is one of the first of Durban's townships to emerge as a result of implementation of the controversial Group Areas Act in early 1950s. The Group Areas Act was a legal system used by the apartheid government to separate Indians, Coloureds and Africans who collectively lived in areas such as Sophiatown (Johannesburg), Cator Manor (Durban), District Six (Cape Town). KwaMashu was originally created in 1958 through the forced removals of African people from Cator Manor (Mkhumbane) and became the first township in Durban. The system left hundreds of people displaced upon its implementation. However, this is how KwaMashu was born. Marshall Campbell, the sugar magnate, had a name the Zulus found difficult to pronounce so they reduced it to *'Mashu'*, hence *Kwa Mashu*, the place of Marshall (Gibson, 2018). The early settlement developed into a township in 1958 – the land was originally owned by abasemaQadini (the Qadi clan). The township gained notoriety due to "*gangsterism*" – hence the nickname *eSinqawunqawini* – the dog that eats other dogs.

Today KwaMashu is a popular venue for township tours and shebeen crawls. The housing types found in the township range from the originally built red brick two-roomed and four-roomed houses. The two-roomed houses are mainly found in Sections B, C and J. Then there are double four-roomed (mainly section E&F) and doubled two- roomed mainly in L-Section. However, with residents earning extra income, most houses have been developed into five to six roomed

houses – some with quality face-bricks. During the late 1970s – a new set of rich housing development took place – mainly in Section D – with mansion-type houses. At the Presidential Job Summit in 1999, KwaMashu Township, due to its history, high rate of unemployment and crime was identified for the Presidential Urban Renewal Strategy Programme – focusing on building more infrastructure and functional policing for proper security (K-Cap, 2017).

The KwaMashu Community Advancement Projects (K-CAP), founded in 1993 by Edmund Mhlongo, has built its own Ekhaya Multi Arts Centre that includes a computer lab (with Internet), music recording studio, theatre facilities, dance studio, workshop space, a video editing multi-media suite and a community radio VIBE FM facilities. Furthermore, the role of this organisation is to produce theatrical productions and implement arts training programmes that benefit young local people (K-Cap, 2017).

As this study explores the mediation of violence with *Uzalo* as its case study, it is important to present a brief discussion of possible sources or causalities of crimes that are presently known. Crime in KwaMashu severely affects the poor residents while the middle-class living within KwaMashu have means to protect themselves and their properties (Moller *et al*. 1978). Moller *et al.* (1978) points out that senior residents of KwaMashu considered crime as less problematic before 1977. Nonetheless, Development Research Africa ((DRA, (1997)) cited in Susanna Godehart (2006) 20 years later, indicated that crime in KwaMashu is a greater concern than political violence. Godehart (2006: 176) stipulates that all her "respondents' link incidents of crime closely to the hostel units". However, crime is not only limited to the KwaMashu hostel blocks and criminal elements are a concern in various sections (Godehart, 2006). It is also important to point out that the focus of this study is not on the KwaMashu hostel blocks or the crime perpetrated by hostel residents. It is more concerned with how KwaMashu audiences view *Uzalo's* representation of crime in KwaMashu and this interest is extended to audiences in the Durban CBD area. Certainly, whenever the issue of crime arises, the policing issue will also arise as means to prevent and/or mediate crime. The type of crimes highlighted were armed robbery, theft, burglary and murder. Godehart also discovered that the police only patrol the road within hostel units/blocks and "do not dare penetrate the super blocks" (2006: 176). This point only relates to section A in KwaMashu where hostels are located. There are types of crimes that take place in KwaMashu that are politically motivated, but for the purpose of this study the focus is mainly on crimes committed in the *Uzalo* text, such as car hijacking, drugs, and (recently in season 3); ATM bombings.

Figure 1.1**: Map showing the location of KwaMashu in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal**

Source: Google map (2016)

The North Central Council's (1998) post-1994 vision for KwaMashu was that:

> By the year 2015 [it] will be a thriving and attractive suburb with all economic classes complementing the vibrancy and richness of the area. It will be a clean and safe environment with all residents living in acceptable serviced housing within a generally good quality of life that is sustainable. Employment opportunities will be provided both in areas outside KwaMashu and within KwaMashu itself. Public transport facilities will be fast, clean and safe. There will be tolerance, forbearance, and a high level of local development orientation and pride (North Central Local Council 1998:24 in Godehart, 2006).

While KwaMashu has not achieved all of the above-mentioned goals, there have been successful efforts to do so. If one agrees with the logic that shopping malls function as a sign of status, growth and modernity (Crawford, 1992), this vision has arguably begun to be achieved. Bridge City is a two-storey shopping centre built on top of the PRASA train station; the main entrance is via a partially open food court and escalators lead from the street to the upper retail level where shops such as Shoprite are located. A hospital which is due to be completed within 3 years is in a walking distance (Capital land, 2017). Bridge City is not the only shopping centre in KwaMashu, there are others such as the Station that can be reached through public transport and both centres have train transportation facilities. Furthermore, Big

Box Park, developed by Durban entrepreneur and property investor Murray Clark, is home to more than 30 local entrepreneurs who showcase their talents in a unique format of recycled shipping containers empowering small business (*ECR Newswatch*, 2016).

(King Shaft Morapane, interview, 26 Aug 2015). In response to how the production considers the reality of township life, Props Master Evan Masson (interview, 15 Sept 2015) explains that:

> It is very much considered, because it is purely a Zulu township from the cultural side of things if I'm doing props I have to have the props spot on, especially if I'm doing ceremonial stuff. You are reminded of how deep the Zulu culture is because even amongst Zulu people they will debate about something. I'll ask a question and they will argue about what the right way to go is. The point is that we have to get it really correct… it's like [KwaMashu residents] were the litmus test. If you get it right amongst the people of KwaMashu then we're getting it right.

Therefore, beyond the consideration that is given to the aesthetics of township life, another integral aspect to *Uzalo's* uniqueness as a South African production is its focus on the Zulu culture. *Uzalo* Executive Producer, Duma Ndlovu (interview, 26 Aug 2015) attests to the veracity of Zulu culture in *Uzalo's* representations, and he notes that compared to other television shows it is an aesthetic difference more than a physical difference:

> *Isibaya* is based on taxi violence based on KZN and the rest of the series covers all the other things. *Uzalo* is based in KZN, nothing else, so we find ourselves having to talk about how a child is raised from a Zulu perspective. So, let me give you good example, I'm sure there have been a number of deaths in *Isibaya*, and the funeral will be a South African township funeral, we had a funeral in *Uzalo* and it was a Zulu funeral and few people had ever seen a Zulu funeral. Because we are losing those things, even Zulus themselves were seeing a Zulu funeral for the first time. And that's because in terms of the thrust, it comes from a different source altogether. I know the *Isibaya* team, I am familiar with them they are my friends but in terms of just articulating a particular identity, I think we will have more of an advantage here because we are rooted in this culture.

This Zulu township setting is thus something that has been credited for increasing *Uzalo's* popularity. *Uzalo* has done something rare in South African television by putting a township setting in primetime programme. Primetime shows mainly present locations that relate to the working class (Mnisi, 2016). Embedded in this setting is violence, which will be explored in this study.

Rationale for the study

Audiences are key to understanding the consumption patterns of any media text and Virginia Nightingale (1996) stipulates that, "any theory about the media is incomplete if it does not take audience into account". The creation of *Uzalo* and its success, in terms of ratings, has led to a variety of questions regarding violence and gangsterism on television as well as the audience's interpretation of such. Zuma-Ncube (2015) explains the creation of *Uzalo* by asking key questions with regards to gangsterism and identification. "We have got a gangster and a priest raising each other's sons after the hospital mistakenly switches them at birth." Furthermore, the debate of nature vs nurture informs part of the study because they are pertinent questions within the context of identity and are a starting point for this study's interest. This leads to questions around representation, identity construction vis-à-vis and interpretation from a cultural perspective (Tomaselli, 2012).

In her study of *Yizo Yizo,* Rene Smith's (2001: 25) statement that "there is very little research in South Africa that deals with the triad: youth, television and violence," supports the need for this study. Although *Uzalo* is not purposively designed to address youth with pro-social messages, as *Yizo Yizo* did, it does add to the body of knowledge with an audience's reception of television violence as portrayed through gangsterism. The element of youth is included in this study as it is reported that youth may be considered *Uzalo's* primary audience. *Uzalo's* language and cultural advisor, Themba Zuma (interview, 28 Aug 2015), highlights the relationship between youth as the primary audience and the representation of violence on *Uzalo:*

> [T]he show has a lot of youth individuals and for the story to have so many youth – and these youth also live in different lifestyle and backgrounds in the story. So I would say it is definitely the youth because we are trying to inspire the youth a lot more. People would think that we are promoting…the gangsters and all that, but that is not what we are doing. Yes we are saying these things that are happening in our space. We are not going to shy away.

Executive Producer, Duma Ndlovu (interview, 26 Aug 2015) is less prescriptive in his idea of the *Uzalo* audience but does acknowledge that it was initially thought that youth are central:

> Well you know the young people I work with have projected that they are the image of *Uzalo*. My argument again is that we don't have enough TV shows to segment things that we do…. So, for instance you put a show at a certain time slot, be *it Rhythm City* or *Skeem Saam* or whatever it is; 30-40 percent of the audience is not going to be your target because people

singularly sit down and watch TV, we don't have 500 channels, we don't have homes with six TV sets. So, you end up everybody watching at the same time and that is my thrust… "I talk to everybody" I don't segment my audiences. I think with *Uzalo*, it has been proven that you cannot segment and target the youth. It is meant for the young people and I argue that I don't think we can do that, it has just kind of dragged everybody.

In response to the large audience appeal across different ages, this study includes but is not limited to youth and thus extends the understanding of the reception of violence as read by a more inclusive sample, as will be explained in the following section.

Theoretical Framework

This study seeks to address its objectives through the use of theories and analytical strategies that are included in representation (Hall, 1980; Barthes, 1975; particularly narratology (Propp, 1968; Newcomb, 2004; Bal, 1997; Kozloff, 2000; Levi-Strauss, 1963) and audience studies (Nightingale, 2004 and Morley 1992). Narratology is used in developing the research questions and concomitant interview questions as one of the ways in which the study will investigate violence with the "gangster" figure as a point of analysis. The Active Audience Theory is also influential in the research questions as the study seeks to investigate the ways in which violence is interpreted. In addition, the Active Audience Theory is the primary theory that influences the methodology that utilised focus groups and the way in which the data will be analysed. The reception analysis will be conducted via a comparative thematic analysis to elaborate upon the ways in which members from each of the different sample groups negotiate (Hall, 1980) the readings of violence.

"It is possible to conceive of television as a contested terrain in which struggles over symbolic representation takes place" (Porto, 2011: 4). Howarth (2016), is of the view that representation in television can be used to defend and sustain a particular reality. This makes representation theory a suitable theoretical lens that is useful in both guiding the study and analysing the findings of two distinct groups. The study investigates the way in which people in KwaMashu and those living in the greater Durban area read the representation of violence in *Uzalo*. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of these two different groups is to set up a comparison between the people in KwaMashu and those outside of it; seeking similarities and differences. The relevance of including two different groups is based on Lewis's (1994: 25) explanation that in

representation "meanings become a battle ground between and among folk cultures, class subcultures, ethnic cultures and national cultures; different communications media and the sign is no longer inscribed fixed within cultural borders" (Lewis, 1994: 25). The study thus assumes that the readings of *Uzalo* may differ according geographic locations.

Both genre studies and narrative are theories that fall within the broader ambit of representation theory (Hall, 1980; and Neale, 2002). This study makes use of both. Genre will be included in Chapter Two as part of the study's literature with which to discuss findings in terms of gangsterism, violence and television. As such, the codes and conventions of the gangster genre will be established in the Literature Review chapter. Narratology will also be drawn on in the analysis but will be presented in Chapter Three as it functions as a theoretical guide.

Narratology

A narrative is deliberately constructed in the encoding process (Hall 1980) by scriptwriters, producers and directors. This dissertation does not examine the encoding process but it uses narrative theory in order to make sense of the responses to the narrative *of Uzalo* by its audience. Levi-Straus's concept of binary oppositions is being mobilized here in investigating, from the audience, the way in which they decode and interpret these two families and what they symbolize, whereby narrative theory will be used to assess the interpretation of the functionality of characters. Propp (1968) was of the view that the "Hero" seeks something and the "Villain" opposes the hero. In *Uzalo,* Gxabhashe (the gangster and head of one family) is set to oppose Mdletshe (the Pastor and head of the other 'rival' family) and conversely Mdletshe's values conflict with the very notion of gangsterism. These counterpoints filter down through each of the families' dynamics and the families themselves are bound together not only by the harmonic magnetism of good vs evil but also the blood of each-others sons.

"A particular genre follows an expected structure of narrative or sequence of action, draw on a predictable stock of images and have a repertoire of variants of basic themes" (McQuail, 2005: 370). Narratology is based on the work of theorists such as Vladimir Propp (1968), Tvetzen Todorov (1969), Claude Levi-Strauss (1967) and Roland Barthes (1977). This study makes particular use of the work done and inspired by Propp (1968) and Claude Levi-Strauss (1967).

Active Audience

Active audience theory is used in this study to better understand *Uzalo* audience readings. Through the use of the concept of the active audience, the study investigates how audiences interpret the representation of violence and crime, particularly with regards to gangsterism. Audience reception serves as a convenient arena within which to explore a series of critical theoretical problems regarding the relations among texts, ideology and social determinations (Livingstone, 1998: 7). Audience watching patterns do not reveal that more watching is equivalent to the acceptance of the text's messages (Ruddock, 2011). Some audiences may watch certain shows due to popularity, watch once and never watch again.

The active audience theory is a reaction to other earlier audience theories that are known as effects models (Berelson, 1959; Katz; 1960; Katz et al, 1977; Key 1961). Effects models focused on how audiences reacted to, or were affected by, the film or media text and viewed audiences as the same idealised, homogenous spectator who reacted to the message the same way regardless of their race, gender, culture or any other different factors that existed among them. On the other-hand, the active audience concept accounts for the multiple ways in which the audience may interpret television as they decode these messages in varying ways according to their own socio-cultural frames of reference. This accounts for the polysemic nature of audience interpretation of texts (Hall, 1980), and the importance of the inclusion of four distinct focus groups in this study.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative methodological approach to collect and analyse data. This is "an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2014: 4). Moreover, qualitative research is used in this study as it focuses on people's descriptions of what occurs in their respective world and in comprehending human phenomena and various meaning that societies assign to these phenomena (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; King and Horrock, 2010). This methodology is suitable for this study because it allows a researcher to collect the responses from the *Uzalo* audience.

The research is a reception study. The research design is the plan that is adopted by the study to answer questions validly, objectively, accurately, as well as economically (Kumar, 2011). It is established that audiences are polysemic in their decoding, that their cultural context matters, and that they often disagree with textual analyses (Hall, 1980). As such this study explores "the

ways in which the haphazard and contingent details of people's daily lives provide the context in which media are engaged with and responded to" (Livingstone, 1998b: 4). Reception studies accounts for consumers of a text being active in the interpretation of these texts via which they actively create meanings (Hall, 1980; Fiske, 1989; Fourie, 2009; Martin-Barbero, 2000; Nightingale, 2004; Sandvoss, 2014).

In terms of data-collection, the study samples 36 participants through four separate focus groups. The first focus group is comprised of both females and males between the ages of 18-30years, the second focus group includes participants between the ages of 40-55years, they must be residents of KwaMashu. The third focus group is comprised of both females and males between the ages of 18-30years and finally the fourth focus group includes participants between 40-55years, they must be residents of the greater Durban CBD (taking place in Thekwini TVET College, Melbourne campus).

A purposive technique was used to sample participants as it strategically selected people who regularly watch *Uzalo* and live both within and just outside KwaMashu. As such, these people are able to speak to the study's key questions on the representation of crime and gangsterism (Palys, 2008).

Data analysis is conducted via narrative theory and active audience theory as well as through drawing on literature on genre, crime and television. Narrative theory (Propp, 1968; Newcomb, 2004; Bal, 1997; Kozloff, 2000; Levi-Straus, 1963) provides a structuralist perspective with which to analyse characters and setting and will thus be used in part of the study's analysis, particularly with regards to setting (KwaMashu) and characters.

The encoding/decoding model (Hall, 1980) reveals the ways in which audiences interpret the codes, conventions and messages embodied in texts. It positions readings on an ideological scale from whether they hold a dominant and/or ii) negotiated and/or iii) dominant reading with regards to the preferred message that is encoded by the producer. The model draws on hermeneutics, in that it deals with the textual interpretation of a text which aids in understanding parts of said text in relation to the whole text within the historical context of the producer (Bleicher, 1980). The 'encoding' aspect will thus be revealed in using narrative and genre theory, both in Chapter Two and Three, to set up what is represented in *Uzalo*, and data

from the focus groups will be organised to reveal if and why the participants hold a particular reading of these representations.

Key Research Questions

1. In what ways does the *Uzalo* audience, as both residents and non-residents of KwaMashu, interpret the representation of violence and gangsterism in *Uzalo*?
   - What are some of the reasons for this local production's popularity (character, narrative structures and plots etc.)
   - In what ways, if any, do audience members consider the representation of violence as gangsterism to be realistic and /or exaggerated?
   - In what ways, if any, do audience members consider *Uzalo* to be a believable representation of township life?
2. How does the audience's residential difference possibly influence these interpretations?
   - What are the similarities / differences between the two different group's interpretations? 1) residents and/or 2) non-residents of KwaMashu?

Structure of the Study

The dissertation is structured within six chapters that are inextricably embedded to investigating the issues around television violence, crime and gangsterism. Chapters are summarised as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduces rationale and significance of the study, provides a background both of *Uzalo* and KwaMashu and outlines the structure of all other five chapters contained within the dissertation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the scholarly work that contextualises this study. It further reviews the theoretical framework applied as well as the methodological approaches of other studies. Furthermore, this chapter helps to compare the relevant literature, views and contradictory statements that assist in finding a gap in the body of knowledge which is arranged thematically based in the following topics:

- Codes, conventions and narrative devices of the Gangster Genre (Neale, 2000).
- Audience studies on violence and television (Ang, 1991).

- Representing Townships on television (Newcomb, 2004).

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework is the chapter that sets up the theories that have been used to formulate the key questions and that assist in making academic sense of the data. The chapter considers the narrative schema of Vladimir Propp (1968) and his categories of stock characters; the villain, the provider/donor, helper, princess, dispatcher, hero, victim and false hero. Active audience theory serves as an arena within which to play out a series of critical theoretical problems regarding the relations among texts, ideology and social determinations (Livingstone, 1998: 7), and is thus suitable for this study in that it also aims to examine if there are differences in reading according to the location of the participants.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter delineates the study's qualitative approach, reception analysis design and accounts for the participant and location sample. The data collection, as well as the form of analysis that is later applied to the data, will also be explained. The researcher used four separate focus groups for data collection. Focus groups focus on a particular subject that is being debated and conflicts are allowed to enhance data that is generated (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Focus groups were chosen in order to gain an understanding of audience (consumption) and identification.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis

This chapter derives meaning from the data based on interpretative philosophy (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Narrative theory and active audience theory are employed to obtain meaning from *Uzalo* and the behaviour of its fictional characters, both in the key questions that were formulated and in analysing the data that responds to these questions. The study thus analyses the data in the light of key questions, literature and theoretical framework that guides the study.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The conclusion chapter summarises the study and syntheses the main findings in direct relation to the key questions and highlights areas for further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter provides the literature that contextualises this study which explores the mediation and audience interpretation of violence on South African television with *Uzalo* as the case study. The chapter begins by reviewing scholarship on violence and television and their relevance to this investigation on *Uzalo* (Ang, 1985; Hall, 1980; Barker, 2000; Jewkes, 2004; Munby, 1996; Morley, 1992; Propp, 1968). In terms of representation, most of the film and television series that include crime and violence often take the form of the gangster genre. As such, a discussion of the gangster genre's character and narrative codes and conventions will be provided so as to set up a body of knowledge from which to compare particular aspects of *Uzalo* in the analysis in Chapter Five of this study.

Previous studies that have examined audiences and television violence will be reviewed. The majority of these studies are written from a media effects (Katz, 2001; Lazarsfeld 1948) and uses and gratifications perspective (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1973-1974; Papacharissi, 2009), but the few that examine the active audience decoding of violence will be included (Boyle, 2005; Villanueva *et al*, 2013), as this study itself adopts a culturalist perspective. Boyle (2005) points out that audience studies about television and violence convolutes the idea of impact and brings up vital issues about setting and knowledge (music, TV programs, computer games, and even YouTube recordings). Research demonstrates that almost all media contains brutality, regardless of age rating (Linder and Gentile, 2009; Thompson and Haninger, 2001; Thompson, Tepichin, and Haninger, 2006; Yokota and Thompson, 2000).

This chapter will also consider the audience in terms of *Uzalo's* locale. Telenovelas are engrained in the cultural milieu in which they are created (Tufte, 2003). The study hypothesises that there will be interesting similarities and difference in the interpretation of violence between the two audience groups under study; those that live within KwaMashu and those that live in the greater Durban area. This seeks to contextualise the forthcoming analysis on the audience's interpretation of the level of veracity to locality in terms of crime and violence, and how geographical and cultural context influences this interpretation.

Soap operas and telenovelas are said to typically focus on domestic and home issues associated with female viewers and characters (Brunsdon, 1995; Gerangty 1991, Gerangty & Weismann, 2016; Gledhill 2003). Soap operas attract many different audience groups within contemporary society and they have discovered a place for themselves and furthermore enable a variety of elucidations to suit the different tastes of society (Ahmed, 2012). This study makes a unique contribution to the field as it explores the audience's active interpretation of violence in a new hybridised South African isiZulu television show which is located in a township space. As such, the active audience theory frames this investigation (Barker 2013, Morley 1992, Hall 1980) and will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Uzalo's Genre: Telenovela

Genre is a French word that means type or kind, and genre plays an important role in categorising theatre, film, television and other art and media forms (Neale, 2001).

Genre can be discussed as one of the ways in which the text is made available to readers or viewers and is one of the ways in which meaning is packaged and classified. Writers, directors and producers use genre in fictional and factual representation of reality (Thornham and Purvis, 2005). The manner in which stories are lived and told/narrated makes it easier to determine the genre. Codes and conventions of any genre compel producers to follow a particular format in telling stories. Genres cannot be completely discussed without consideration of audiences as "the product of a text-and audience-based negotiation activated by the viewer's expectation" Turner (2001: 7). According to Lacey (2000: 133), a "repertoire of elements that serve to identify genres consists of character types, setting, iconography, narrative and style".

Telenovela, as a genre, originates from the Latin American "television novel" (O'Donnell, 1999: 3). It is believed that the telenovela is a successor to radio-novella that emanated from Cuba in the 1940s (Gonzalez, 1998). At the present moment, the telenovela is used almost across the world to tell either domestic stories or narrate international stories through an imported television production. *Uzalo u*ses the telenovela genre to narrate and locate township gangster stories and furthermore, in its elevation of criminal activity and the cliff-hangers that entice its audience back. These are the defining characteristics of the telenovela genre (Tufte, 2000a). Nevertheless, telenovela is not only limited to gangster narrative. Instead, telenovelas, like all other television genres, are "subject to market pressures that influence the shape of the text" (Turner, 2001: 5).

Both telenovelas and soap operas are serial melodramatic genres pitched to popular audiences and are based on 'the spectacle' (Acosta-Alzuru, 2008). Due to the shared qualities of these definitions, *Uzalo* can be described as both a telenovela and a soap opera. The show airs in a serial format, Monday to Friday (20:30-21:00pm), and is built on the basis of intrigue whereby the audience observes the odyssey and challenges that evolve through conflict in family, money, love and dynasty (Martinez, 2010). While these are facets of both genres, there are also important differences between them (Acosta-Alzuru, 2008). Soap operas never end, while telenovelas mainly rely on ratings for their life span. In essence, telenovelas run for about 120 episodes, making it longer than a series and shorter than a soap opera (Mkhwanazi, 2015). *Uzalo* has both characteristics. Ultimately, *Uzalo* can be described primarily as a telenovela because it has a limited number of episodes. At this juncture it is its third season and soap operas are not typically screened according to seasons (Mkhwanazi, 2015). The term "telenovela" is thus preferred in this study, but the above explanation was added in order to explain why other sources may refer to the telenovela as soap opera. To a certain extent *Uzalo* can be considered as gangster genre.

The Gangster Genre: Codes, Conventions and Narrative Devices

This section draws on research by international and local scholars, particularly in setting up codes and conventions of the gangster genre (Neale, 2001). It also includes scholarship on the ways in which the Tsotsi's (South African gangsters) and their typical location of the township are represented.

One of the reasons that *Uzalo* can be referred to as being in the gangster / crime genre is its depiction of violence and the archetypical behaviour of its gangsters involved in organised crime, which is a popular theme for novels, movies, film, television and journalistic writings (Lyman and Potter, 2011). The study of any gangster film or television show requires an understanding of the gangster genre. Genres are patterns/forms/styles/structures which go beyond individual films and supervise their construction by the filmmaker and their reading by the audience (Neale, 1980). Genres consist of various codes and conventions that inform audience expectations (2001). Codes and conventions are inclusive of "visual imagery, plot, character, setting, modes of narrative development and music" (Cook, 1985: 58).

In line with gangster storylines and conventions, it is important to note that there are separate levels in gang ranks. Mncube and Madikizela-Madiya (2014) explain that gangsters range from scavenger types (pretty crimes) to territorial types (well organised with initiation rites) to corporate gangs (they are well structured, conduct illicit activities and have distinct names and symbols attached to the names in reality). The phenomenon of gangsterism exercises fear and violence over vulnerable communities which take away their bonds of social life (Du Toit, 2014: 4). The interesting disjuncture here is that people fear gangs in their communities but admire them on television. This is supported by the fact that *Yizo Yizo* "rapidly established a large audience, of between 1.2 to 2.1 million viewers per episode, making it the most watched programme on South African TV" (Barnett, 2004: 15).

The repeated, expected and almost predictable qualities of a genre can be organised within the following code and convention categories: i) characters, ii) narrative structure, devices and plot, iii) setting, iv) worldview and tone.

Characters

The leading gangster characters in *Uzalo* are discussed in this sub-section and appear in order of the popular roles that they are portraying in the show. Characters have different roles in narrative. One function is to create, in audiences, a desire to eagerly wait for the next episode "not in order to find out the answers but, to see what further complications will defer the resolutions" (Modleski, 2008: 29). Gangster characters often have a certain charisma and dress code which entices viewers into the attainability of a high profile and expensive lifestyle.

In the past "gangster films were divided between censorship issues and journalistic accounts of historical phases and thematic and iconographic features of the genre" (Cook and Bernink, 1999: 173). However, in the late 1970s gangster films were presented based on character's physical appearance, dress code, guns and cars (Ryall, 1979). Therefore, this means that the gangster genre has evolved since the early years of the 20th century, in the sense that nowadays whichever argument is being made about gangster films, it has to take audiences into consideration as opposed to the past where gangster film discussions were based on censorship issues or journalistic accounts. Audiences have come to expect a certain level of violence which has informed a less strict eye on censorship. Taking into consideration that over a period of

time, gangster films have had to outdo their predecessors to attract viewers and thus viewers have been desensitised by their own evolving habits and tastes.

Gangster films are one of the most popular genres in cultural studies. Part of the popularity could be informed by the provocative nature of gangster characteristics. Over the years gangster films have helped to "establish a wider urban retro trend, a trend which, like the mafia mystique itself, centred on bosses and leaders, on historical city based syndicates and on male codes of fashion and style" (Neale, 2002: 34). The gangster codes of fashion and style include suites, glasses, hats, ties, cars etc. (Neale, 2002). A defining characteristic is the pursuit of power, though the gangster's "power is never absolute" (Neale, 2002: 37). These powers are limited by struggles with rival gangs, police and community. In *The Sopranos*, lead character Tony Soprano has to maintain his powers and influence in the waste management business and subsequently he is in constant dealings with authorities and business rivals. These duties never wane and Soprano finds himself in states of flux as often as in states of triumph. The stakes are high and the consequences are dangerous.

Mapantsula (1988) and *Jerusalema* (2008) were released twenty years apart and they both represent a gangster from a South African perspective. In South Africa, a gangster genre has been used "to engage with the themes of economic inequality…and to explore the possibilities of violence both to transform and to destroy" (Marx, 2010: 261). The difference though between *Mapantsula* and *Jerusalema* is that one represents the township tsotsi and the other represent the city gangster. Tsotsi "refers to a type of street-wise criminal who operates in the larger South African townships" (Dovey, 2007: 153). Conversely, the gangster is discussed as "the man of the city, with city language and knowledge carrying his life in his hands" (Warshow, 1948: 583).

Tsotsi (2006) was released between *Mapantsula* and *Jerusalema* and is set in Alexandra township. It tells the story of the making of a tsotsi. A young man runs away from an abusive home to stay with his friends under a concrete bridge, he then travels between this place and suburbia to commit crimes such as car hijacking. Similarly, in *Mapantsula* the leading gangster character travels to the city and suburbs to commit crimes and then returns to the township. Yet in *Jerusalema*, a gangster grows up in a township where he learns the ways of a gangster and then moves to the city. These three gangster films show a steady growth with regards to the forms of crimes that are being committed. *Mapantsula* focuses on shoplifting, *Tsotsi* is

premised on mugging and car hijacking, while *Jerusalema* deals with the hijacking of inner city buildings. All three gangster films were premised "between the world of organised crime and world of organised legality" (Morris, 2010: 94).

Typically, gangsters are male (Marx, 2010) but in *Uzalo* there is one female gangster character. These are *Uzalo* gangster characters:

- Gxabhashe / Muzi Xulu (portrayed by Mpumelelo Bhulose). Gxabhashe is the head of the Xulu family. He owns a scrapyard business which serves as a front for his illegal dealings. He was the leading gangster character in season one.

- Mastermind / Zweli Maphumulo (portrayed by Ntokozo Dlamini). Mastermind works for Gxabhashe in his scrapyard business where stolen/hijacked cars are stripped. He is known for his skills in de-activating any electronic device installed in vehicles. Now, in season three, he works with the rival of Nkunzi Mhlongo (leading gangster character); Qhabanga Mhlongo.

- MaNgcobo (portrayed by Thandeka Dawn King). A female gangster character married to Gxabhashe and a mother to two of his children. In season three she is married to Nkunzi Mhlongo.

- Mxolisi Xulu (portrayed by Nay "Maps" Maphalala). He is son to Gxabhashe and MaNgcobo, a gangster character that was at first against crime but was coerced into it by his father. By the end of season one he had already murdered one of Mdletshe sons.

Other characters from *Uzalo* are easy to define from gangsters. They typically work in salons, clubs, shisanyamas and they reside in ordinary township homes. Gangster characters are often "identifiable by their speeches, behaviour and dress" (Strelitz, 2000: 41). In spite of their identification through their actions and styles as gangsters, they insert meanings of *Uzalo* into people's social experience in a way that guides the meanings of what constitutes being a gangster and the meanings of *Uzalo* as a show (Strelitz, 2000; Fiske, 1987b).

Narrative Structure, devices and plots
In many different instances "binary oppositions underlie the narrative structures of many television programmes" (Bignell, 2013: 98). This is particularly true of gangster films due to the conflict that is created in the 'clashing' of these oppositions. This conflict is expected by gangster genre audiences as it creates suspense and drives the narrative forward (Lévi-

Strauss's, 1967). These conflicts are typically set up (in international and South African genre films as i) main protagonist/gangster vs rival gangsters (e.g. the *Godfather*, *Scarface*), ii) protagonist/gangster vs 'the system' (. e.g. *Mapantsula*, *Jerusalema*, *Public Enemies*).

In the narrative structure of *Uzalo*, a gangster refers to a streetwise criminal who operates in the larger South African township of KwaMashu (Dovey, 2007). *Uzalo's* storyline is premised on two rival families, a Xulu family headed by a gangster Muzi Xulu known as Gxabhashe and Mdletshe family headed by a pastor Melusi Mdletshe. These two rival families create a 'binary opposition' (Lévi-Strauss, 1967) in its narrative.

Morris (2010: 85) notes that violence is the "primary means of masculine self-regeneration". Gangster narratives can follow two types of plots in terms of self-generation, one being a politicised plot as shown in the film *Mapantsula* (see Davies, 1990 and Tomaselli, 2006). Panic, the leading gangster character in *Mapantsula*, believed that the poverty in townships is caused by a political system which discriminated against other races in South Africa. *Mapantsula* and *Jerusalema* were released 20 years apart from each other but a common feature is that they are both born of a country that was once crippled by systematic racial divide (Marx, 2010). Furthermore, the narrative of both signifies poverty, crime and violence. In addition to that, a capitalist society that does not favour illiterate citizens and consequently incites gangster narratives that portray a man in search of a pot of gold.

Tsotsi's (2005) narrative structure, "politicisation has given a way to the narrative of moralisation within a structure" (Morris, 2010: 87), based on the decisions and struggles a young 'Tsotsi' makes in deciding whether or not to return a baby he accidentally kidnaps during a hijacking. *Uzalo* arguably also follows a moralisation structure. An example is when Mxolisi kills and buries his younger brother but months later he decides to come clean about it. Furthermore, the initial swapping of the gangster's and pastor's babies at birth conceives of an evolving moral divide that deepens through the nurturing process. Although gangsterism is a central plot feature in *Yizo-Yizo*, some scholars reduce it to nothing but high school peer-pressure characterised by bulling. Nevertheless, the SABC and producers argue that it is all educational (Smith, 2001). Hence there is an aspect of moralisation.

Another popular plot in genre films is that of redemption. Warshow (1948: 583) labelled "gangster as tragic hero" and pointed out that enigma is resolved by the death of the gangster.

Recently though, the gangster genre has changed in favour of redemption and moralisation. *Tsotsi* proposed the possibilities of moral redemption and rehabilitation of a gangster (Marx, 2010). The Warshow essay about a gangster as tragic hero and the film *Tsotsi* are almost six decades apart and is an indication that over a certain period of time the gangster genre has evolved from a dead end to redemption. Gone are the days where "gangster protagonists were born to die" (Munby, 1996: 103).

Another popular plot in gangster films is the rise and fall of power. Most leading gangster characters are in the pursuit of power and the sustainability of that power (Munby, 1996). Tsotsi wielded power over his gang members and those who challenged his power were killed or banished from the gang. *Jerusalema* depicted Lucky being hooked on "crime, violence and struggle for power in the hostile Hillbrow environment" (Khan, 2016: 4). One could furthermore surmise that the ambition of power and the pursuit of it is what separates a lead gangster from just a gangster. Thus, a mirroring of capitalism within the gang hierarchy becomes evident.

Genre theorists argue that generic norms and conventions are recognised and shared not only by theorists themselves, but also by audiences, readers and viewers (Neale, 2001). One such audience expectation of a gangster genre is suspense (Piemme, 1975). This suspense is created by narrative devices such as cliff-hangers where a television show ends on a heightened moment without showing the resolution. For example, there is a disruption or broken off action at the very moment when the protagonist is to be pushed over the cliff by his opponent or enemy (Ang, 1985). From the moment that the narrative reaches this point, audiences eagerly wait to watch the next episode. Cliff-hangers have a way of keeping audiences "in suspense, sharing the feelings of the characters and discussing their psychological motivations, deciding whether they are right or wrong, in other words living 'their worlds'" (Piemme, 1975: 114).

The manner in which plot is structured plays a pivotal role in attracting audiences that are interested in that particular text. In terms of the Aristotle theory cited in Gronbeck (2004), plot is the most significant aspect of the story. Furthermore, a structure of the plot provides "a sense of a beginning, a middle an end" (Thornham and Purvis, 2005: 31). *Uzalo,* in season one, like any other telenovela showed a sense of melodrama in its plot. Melodrama mainly includes exaggerated plot, heightened plot and exaggerated emotions. According to Newcomb (1974) most of the problems forming the centre of telenovela plots can be best defined as being in the

areas of emotional pain. Though this plotline has been criticised as too exaggerated and over-done (Ang, 1985), it still has massive support and viewership especially during prime-time television. Violence and conflicts in telenovelas are both exciting and entertaining. Mulvey (1987) notes that the excitement is derived from the conflict between people tied by blood or love. This is what is currently unfolding in *Uzalo's* third season, where Nkunzi and his brother Qhabanga are at war with each other yet they are blood relatives. Family members that end up at war with each other, as is the case *Uzalo*, are normally at peace to begin with. Things change over a certain period of time as plot is guided by "the relations between time, space, sequence and causality" (Thornham and Purvis, 2005: 31).

Typically, rivalry or binary opposition with other gangsters or police are mostly the significant plot characteristic of gangster or crime genre (Levi-Strauss, 1967; Dirks, 2018). The rise and fall of a leading protagonist in pursuit of power and wealth, and the show of gentleness as well as an expression of sensitivity are key to gangster plots (Dirks, 2018). There is a possibility that most gangster characters are admired because of the revealing of a hidden depth of sensitivity and gentleness. *Uzalo* portrayed Gxabhashe as a kind family loving man, therefore, keeping in line with the gangster plot.

Storyline plays an integral part in showing and guiding how an enigma is resolved. It is true that a gangster is a self-made man that is searching for the pot of gold (Marx, 2010). The storyline narrates how the pot of gold is found, normally through illegal means. Like most other gangster films, *Uzalo's* storyline is premised on one powerful character. Characters in gangster narratives often fall prey to crimes in the pursuit of wealth, status and material possessions such as clothes and cars (Dirks, 2018).

Settings

Gangster film locations often borrow from typical film noir settings. These include: i) Urban setting / cities - Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York and Chicago are the location of many classic noirs., ii) The city is presented as a labyrinth or maze, iii) Bars, lounges, nightclubs and gambling dens are usually the scene of action, iv) Industrial settings > refineries, factories, train yards and power plants, v) Usually night. In terms of South African gangster films the most common city in which the story is set Johannesburg (e.g. *Mapantsula, Jerusalema, Yizo Yizo, and Tsotsi*).

The *mise-en-scene* of the gangster genre includes the lighting, setting, characters and costume. Gangster film is linked to film noir in terms of genre. Film noir uses low light, smoky indoor scenes at times with guns, cigarettes, money and drugs as part of the props to set the mood (Arkers, 2013). Nonetheless, film noir is not a genre but a specific period of film. In other words, film noir refers to those Hollywood films of the 1940s and 1950s which portrayed the world of the dark, slick city streets, crime and corruption (Schrader, 1972). Therefore, this implies that film noir is a style commonly adopted by the gangster genre.

The settings of *Uzalo* "are specific – a street, a motel, a square, a small housing development – and are defined geographically so that the audience builds up a precise sense of place" Geraghty, 1991: 35). This place is located in KwaMashu township. *Uzalo* has done something quite unusual by putting up a township setting on a prime-time television. As indicated in the previous chapter; SABC 1 describes *Uzalo* as provocative, bold and authentic narrative that tells a story of two family dynasties Xulu and Mdletshe with two young men who carry their families hopes and legacies (SABC 1, 2015). The *Uzalo* storyline includes two baby boys that were accidentally switched at Queen Anne hospital in February 1990 (Ferreira, 2015; Zuma-Ncube, 2015). February 1990 is an indicative of time and KwaMashu and tells the story of an ever-changing lifestyle and living conditions of the township (space or location). This may be especially true for the residents in KwaMashu who share a close proximity to the setting in which the narrative is shot. However, this study analyses assertions from those who reside in KwaMashu and those from outside. Setting cannot be completely separated from the plot. The background of a specific scenery has to correspond with the setting in order to produce the desired text (Lethbridge and Mildorf, n.d). The township, as a setting is further discussed below.

World view and Tone

Generally, world view is hard to discuss without the term 'philosophy'. World view is mainly "used to emphasise a personal and historical point of view" (Vidal, 2008: 3). It is argued that gangster films are morality tales, labouring the adage that 'crime does not pay.' From another view point, they are the fearless pursuit of the 'American Dream' where characters either triumph or fall prey to crimes in pursuit wealth, status and trendy lifestyles with flashy cars, clothes etc. (McNulty and Russell, 2010). The pursuit of American dream refers to the success

stories turned upside down (Dirks, 2018), consequently, gangsters live in a dream deferred world of success and wealth and thereby decide to pursue those dreams through illegal avenues. Furthermore, gangsters are portrayed as victims of their previous circumstances, this is due to the fact that the stories are told from their viewpoint (Dirks, 2018).

In the case of *Uzalo,* world view refers to the codes and conventions that guide gangster genre. "Gangster genre includes films that deal with organised crime - not just the mafia variety, but all varieties of a criminal underworld" (Ennis, 2012: 9). Furthermore, Ennis adds that "gangster films crucially, deal with race and ethnicity" (2012: 10). In addition, in a number of narratives, protagonists in gangster films are on a quest for material success and power.

Gangster films started to gain popularity in the early 20th century through films such as *The Musketeers of Pig Alley* (1912), *The Public Enemy* (1931) and *Scarface* (1932). Violence, murder, drugs, wealth, stylish dress code, show of power etc. are frequently seen in gangster genre films. Genres are conventional because they are critiqued and subverted over a certain period of time. Consequently, codes and conventions can alter over time (Jefferies, 2013). For example, Gxabhashe was portrayed as wealthy and powerful but he was shot by Pastor Mdletshe and later (season 3) killed in jail. Furthermore, Jefferies points out that conventions should be well thought out and take into consideration the rise and fall of a protagonist/gangster as he or she pursues wealth and power.

The tone that informs the behaviour of *Uzalo's* gangsters is their dreams and aspirations guided by "desire for quicker success" (Weidinger, 2013: 07). This implies that most gangsters in *Uzalo* such as Gxabhashe, Mxolisi and Mastermind, to name the few, want to make it big through crime and are motivated by material success. The background and upbringing of Gxabhashe and Mastermind has never been told in *Uzalo's* storyline but their aspirations are as clear as daylight. An actor that portrays a certain character has to understand the mode, the feeling and the voice/tone of both character and producer. In essence, "the ordinary sense-making of the text is part of the story-line" (Lockyear, 2004: 33).

A gangster searching for the pot of gold can be ruthless, dangerous and systematically manipulative with the intention to control (Marx, 2010). Gangster genres offer dramatically heightened versions of a daily desire to "make it" and most importantly to be accepted to socio-cultural norms. Therefore, the gangster story has cross-cultural appeal to the audience (Munby,

1996). The leading protagonist in *Uzalo* bribes police in exchange of favours and freedom and he assigns his goons to kill either rivals or dissidents.

Representation of violence in South African Television

Gerbner (1983), explains that the representations of violence on television are not violence but images and messages about violence. In other words, Gerbner implies that the violence that is shown on television is fictional and therefore there is no need to act on it. In this section, discussion on television representation of violence, gangsterism and township life in South Africa considers the following: i) what has the history of representing violence on South African television been? ii) who have the stereotypical perpetrators been and why? iii) what are some of the reasons for representing violence? iv) what are some of the critiques of these previous representations violence?

Primetime television is loaded with ultraviolent texts. Some scholars have likened media violence with the Trojan horse which is wrapped in insidious ideologies (in the guise of entertainment) that infiltrated into the audience consciousness (Gerbner, 1983; Ruddock, 2011).

Visual fictional genres turn to mirror or exaggerate the ways of real life so that they are simultaneously recognisable by including an element of reality but exaggerated via melodrama (Andersson, 2010). It is normal nowadays to see violence on South African television both in the news as well as in fictional programmes (Mngadi, 2017; and Smith, 2000) such as *Lockdown,* a current show that revolves around prison gang violence, *Isibaya* depicts taxi violence, and *The Queen* portrays gang wars that emanate from drug dealings. A programme from the past, Mapantsula (1988), presented a plot that was premised on domestic, prison and political violence. These gangster themes seemingly reoccur over the generations through popular demand and are repackaged to inform a current climate. On the international stage, Tony Soprano of *The Sopranos* proved to be a very popular gangster character. He was a businessman and a family man, with wife Carmela and two children (a) son Anthony Jr. (A.J.) and (b) daughter Meadow (Maloney *et al*, 2015). Tony's anxieties revolved around a dangerous and illegal underworld, he desired power and control in business and at home. Through the porthole of psychotherapy sessions with Dr Melfi, the viewer was given backstage access into his personal thoughts and we gained a deeper insight into how and why his gangster decisions were motivated (Weidinger, 2013).

The television show *Yizo-Yizo* depicted violence under a plethora of agendas; political violence, silence violence, traumatic violence, lifestyle violence and mostly criminal violence just to name a few. Andersson (2010) argues that political violence and its legacy and memory appears to be the parent of most other forms of violence. Societal imbalances of the past still continue to be visible in KwaMashu and other parts of Durban and political killings still occur, particularly in hostels.

Uzalo has managed to present itself as a highly ranked competitor for primetime South African television with its fiercest competitor being *Generations: The Legacy*. *Generations* was launched in 1993 as a SABC 1 soap opera. With *Generations,* the SABC showed the needs, dreams, and aspirations of all South Africans (Black, White, Coloured, and Indians) in a multilingual and multiracial production set (Tager, 2010). Since then, *Generations* has been South Africa's most watched television production with its ratings once reaching 10 million viewers. This changed in 2015. When *Generations* (2015) was knocked out of the number one spot by *Uzalo* with *Uzalo's* audience numbers at 5 563 000 and *Generations The Legacy* with 5 471 000 (Dayimani, 2015)[1]. These high audience rating, combined with the fact that much of *Uzalo's* story involves violence, promoted this study to explore the narrative and active audience interpretation of violence.

This study hypothesises that the success of *Uzalo* in terms of viewership ratings could mean that some viewers may feel that are identify with a particular character or storyline (Morris, 2010). In September 2018, *Uzalo* had 10.2 million viewers each night (SABC, 2018). The role of representation on television is to ensure that programmes are correctly "encoded by technical codes with the camera, lighting, sound, music, and editing in order to transmit conventional representational codes, to convey the narrative, conflict, character, action, dialogue, setting, casting, and so forth" (O'Donnell, 2007: 157). *Uzalo* uses most of these representational codes to locate a gangster narrative in the township setting, which may contribute to its success and high rankings.

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[1] Available at: http://www.destinyconnect.com/2015/06/24/generations-takes-knock-uzalo-takes-top-spot/
Accessed on 08 March 2016

Uzalo is set in the township of KwaMashu, and the violence that is presented in *Uzalo* is driven by gangsterism. It is important to acknowledge that there are many forms of violence; domestic violence, gender based violence, sexual violence and white-collar crimes but gangsterism is the focal point of *Uzalo* narrative, as will be discussed in the next section.

In the history of South African cinema there has been little effort to negate black bodies from being consistently represented as deviant, aggressive, uncivilised, hypersexual and counter progressive (Ellapen, 2007). In most cases where a township story is told, it is usually linked to gangsterism, as seen in *Tsotsi*, *Mapantsula*, *Jerusalema* and Four Corners.

Township spaces are "often presented as sites of illicit and illegal activities, they foreground the 'otherness' of black identity by representing black people within them as drunk, sexually lecherous, lazy, dangerous and deviant" (Ellapen, 2007: 126). Another past (and previous presentation) of black South Africans relates to violence. This started a long time ago with the stereotype that Zulu men are born killers and it should be nullified. Carton and Morrell (2012) explain that Zulu soldiers are renowned for decimating a British army at the Battle of Isandlwana in 1879. This military victory not only entrenched a legacy of merciless conquest long attributed to King Shaka, but also sensationalised the idea that Zulu men are natural-born killers. In addition to that, the film *Shaka Zulu* (1985) also contributed to this stereotype as King Shaka was portrayed as ruthless. Consequently, in 2001 black South African historians and language scholars told the SABC not to broadcast the *Shaka Zulu* series as they claimed that Zulu children would grow up believing that "Shaka was a bloodthirsty king who ruled with iron fist" (Tomaselli, 2003; and Mkhize 2001: 7).

This study investigates if the interpretations of violence in *Uzalo* relate to these negative stereotypical images of township people as being deviant or lazy, and if the violence presented in *Uzalo* relates to the bloodthirsty image of Zulu men. Or on the other hand, in what ways may these representations in *Uzalo* show a township in a positive light, as a space for entrepreneurship, and a sense of community etc. The study will also investigate if the violence presented in *Uzalo* is contextualised within social relations and structures, or is to simply make for an interesting, popular and exciting storyline.

Films such as *Mapantsula* and programmes such as *Uzalo* promote certain lifestyles, Gxabhashe in *Uzalo* wears expensive clothes and he owns double story house. In *Mapantsula,*

Panic, "is dressed nattily, always wearing formal pants, shirts, well-shined shoes, suit jackets and hats. Looking dapper and fashionable" (Govender, 2011: 42). It is not easy to separate gangster films from this sense of style. All these television shows and films contribute to township aesthetic (Ellapen, 2007). The term aesthetic is derived "from the philosophical analysis of art, aesthetic refers to insight, expressiveness and beauty in creativity…aesthetic provides a paradigm for talking about texts as art and art as human civility" (Hartley, 2002: 4). The term township aesthetic is a combination of both township and aesthetic which can be interpreted as the township "space that is characterised by the blending of the rural with the urban and subsequent hybridity and culture (from music to fashion) that emanates and resonates strongly throughout South Africa" (Ellapen, 2007: 127).

Uzalo's narrative is based in the KwaMashu Township. In most television shows and films, a township is presented as underdeveloped and crippled by poverty, unemployment, decay and violent deaths (Ellapen, 2007) e.g. *Mapantsula* (Soweto), *Tsotsi*, (Alexandra, Johannesburg) and not forgetting *Yizo Yizo* (Soweto). It is true that there are dilapidating houses with criminality rearing its ugly head in and outside squatter camps, however this is not the complete identity of a township as portrayed in *Uzalo* series. The problem of stereotyping townships as such is not unique to television and a cinema aesthetic. "The role of stereotype is to make visible the invisible so that there is no danger of it creeping up on us unaware" (Dyer, 1993: 16). Township spaces in South Africa were created out of Afrikaner Nationalist ideologies starting with the 1950 Group Areas Act that which gave the government complete control over land purchase and empowered them to separate population settlements on the basis of skin colour (Ellapen, 2007).

Most gangster films that locate themselves in South African townships are successful in the market and are not easily forgotten, taking into cognisance *Mapantsula* (1988), *Tsotsi* (2005) and *Jerusalem* (2008). In township aesthetics, terms such as thug and gangster are not frequently used and tsotsi is a more common expression when referring to someone who operates outside of the law. Morris (2010) notes that tsotsis speak tsotsitaal, a vernacular mostly used in townships. In Eskia Mphahlele's (1959) autobiography he describes tsotsis as Malaita which means streetwise gangs who are characterised by violence, fashion and criminality. The term Malaita is frequently used in ETV's soap *Scandal,* by a gangster character Neo Mokgethi portrayed by Jerry Mofokeng. The lead character in *Mapantsula*, Panic, has an undying love for fashion that he cannot afford and consequently he is led into a spree of shoplifting crimes.

KwaMashu is known for car hijackings, murders in hostels and, most recently, a drug (Mercedes) that has killed quite a number of young people (Petersen, 2016). *Uzalo* does not shy away from these issues and relays them through gangster plots.

At times, young people desire the finer things in life such as fast cars and expensive fashion but they are not willing to put in the work to earn them. "Cars are the most obvious indicators of wealth and power. They are motifs used throughout *Yizo-Yizo* to explore youth obsession with brands" (Andersson, 2010: 148). This behaviour of attaining quick riches develops 'rags-to-riches stories,' as portrayed in *Yizo-Yizo* (Bhekizizwe Peterson, 2001). Andersson (2010) makes these crucial points regarding lifestyle violence:

> Lifestyle violence is partly caused by defining the gap between expectations of grand lifestyle, and fulfilment as existing because of factors as individual has no control over. Some people argues that they come from poor and previously disadvantaged background. The sense of a gap between desire for fine things and fulfilment of that is a primary cause for lifestyle violence. Nonetheless, it is not a crime to desire goods, however, the motivation to close the gap by getting part of the cargo of goodies that one desires through violent means is a second component of lifestyle violence.

Tsotsi and *Mapantsula's* cinematic representations of the 'township space' are mostly reduced to landscapes of poverty and criminality that perpetuate the myth of otherness (Ellapen, 2007). This is different from what is presented in *Uzalo* because its storyline and context is premised on a powerful rich gangster who has all the trappings of success, therefore the viewer is privy to a vision of the township beyond the norm of poverty.

The above discussions are important as the study is primarily interested in the manner in which the township location of *Uzalo* alters any telenovela or gangster film/series generic codes and conventions with regards to the presentation of violence. Moreover, the ways in which this violence is both seen as fictional and exaggerated or true to life by the two different audience groups. Based on what is typically presented in township locations on television, this study endeavours to establish other modalities of a township space as represented in the isiZulu *Uzalo* (see Chapter 5).

Television Audiences and Violence

This section presents research that is written from two differing audience approaches (i) media effects (Potter, 2012; Gerbner, 1983) and (ii) the active / reception approach (Hall, 1980). These two theories are important to this study because they differ from each other; effects studies assume that the audience is passive and active audience views audiences as active producers of meaning.

Media Effects

Normally, the effects that are argued to be caused by the media's portrayal of violence tend to be placed under scrutiny whenever there has been a violent incident such as mass shootings etc. (Common Sense Media, 2013). In support of Common Sense Media view, in 1996 Thomas Hamilton, who had no criminal record, shot sixteen primary school children and one teacher before killing himself in the Scottish town of Dunblane (Murdoch, 2001). Popular entertainment was blamed for the incident (Neil, 1996). However, it is difficult to establish the link and unique contribution of media violence to violent behaviour (Ferguson, 2009a). A number of effects studies that have been published over the years that are based on teenagers. Internationally, a year-long study that was published 1986 (Huesmann and Eron, 1986) found that in the United States of America, young girls' who watched violence on television had were not greatly affected. Furthermore, boys viewing violence on television did not assume later aggression. Conversely, "the entire study of mass communication is based on the assumption that the media has significant effects, yet there is little agreement on the nature and extent of these effects" (McQuail, 2005: 456). To prove the little agreement, Sullivan (2013: 47) "the operative notion in the effects paradigm is that the audience exists in a natural occurring state that can be interrupted and dramatically changed thanks to specific media messages".

As this section is informed by behaviourist tradition, particularly media effects, it is practical to differentiate between the types of effects. The latent effects refer to media content that might become apparent after a coder/encoder has interpreted or connotatively understood the message before coding (Sparks, 2010). Meaning, the producers of a television programme may have presumed the reaction to a message, only to find that the reaction is completely different to what they may have expected. On the other hand, there are intended effects, "although the overall effects of negative political advertising are as likely to be backlash as intended…independent sponsorship resulted in greater intended effects against the proper

target and less of a backlash" (Roddy and Garramone, 1988: 4). This indicates that political intended effects are planned and targeted to certain individuals. Unfortunately, media platforms that are used in the process and have an effect on audiences that are perceived as passive by the effects approach. The debate on whether viewing violence on television causes aggressive behaviour or not is an old discussion. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH, 1982) in United States of America concluded that a weight of the evidence shows that viewing television violence does cause aggressive behaviour. Since there are many different ways to analyse and define the effects of television. Fourie (2007: 230) explains that:

> (a) Manifest and latent effects happen when the audience are aware/unaware that media have caused them to behave differently, (b) whilst intended or unintended effects; intended for example political campaign advertisements or unintended such as media violence and (c) time-scale effects discuss effects based on short-term vs long term media exposure.

It is important to point out that this study is not an effects study and does not focus on psychological effects of crime in the media. This section does, however, include a discussion on the media effects audience perspective as numerous studies have been conducted on the relationship between television, audience and violence (NIMH, 1982; Gerbner, 1983; Fourie, 2007; Sparks, 2010). Furthermore, violence on television is somehow unpleasant, interesting or morbid (Villanueva, 2013). Previous studies found that boys are more vulnerable to the effects of viewing violence than girls, as boys view violence from male characters as socially desirable (Comstock and Paik, 1991; Geen, 1994). Furthermore, "violent actions are seen promoting patriarchal ideologies by denying male insecurity while sanctioning male power" (Carter and Weaver, 2003: 74). Patriarchy is structured by masculinity and most of the time boys see this as an interesting path to feeling powerful. Most of effects researchers agree that television violence does have an effect, either intended, unintended, lament, positive or negative. "Media influenced effects are those things that occur as a result – either in part or in whole – from media influence. They may occur immediately during exposure to a media message or they may take a long time to occur after any particular exposure" (Potter, 2012: 38).

However, some individuals and groups are now promoting educational interventions with audiences as an alternative solution to violence (Bragg, 2001). In as much as media education is important, Bragg (2001) contradicts herself in saying that media education is not a solution to the problem of violence because the media did not cause it in the first place. Nonetheless,

television plays a pivotal role in communities in its purpose of educating, entertaining and disseminating information, therefore, media cannot assume a spectator role. Gerbner (1983) argues that irrespective of gender, race, and class or even location, every heavy television viewer tends to have less trust in others, be less tolerant of differences and be pessimistic about civil rights and more acceptable of authoritarian rule that may protect their 'mean world'.

Gerbner (1967) argued, after conducting a comparative study about violence on television and the real world, that television cultivates a world view that is more violent than the real world. Gerbner, further illustrated that due to televised violence, heavy viewers are more likely to think that their chances of experiencing violence are higher.

King'ara (2010) stipulates that in an African context, soap operas have been a very useful tool to influence cultural attitudes about poverty, family planning, various sicknesses and prejudice. Therefore, the sentiment that unrestricted media care less about social issues and community wellbeing are repudiated. Past studies have focused on negative effects but there are certainly positive effects in relation to media violence. This is documented in much entertainment education literature (Cardey, S. *et al*, 2013; Singhal & Rogers, 2001; Tufte, 2008). It is however, not clear whether highly regulated media may assist in mediating media violence. "The most constant element has been a negative perception of the media – especially the inclination to link the media portrayal of crime, sex and violence with the seeming increase in social and moral order" as per media effects model (McQuail, 2005: 53). Television is not the only media platform that has come under constant attacks for contributing to the ills of society and, according to McQuail (2005), the Internet has been accused of encouraging paedophilia, violence and hate.

It is inevitable that effects of violent behaviour are critiqued. The "history of family violence is not only a predictor of violent behaviour on its own but that it may actually enhance a young person's response to violent media" (Common Sense Media, 2013: 16). In addition to that, Stransburger *et al* (2009) concur that children raised in homes that are characterised by parental aggression show a stronger effects of media violence. Mxolisi in *Uzalo* was raised in a violent family and so he became exactly that or more. Then again, it impossible to imply that every young person that may have seen violence at home would automatically be violent. Media violence frequently frame their argument on psychological perspective in response to a long-running debate about copycat violence (Kitzinger, 2004). Kitzinger further adds that up to this

particular juncture is has never been properly established the extent in which media representation of violence desensitise viewers. On the contrary though, it was established long time ago that viewers who watch heavy violence on television are thought to develop "mean world syndrome" (Gerbner, 1967). These effects were established by Gerbner. This perception suggests that violent television content informs the viewers that the world is more dangerous than facts and statistics suggests or put out.

After all is said and done it is story-telling. "Most researchers, whether their speciality is media, psychology, violence, or criminal justice, reject the idea that any single factor can cause an otherwise non-violent individual to become violent, particularly when it comes to violence on the scale of a massacre" (Common Sense Media, 2013: 11). This study agrees with the premise that television does not consistently cause isolated effects in its audience because audiences are able to reject media influence that comes through preferred meaning and create their own meaning/effects (Potter, 2012). Their social context influences these interpretations, as this study will show in Chapter 5.

Active Audience

Audiences are hard to manage and to predict because they can be defined and constructed in so many ways and still they have no fixed existence (McQuail, 2005). This study agrees with the understanding of the audience as "both a product of social context which leads to shared cultural interests, understandings and information needs and a response to a particular pattern of media provision" McQuail (2005: 396). Nightingale (2003) expands on this definition by proposing the four types of audiences (i) audience as the people assembled, (ii) audience as the people addressed, (iii) audience as happening, and (iv) audience as hearing or audition. This study does not intend to adopt and/or discard any type of audiences but it does accept that, nowadays, audiences are active and are themselves producers of meaning.

There has been shift within the cultural tradition, a shift "from numbers to meaning, from textual meaning to textual meanings, from the general audience to particular audiences" (Barker, 2012: 340). Therefore, "active audience 'tradition' suggests that the audience are not cultural dopes but are active producers of meaning from within their own cultural context" (Barker, 2012: 339). As a result, audiences are no longer considered or perceived as passive but are active producers of meaning. It is important to note that reception analysis is the

audience research arm of modern cultural studies. "Audience reception serves as a convenient arena within which to play out a series of critical theoretical problems regarding the relations among texts, ideology and social determinations" (Livingstone, 1998: 7).

Understanding audience reception is not an easy research process. Morley (1980) gathered 29 small groups of professionals in his *Nationwide* study. *Nationwide* was a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) current affairs programme (Sullivan, 2013). Onto Hall's interpretative positions of a dominant, negotiated and/or oppositional reading, Morley further adopted Parkin's (1971) work which argued that class position (informed by income, type of employment and level of education) plays a pivotal role in guiding individual's response and meaning. Morley's study looked "empirically and systematically at audience interpretations of television" (Sullivan, 2013: 146). Notwithstanding interpretative tradition; some participants (such as students) showed little interest in the programme. Unlike many Dutch women who watched Dallas and found its family trials and tribulations to be similar to their own lives, particularly in regards to "emotional realism" (Ang, 1985: 41-43). These scholars acknowledge the role of audiences and their participation in meaning production.

Violence depicted in *Uzalo* might not be its primary drawcard. Gangsters and violence acts are often part of the fabric of township life and if you are going to authentically portray township life, then violence is part of the package. Rojek (2003: 96-98) states that "media representations are constructed by producers and assimilated by audiences," and further argues that audiences decode the preferred code of reference. In terms of the encoding and decoding process (Hall, 1980), it is the audiences that decode the television texts and it is entirely up to them to arrive to any conclusion thereof. Conversely, O'Donnell (2007) argues that representation is not an original entity but a mere surrogate of something real. *Uzalo* uses violence through gangsterism to represent just one aspect of the township setting. Other characteristics include parenting (Onuh, 2015), murder, betrayal and entrepreneurship whereby legitimate businesses are used as cover for gangster activities (Gibson, 2018).

Further, it is important to note that in *Uzalo* not everyone is a gangster. As a result, *Uzalo* might be of interest to people because it depicts their everyday lives possibly in more than one dimension. Research has shown that audiences respond to well-rounded representation of their lives. People, therefore, like to see themselves on screen and will support by watching programmes that represent their everyday lives in realistic manner (Ang, 1985).

Television plays a pivotal role in storytelling and reaches millions of audiences across the globe. "No other medium can match television for the volume of popular cultural texts it produces and the sheer size of its audiences" (Barker, 2000: 259). The audience then make meaning in a negotiation with these cultural texts, as audiences are not cultural dopes, as assumed within media effects approach but are active producers of their own meaning and understanding (Barker, 2000). As such, this study adopts a culturalist understanding of the audience as active in its investigations of the sample's interpretation of violence in *Uzalo*.

In the late 20th century, Johnson (1983) sited in Strelitz (2000: 38) identified four "moments in the circuit of the production, circulation and reception of the cultural products – production, texts, readings and lived cultures". When Johnson identified these moments, Hall (1980) had already proposed an analytic separation of the encoding and decoding of moments in texts production and reception. As a result, the debate about the power of the text over audiences (Strelitz 2000) and vice versa is now defunct as text has only the power to propose ideological reading. Therefore, audiences should now be seen as active decoders and producers of their own meaning (Strelitz, 2000; Hall, 1980; Morley, 2000). Television texts are polysemic as Fiske (1987b) agreed that texts offer quite a number of different meanings. Debates and interpretations are negotiated from a cultural studies perspective as history oscillates between theories that stress textual power over audiences and audiences over textual power (Strelitz, 2000). Viewers interpret the television content on the basis of the past experience and present expectation (Wilson, 1993). In a number of cases, the role of the media is often interpreted "as one of information providing, education and entertainment" (Lockyear, 2004: 26) to audiences. Though this may be true to a certain extent, it is up to audiences to either accept or reject the information provided to them.

Arline Kaplan (2012) argues that crime and violence in the media has increased drastically. Yvonne Jewkes (2004: 3) stipulates that "soap operas regularly use stories centred around serious and violent crime in order to boost ratings". This could be the reason why producers of telenovelas and other genres would not exclude violence in the storyline. It has been argued that the media is like all other capitalist controlled institutions, the ruling elite will pursue profits and audiences will be represented as commodities to advertisers (Murdock and Golding, 1974; Jewkes, 2004), even if it means allowing violent content to dominate programming.

Textual and reception analysis used in the study of *Yizo Yizo* found that violence was applied to substantiate dramatic intent. However, *Yizo Yizo* failed to expose the myth about township high schools and as a result viewers were left with dominant depiction of violence (Smith, 2001). *Mapantsula* (1988) depicted police using violence and torture against prisoners, it was at first restricted in South Africa as it had the power to incite "probable viewers to act violently" (Davies, 1990: 98). The film ended without showing what happened to Panic, who had committed quite a number of crimes, and so the enigma was never resolved.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature that is relevant to audiences' interaction with violence and gangsterism on South African television. It discussed and contextualised the study it terms of (i) genre, (ii) gangster genre's codes, conventions and narrative devices, (iii) representation of violence as well as (iv) television audience and violence. The chapter argued that *Uzalo's* is of the telenovela genre because of the heightened crimes that it shows and the cliff-hangers that it leaves (Tufte, 2000). It also argued that *Uzalo* is part of the gangster genre because of codes, conventions and narrative devices that it utilises. The gangster genre is discussed in this chapter through binary oppositions (Levi-Strauss, 1967), settings, dress codes, cars etc. The chapter also explored the representation of violence on South African television by highlighting the history of the tsotsis and townships. Gangster films have showcased townships such as KwaMashu, Soweto, Alexandra etc. due to their history of violence. Television audiences are no longer passive, therefore, this chapter discussed through sub-headings; effects and active audience how the audience receives and make sense of television programmes such as *Uzalo*. Chapter Three discusses the theory that guides the study.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The previous chapter thoroughly discussed, investigated and reviewed the literature that has been studied previously by other scholars. This chapter focuses on the theory that is being used to both collect and analyse data in the field of culture, communication and media. This study adopts an active audience theoretical framework and thus moves beyond an effects explanation of the representation and consumption of violence (Boyle, 2005). Therefore, this chapter is expected to theoretically evaluate and integrate the content of research works previously done in the same field of study. In order to successfully examine this theoretical chapter, the study employs two elements of theory; (a) narrative theory and (b) active audience study. As stated by Grant and Osanloo (2014), "the importance of theory-driven thinking and acting is emphasised in relations to the selection of a topic, the development of research questions, the conceptualisation of literature review, design approach and analysis plan for the dissertation study." Furthermore, theoretical framework can be referred to as "part of research study that sets out to describe the research question (hypothesis) and the line of inquiry and method used to answer it" (Ocholla and Le Roux, 2011: 1).

Basically, theory means different knowledges applied to different methods. Ocholla and Le Roux (2011) stipulate that theory serves as the lens that a study applies to examine a certain aspect of study/subject field. Though it may not be scientifically proven, it is however believed that theory may be of assistance in identifying key variables with power that may influence a phenomenon. It is hard to imagine any well conceptualised and structured study without theoretical framework. Without theoretical framework, the structure, purpose and vision is not crystal clear and can be likened to a house being built without blueprint (Grant and Osanloo, 2014). According to Eisenhart (1991: 205), theoretical framework is "a structure that guides research by relying on a formal theory; constructed by using an established, coherent explanation of certain phenomena and relations". It is important to note that theory does exist in a vacuum or extradited from unknown sources. Theoretical framework is derived from an existing theory in literature that has already been tested and validated by other scholars in a particular field of study and is considered a generally acceptable theory in the academic literature. On the other hand, conceptual framework serves as a logical structure of connected

or related concepts that help provide a picture or visual display of how ideas in a study or research relate to each other within the theoretical framework (Grant and Osanloo, 2014). The study contains two main objectives that can be summarised as follows:

- To provide insight as to what *Uzalo* reveals about the mediation of violence in contemporary South African television and audience interpretation of such.
- To explore the audience interpretation of the representation of violence and gangsterism in *Uzalo* by both residents and non-residents of KwaMashu.

The study seeks to address the aforementioned objectives through the use of theories and analytical strategies that are included in narratology (Propp, 1968; Newcomb, 2004; Bal, 1997; Kozloff, 2000; Levi-Strauss, 1963; 1967) in and active audience studies (Ang, 1985; 1991; Barker, 2000; Geraghty, 1991a/b; Hall, 1980; Morley, 1992; Nightingale, 2004, Tager 1997; 2010)

Narrative Theory

Since the beginning of time and indeed the era of information, African people, irrespective of their race, gender, creed, ethnicity or background, have always been known for their story telling tradition. Poems and fairy-tales are part of their narrative. However, since the arrival of television in the mid-1970s and the rise of the contemporary information age, there are now new ways of knowing (epistemology) and telling such stories (discourse) based on various methods and narratives. In countries such as United States of America (USA), television is the contemporary principal story teller (Kozloff, 2000). A particular genre will follow an expected structure of narrative or sequence of action, draw on a predictable stock of images and have a repertoire of variants of basic themes" (McQuail, 2005: 370). A narrative is thus deliberately constructed in the encoding process (Hall 1980/2010) by scriptwriters, producers and directors. This dissertation will not examine the encoding process but it will use narrative theory in order to make sense of the responses to the narrative of *Uzalo* by its audience.

Narratology is defined as the study and theory of narratives, or complex stories – what they are made of, how they are structured, and how audiences gain from using them as vehicle for communication. Narratology had its beginnings in the study of literary texts. Narratology involves the analysis of narratives, whereas storytelling involves nuts and bolts of capturing events through a story. Hence, narrative is a strategy for sense-making that is counter to a

rational-scientific model. The great narrative is dramatic, surprising, complex, and understood only in retrospectively (Browning, 2009).

Narratology is based on the work of theorists such as Vladimir Propp, Tvetzen Todorov, Claude Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes. This study will make particular use of the work done and inspired by Propp (1968) and Claude Levi-Strauss (1967). Narratology can be narrated as the "theory of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artefacts that 'tell a story'. Such a theory helps to understand, analyse, and evaluate narratives" (Bal, 1997: 3). Furthermore, the study of narrative has quite a number of terms that are embedded to it:

> A narrative text is a text in which an agent relates ('tells') a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof. A story is a fabula that is presented in a certain manner. A fabula is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors. An event is the transition from one state to another state. Actors are agents that perform actions. To act is defined here as to cause or to experience an event (Bal, 1997: 5).
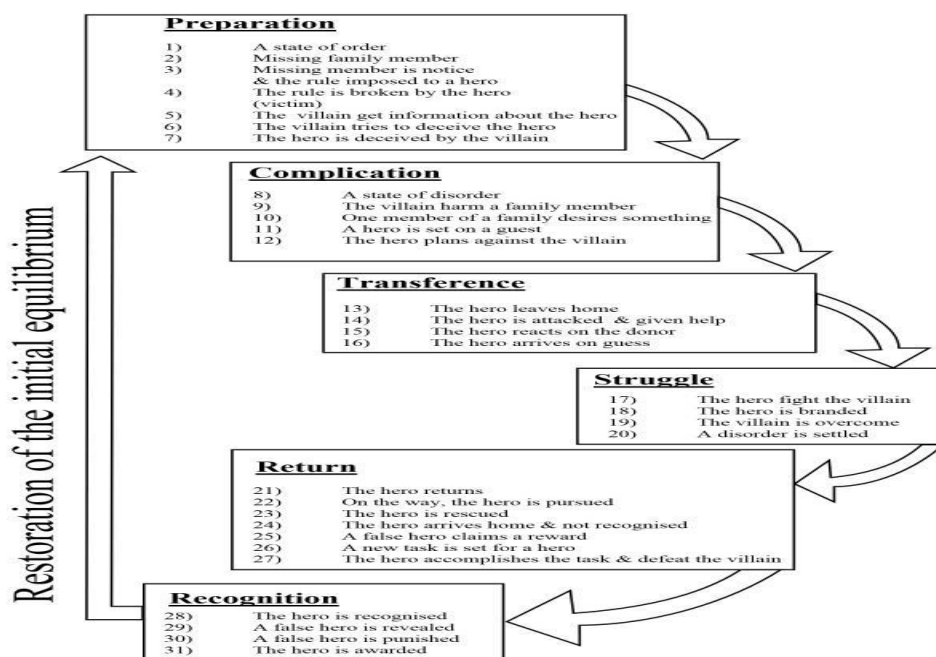

Figure 2.1: **Propp's Narrative Functions**

Source: Mthethwa (2014) - adapted from Propp (1958)

The study considers the narrative schema of Vladimir Propp (1968) and his categories of stock characters; the villain, the provider/donor, helper, princess, dispatcher, hero, victim and false hero. Propp argued that all narratives share common features serving similar purposes. "These

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"functions", he argued might take varying shape in specific cultural context but could, on close analysis, be found to serve different narratives in the same manner" (Newcomb, 2004: 415). This schema is useful in considering the narrative function and reception of the gangster character. Although a gangster may be considered a villain, the main gangster character in *Uzalo* season 1, Gxabhashe, was both a villain and also one of the most popular characters amongst the audience. It will be interesting to investigate this in terms of subverting Propp's categories. In essence, Propp argued that whenever the hero is tested and possibly attacked, he received magical power (known as helper). More often than not, problems encountered by a hero are masterminded by the villain. However, narrative theory that is based on linguistic theory considers communication as constitutive as well as an ever-present function of language, at times it is called "narratology" with its homologous concepts of narrator and narratee (Sylvie Patron, 2006). In contrast to other theories, "narrative communications are those which posit the fictional narrative" (Patron, 2006: 119). Apparently, there are two properties that can define narrative (i) the property of telling a story, (ii) and property of being told by someone {who can be called a "narrator"} (Genette, 1972).

Todorov (1969) identified three (3) variables in which a character is premised on, (i) equilibrium, (ii) disequilibrium and (iii) new equilibrium. We can relate these to *Uzalo* at certain points of the storyline, for example, Gxabhashe's business empire is booming and things are good for him in general; this is a state of equilibrium. When the character Nkosinathi Mdletshe sees some dodgy dealings at Gxabashe's scrap-yard and confronts the situation, Gxabhashe almost strangles him to death (Mdletshe is paralysed and loses his memory) which creates the disequilibrium, ultimately Gxabhashe managed to silence Nkosinathi which brings about the new equilibrium. A story is "what happened to whom, and the discourse that is how a story is told and the third layer is how a story and discourse are affected by the text's placement" (Kozloff, 1992: 69). This implies that the narrative can always be split into two parts or sub-sections. Though not stipulated the same, they are nevertheless the same; German novelist Gustuv Freytag, cited in Kozloff, argues that "well-made plays begin with an expository sequence setting out the state of affairs, rise through twists of complicating actions to a climax, and then fall off in intensity to a coda that delineate the resolution of the crises and new state of affairs" (1992: 70).

Claude Levi-Strauss (1967) observed "a similarity between myth and meaning and between signifiers and signified thereby created a methodology for reducing all cultural practices to

essential pairs of binary opposite concepts". Narrative theory makes meaning of the texts and discourse that includes possible reasons for the behaviour attached to character (Kozloff, 1992). Claude Levi-Strauss' (1967) work on narrative binary oppositions in analysing characters, settings or actions in terms of their similarities and differences (Prinsloo, 2009), offers formulas for recognising relationships between features. It will thus be useful in interpreting the study sample's interpretation of different characters within the narrative characterised by violence. This approach is useful in setting up characters (as binary oppositions) and extends to their paradigmatic structures, opening up analysis to broader features that speak to the representation of gangsterism-Christianity. The use of narrative theory will thus allow for an investigation as to what the connotative meanings may be in the binary oppositions of two rival families in *Uzalo*; one with a gangster and with the pastor.

Narrative theory is being used to assess the interpretation of the functionality of characters. Propp (1968) was of the view that the "Hero" seeks something and the "Villain" opposes the hero. In *Uzalo*, Gxabhashe (the gangster and head of one family) want his criminally sullied business to flourish but Mdletshe (the Pastor and head of the other 'rival' family) opposes him. The study seeks to investigate, from the audience, the way in which they decode and interpret these two families and what they symbolise. *Uzalo* is part of the telenovela genre and the narrative is, therefore, premised along the structured lines of this particular narrative. Roland Barthes scholastic work in culture studies is one of the most influential and described the narrative as:

The narratives of the worlds are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though as any material were fit to receive man's stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting (think of Carpaccio's Saint Ursula) stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinitive diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society, it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyments of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural background. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is

international, trans-historical, transcultural; it is simple there, like self itself (Barthes, 1977: 79).

There are many ways of understanding narratives, although, "due to interdisciplinary nature of narrative studies; there is no definitive theory, no paradigmatic definition of what a narrative actually is" (Paul Hazel, 2007: 1). In the earlier paragraphs, it was stipulated that a narrative always has a fabula which relates to the chronological order of things. However, "narrative must always have a beginning, middle and the end but may not be that sequence" (Chandler, 2002: 90).

In the world of film, serial, telenovela and soap opera, narrative inter alia includes "unique sequence of events, mental states, happenings involving human beings as characters or actors (Bruner, 1990: 43). Narratives that are known in modern research are derived from text on novels, historical writings and films (Hazel 2007). In addition to that, narrative can emanate from function of the memory, for example, King Shaka praise-names were previously not included in his written life story but were told by elders to the younger generations. On the contrary, storytellers do not only use narrative to tell stories of the past, stories can also be used to tell of future predictions and can be a means for planning for them (Hazel, 2007). Athough memory is good for certain narratives such as oral and verbal interpretation for visually impaired television audience members, in scientific research there is an understanding that according to (Hazel, 2007: 6) "memory is not a store of 'raw' experience: sensory data is always organised, ordered, contextualised and encoded".

Characters are an interesting key part of the plot. In fact, without characters there is no narrative, yet, Kozloff (2000: 75) argues that "it is nonsense to think or perceive characters as the normal people, characters are just phantasms, nothing but a concatenation of the actions they perform". In cultural studies, the popularity of Propp's theory has resulted in it being challenged, questioned and recast by many theorists as well as cultural scholars. Greimas recast Propp's theory as follows: (i) subject, (ii) object, (iii) sender, (iv) helper, (v) receiver and (vi) opponent. It is believed that the leading protagonist becomes the "subject" that is challenged by the opponent. Producers understand the importance of characters and that their representation on television significantly differs from that of cinema or theatre representation; series has a leading protagonist in each episode that has "nowness" (Fiske, 1987).

Active Audience

Through the use of the concept of the active audience, this study investigates how audiences interpret the representation of gangsterism, violence and crime. The study focuses on audiences as consumers of media products such as *Uzalo* (Downing 2004). Audience reception serves as a convenient arena within which to explore a series of critical theoretical problems regarding the relations among texts, ideology and social determinations (Livingstone, 1998: 7). The active audience theory is unlike other earlier media audience theories that are known as effects models (Berelson, 1959; Katz; 1960; Katz *et al.* 1977; Key 1961). Effects models focused on how audiences reacted to or were affected by film or media text and viewed audiences as the same idealised, homogenous spectators who reacted to the message the same way regardless of their race, gender, culture or any other diverse factors that existed among them. The concept of the active audience shifted the focus from numbers to meanings (Barker, 2000). It will be used to gain an understanding of the processes of interpretation and identification by this study's sample, both comparatively between the residents and non-residents of KwaMashu and within the groups themselves. This is because Barker (2000) argues that audiences are not culturally static but active producers of meaning. However, David Morley (1992) stipulates that individual readings are mostly framed by shared cultural formations and practices that pre-exist to a particular person.

The origins of today's media audiences emanate from public theatrical and music performances; not leaving out popular sport games and spectacles of antique times (McQuail, 2005) an active audience constitutes received wisdom about the act of viewing media in nowadays (Shimpach, 2014). There is a difference between audience and audiences as well as an active audience. It is important to note that:

> Audience in the singular, is the easiest term to understand and dismiss. It implies that television reaches homogenous mass people who are all essentially identically identical, who receive the same messages, meanings, and ideologies from the same programmes and who are essentially passive. The term 'audience's inability to account for social differences and consequent differences of meanings means that it ascribes great centralising, homogenising power to television and its producers. Pluralising the term into 'audiences' at least recognising that are differences between the viewers of any one program that must be taken into account. It recognises that we are not a homogenous society. Audiences are active producers of their own meaning (Fiske, 1987; Barker, 2000 & Hall, 1980).

Fiske has described audiences and how they make meaning out of television or media text, conversely, audiences are also defined as "anonymous and variable collective of individuals addressed, as a group and as individuals by the organs of 'mass' media communication" (Long and Wall, 2009: 222). A telenovela's narrative and characters create a close relationship with their audience so that regular viewers have an intimate knowledge of a programme, so much so that their identification with certain characters are sources of confusion to those who do not watch the programme more often (Geranghty, 1991). However, one cannot ignore that the telenovela/soap opera, as a genre, has to be to be built on open-ended narrative forms where location informs geographical space with which audiences can easily identify (Allen, 1985; Ang, 1985; Buckingham, 1987; Dyer *et al.,* 1981; Geraghty, 1991). In addition, "the contextual variables of family, class, gender and neighbourhood qualify the audience reaction" (Barker, 2000: 270). Audiences thus interpret television texts according to their own cultural positions that are influenced by geographical location etc. People are not audiences by nature but by culture because they learn to think and act in certain contexts that are always in line with their culture. However, from the research perspective, the audience is mainly contextually and textually-bound (Nightingale, 1996). Nevertheless, in terms of a specific method, it is argued that ethnography is a valid method of studying television and audiences/viewers (Morley, 1980a).

Actual people in actual situations watch and enjoy actual television programmes. Active audiences acknowledge the difference between people despite their social construction and pluralise the meanings and pleasures they find in television narrative (Fiske 1987). Out of many characteristics of a good narrative discourse, a well scripted plot of a telenovela leaves audiences with cliff-hangers after each episode. Cliff-hangers commonly lead to gossip amongst audiences, "the word gossip is clear from a phallocentric discourse; its connotations are of a triviality feminity, and it is opposed by implications, to serious male talk" (Fiske, 1987: 77). Alternatively, gossip can be considered as the sense-making process attached to active audiences. According to Gerangty (1981), gossip is more of a "social cement" that binds together inter alia characters and narrative strands in television, binds viewers to each other as the gossip about the show goes on and finally establishes an active relationship between the viewer and programme. Hypothetically, the more audiences openly discuss and gossip about a soap opera such as *Uzalo*, the easier it becomes to comprehend whether the programme is a true reflection of society, in terms of representation and identification, or not. In essence "audiences are active creators of meaning in relation to text" (Barker, 2000: 32).

Hall (1980) adds that in terms of encoding – decoding, audiences do not just consume the message that encoders intend them to, considering that television texts are polysemic and so the meaning is decoded by different viewers. It cannot be disputed that audiences are active and derive a variety of meanings from soap operas / telenovelas (La Pastina, 1994). However, there is a method that could be influenced by one's cultural orientation as used in processing texts from television as identified by Hall (1980) encoding – decoding; i) the dominant-hegemonic encoding/decoding position which accepts the preferred meaning that is composed by the producers, ii) negotiated position – the code which acknowledges that there is a preferred meaning but creates its own rules and understandings about certain narratives, iii) opposition position – a code where audiences comprehend the intended meaning, however, reject it and formulate the new connotative meaning that ultimately opposes the other. After all is said and done, audiences somehow understand that "watching television is constitutive of and constituted by forms of cultural identity" (Barker, 2000: 273). More often than not, representation becomes a contested terrain particularly as a result of contradiction between cultural belief and popular culture.

These three positions (dominant, negotiated and opposition) have failed to point out the reasons that make audiences take a particular stand or position. Some audience members argue in favour of certain characters which could possibly emanate from a shared cultural orientation or experience with that character. Therefore, some audience members' perspectives are not based on rationale and do not come from the generally acceptable epistemological perspective and are instead purely based on emotions. Therefore, this creates a gap between the three identified positions by Hall (1980) and there is now a need for a Bias Position. It is a bias position because each and every audience member argues their views which are based on i) personal experience, ii) cultural background and iii) preconceived knowledge therefore whichever position is taken is based on loyalty and bias to these three dimensions.

Television is not just a series of tales but also a performance medium, however, the nature of the relationship between television's tales and viewers of those tales, according to Allen (1992: 101), is of utmost importance in determining the success of the text. The ways in which audiences make sense and derive pleasure from television depends on how they perceive a particular act (Allen, 1992). In other words, cultural background counts in comprehending things differently from others.

Audiences normally prefer certain types of television genres that they can easily relate to. Serial narrative, affectionately known as soap opera, "is the most popular form of television programming in the world" (Allen, 1992: 107). Therefore, a discussion on popular television programmes would be inseparable from a dialogue of popular culture, melodrama and active audiences.

Audiences are active and dynamic in their nature as they do not receive texts and automatically accept them as they are originally encoded. Therefore, it is important to also understand how audiences receive texts (reception theory) and then decode or react to them. Notwithstanding the fact that audiences mean different things to different scholars, which has led others to a point where they categorise audiences into three models namely; i) audience-as-outcome; this model observes audiences as acted upon by the media, ii) audience-as-mass; this model regards audiences as a vast number of people scattered across time and space who also act autonomously from each other/medium and possibly do not know each other, iii) audience-as-agent; this model interprets audiences as free agents with rights to choose what to watch on television (Webster, 1998). Conversely, McQuail (2005) states that audiences shall be understood differently and in overlapping ways: by place (as in the case of local media); by people (as in the case of certain age group, gender, or income category); by type of medium / channel involved (technology and organisation combined); by content of its messages (genre, subject matter, style), and by time (daytime and primetime). There is another perspective on audience categories / types offered by Nightingale (2004). Firstly, the audience as "people assembled". Secondly, audience as "the people addressed". Thirdly, the audience as "happening," for example, the experience of reception alone or with others. Fourthly, the audience as hearing or audition as in the case of active audiences. In the 1980s, television audiences were fiercely studied by Birmingham School, where David Morley and many other scholars from the field emanated from, and their focus was based on audiences that watched soap operas. To date, scholars are still debating whether or not it is correct to categorise and differently distinguish audiences as was done in the past by Webster and McQuail. Nonetheless, that approach is being opposed by Sandvoss (2014: 230), "the concept of audience seems to have lost its analytical utility. As audiences are everywhere, they become increasingly indistinguishable and ultimately invisible".

Irrespective of how audiences are viewed, perceived, categorised or understood, they are always assumed to "bring with them a pre-existing set of beliefs, experiences, and expectations

about what they hope to gain from watching a particular television programme" (Sullivan, 2013: 105). Understanding audiences can never be an easy process since audiences are dynamic instead of static, their views are often complex and hence it's not easy to comprehend their reception and understanding thereof. In summary "audiences are both a product of social context (which leads to a shared cultural interest, understanding and information needs) and response to a particular paten of media provision" (McQuail, 2005: 396).

Reception research is an empirical study of the social production of meaning in people's encounter with the media discourses. Contrary to media ethnography, reception research does not study media use as it happens in the natural conditions of everyday life. Contrary to the methodology of survey research, reception does not expose people to a finite set of questions with pre-given response options. Instead it explores media experiences through the medium of extended talk. It seeks to illuminate audience practices and experiences, by getting those involved to verbalise them in the non-natural but open situation of the qualitative research, in which informants have considerable power to influence the agenda (Schrøder et al, 2003: 147). Basically, reception studies are viewed as the body of work that scholastically interpret relation between audiences and the medium (Sandvoss, 2014 and Livingstone, 1998).

Encoding and Decoding

Approached from a media-culturalist perspective with an emphasis on content, reception and context (McQuail, 2005) this study aims to explore if and how different viewers hold different readings of the show (Hall, 1980). Meaning that construction is active and will occur in a variety of ways according to a diversity of viewers who may hold dominant, oppositional or negotiated reading perspectives (Hall, 1980) of *Uzalo*. Cultural proximity does influence audience decisions to watch a particular show because of shared experiences and language. Audiences "do tend to choose programmes that are most culturally relevant or proximate to them" (La Pastina and Straubhaar, 2005: 273).

Encoding and decoding are two separate terms that are both embedded with different but interlinked meanings. Hall (1980), one of the most renowned scholar in audience studies, labelled these as "determining moments" that occur in any communication exchange. Encoding is when the text's creator places an idea, event or experience in a format that will be meaningful to audiences. To transform an event via television, it must first be transformed using Sullivan (2013) and Hall's (1980) aural-visual forms of the television discourse.

"To put it paradoxically, the event must become a story before it becomes a communicative event" (Hall, 1980: 129). According to Sullivan (2013), this is the point where language and professional codes of production as well as conventions of text production comes alive.

Decoding is about message / text reception and interpretation. Before any text tries to educate, inform, entertain, instruct, or persuade, it has to be "appropriated as a discourse and be meaningfully decoded" (Hall, 1980: 130). Furthermore, Hall summarises that the difference of interpretation between television producers and the viewers is the work of "structural differences of relation and position between broadcasters and audiences" (1980: 131). As it may be expected in academia, scholars do not always agree on recent findings or developments in their field of interest. In spite of all these informed arguments, Fiske (1989: 57) declared that there is no text, and there is no audience; there are only open processes of viewing".

In as much as audiences have the right to hold different opinions or contradicting views about either *Uzalo*, *Tsotsi* and/or *Mapantsula*, it is however, important to always note that "texts (whether print, pictorial or televisual) are polysemic, capable of being interpreted in distinctly different ways by different viewers" (Sullivan, 2013: 142). The issue of time and space is of utmost importance in audience studies because it informs us how viewers receive their information. If you consider that each home in the 1980s owned or used a television set, which meant that watching a programme was a shared event and thus the comparative influences of opinion were immediate within a household. These days, shows aired on television can also be accessed via the internet on channels such as YouTube or can be downloaded to smartphones, tablets and other computer devices. (Sullivan, 2013). Indeed, in this age of information and technology, audiences can access their content on demand and on a device of their choice. Moreover, they can upload their opinions of the programmes they watched with immediate effect to the collective discussion. Nonetheless, Sullivan (2013: 168) points out that quite a number of scholars focused on audience studies, such as David Morley's seminal work in The Nationwide Audience opened doors for audience scholars to examine specific interpretation of media texts and associate to those meanings with social categories. However, in spite of what Sullivan alluded to with regards to audience, this totally ignores the role of the medium in the entire process of audience studies.

In media studies, anything that relates to photography, film and drama may find the pervasive use of the term 'representation'. As is the case in this chapter, representation that enables the audiences to actively participate in decoding process of *Uzalo* is examined. Representation

means; "to represent something by describing or depicting it, calling it up in the mind by description, portrayal or imagination. To represent also means to symbolise or to stand for, to be a specimen for or to substitute for" (Long and Wall, 2009: 79). Multinational broadcasters are often accused of unfair reporting and stereotyping of the African continent. Stereotyping is a process that involves an expression of exaggerated beliefs about a group that serves to qualify or justify the conduct towards that of those who hold and perhaps express that belief (Long and Wall, 2009). It is apparent that in most avenues, *Uzalo* does attempt to minimise any misrepresentations of the township; they shoot a percentage of scenes on location in KwaMashu, the studio is situated very near the township and an active involvement is always encouraged with the people of KwaMashu, who are often cast as extras. Furthermore, two of the actors who play protagonists in *Uzalo*, Leleti Khumalo and Bheki Mkhwane, are from KwaMashu.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed theories that guide the study in terms of data collection and analysis. Therefore, this chapter has theoretically evaluated and integrated the content of research works previously done in the same field of study. As successfully examined in this theoretical chapter, this study employed two elements of theory; *the narrative theory,* and *active audience study*. The study analysed narrative and active audience theories. Poems and fairy-tales have been part of the isiZulu culture since the beginning of time and the era of information. Narrative theory is applied in order to analyse and understand characters, plot, text etc. in a gangster premised narrative / soap opera. Hence, active audience / reception theory is used to analyse audience reactions to the plot and texts. The next chapter is the methodology chapter which discusses the data collection methods and analysis.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The previous chapter explored the theories that frame the study. This chapter focuses on the research methodology employed, which is qualitative in nature. Furthermore, this chapter includes a description of the research paradigm, research design, data collection methods (including recruitment and sampling), and a form of analysis that will be employed in Chapter Six.

Research Paradigm: Interpretative

The term paradigm is derived from the Greek word *paradeigma* which is interpreted as *pattern* and was first utilised by Thomas Kuhn (1962). It is argued that research has three related dimensions i) ontology, ii) epistemology and iii) methodology (TerreBlanche and Kelly, 1999). Research paradigm is an all-encompassing system of interrelated practice that defines the nature of research enquiry along with the aforesaid three dimensions (Thomas, 2010; TerreBlanche and Kelly, 1999).

This current study adopts the interpretative tradition or paradigm of media studies. The interpretative paradigm can also be called constructionist paradigm. Interpretative tradition is used to explore the ways in which the audience make sense of their social worlds and how they interpret these understandings through language (IsiZulu), sound (music; sound track), lifestyle (dress code) etc. (Deacon *et al* 1999). The language, sound and lifestyle all relate to the *Uzalo* storyline and gangster narrative. Participants made reference to these elements during focus group recordings but the next chapter discusses this thoroughly. The core task of research is an interpretive one: to make sense of the ways people make sense of their worlds by continually guessing meanings and assessing those guesses as well as drawing conclusions from the better guesses (Deacon, 1999; and Geertz, 1973). Certainly, after each *Uzalo* episode, the audience are left guessing the possibilities of what the next episode could bring and how a mystery could be resolved.

Research Approach

This approach can be defined as "exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2014: 4). Moreover, qualitative research is used in the study as it focuses on people's descriptions of what occurs in their respective worlds and in comprehending human phenomena and various meanings that societies assign to these phenomena (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; King and Horrock, 2010). This methodology is suitable for this study because it allows a researcher to collect the responses/views directly from the *Uzalo* audience.

Research Design: Reception Study

The research design is the plan that is adopted by the study to answer questions validly, objectively, accurately, as well as economically (Kumar, 2011). This study adopts a reception study design. Reception study is a valuable research design in Cultural Studies as it:

> Speaks of media messages as culturally and generically coded discourses, while defining audiences as agents of meaning production. It conceives of recipients as active individuals who can do a variety of things with media in terms of consumption, decoding and social uses (Jensen and Rosengren 1990: 217-18).

Reception studies establish the audience as a polysemic in their decoding, that their cultural context matters, and that they often disagree with textual analyses (Hall, 1980). Researchers are sensitised to the ways in which the haphazard and contingent details of people's daily lives provide the context in which media are engaged with and responded to (Livingstone, 1998b: 4). Reception analysis is important to television and film studies as it helps to evaluate how the audience reacts to the production and how it is understood or interpreted. This current study focuses on *Uzalo* audiences and the ways in which they interpret violence in *Uzalo*. Therefore, in order to meet the objectives of the study and respond to research questions; reception study becomes the most suited design.

Data Collection: Focus groups sampling and recruitment

Focus group discussions are a popular and rigorous data collection method for this reception study.

Focus groups were utilised to collect data in this qualitative study. Focus group are described as "a group of subjects interviewed together, prompting a discussion" (Babbie, 2013: 349). It is a strategy in qualitative study "in which attitudes, opinions or perceptions towards an issue, product, service or programme are explored through a free and open discussion between members of a group and the research" (Kumar, 2011: 127-8).

The advantages of focus groups are that they are relatively inexpensive (requires only a small gift incentive for participants) and are a manageable scale for students running a small-scale research project. The group dynamics within the focus group tends to stimulate respondents to contribute to the discussion, allows for strong interaction between participants which triggers discussion and elaboration from participants (Berger, 1998). "Focus groups also provide a great degree of interviewing flexibility. The moderator can easily follow up on members' comments, ask question as needed, solicit opinion, and raise issues and so on" (Hennick, 2007:10). The disadvantages of focus groups are their limited representation: because of the small numbers of respondents involved, it is not possible to generalise findings too widely (this is also true of most other types of deeply qualitative research). Data from focus groups do not lend themselves to quantification (Berger 1998: 91). Focus groups are designed to answer "why" and "how" questions; but are not capable of answering "how many" questions.

For the purposes of this study, four separate focus groups were conducted to gain an understanding of audience interpretations of the representation of violence and gangsterism in *Uzalo* by a sample of its audience. The first criteria for the study's sample was that all participants are regular viewers of *Uzalo*. The sampling technique is therefore purposive, which is a "non-random sample where the researcher deliberately selects the subjects against one or more traits to give what is believed to be a representative sample" (Gray, 2009: 152). The next chapter five focusses on analysis.

Familiarity with the topic or product under scrutiny is the first requirement. The criteria of selection for the discussion group is based on the use or knowledge of a particular product; or the inclusion in a particular demographic where patterns of behaviour or consumptions can be construed as likely to be similar. In summary, the criteria for inclusion in the current research is that the participants are; i) regular viewers of *Uzalo* and in order to set up a comparative analysis must be, ii) residents of KwaMashu (focus groups 1 and 2) 2) and iii) non-residents of KwaMashu (focus groups 3 and 4). The reason for including both residents and non-residents

was in order to establish if cultural proximity influences the selected audience's interpretations. The popularity of and identification with aspects of a soap opera is equated with its cultural proximity and the "ease with which audiences are able to identify with the characters, contexts, and situations portrayed" (Teer-Tomaselli 2005: 568, see also Ponono and Wasserman, 2016). The assumption here is that *Uzalo* may be more culturally proximate to audience members who live within KwaMashu as its narrative and most of its filming is based in KwaMashu F section. In order to set-up a comparative element in the study, another sample group who live outside of KwaMashu was included. This ensured an exploration of the audience interpretation of violence and gangsterism with respect to the influence of location as cultural proximity incorporates "educative, cognitive and emotional elements and aspects related to the audience's immediate surroundings" (Castelló, 2010: 207).

Homogeneity among the participants is important since, in focus groups, researchers are interested in the attitudes and behaviours in a specific demographic, rather than in widespread generalisability (Greenbaum 1998: 2; Krueger 1988: 35). The ideal size for a focus group is between 7-10 persons. Anything larger than 12 tends to break down in sub-groups, losing the dynamic of a single conversation; anything fewer than 6 tends to lack sufficient variation in points of view to generate lively discussion (Greenbaum 1998: 3. Berger, 1998:5). The focus groups included both men and women that were included within the same groups. This decision seemed suitable as the study does not investigate domestic violence, which may have been difficult to discuss in mixed-gender groups, but rather the representation of criminal violence and gangsterism. "Focus groups create a setting in which diverse perceptions, judgments and experiences concerning particular topics can surface. Persons in focus groups are stimulated by the experiences of other members of the group to articulate their own perspectives. The ways they support, debate or resolve issues with each other can resemble the dynamics of everyday social discourse" (Lindlof, 1995:174). The age differential within a single group should not be more than 15 years (Berger, 1998: 89; Greenbaum 1998: 4; Krueger 1988: 35). This study was limited to the sample of people between the ages of 18-30 years and 40-55 years. The rationale being that the storyline has characters such as Mxolisi and Mastermind that are aged 26 but there are characters such as Gxabhashe and Pastor Mdletshe who represent an older section of the population.

Recruitment

To recruit the younger group of participants between the ages of 18-30 years in KwaMashu, the researcher made an announcement to students at KwaMashu Community Advancement Projects (K-CAP) through staff member(s). Gatekeeper permission was obtained prior to addressing the youth (see appendix 4). The announcement was made on the 20th and 21st June 2017 in the K-CAP film classes that are offered to youth of KwaMashu and surrounding areas. The youth were asked if they were prepared to participate in a 60-120 minute discussion. The suitable participants (meeting the above-mentioned inclusion criteria) voluntarily participated. The focus group took place on the 22nd June 2017.

It was more difficult to recruit the older group within the ages of 40-55 years of KwaMashu participants. Finally, K-CAP indicated that there is a scheduled, structured and appropriate community meeting in which the older group could be recruited. The community meeting took place in the afternoon of 22nd June 2017. The focus group took place the next day on the 23rd June 2017 at K-CAP. It is important to point out that K-CAP made the announcement and clarified the criteria during the community meeting.

In order to recruit youth between 18-30 years outside of KwaMashu, the researcher placed a notice at Thekwini TVET College (Melbourne Campus) and the Student Representative Council (SRC) assisted in recruiting potential participants. Here too, prior permission for the gatekeeper's letter was obtained from Thekwini TVET College (see appendix 5). The focus group for the younger group in Durban CBD took place on the 30th June 2017.

The older group participants between 40-55 years, in Durban CBD were mostly recruited from around Dalton Hostel as it is close to the venue where focus group was scheduled to take place. It is important to note that the Durban CBD older group comprised of Dalton Hostel residents, Thekwini TVET staff member(s), some participants one or two stated that they were in CDB for certain reasons but are originally from surrounding townships such as Umlazi and are familiar with *Uzalo*. CDBs always attract people from different townships. Dalton Hostel was built in 1934 for males only and is located on the corner of Sydney and (57) Dalton Road and was built along with other hostels such as Jacobs, Thokoza, Umlazi-Glebe etc. in early years of the 20th century (Vedalankar, 1993). The focus group successfully took place on the 29th September 2017 at Thekwini TVET College.

In summary, this study conducted four focus groups each comprising of nine people. The total sample number for this study is thus 36 participants. This number is deemed sufficient for this Masters study as expanding the number of focus groups "probably does little to improve the projectability of the data (since the data is still qualitative) (Greenbaum, 1998:14). The sample was stratified along 1) geographical location and 2) age.

Location	Age	Gender	Number of participants
KwaMashu	18-30	Females 3 – Males 6	9
KwaMashu	40-55	Females 8 – Males 1	9
Durban	18-30	Females 6 – Males 3	9
Durban	40-55	Females 1 – Males 8	9

Table 4.1: Summary of sample group

KwaMashu Community Advancement Projects (K-CAP) and Thekwini TVET College (Melbourne Campus) are to be sent a copy of the final research reports.

Preparation and Recording

The focus groups were guided by a focus group discussion schedule (see appendix 3). The researcher aimed to ensure that the schedule was not overly prescriptive so as not to over-determine the discussion (Krueger, 1988:36; Fourie, 2009:451). The questions included in the schedule were designed to stimulate discussion that directly addressed the study's key research questions. However, the schedule was open ended enough to allow for different perspectives to emanate from the group. Questions were direct, clear and simple (Krueger, 1988).

All focus groups were audio-recorded, and participants were made aware of this through both the recruitment process and the informed consent forms (see appendix 1). As part of preparation, study participants were provided with an informed consent forms. No focus groups were conducted with persons under the age of 18 years old. The primary language of communication within the study was English, however, those participants who preferred to respond in other vernacular languages such as isiZulu did so, which was also acceptable as the researcher is IsiZulu speaking. As such an IsiZulu informed consent form was provided to such participants (see appendix 2).

Ideally, venues in which focus groups are held should be inviting, large enough to allow participants to sit in a circle with sufficient space, but not so large as to be alienating (Krueger 1988:36). The current research took place in a smallish seminar room with a central table for refreshments, and chairs arranged in a circle. Technically, it is useful to use at least two separate audio recorders (in case one fails) or in order to capture the sound from two different locations in the room. Noise and distractions were avoided by closing the door.

Facilitation

The facilitation of the focus groups requires that the moderator is well prepared and fully aware of the research questions under discussion (Greenbaum, 1998: 66; Krueger, 1988: 33). This study's four focus groups were facilitated by the researcher who had an in-depth understanding of the study's central objectives. A facilitator needs to balance a lively discussion since "interaction among participants is a vital part of the focus group process and must be encouraged to maximise the quality of the output from the session" (Greenbaum, 1998: 66), while at the same time, exerting the moderator's role as an "authority figure in the room who is in control of the group discussion" (Greenbaum 1998: 67). As the facilitator is bi-lingual (English and IsiZulu), he was confident of engaging with all participants.

Thorough preparation and a sensitivity to group dynamics are called for here. The researcher in this study ensured that the more retiring participants were allowed opportunities to speak. As the researcher, I would remind participants of the question under discussion and then randomly asked retiring participants if she or he something to say. All the points in the discussion guide were addressed in each group in order to ensure consistency and reliability in data collection. "The aim of the focus group discussion is not to build consensus, but just the opposite – to find out what each member of the group thinks about the topic under discussion, and to elicit from each person his or her opinions and descriptions of the behaviour of interest" (Berger, 1998:89).

Transcription and Analysis

After the completion of the focus groups, recordings were transcribed. The audiotape transcription was done soon after the focus group was completed in order to highlight areas

that needed to be followed up on (Lindlof, 1995: 210-211). Unintelligible parts of the transcripts were indicated with ellipses or underscores (Lindlof, 1995: 211).

Data Analysis

The reception analysis is conducted via a comparative thematic analysis of themes that emanate from the data set of participants who live within, and those who live outside of KwaMashu. The collected data (responses from the focus group) is organised thematically. Data analysis is the process where qualitative data has been collected and analysed to form an explanation, understanding or interpretation of people's situations that are being investigated (Sunday, 2018).

Thematic Analysis

In order to ensure that the study responds to its research questions, the data is organised through a comparative thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method that identifies, analysis, and reports patterns (themes) within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Phases of Thematic Analysis	
Phases	Description of thematic analysis process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Table: 4.2 **Braun and Clarke's (2006) process of thematic analysis**

The table above shows the process that the study followed in thematically analysing data through themes and patterns within the data set, as shown in the following chapter. This current study adopted theoretical thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006: 78) "through theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data". Furthermore, some authors are of the view that theoretical thematic analysis tends to be driven by the researcher's analytic interest in the area, thus more explicitly analyst-driven. In this process, it is easier to theoretically code and analyse data with a specific purpose to answer a research's key questions. To answer research questions, I carefully perused key words within research questions and then used those key words to develop themes or patterns.

Narratology and the Active Audience

The identified comparative themes are then analysed in the light of: i) the key research questions, ii) the theoretical framework of narrative theory and the active audience, mobilised via the encoding/decoding model (Hall, 1980) and iii) literature on crime and television (Munby, 1996; Dovey, 2007 and Ellapen, 2007). This is in order to understand how the narrative and central characters, that represent violence, are negotiated by the different focus group participants, both within and outside KwaMashu.

Due to the pervasiveness of narrative in daily activities, cultural diversity and in media texts; narrative theory examines how people make sense of the world and make sense of stories (Aldama, *et al*, 2016). This narrative is inextricably bound to encoding and decoding (Hall, 1980). In telenovelas, the "hermeneutic code predominates" (Spigel, *et al* 2008: 29). In other words, the narrative (text) is open to a whole variety of interpretation including identity construction, which links to Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding that "has been hugely influential within cultural and media studies, and remains central to contemporary audience research" (Greer, 2010: 54) as it accounts for the polysemic nature of audience interpretation of texts. The study uses the 'active audience' theory, mobilised via the encoding/decoding model, to assess how the audience interprets the construction of gangsterism and television violence in *Uzalo*. The model is useful in this study as it positions the participant's readings on an

ideological scale from whether they hold a dominant and/or ii) negotiated and/or iii) dominant reading with regards to *Uzalo's* preferred messages. Decoding is important because the study is about how audiences read violence in *Uzalo*, so the negotiated readings can be captured accordingly. This is in order to indicate the way in which context influences the *Uzalo* audiences both in KwaMashu and greater Durban.

Ethical Issues

In order to ensure all ethical issues are taken into consideration, gatekeeper letters were obtained from relevant authorities such as K-CAP in KwaMashu (see appendix 4) and Thekwini TVET College in Durban (see appendix 5). In social sciences research, the practice and outcomes of social research have to be trustworthy and therefore systems of ethical assurance have to be established and maintained (Iphofen, 2011). Participants took part voluntarily and informed consent forms (appendix 1 and 2) were issued to participants in English and IsiZulu for those who preferred to read and sign a Zulu version.

The University of KwaZulu-Natal issued ethical clearances in May 2016 and data collection commenced in June 2017 and ended in September 2017. Some participants elected to use pseudonyms whilst others used their shortened real names. All this was done to protect the real identities of the participants.

Validity and Reliability

There are many different ways to define validity but Babbie (1989: 133) understands validity as "the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration". This explanation is in line with the study where audiences validly decode meanings of television violence presented through gangsterism in *Uzalo*. Data validity can be accepted however, the data has to be reliable. Data reliability refers to dependable, consistent, predictable, stable and honest data and as a result the research instrument must have the consistency and stability to produce similar results under repeatable attempts (Kumar, 2011; Moser & Kalton, 1989). This is a qualitative study, data was collected voluntarily from participants who met all the recruitment criteria in KwaMashu and in Durban CDB through focus groups.

Conclusion

The study's methodological approach has been discussed in this chapter. The selection of this qualitative reception study approach, its concomitant data collection and analytical tools is in direct correspondence to the study's key research questions, i.) what are some of the reasons for this local production's popularity {characters, narrative structure, plot?}, ii.) In what ways, do audience members consider the representation of violence and gangsterism to be realistic and / or exaggerated?). The overall guiding theory of the active audience led the researcher to place value on the actual participant responses that will be included in the next chapter in order to support the selection of themes and substantiate the academic arguments of this study's analysis.

Not all seasons of *Uzalo* are under investigation, key focus is on season one but highlights on season two and three can be made.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The previous chapter delineated the methodological approach that is adopted in this study. This chapter is informed by the active audience theory that proposes that the participants are active producers of meaning based on their cultural contexts (Barker, 2012) that may be reflected in the telenovela genre (King'ara, 2013; Castello, 2010). The interpretation of the representation of violence and gangsterism affords gaining deeper meanings on *Uzalo's* decoding narratives (Wigston, 2009).

Focus groups were coded according to location (KwaMashu and Durban CBD), age and participants. The table below shows the group code descriptions. These codes will be used in referencing the participant's focus group excerpts.

Location codes	Location / Age	Participants code	Example
K1	KwaMashu younger group	P1- P9	K1P1
K2	KwaMashu older group	P1- P9	K2P1
D1	Durban CBD younger group	P1- P9	D1P1
D2	Durban CBD older group	P1- P9	D2P1

Table 5.1: Focus group codes descriptions

Data was collected through four separate focus groups that were transcribed. Themes were then theoretically identified from the research question, and the ways in which they are characterised is influenced by the study participant's responses that directly illustrated these themes. The following five themes, and eight sub-themes were identified:

Themes and sub-themes	Sample responses
Decoding popularity - Characters - Narrative structure	• Good and bad • Dress code and lifestyle • Hijacking scenes • Cliff-hangers
Representation - Realistic - Unrealistic - Exaggeration	• Gangsterism • Township life
Comparison - Similarities - Differences	• Entertainment Education • Police Corruption • Violence

Table 5.2: The themes (as per research questions) and sub-themes (as per participant responses)

The data is organised thematically. Narratology (Propp, 1968; Levi-Strauss, 1967; Todorov, 1969; and Barthes, 1977), and key concepts connected to the concept of 'active audience' (Hall, 1980; Ang, 1985; Morley, 1980; McQuail, 2005; and King'ara, 2010) are then employed to analyse these themes. One such concept is cultural proximity. *Uzalo's* popularity and audience identification, with aspects of its narrative, is explained through the idea of cultural proximity (Castelló, 2010: 207; Roome, 1997) and the "ease with which audiences are able to identify with the characters, contexts, and situations portrayed" (Teer-Tomaselli 2005: 568, see also Ponono and Wasserman, 2016). The assumption here is that *Uzalo* may be more culturally proximate to audience members that live within KwaMashu, as its narrative and most of its filming is based in KwaMashu F section. Furthermore, one of the key questions interrogates whether the gangsterism and violence in *Uzalo* is exaggerated or true to township life, Hall's encoding/decoding model (1980) is used in this analysis. As such, the chapter will identify if, why and how the participants hold a dominant and /or negotiated and / or oppositional reading of *Uzalo's* preferred reading.

THEME 1: DECODING POPULARITY

This section decodes *Uzalo's* popularity based on its characters and narrative structure.

Characters

Gangsters characters are not all equal, therefore, it is important to note that according to Mncube and Madikizela-Madiya (2014) gangsters range from scavenger types (pretty crimes) to territorial types (well organised with initiation rites) to corporate gangs (well structured, conduct illicit activities and have distinct names and symbols attached to their real names).

Consequently, this section discusses gangster characters based on their popularity as discussed by the audiences.

The most prominent characters that participants discussed appear as prioritised below.

- Gxabhashe / Muzi Xulu (portrayed by Mpumelelo Bhulose). Gxabhashe is a gangster and the head of the Xulu family. He owns a scrapyard business.
- Mastermind / Zweli Maphumulo (portrayed by Ntokozo Dlamini). Mastermind is a gangster who works for Gxabhashe in his scrapyard business where stolen/hijacked cars are stripped. He is known for his skills in de-activating any electronic device installed in vehicles.
- MaNgcobo (portrayed by Thandeka Dawn King). She is female gangster character married to Gxabhashe (season 1) and mother to two of his children.
- Mxolisi Xulu (portrayed by Nay "Maps" Maphalala). He is the son of Gxabhashe and MaNgcobo, a gangster character that was at first against crime but was later coerced into it by his father. At the end of season one he had already murdered one of the Mdletshe sons.

This section discusses the ways in which the research participants viewed the popular gangster character as 'good' and/or 'bad', which is usually based on the lifestyle they reflect. Based on his study of popular American gangster series, *The Sopranos*, Hibberd (2014) states that the emphasis of gangster narrative is usually on murder, robbery, extortion, and racketeering. However, they are intricately linked to consumerist values, individual and corporate greed, and power structures, which allows the audience to differentiate 'the good guys' from 'the bad guys'. Furthermore, telenovelas permit audiences to emotionally participate in a set of fictitious powers that play with human questions in relation to the good and bad, love and hate, life and death, virtue, honour and sin (Maziotti, 1993; Gonzales, 1998).

The telenovela narrative "almost always centres on a main character" (O'Donnell, 1999: 4). Gxabhashe was undoubtedly the most popular character and this section discusses the readings of his good and bad attributes, as identified by the study participants.

Gxabhashe: the good, the bad and the popular

Figure 5.1 **Image showing Gxabhashe standing in his panel beating office**

Source: Instagram (2018)

The views below were made by both the younger and older group from KwaMashu. Although Gxabhashe is a gangster, he is believed to be both good and bad. The responses below show that good, in this case, is equated with good looks and material success:

> *Muzi is being admired for loving and supporting his family, he was very strong as the head of the family and nobody would mess with his family. Everybody wants a supportive father figure (K2P2).*

> *He was given a character of someone who succeed in everything he does. Someone with money, bubbly wife and stolen cars (K1P5).*

> *Physically, he looked good and he was given a powerful character all he had to do was to toughen up his face (K1P7).*

The relationship that Gxabhashe has with *Uzalo* audiences is characterised by both love and hate. One of the main reasons that Gxabhashe is considered 'good' is that in spite of the

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violence associated with his 'work', he is a loving family man. P2 discusses him as a strong character with enormous family values.

> *What I used to love about Muzi is that he was well off financially but he never used that against his wife by cheating on her (K2P7).*

On the other hand, P9 appears to have mixed feelings about Gxabhashe and thus hold a negotiated reading (Hall, 1980).

> *Gxabhashe had no problem except that he was so committed to his work, even though he was thief "yize ke wayeyisela" (K2P9).*

Media texts are polysemic (Hall, 1980; Ang, 1985; Hobson, 1982). The possibility of multiple interpretations of one character is evident in the different opinions of Gxabashe offered thus far, and that are to follow. Textual devices are often employed to create texts that are open to polysemic readings (Pitout, 2018). Thus, the apparent irony that a violent, ruthless business man like Gxabashe can be a dedicated and loyal family man facilitates these varied readings. Newcomb (1991) explains that texts are constituted *inter alia* through different languages and meaning. This may include dress codes, physical appearance, religion, class and occupation and accounts for why participants in one group view the same character differently.

These perceptions of Gxabhashe are arguably similar to those represented in *Sopranos*. Hibberd (2014) summarises that Tony Soprano's daughter Meadow, was a university student and his son AJ, was sent to military school. Similarly, in *Uzalo,* Mxolisi is introduced as a business school student. The argument by P3 (KwaMashu older group) is in-line with the narrative of gangster fathers' support of their children's education.

> *There are fathers in KwaMashu who are like Gxabhashe but who ensures that their children excel academically. Fathers who will say what I did was for you to have better life (K2P3).*

> *Gxabhashe did something truthful, he refused Mxolisi as he came back from Johannesburg to get into crime. Mxolisi got into crime by force but Gxabhashe did not want him to (D2P2).*

Miliora (2004: 73) emphasised that "some of Scorsese's characters express their phallic significance by showing off their superior strength by beating, raping and demeaning women". In general, Gxabhashe was not read as a violent person towards his family, and thus does not

subscribe to this "phallic significance". However, some characters did discuss the scene when Gxabhashe started to bury his family as a tactic to get the truth from them. Deductively speaking, after Gxabhashe has lost thousands of rands[2], he demonstrates his authority by burying his own wife and son. What is interesting is that this did not illicit a negative reading of the character, but instead reappears to generate admiration among the participants based in Durban CBD. The audience's admiration for this character is based on power and money.

> *Gxabhashe had money and if you have money as a man you have power and nobody can say that they do not want that power to order people around (D1P1).*

> *Gxabhashe's popularity was based on the fact that he had money, as George has indicated that he was loved by females. What is important at this stage is money and who are you dating, what he has? It is the status that matters. That is why people loved him, other than that I do not see much about Gxabhashe (D1P3).*

According to Levi-Strauss (1968), the narrative world and the general world at large makes better sense when situations are portrayed with their oppositions. "Structuralism relies on binary opposition in order to transfer meanings in the easiest way" (Wigston, 2009: 276-277). This makes it easier for audiences to understand characters from the onset and to the enigma resolution. However, P1 from Durban youth group explains that these dichotomies can blur:

> *My favourite character is Gxabhashe due to manpower, sometimes in life we are forced to do bad things in order to achieve the good things. We look at things from the gangsterism perspectives. However, it is the only way to put food on plate and to put bread and butter so that some people can eat before they sleep and that is part of everyday life (D1P1).*

When television character's lives mirror the complexities of real life and move beyond the simplistic notion of good and bad, they become more relatable to the audience. Hobson (2003: 106) aptly explains:

> Good characters and bad characters seem to be a redundant concept in relation to genre. As in real life people are more complex than merely being good or bad, hero or villain; they are not that simple. Characters are multi-faceted…their different characteristics and their interaction with a number of other characters so that we can judge their behaviour and understand their motivations. The acceptance of different characters and an understanding of their psychological

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[2] South African currency

complexities is something that is possible because the nature of the genre again enables the production to develop and reveal many aspects of major character.

The assertion by P9 from Durban older group indicates a binary opposition within Muzi Xulu)[3] character. P9 understands Gxabhashe as a bad man with good family intentions:

> *Muzi Xulu is the family man that would do bad things but always keep in mind that he is the family man, a man that has never abused his family but what was wrong about him he abused community. His actions may have encouraged other males to take good care of families, Gxabhashe is the man that sacrificed so much including his own life for the sake of the family. I think this is why people admired him and that earned him dignity (D2P9).*

In the below-mentioned excerpts, P5 from the KwaMashu older group stated that Gxabhashe was a violent character and referred to the incident where he buried Mxolisi and MaNgcobo alive. This very different view from what is presented above, proves the active audience arguments that suggest the "processes of meaning construction and the place of television in the routines of daily life alter from culture to culture and in terms of gender and class within the same cultural community" (Barker, 2013: 340). P8 from Durban CBD youth group reads these instances from a moral decay perspective.

> *Gxabhashe was a ruthless character, because even if you intend to scare someone but digging a grave and covered them with grave soil. Can you imagine being buried alive! (K2P5).*

> *It is a sad reality that people have become so ruthless in such a way that a father would bury his son and a mother alive, yes it was sad but people have become so heartless and so ruthless and driven by money, they will do anything to get what they want (D1P8).*

Genre audience scholars have noted that audiences "commute with considerable ease between a referential and a purely fictional reading" (Seiter *et al.* 1996: 147). This means that although audiences understand that film characters are fictional, they use them as a 'site' of reference and identification. The varying excerpts below demonstrate that Gxabhashe's gangster characterisation was convincing for some, but questionable for others.

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[3] Muzi Xulu is a gangster character affectionately known as Gxabhashe and head of Xulu household.

Gxabhashe was cute but there was no justice to his character, his character was not convincing to me... To me he was a gangster that didn't frightened me out (K1P8).

I am thinking that the main reason why Gxabhashe was so popular is that he did not tolerate nonsense, if it happens that one step on his toes, he must apologise quickly or else (D1P4).

Gxabhashe loved his family and he cares about it, and that teaches us as men to take care of our families. Others act as if they loved Gxabhashe but in essence they were scared of him (D2P7).

A key convention in establishing characters is through the way they look, that includes their dress code.

Gxabhashe, dress code and lifestyle

According to Fiske (1987b: 142) "the way characters are dressed points to a particular lifestyle that forms the theme of the narrative". The gangster's typical dress code and lifestyle is captured as per participants' assertions. "Throughout the history of gang ethnography, particular dress codes and fashion styles have always been perceived as representations of gang culture" (Hellemont and Densley, 2018: 45). Film gangster characters are often "identifiable by their speeches, behaviour and dress" (Strelitz, 2000: 41). Gangster characters have their own clothing style that often reflect their affiliation (Ellapen, 2007). Generally, gangsters appear in their black suits, ties, hats etc.

The majority of the interviewees referred to Gxabhashe whose dress code and lifestyle was appreciated as appropriate for his portrayal as a gangster. P7 warns about the deceiving looks of gangsters in the streets.

Gxabhashe's dress code, it worked for me because as much as I am not a gangster he was the big shot, the boss of the gangsters. It is always the ones that are most respected, cologne is on point, they do not get their hands dirty, instead they assign someone to do the work, so his dress code I found it very realistic (K1P7).

It is correctly portrayed. Dress code ensures that when people see you – you don't look suspicious. If you wear a suit people trusts you (K1P1).

Dress code is deceiving as there are street gangs who wear smart clothes and carry brief case but all what they do is pickpocketing (D1P7).

The second most popular gangster character in *Uzalo* is Mastermind / Zweli Maphumulo (portrayed by Ntokozo Dlamini).

Mastermind: the good, the bad and the popular
Mastermind is not an independent gangster, as he is encoded and decoded as Gxabhashe's henchman. In line with secondary characters code (Branch, 2012), he is blindly loyal to the primary character and that benefits his own ambitions to accumulate more material wealth. "Secondary characters in any literal work play supporting roles. In their cameo appearances, they reinforce the importance of the primary characters" (Branch, 2012: 57).

> *My favourite character is Mastermind, but not gangster part, I can't steal, the part of being over protective of your family and sisters (K1P9).*
>
> *Mastermind cares about his family especially his sister and family, even though his career life is not acceptable but he cares about the family (K2P2).*
>
> *The reason is that he is a family man. That shows me the other side that suggest that a person may be a gangster but with good intentions (D1P2).*

Similar to Gxabhashe, interviewees admire Mastermind for committing crimes with good intentions and underpinned by family values. However, P7 questions how Mastermind spends his money. He is a gangster with an expensive sports car but he is unable to build a home for his family. According to Feasey (2008), popular texts have an impact on people's lives. P4 insinuates that Mastermind is a negative role model that may be a bad influence on young audience members. "What they are showing makes children see that if Mastermind can hijack, I too can do that. Let me quit school and steal cell phones, let me get into car theft business*" (D1P4)*. This type of thinking relates to the media effects model (McQuail, 2005; Common Sense Media, 2013) where the audience is conceptualised as 'exposed' to media's influence whether of a persuasive, learning or behavioural kind. "Media influenced effects are those things that occur as a result – either in part or in whole – from media influence. They can occur immediately during exposure to a media message or they can long time to occur after any particular exposure" (Potter, 2012: 38). This study, however, subscribes to the idea of the active audience. Reception analysis is the audience research arm for this culturalism tradition (Morley, 1980; Ang, 1985; Hall, 1980). "The emphasis in reception analysis is on the complex signifying process of the negotiation between texts (e.g. television programmes) and readers

(e.g. viewers) situated within specific socio-cultural contexts" (Bitterest, 1996; Lindlof, 1991; Livingston, 1998; Pitout, 1996), which will be discussed below in the comparison of readings by the two different geographical sample groups.

The above excerpts reveal that Mastermind means different things to different audiences. Some view him as a character who cares about family and is culturally rooted, yet others view him simply as a KwaMashu gangster.

Mastermind: dress code and lifestyle

Gangster characters are affectionately known for their sense of style. Although some interviewees commented on Mastermind's sense of style, more participants referred mostly to his physical features and his house:

> *Mastermind stays in two-room house but it looks great. I love both indoor and outdoor scenes (K2P9).*

P6 in the KwaMashu older group states that Mastermind's house has a contradicting appearance as:

> *A Mastermind two room house is beautiful in the interior but the exterior is not so good. The furniture inside is just too much for a two-room house (K2P6).*

Male characters are portrayed as either television has presented masculinity as a norm and trendy especially for young male characters (Feasey, 2008). Mastermind is known as a gangster who finances his lifestyle through car theft. His attire consists of a thick necklace, earrings, and colourful t-shirts. He has expensive taste in alcohol and is aligned to the description of the glamour gangster that is a continuous problem to the community.

MaNgcobo: the good, the bad and the popular

Figure: 5.2 **Image showing MaNgcobo leading an all-women heist**

Source: *TV Plus* (2018)

Although gangster narratives are incomplete without women characters, these women have traditionally been portrayed as cheap, greedy, mindless, and mere sexual ornaments to a hero's status (Golden, 1978). The genre has, at times, added texture to the female representation with its portrayal of streetwise women who enter into gangsterism through relationships with violent men, although this is not often (Davies, 1990). In *The Soprano's*, the wife (Carmela) of Tony Soprano is aware of what her husband was doing, but she is not a gangster herself. In season one of *Uzalo*, Gxabhashe was the family spearhead while MaNgcobo was his supportive wife who ran the household. However, by season three, with Gxabhashe out of the picture, MaNgcobo has become the natural head of the family with numerous run ins with the law. When she elevates her law-breaking status to murderer, the subversion of the codes and conventions that define female characters in the genre is complete and she is no longer bound by the confines of victimisation but rather has become the enforcer, a role traditionally held by men. Thus, MaNgcobo is considered by the participants as a greedy and ruthless gangster. "After the arrest of the gangster, Gxabhashe, MaNgcobo takes control of running the affairs of

the home and panel beating business although, that was a cover for their involvement with car theft" (Onuh, 2017: 6). Onuh reveals that MaNgcobo's character challenges the norm of the submissive and naïve gangster's wife character. One specific example of this is that "MaNgcobo stood in front of Nkosinathi's body with a hardened and fearless face. These acts represent her being in control of herself, Mxolisi and the entire situation" (Onuh, 2017: 80). MaNgcobo has revealed that being a gangster's wife does not automatically relegate her to being naïve, nor is she reliant on gangster's friends/goons to get things done. Instead, she proves to be stronger than some male gangsters in *Uzalo* as; she owns and manages a panel beating business (season 2), she was once buried alive, she has killed and buried people such, she has survived prison, she divorced a gangster (Gxabhashe) and married another gangster (Nkunzi) and she is still standing to this day. This view is supported by a research participant from P1 from the KwaMashu older group who identifies with MaNgcobo based on her own township experience:

> *I would say MaNgcobo is my favourite because she is so powerful, she has influenced Nosipho and she has a strong mentality. Nosipho, is confident that was raised by strong woman. Therefore, I was not raised to just say yes in everything (D1P7).*

This identification supports King'ara (2010: 90) statement that soap operas "offer stories that authenticate the audience's world by reflecting that world back to them". This implies that P1 feels there is something relatable in MaNgcobo's characterisation, based on her own experience:

> *Gangsterism is bad but I believe I can portray MaNgcobo, if I were to be given an opportunity I can do this and I am quite familiar with guns, where I have been employed I used gun a lot and I have also suffered as a result of guns. This is why I say I can portray MaNgcobo greatly because I have had gun facing me and being taught about it, cash in transit is what I am able to do (K2P1).*

P7 understands that MaNgcobo is a very capable woman when it comes to family affairs

> *No matter what Gxabhashe was arrested for, but MaNgcobo is handling family affairs so well, Nosipho loses her way but MaNgcobo always bring her back on track (D1P7).*

In the past, women that were seen on television were rarely portrayed in positions of power, authority, experience, or maturity; yet "women make up 52 per cent of the world's population" (Thorpe, 2010; Feasey, 2013: 26). Consequently, it is possible that any woman character that

is portrayed in these positions of power and authority is destined for popularity as her character was seldom seen on television (Golden, 1978). MaNgcobo is committed to the protection of her children, family and business. She is not an ordinary Zulu wife who submits to a man unreservedly. Therefore, we can conclude that she is not only a character who subverts the codes and conventions of the genre but also the culture.

However, yet again the readings of MaNgcobo were polysemic (Hall, 1980; Pitout, 2018), as other participants read the character differently and felt that MaNgcobo is someone who loves money more than people. Participants in KwaMashu discussed and linked MaNgcobo to the reality of township life especially (K2P3).

> *MaNgcobo does a heightened crimes, for instance if we were to be in "stokvel" with her nobody will get dividends. She is so into money (K2P8).*
>
> *There are women like MaNgcobo who are taking care of themselves in KwaMashu (K2P3).*

MaNgcobo: dress code and lifestyle
In Mzansi Magic's telenovela *The Queen*, Harriet Khoza is a leading gangster character who, like MaNgcobo, wears lavish clothes and exclusive accessories. MaNgcobo is also well known for stylish home decorating and her expensive taste in cars and long-hair wigs. Her outfits, make-up and hairstyle do not reflect the look of an ordinary Zulu wife but rather expresses the attitude of a contemporary and independent woman (Onuh, 2017). MaNgcobo's fashion sense infuses a western influence and a streetwise sassiness which she meticulously pays attention to with each garment and accessory. Her adornment of unmistakeably expensive jewellery leaves us in no mind that she exudes confidence and success. Furthermore, she is presented to be brave and determined through her body gestures (Onuh, 2017). MaNgcobo's sense of style and fashion reflects her material success and completes her status as powerful woman and ultimately a popular character.

Moreover, the Xulu's reside in a bright, double story house which suggests that they are wealthy and bold. The following assertions about MaNgcobo's dress code and lifestyle were extracted from excerpts of participants, though P7 and P3 come from different places and different age groups, both read MaNgcobo from a dominant position (Hall, 1980) as they both characterised her, through her place and setting.

I love mostly indoor of MaNgcobo's home; it's more of a modern home…it has "va va voom" (K2P7).

MaNgcobo is driving Range Rover even in my neighbourhood it happens (D1P3).

Uzalo captures quite a number of things about the realities of township life as (D1P3) argues. Although MaNgcobo is portrayed as gangster, to her children she is a loving and caring mother. However, it is worrying that nothing much is written about the "mothering, motherhood, and the maternal role" (Feasey, 2013: 26) that she plays within the Xulu family. Over the years the role of a good mother has been characterised as a natural, fulfilling, meaningful and altruistic moulding of friendships and intellectual stimulation (Feasey, 2013; Green, 2004). MaNgcobo does all that, but she also challenges the norm by being an independent, strong and fearless character. So, although she presents her strength and determination through her body gestures and tone of voice (Onuh, 2017), her commitment to the family is beyond doubts and this inclines the viewer to believe that there is a softer side to her. Furthermore, it could be suggested that the audience is enticed to keep watching for the small moments when she reveals her soft side as much as they revel in the hard side of her character. Nonetheless, MaNgcobo is adored by the participants.

Mxolisi Xulu is an interesting character to discuss as a gangster. Although he was raised as Gxabhashe and MaNgcobo's son, in fact, he is Pastor Mdletshe's son as he was swopped at birth with Ayanda. His involvement in the criminal world triggers interesting thoughts on the nature-nurture debate.

Mxolisi: the good, the bad and the popular

Many gangster fathers want their children to obtain a better education and to live a straight life, as is the case in *Uhondo* (King'ara, 2013), *The Sopranos* and *Uzalo*. At first, Mxolisi receives a good education but he later turns to a life of crime in the *Uzalo* narrative, eventually becoming a murderer when he kills his own brother Nkosinathi. Feasey (2008: 10) observes that "men have been seen to express their thoughts through action and aggression in the contemporary soap". However, Mxolisi's popularity is achieved through his continual attempts to redeem himself as the forces of good (nature) and bad (nurture) battle within him.

At first Mxolisi was introduced as an educated person, they should have kept that or when he changed to being a Mdletshe he should have been made that educated person. The next thing gangster, what is that? (K1P5).

There is a lesson, and as I have indicated Mxolisi is my favourites. There was a time when he killed his brother but after some time he came clean to his parents that he killed Nkosinathi. He went to confess to the police, MaNgcobo prevented him from telling the whole truth (D2P8).

Redemption is a classic narrative in gangster genre films, including those in South Africa. "Films such as *Boy Called Twist* (2004), *Dollars and White Pipes* (2005) and *Tsotsi* (2006) all propose the possibilities of moral redemption and social rehabilitation for the gangster" (Marx, 2010: 263). *Uzalo* also follows in this tradition.

P1 argues that the source of Mxolisi's initial negative behaviour is not based on blood. Rather, the criminal social context in which he was raised 'taught' him to be a gangster:

The reason why Mxolisi behaved the manner in which he did is because he was not raised by the real father, ain't no father will allow his son to be like him. As we are here none of us would allow his child to drink alcohol and smoke cigarette. Mxolisi was raised by other parents, so he grew up thinking that the father is right as he saw money flowing in (D2P1).

Mxolisi grew up in gangster family and he became a gangster (K1P9).

On the other hand, some participants believed Mxolisi's criminal tendencies to be based on his 'nature', "Mxolisi is a pure gangster whether he is at home, church, so his personally is that of a gangster" (D1P3)

Mxolisi: dress code and lifestyle

As indicated earlier telenovelas were initially established as a female genre (Geraghty 1991, 2005; Geraghty and Weismann, 2016. Hobson (2003: 138-9) believes that "many of today's soap operas are keen to include all manner of kidnappings, car chases and violent beatings in order to appeal to male audiences". Fast cars and glamour are typically associated with the gangster genre (Kich, 2014) and, as such, the gangster characters lend themselves to this audience expectation and appeal. This insinuates that car thefts and hijackings may remain in the *Uzalo* storyline as it is one reason for the production's popularity.

Fathers and brothers in KwaMashu wear elegant clothes and drives beautiful cars though not in the same level as the one that Mxolisi drives. Life is on another level in KwaMashu (K2P2).

Mxolisi and Mastermind are gangsters who wear beautiful clothes and show with liquors they drink as Mastermind would do (K2P6).

To summarise, some of gangsters that are portrayed in *Uzalo* are murderous while others are just thieves with guns and who are hungry for material success. Therefore, Mxolisi's lifestyle can be linked to the discussion about the reality of township life that is captured by *Uzalo*. Gxabhashe, Mastermind, MaNgcobo and Mxolisi's interests all lie in the car theft business and their success is visible by the fast and flashy cars they drive. It is evident from some of the participant's responses that some of the audience fear that this 'gangster glamour' portrayed on *Uzalo* might negatively influence their own children. The implications of this is that after conducting a comparative study about violence on television and the real world, the conclusion was that television cultivates the world view that is too violent for the real world (Gerbner, 1967). However, in spite of this possible negative effect, people enjoy watching gangster films, not only for the entertaining characters, but also the narrative structure which is the second sub-theme for decoding *Uzalo's* popularity.

Narrative Structure

Narrative refers to "a chain of events in cause effect relationship occurring in time and space." (Bordwell & Thompson, 2010: 83). Telenovelas take the form of a serialised narrative (as discussed in Chapter Two), (McCarthy, 2001). For media scholars, narratology allows us to consider the ideological implications of shaping and organising human experience in forms that have ongoing appeal to audiences and are reshaped in reaction to social, cultural or industrial change (Newcomb, 2004). It is the idea of appeal that is significant for this study's theme of the production's popularity. This sub-theme on narrative will draw on Claude Levi-Strauss' (1967) concept of binary oppositions, Roland Barthes (1974; 1977) concept of the enigma code and Tvetzen Todorov's (1976; 1977) narrative structure of shifting states of stability in its discussion of what makes these aspects of *Uzalo* popular with the audience.

Conflict may occur due to the clash of 'binary oppositions' (Levi-Strauss, 1967). *Uzalo* is premised on two rival families, the Xulus and the Mdletshes. "In narrative, everything has a meaning. Every action must contribute to the narrative" (Wigston, 2009: 269). It is therefore not surprising that these two families constitute two opposing elements that drive the narrative. As such, conflict is a significant narrative device used to drive the action in *Uzalo*. Mittell's (2004: 198) explanation that "dramatic pleasures are most engaging when conflicts and goals are extreme," supports the idea that conflict in narratives increases a production's popularity.

P6 and P9 from Durban older group demonstrate how they make sense of *Uzalo's* narrative in terms of 'binary oppositions' (Levi-Strauss, 1967):

> *In any community where there are wealthy families surely there will be animosity. These are two kingdoms; dark kingdom cannot withstand kingdom of light. On the other side they are preaching good news and on the other side they are luring people into crime (D2P9).*

> *In essence, it's God of the earth and evil of the earth. I would say its religion this side and gangsterism the other side. It's God and devil. I support pastor because even at home they will cut-off my hands if I were to support the evil side. We are too religious at home there is even a pastor (D2P6).*

King'ara (2016: 106) explains that a telenovela's narrative structure represents society and reveals the internal conflicts within society's cultural order. This is evident above, in the way that P9 relates his understanding of the conflict in *Uzalo* back to his own experience, which is governed by religion.

Cliff-hangers are a narrative device that play a pivotal role in keeping the audience interested in a programme. They are 'hooks' that are used to sustain an audiences' viewership and attention to the next episodes through suspense and curiosity (Hobson, 2003). "I watch *Uzalo* because I am always eager to see what's next" (K2P2). *Uzalo* sustains its viewers' attention and interest through these cliff-hanger devices, keeping in line with the telenovela genre narrative.

When *Uzalo* was first aired on the 09th February 2015, the storyline commenced with two new born baby boys accidentally being switched at Queen Anne hospital in February 1990 (Ferreira, 2015; Zuma-Ncube, 2015). This was the introduction of an enigma. The plot then proceeds to show how the child of a rich gangster is raised by a pastor and vice-versa. *Uzalo's* narrative thus operates on the hermeneutic of enigma code (Barthes, 1977) that maintains interest in the story. The audience is provided with information of the switch and the rest of the narrative in season one is devoted to answering questions raised by this initial event. Both KwaMashu residents and non-residents attest to watching *Uzalo* to see how the enigma is resolved:

> *When Duma Ndlovu was explaining Uzalo at Playhouse, he said it is a Zulu story relating to two children that switched at the hospital and we were so interested in watching it and how the kids are going to grow up. Maybe they ran out of ideas to*

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sustain that narrative… Uzalo ended in season one when they revealed that Mxolisi is Mdletshe's son (K1P8).

Steve Neale (1990) has argued that different genres can be distinguished by the different way they disrupt and restore equilibrium, and the different relationship they produce between the initial and stable closing states. For example, "western and gangster films work towards driving out a corrupt old order and establishing a new one" (Gledhill and Ball, 2013: 364). In terms of Todorov's (1976; 1977) narrative theory and *Uzalo*, two women giving birth was an equilibrium and the disequilibrium happens when the babies are switched at birth. There is recognition of the disruption when the sons' true identities are revealed. However, although the enigma is resolved, this does not bring about a new equilibrium. Rather, it generates further disruptions that encourage the audience to continue watching into the next season. In telenovela genres, the enigma that is presented at the beginning of each season has to be resolved by the end of the season.

The next theme discusses the representation and interpretation of the realism of gangsterism and township life.

THEME 2: REPRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE REALISM OF GANGSTERISM AND TOWNSHIP LIFE

Representation, in its broadest sense, involves "using language to say something meaningful about or to represent, the world meaningfully to other people" (Hall, 2013: 1). In this case, *Uzalo* uses both language and action through characters to represent a township aesthetic via a gangster narrative. Generally, "aesthetics refers to insight, expressiveness and beauty in creativity…the term is used as a means of separating art from craft" (Hartley, 2002: 4). A township aesthetic in contemporary South African film and television is linked to the commodification of poverty through the representation of a township as a site of decay and crime Ellapen, 2007). However, as discussed above and below, *Uzalo*'s representation of KwaMashu includes the middle class, affluent housing and glamourous lifestyles.

Uzalo places the township at the centre of its construction of a cultural identity within a post-apartheid South Africa. The township is a uniquely South African space that was initially created during apartheid as a "peculiar spatial institution scientifically planned for the purposes

of control" (Mbembe, 2003: 3). Further, "the space of the township works to create a shared cultural and local identity" (Gibson, 2018: 97-98).

The township of today is now not only a 'marginal place' caught between the rural and the urban (Ellapen 2007), but a place of entrepreneurship and lively development:

> KwaMashu by the year 2015 will be a thriving and attractive suburb with all economic classes complementing the vibrancy and richness of the area. It will be a clean and safe environment with all residents living in acceptable serviced housing within a generally good quality of life that is sustainable. Employment opportunities will be provided both in areas outside KwaMashu and within KwaMashu itself. Public transport facilities will be fast, clean and safe. There will be tolerance, forbearance, and a high level of local development orientation and pride (North Central Local Council 1998:24 in Godehart, 2006).

In spite of its images of violence and gangsterism, *Uzalo* is South Africa's most watched television production with 10.2 million viewership each night (SABC, 2018). In order to make-sense of this, assertions from interviewees have been selected to explore if and how realistic/exaggerated/believable gangsterism and township life is to a select sample of the audience. This section of the study uses an active audience theory (Ang, 1985; Morley, 1980; Hall, 1980; Livingstone, 1998) that "examines how audience actively ascribe meaningful interpretation to media messages" (Roscoe, Marshall and Gleeson 1995: 88). In this way, the readings of gangster and township life are polysemic.

Realistic

Realism "is usually understood as a set of narrative qualities that make characters appear to be particular individual people - living particular individual lives" (Carnell, 2006: 5). Narrative has to appear as realistic as possible so that audience may believe it and possibly identify with it. For example, Dutch women who watched *Dallas* found its family trials and tribulations to be similar to their own lives and particularly its "emotional realism" (Ang, 1985: 41-43). This section uses the encoding/decoding (Hall, 1980) model to analyse excerpts from participants with regards to realism.

Mapantsula (1988), *Tsotsi* (2005) and *Jerusalema* (2008) are popular gangster films that locate themselves in South African townships. The problem is that township is often presented as dangerous and underdeveloped (Ellapen, 2007). The participants observed these aspects of a township in *Uzalo*:

There are things I have seen in KwaMashu and Uzalo showed those things for instance burning of a person alive, in KwaMashu hostel person is just burnt. Further, it is not one person who just decides to burn the other person, it goes back what Sfundo has said it's a forum that decides what to do with a gangster. If you have done something wrong especially within hostel compounds you will be burned. So yes, the story of people being burned is correct but not by one person (K1P2).

It is reality because due to unemployment people just get involved into crime and prostitution, in township there are those who are trying so hard to make progress, so it is reality (D1P3).

Ang (1991: 34) stipulates that "realism seems to be a favourite criterion among viewers for passing judgement". P2 stated that *Uzalo* has correctly represented KwaMashu especially when it comes to people being burned alive but then complained that in KwaMashu it is not just one person who makes a decision to burn another person. Furthermore, the absence of the KwaMashu hostel in the plot is a concern. Hall (1980) explains that audiences are more likely to adopt a negotiated reading in their decoding of a text, which is a clear indication of P2 and P3's position as they both agree and disagree with some of *Uzalo's* representation of KwaMashu. Negotiated readings allows audiences to agree or disagree with preferred/dominant and oppositional reading by finding a common ground within the text.

Township space and lifestyle means different things to different people. "The hybridity of the township space reflects the porosity of spaces - within the space of the township has seeped the rich urban and rural cultures that have defined black culture for decades" (Ellapen, 2007: 127). Furthermore, Ellapen argues that the township space is often presented with its inhabitants over indulging in alcohol, being hyper-sexual, lazy, dangerous and deviant. P8 agrees that what appears in *Uzalo* is believable because, in township life, people are susceptible to staying within their comfort zones.

People in townships are too relaxed they do not want to get out of their comfort zones, they don't want to go and hustle as in the case of Uzalo (D1P8).

I agree, that hustling is within township for example car wash, hair salons and also there are other illegal things going on such as drugs, car hijacking at Eyadini during Durban July (D1P1).

Despite the confirmed degree of realism, other research participants revealed unrealistic aspects to *Uzalo's* portrayal of KwaMashu .

Unrealistic

Audiences are "active creators of meaning in relation to the television" (Barker, 2000: 269). Audiences negotiate their position on the bases of prior knowledge and experience. Ang (1991) states that reading a text as unrealistic is associated with 'bad' storytelling and that a good narrative is believable and realistic. According to P1 from KwaMashu and P2 from Durban CBD *Uzalo* does not realistically portray KwaMashu.

> *Uzalo is misrepresenting KwaMashu, we know that place its deaths everywhere and what we see in Uzalo is 10% of what is really happening in KwaMashu. People are being killed in KwaMashu, Uzalo did not portray that part of the township (D2P2).*

> *No, they are not portraying true reflection of KwaMashu, in KwaMashu there are sport and talent schools, you see in the morning there are school kids, some people go to work, some are not (K1P1).*
> *There are beautiful and stable families in KwaMashu; not everyone is a gangster (K1P8).*

P8 holds an oppositional reading to the level of gangsterism in *Uzalo* (Hall, 1980). Audiences are "active and knowledgeable producers of meaning not products of a structured text" (Barker, 2000: 269). Her response signals the television spectacle. The television spectacle in *Uzalo* is a deliberate misrepresentation that constitutes one of the pleasures of watching television as it "involves an exaggeration of the pleasures of looking" (Fiske 1999: 243).

Exaggerated

P6 holds an oppositional reading (Hall, 1980) of the portrayal of violence in *Uzalo* with Gxabhashe as the perpetrator. Viewers interpret the television content on the basis of the past experience and present expectation (Wilson, 1993). P6 oppositional reading could be guided by present expectation, when that expectation was not met, then an oppositional reading was adopted.

Uzalo exaggerated gangsterism, I mean there is no father who can be angry up to a point where he buries his child alive. There are fathers who can allow their children to be arrested so that they can learn a lesson but not burying a child alive (D1P6).

Overall, it appears that *Uzalo's* representations of township life and gangsterism is considered both realistic and unrealistic. This is aptly explained by Gibson (2018: 100) as the interplay between social realism and spectacle:

> Whilst the soap opera is commonly referred to as 'a world of interiors' (Allen, 1985: 65) and as a genre by its 'infrequent use of location setting' (Allen, 1985: 68), it is the use of location setting and shooting that distinguishes *Uzalo* aesthetically and that foregrounds what I term 'soap opera spectacular realism', which combines the narrative pleasures of 'soap opera realism' (Jordan, 1991) with the visual pleasures of 'spectacular television' (Wheatley, 2016).

The next section compares the participants interpretations that are organised around the similarities (education and entertainment) and differences (representation of corruption and violence) identified by both groups.

THEME 3: COMPARING KWAMASHU RESIDENT AND NON-RESIDENT INTERPRETATIONS

This section compares similarities and differences amongst participants based on either location or age. The concept of cultural proximity is relevant in making sense of these interpretations, as based on this concept it is assumed that the participants who live within KwaMashu may hold different readings to those that live outside KwaMashu. This is because those that live within KwaMashu share a common space with the narrative setting and may possibly share discourses, meanings and cultural values (Castelló, 2010). "Proximity is related not only to the language spoken by the characters and audience, but also to aspects such as where the audience lives, the audience's cultural and educational background and its media consumption habits" (Castelló, 2010: 220).

Firstly, what appears as the most prominent similarity was the concept of *Uzalo* being both educational and entertainment.

Similarities: Educational and Entertainment

King'ara (2010: 90) states that "conventional soaps could be viewed as educational". P8 from KwaMashu and P9 from the greater Durban area support this view, and believe that the impetus of this education is due to its local content:

> *Uzalo teaches our children proper Zulu language. Children in nowadays do not know proper Zulu language, this caused by watching foreign pictures (international television programmes). At times certain words are being spoken in Uzalo and a child would ask; mom what does this word mean? And I will explain (K2P8).*

> *I love local content for educational purposes and to promote local acting talent. If you look back films and series productions were made from overseas. Now we see these productions being made locally and it means we are progressing in our country (D2P9).*

Furthermore, P8 specifically relates it to the impact on young children and increasing their vocabulary and the goes on to discuss the impact of foreign content and its negative influence on these young viewers. These participants from different locations hold a similar view about *Uzalo*'s educational value. In addition, these participants also acknowledge other benefits such as increasing the dialogue between viewers and appeasing the curiosity of children in learning new Zulu words. "Social education through soap operas has the greatest impact on the audience when it appears as part of such society shaping practices and meanings" (King'ara, 2010: 106).

Though there is age difference between P2 and P3 one of them admires the gangster because the gangster cares about the family and P3 finds violence very entertaining. Participants are both from Durban CBD and they adopt a dominant reading (Hall, 1980).

> *My favourite character is this guy with short cut; Mastermind, out of many things that he does, he cares for his one and only sister (D1P2).*

> *President Zuma says there is too much violence they themselves are causing the violence in parliament. Violence entertains (D2P3).*

The following assertions discuss the differences that transpired from participants.

Differences: Corruption and violence

Interview excerpts indicate that there is difference between the younger KwaMashu group and Durban younger group in their interpretation of local corruption in South African society,

particularly with regards to police bribery and dishonesty. However, in the younger KwaMashu group it is believed that there is a misrepresentation of township life in *Uzalo,* which ultimately has a negative impact on tourism.

> *Uzalo interprets KwaMashu culture as if KwaMashu people are being murdered (KwaBulawayo), bombs fly and people are burnt. People in Johannesburg for example are now going to be scared to visit KwaMashu because the place has been presented as being dangerous (K1P1).*

P1 from KwaMashu older group disputes the manner in which *Uzalo* represents KwaMashu. Conversely, P4 from Durban older group supports the *Uzalo* narrative. These are visible differences particularly with P1 from KwaMashu. It is, however, not surprising because active audience paradigm notes that "audiences are not cultural dopes but are active producers of meaning from within their own cultural context" (Barker, 2000: 269). This does not suggest that audiences have to agree with each other all the time.

> *KwaMashu is the notorious place, some of the things do happen here; remember we are closure the hostel and there was a time when someone was burnt alive and he ran away as he was on fire. The claim was that he was burnt because of crimes he had allegedly committed. Other things like burying a person alive is a misrepresentation of KwaMashu (K2P1).*

> *Uzalo shows what is currently happening in KwaMashu even though they cannot show everything. The form of crime that is shown is the one that we know these days (D2P4).*

Audience reception serves as a convenient arena within which to explore a series of critical theoretical problems regarding the relations among texts, ideology and social determinations (Livingstone, 1998). The KwaMashu residents demonstrated a "much stronger competence in understanding and relating the programme to their lives" due to an "'illusion of reality' (Ang 1985), which is the ability for certain viewers to relate to a sense of realism that is portrayed by a programme" (Ponono and Wasserman 2016: 90). The KwaMashu group proved to have a sense of reality and cultural proximity to the township, showing that "in the production and reception contexts studied, elements such as language, where people live, their cultural environment and, above all, their cultural consumption are all likely to produce slight differences in these messages" (Castelló, 2010: 220).

Another participant from the same group disputed the incident of being buried alive and reminisced about a similar atrocity, albeit a different method, of necklacing in the community.

P2 mentions below and acknowledges undoubtedly that in reality KwaMashu is indeed a violent space to inhabit and offers a suggestion:

> *I may not mention people's names for safety reasons but in KwaMashu blood has been spilled everywhere. A prayer is needed (K2P2).*
>
> *As we were growing up we have seen people being necklaced with burning tyres. Then petrol was never used, women on other side would be ordered to hide because they will reveal these incidents at a later stage (K2P6).*

Conclusion

The analysis of the focus group discussions, based on narrative theory and the encoding/decoding model (Hall, 1980), has revealed that audiences are active producers of meaning (Morley, 1980). In spite of its violent content, *Uzalo's* popularity is secured by its entertaining and glamorous portrayal of gangster characters and through a narrative structure that relies on the enigma code and cliffhangers. It also found that *Uzalo* is interpreted as both realistic and unrealistic based on the interplay of the social realism within its KwaMashu shooting location and its exaggerated storylines. Participants from both KwaMashu and Durban agree that *Uzalo* is both entertaining and educational. However, they disagree on the veracity of the representation of corruption and violence.

The next chapter synthesises and summarises the entire study.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Introduction

This study examined the interpretation of the representation of violence and gangsterism on South African television, using *Uzalo* as case study. Audiences were interviewed in KwaMashu and in the Durban CBD. The reason for this was to compare responses from these two locations. Research participants were divided into four separate age groups. The rationale was to establish how younger participants and older participants interpret the representation of violence and gangsterism in *Uzalo*. The study contains two main objectives that can be summarised as follows:

- To provide insight as to what *Uzalo* reveals about the mediation of violence in contemporary South African television and audience interpretation of such.

- To explore the audience's interpretation of the representation of violence and gangsterism in *Uzalo* by both residents and non-residents of KwaMashu.

The study key questions are as follows:

1) In what ways does the *Uzalo* audience, as both residents and non-residents of KwaMashu, interpret the representation of violence through gangsterism in *Uzalo*?

- What are some of the reasons for this local production's popularity (characters, narrative structures, plots etc.)?

- In what ways, if any, do audience members consider the representation of violence through gangsterism to be realistic and /or exaggerated?

- In what ways, if any, do audience members consider *Uzalo* to be a believable representation of township life?

2) How does the audience's residential difference possibly influence these interpretations?

- What are the similarities / differences between the two different group's interpretations? 1) residents and/or 2) non-residents of KwaMashu?

To respond to research questions, focus groups were conducted in KwaMashu and in the Durban CBD to answer key research questions and meet research objectives as stipulated above. Each of the chapters in this dissertation had a specific role to play in answering the research questions and meeting the objectives of the study.

In summary, Chapter One introduced and delineated the study. In terms of the research rationale, *Uzalo* remains one of the most watched television shows in South Africa, therefore, it was both crucial and relevant that the study investigated how viewers read and interpret the representation of violence and gangsterism that is shown in *Uzalo*.

Chapter Two reviewed the scholarly work that contextualises and guides this study. It confirmed *Uzalo* to be a telenovela, according to its abidance with the genre's narrative and codes and conventions (O'Donnell, 1999; Neale, 2001). It furthermore reviewed the narrative structure, examined tsotsis in relation to other known perceptions of gangsters, as well as television audiences and violence, under which effects and active audiences are discussed. This chapter also found that for quite a number of years the township space has been presented as poverty stricken, with lazy occupants who enjoy indulging in criminal activities (Ellapen, 2007), crucially, it endeavoured to highlight the constantly involving internal and external perceptions of the South-African township, with KwaMashu as its case study.

Chapter Three applied theories that are relevant to audience studies. The theories that were mobilised are i) narrative theory (Propp, 1968; Todorov, 1969; Barthes, 1977) ii) active audience (Barker, 2000; McQuail, 2005; Morley, 1992; Ang, 1983) and iii) encoding/decoding (Hall, 1980) as well as iv) thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The three theories were selected in order to establish how audiences read and interpret the representation of violence and gangsterism on South African television using *Uzalo* as case study (McQuail, 2005; Barker, 2000; Hall, 1980). Thematic analysis was applied in order to theme and analyse the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Chapter Four delineates the study's qualitative approach, reception analysis design and accounts for the participants and location sample. Therefore, the study employed a qualitative methodological approach which played an important role in data collection from focus groups and the data analysis of themes that were relayed through research questions and discussed by the groups. Focus groups are key in reception and audience studies as they provide a platform that enables the researcher to better read the emotions and comprehend participants' experience. Furthermore, they obtain rich and diverse data that reflect the views of the participants, thereby answering the research questions and verifying the study.

Chapter Five is an analyses chapter. Data themes were generated in connection with research questions. Under the theme decoding popularity; from the data collection process, it became evident that *Uzalo's* the popularity is primarily established through its characters. The most

popular gangster characters are Gxabhashe, Mastermind, MaNgcobo and Mxolisi. The study established that the popularity of *Uzalo* emanates from the complexities of these characters and their capability of good and bad behaviour. Furthermore, that their bad behaviour is fuelled by a desire for an extravagant lifestyle and the lure of power.

The manner in which *Uzalo* is structured brought in another element that contributes to the popularity of this production. By pitting two imposing representations of good and bad (gangster family and Christian family) against each other, the show created an enticing narrative which is reflected in its popularity. Audience members in KwaMashu and the Durban CBD compared *Uzalo* with *Yizo-Yizo* and complemented *Uzalo* for having a religious theme in its narrative structure, thus, appealing to a wider audience. Furthermore, the study found that, although there were varying responses from participants, the predominant reading perceives it to be a true reflection of KwaMashu life and audiences revealed that they rely on *Uzalo* for educational purposes. There was a concern from residents about exclusion of KwaMashu hostels in the narrative, but this was counter balanced by its unique inclusion of the middle-class lifestyle in a township setting, which is something that has previously been overlooked by South African television.

The plot is informed by the genre. The telenovela genre is defined by a heightened storyline which, through narrative devices such as cliff-hangers and unresolved stories, keeps the audiences on the edge of their seats and returning for more. Therefore, research findings indicate that characters, narrative structure, plot and genre made an enormous contribution to the popularity of *Uzalo*.

Theme representation found that participants had mixed views on *Uzalo's* portrayal of violence through gangsterism. Those participants who complained that the violence shown in *Uzalo* is an exaggeration of township life, mostly referred to the scene where Gxabhashe buried his wife and son alive. However, we can also consider that this scene was more an exaggeration of Gxabhashe's actions which, as a leading character, at times needs to be larger than life. Furthermore, according to the study participants, the burning of people only happens within KwaMashu hostels, therefore, the burning of people alive in *Uzalo* is a misrepresentation. However, one can also argue that because the hostels are geographically a part of KwaMashu, the burning of people in *Uzalo* represents events that take place in hostels and indeed the hostel life itself. As demonstrated, participants are never expected to just agree with dominant position by the encoder but may settle for negotiated position (Hall, 1980).

The township space means different things to different people. "For a long time, artists (fine artists, painters, filmmakers and more recently interior designers) have drawn inspiration from the township space" (Ellapen, 2007). KwaMashu is one of the most popular townships, particularly when it comes to storytelling (Ellapen, 2007). As a result, the study finds that the participants both inside and outside KwaMashu considered *Uzalo* to be a believable representation of township life. P1 from Durban younger group indicated that *Uzalo* shows the same township where people own salons, and other normal township businesses. However, this was not a unanimous perspective. P3 in the younger Durban group indicates that "violence and crime is a norm in township businesses". Overall, the common reading of the reality of violence as portrayed in *Uzalo* was conducted from a negotiated position (Hall, 1980).

There is a worry from P2 of Durban that gangsters do not ever get sentenced like other thugs because they are in cahoots with the police. Another difference is that P1 of KwaMashu says that *Uzalo* interprets KwaMashu culture as if people are being murdered everywhere, that bombs fly over the township and people are burnt on a regular basis. Some concur that KwaMashu is a notorious place due to its proximity to the hostels. This displays an ability by those who live in KwaMashu to step outside the programme, to be critical of a shallow depiction of place but not of a violent character.

Nevertheless, most participants agree that township space is well represented in *Uzalo*. Participants outside KwaMashu view *Uzalo* as a production that represents all townships in Durban. Indeed, *Uzalo's* relatability beyond the borders of KwaMashu is a testament of the show's cross appeal. This can further be substantiated by the 10.2 million viewers the show receives, considering that the population of KwaMashu is only about 180 thousand.

In comparison theme, there were differences in readings within the KwaMashu group itself. Some participants in KwaMashu indicated that they watch *Uzalo* for educational value, some for self-reflection, some for cultural proximity, some are inadvertently forced to watch by parents and others watched to see if *Uzalo* is true to life in KwaMashu. The most common consensus between them, and the biggest influence on viewing patterns, was that violence entertains. Across all four focus groups the similarities were that *Uzalo* provides educational value specifically to the Zulu language, and although not related to violence, many commented that they believe that the *Uzalo* production allows for employment opportunities to local artists and proximity.

Limitation of the study

This study reflects the ways in which audiences in and outside KwaMashu but both within in Durban. Therefore, conclusions and recommendations thereof from this study cannot be generalised outside of KwaZulu-Natal. Another limitation is that the study does not interview *Uzalo* producers, the study only reflects the views of the audiences, and hence the decoding of the representations of violence.

Further research

It is well regarded that *Uzalo* did something rare in television when it placed a township space in prime-time television (Ellapen, 2007), it also successfully introduced new faces and reigns supreme in terms of ratings. Further research may be needed to explore the motivations for the inclusion of certain characters and storylines from the production perspective and, indeed, what this may reveal about certain patterns of representation present on current South African public television.

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INFORMED CONSENT FORM

TOPIC: Audience interpretation with the representation of violence and gangsterism in South African television: A case study of *Uzalo*

Correspondence with interviewees: Letter of invitation to participate in the study

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is:
Musa Mpanza, (Masters student)

I am collecting data to complete a study on: **Audience interpretation with the representation of violence and gangsterism in South African television: A case study of *Uzalo*.** The study is conducted under the supervision of University of KwaZulu-Natal, Centre for Communication, Media and Society (CCMS). My supervisor name is Dr Lauren Dyll-Myklebust. I am writing to request your participation. The importance of this study is to explore the representation of violence driven by gangsters in South Africa using *Uzalo* as case study and the ways in which these representations are read and understood by its audience.

This aims to explore the ways in which *Uzalo* audiences interpret and make sense of, the stories in *Uzalo,* with a particular interest in the interpretation of violence and crime.

Participation in this study is voluntary. As a participant, you may withdraw from the research at any time without negative consequences. The interview or focus group will not be paid for in money, but a small token gift/appreciation may be given. In the focus groups light refreshments will be provided. In general, responses will be treated in a confidential manner.

Confidential information will not be used without your permission. If you agree to be part of the focus group, we will request that you choose a pseudonym for the purposes of this research, so your real identity will not be revealed in the final reports. As a participant, you will be treated with respect and dignity. In addition, you will not be deceived or tricked into providing information unwillingly.

We request the use of an audio-recorder for the focus groups. The data will be kept securely for five years for purposes of verification by my supervisor Dr Lauren Dyll-Myklebust at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Should you request, an electronic copy of the final projects will be sent to you on completion.

Thank you for your time.
Your willingness to participate in this study will greatly be appreciated.

Details of the researcher and institution of research:

	address	Phone Number	Email address	
Researcher	Musa Mpanza	+27-83-333-2122	216024736@stu.ukzn.ac.za	
Department	Centre for Communication Media and Society (CCMS)	+27-31-260-2505	http://ccms.ukzn.ac.za/Homepage.aspx	

Institution	University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Howard College Campus, Masizi Kunene Ave, Glenwood, Durban, South Africa.	+27-31-260-1813	www.ukzn.ac.za	
Supervisor	Dr Lauren Dyll-Myklebust	+27-31-260-2298	dyll@ukzn.ac.za	
Chair, UKZN Human Sciences Research Committee	Dr. Shenuka Singh	+27-31-260-8591	singshen@ukzn.ac.za	
Committee Clerk, UKZN Human Sciences Research Committee	Mr. Prem Mohun	+27-31-260-4557	hssrechumanities@ukzn.ac.za	
Please do not hesitate to contact any of the above persons, should you want further information on this research, or should you want to discuss any aspect of the interview process.				

Signed consent

• I understand that the purpose of this interview is for solely academic purpose. The findings will be published as research projects/dissertations, and may be published in academic journals.	**Yes** ☐	**No** ☐
• I understand I may choose to remain anonymous. (Please choose whether or not you would like to remain anonymous.)	**Yes** ☐	**No** ☐
• I understand that I many choose whether or not my name will be quoted in remarks and or information attributed to myself in the final research documents. • I choose to use a pseudonym, not my real name.	**Yes** ☐ **Yes** ☐	**No** ☐ **No** ☐
• I understand that I will not be paid for participating.	**Yes** ☐	**No** ☐
• I understand that I reserve the right to discontinue and withdraw my participation any time.	**Yes** ☐	**No** ☐
• I consent to be frank to give the information. • I consent to the use of audio-recorder during focus group discussions.	**Yes** ☐ **Yes** ☐	**No** ☐ **No** ☐
• I understand I will not be coerced into commenting on issues against my will, and that I may decline to answer specific questions.	**Yes** ☐	**No** ☐

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* By signing this form, I consent that I have duly read and understood its content.

Name of Participant	**Signature**	**Date**
Name of Researcher	**Signature**	**Date**

APPENDIX 2

INFORMED CONSENT FORM / IFOMU ELINOLWAZI NOKUZIVUMELA NGOKWAKHO

ISIHLOKO SOCWANINGO: Audience interpretation with the representation of violence and gangsterism in South African television: A case study of *Uzalo*

Ukuxhumana nabazoba ingxenye yocwaningo: Lena incwadi yesimemo sokuthi nawe ubambe iqhaza kulolucwaningo

Sanibonani,

Igama lami ngingu:
Musa Mpanza, (Umfundi weziqu zeMasters)

Ngiqoqa ulwazi ukuze ngiqede ucwaningo ngesihloko esithi: Audience interpretation with the representation of violence and gangsterism in South African television: A case study of *Uzalo*. Ucwaningo lolu lwenziwa ngaphansi kwesikhungo semfundo ephakeme iNyuvesi yaKwaZulu-Natali, ophikweni lwayo iCentre for Communication, Media and Society (CCMS) ngamafuphi. Umqaphi waloIucwaningo nomele iNyuvesi nguDokotela Lauren Dyll-Myklebust. Ngibhala lesisimemo ngenhloso yokunimema ukuthi nize nizoba ingxenye yalolucwaningo. Ukubaluleka kwalolucwaningo kuwubhekisisa ngeso elibanzi indlela ababhali bemidlalo kamabonakude efana no*Zalo* abaveza ngayo udlame olubhebhethekiswa imigulukudu eNingizimu Africa, ucwaningo luphinde lubhekisise izindlela nina njengabantu baKwaMashu nokubona abaKwaMashu enibuka niphinde niluqonde ngayo *Uzalo.*

Inhloso ngqangi yalolucwaningo ukubhekisisa kabanzi ukuthi ababukeli bo*Uzalo* baluhlaziya kanjani futhi mqondo muni ababa nawo ikakhulukazi uma sekuziwa ezindabeni zodlame nobelelesi.

Uma ukhetha ukuzimbandakanya nalolucwaningo lokho kusho ukuthi ukwenza lokho ngokuzikhethela kwakho (awuphoqelekile). Njengomuntu oyingxenye yocwaningo uvumelekile ukwenyula ocwaningweni futhi kungabibikho zenzo zokwenzakalisa. Kulolucwaningo akekho umuntu ozothola inkokhelo enjengemali kodwa ke ngokwenza ubuntu kukhona okuya ngasethunjini okuyotholaka mhlampe ke nokuncane nje kokuzibongela (uma kukhona). Izimpendulo ezovela kulabo abazoba ingxenye yocwaningo ziyogcinwa ziyimfihlo.

Ulwazi oluyimfihlo alusetshenziselwa ezinye izizathu ngaphandle kwalezi oluqoqelwe zona futhi angeke lusetshenziswe ngaphandle kwemvume yakho. Uma uvuma ukuba ingxeke yesigungu esikhethekile (focus group), siyocela ukuthi usebenzise igama okungelona elangempela kulolucwaningo. Lokhu kwenzelwa ukuthi ubuwena bungaveli nakwimiphumela yokugcina yocwaningo. Njengomuntu oyingxenye yocwaningo uzonikwa isithunzi nenhlonipho ekufanele. Ukwengeza nje kulokho, akukho maqhinga angalungile ayosetshenziswa ukuthola ulwazi thizeni kuwe obungazimisele ukulukhipha.

Ngokuzithoba siyacela ukusebenzisa isiqopha-mazwi ngesikhathi isigungu esikhethekile sibhunga, ukuze sikwazi ukuqoqa ulwazi nxazonke kubahlali baKwaMashu kanye nabahlala ngaphandle kwaKwaMashu. Ulwazi luzogcinwa iNyuvesi endaweni evikelekile iminyaka emihlanu ngenhloso yokuqiniseka lololulwazi ngumqaphi wami obheke lolucwaningo uDokotela Lauren Dyll-Myklebust ozinze eNyuvesi yaKwaZulu-Natali. Uma unesifiso sokuzwa noma ukubona imiphumela yalolucwaningo iyothunyelwa kuwe uma nje seluphothuliwe ucwaningo.

Ngiyabonga kakhulu ngesikhathi sakho.

Ukulangazelela kwakho ukuba ingxenye yalolucwaningo kuyathokozisa kakhulu.

Imininingwane yomcwaningi kanye neyesikhungo okwenziwa ucwaningo ngaphansi kwaso imi kanje:

	Igama nekheli	Inombolo yocingo	Email address	
Umcwaningi	Musa Mpanza	+27-83-333-2122	216024736@stu.ukzn.ac.za	
Umnyango	Centre for Communication Media and Society (CCMS)	+27-31-260-2505	http://ccms.ukzn.ac.za/Homepage.aspx	
Isikhungo	University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Howard College Campus, Masizi Kunene Ave, Glenwood, Durban, South Africa.	+27-31-260-1813	www.ukzn.ac.za	
Umqaphi wocwaningo	Dr Lauren Dyll-Myklebust	+27-31-260-2298	dyll@ukzn.ac.za	
Usihlalo, wekomidi laseUKZN elaziwa ngokuthi iHuman Sciences Research Committee	Dr. Shenuka Singh	+27-31-260-8591	singshen@ukzn.ac.za	
Osiza ikomidi, leUKZN Human Sciences Research Committee	Mr. Prem Mohun	+27-31-260-4557	hssrechumanities@ukzn.ac.za	
Sicela ungangabazi uma ufisa nanoma ubani ubhalwe lapha ngenglela. Noma udinga ulwazi oluthe thuthu olumayelana nocwaningo. Kulokhu okulandelayo kwebha uYes noma uNo ebhokisini elincanyana. Bese uyasayina.				

Ukusayina ukuthi uyavuma

• Ngiyakuqonda ukuthi ukuba ingxenye yalolucwaningo kungenxa yokuthi ulwazi luyosetshenziselwa ezemfundo kuphela. Okutholakele kungasatshaliswa ngokuthi kushicilelwe njenge project or umqulu wezefundo futhi kungenzeka kube nocishicilelo nakuma journals.	**Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

• Ngiyakuqonda ukuthi ngingakhetha ukugodla igama lami. (Ngicela ukhethe phakathi uyalisho yini igama lakho noma uyakigodla).	**Yes** ☐ **No** ☐
• Ngiyakuqonda ukuthi ngingakhetha ukuthi igama livezwe uma kucwaningwa izimvo zami nokungezona ezami kodwa engibe name ingxenye yazol noma ngikhethe ukuthi lingavexwa. • Ngikhetha ukusebenzisa igama lami langempela noma cha	**Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐
• Ngiyakuqonda ukuthi akuholwa mali.	**Yes** ☐ **No** ☐
• Ngiyakuqonda ukuthi nginalo igunya lokuhoxa kulolucwaningo noma inini.	**Yes** ☐ **No** ☐
• Ngiyavuma nokudedela ulwazi ngaphandle kokunanaza. • Ngiyavuma ukuthi izinkulumo ziqoshwe ngesikhathi sokwabelana nolwazi.	**Yes** ☐ **No** ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐
• Ngiyakuqonda ukuthi angeke ngiphoqwe ukuphala ngezinto ezithile engingathandi ukuphawula kuzo.	**Yes** ☐ **No** ☐
* Uma usayina leliform, kusho ukuthi ufundisisile waphinda wakuqondisisa konke okubhalwe kulo.	

_____   _____   _____
Igama lakho   **Sayina lapha**   **Usuku**

_____   _____   _____
Igama lomcwaningi   **Sayina lapha**   **Usuku**

Appendix 3

Focus Group Discussion Guide

My name is:

Musa Mpanza (216024736)

I am a Masters student at The Centre for Communication, Media and Culture Studies (CCMS), University of KwaZulu- Natal (UKZN). We have distributed an informed consent forms that we request you read and sign before the focus group begins. As is detailed in the informed consent form, we would like you to participate in a focus group to ask about how you view the TV show, *Uzalo*.

My supervisor is Dr Lauren Dyll-Myklebust. Should you have any queries please contact her on Dyll@ukzn.ac.za or +27 31 260 2298 (office hours)

1. Introductions and pseudonyms
(The focus group questions are themed under the study's key questions to ensure focus and logic)

Interpretation

- **To explore interpretation of the representation of violence (driven by gangsters) in *Uzalo***
- As someone who watches *Uzalo* regularly, do you prefer local to international telenovela? If you were to explain just a bit further, what would you say are your reasons for this?
- How does *Uzalo* compare to previous South African television productions such as *Yizo Yizo* and films that include gangsters such as *Tsotsi?*
- With regards to the depiction of gangsterism in *Uzalo*: as someone who stays in KwaMashu do you think that you are well represented through *Uzalo* storyline? Please support your answer by explaining your reasons for it.
- Muzi Xulu affectionately known as Gxabhashe is not so kind, what do you think makes him so popular to the viewers?
- In terms of the plot what are your thoughts on *Uzalo* using a gangsters in their storyline? Please broadly elaborate your thoughts.
- Do you think that someone maybe born of gangster/pastor can turn out to be different from their fathers like in the case of Mxolisi and Ayanda? Please discuss and give general examples of this.
- Why do you to watch *Uzalo?* And what motivates you to watch? Is it because we identify with it, if so-how?
- Does *Uzalo* character such as Mxolisi and his "father" Gxabhashe represent the realities of KwaMashu township according to your own experience in or outside KwaMashu? Please discuss your own experiences.

- At times *Uzalo* record some of the scenes outdoor, is this a real life of KwaMashu (being out and about)?

- Which scenes do you enjoy the most between indoor and outdoor recorded?

- Unemployment is pervasive in Durban townships, *Uzalo* characters most of them are working/hustling; can this be correctly interpreted as a true reflection of KwaMashu? Please discuss.

- As someone who watches *Uzalo*, which character is your favourite between Mxolisi, Mastermind, Mkhonto, Zakes and/or even Gxabhashe? Please further comment on why this chosen character?

- In your fair opinion, the manner in which *Uzalo* depict gangster car high-jacking and drug crimes in KwaMashu? Is there some truth in it? How so?

- In season two of *Uzalo* MaNgcobo has briefly joined the gangsters paradise as scrap yard boss, are there any mothers in KwaMashu with MaNgcobo's identity or behaviour? Please use general examples to substantiate your answer.

Identification

- **To explore the interpretation of violence and gangsterism by the residents of KwaMashu and non residents of KwaMashu.**
- As KwaMashu resident or non-resident, what do you feel is the level of truth in a way *Uzalo* portray as your daily life? And how does this affect identification with the show?
- How does it affect your viewing patterns to see two families hating and fighting each other so much as is the case between Xulu (crime and violence) and Mdletshe (peace and religion) households? Have you seen this in your own community?
- As a loyal person in terms of your watching patterns of *Uzalo*, what would you say construct and/or deconstruct identities in television audience particularly those who watch telenovelas such as *Uzalo*?
- In your opinion, how realistic or fictional do you believe the portrayal of violence is to be?
- Does the domination of violence by gangster(s) reflect the township realities in relation to businesses? Explain your experience or perception of township businesses.
- Do we know our identity as KwaMashu residents or non-residents? Can we be able notice when producers and/or actors misrepresent our identity on screen? However, as the viewers how will we know?
- Can we identify ourselves with *Uzalo* particularly with Muzi "Gxhabhase" Xulu and Mxolisi Mdletshe characters? Kindly discuss your choice of character.

Gangsterism

- **How does *Uzalo* audiences interpret the crime and what does that mean for a contemporary South Africa in terms of identification?**
- Gangsters are ruthless; do you think Gxabhashe character (including being a murderer, dress code etc.) portray real township gangsters?
- Crime and drugs abuse is known in KwaMashu; what are your views on rich gangsters? (Judging by Xulu's home, lifestyle etc.).
- Who is your favourite *Uzalo* character that is a gangster including but not limited to Gxabhashe, Mkhonto etc? Have you ever thought of imitating him? Please explain why this character of interest to you.
- Do you believe that children raised by gangsters are likely to join criminal activities? If yes, please explain briefly.
- There are scenes are filmed in the salon and church doorway with happy people all over and there are those of scrapyard and car highjack; Which ones do you prefer and give kindly reasons for your answer?

Violence consumption

- **What needs to be done to mediate crime in contemporary South African television?**

- Many people including President Zuma have raised concerns about the increase of violence in television content; do you share the same sentiment? Why?
- Has the crime that is being shown on television influenced the cultural norms of the township in one way or another?
- *Uzalo* storyline has violence in it, so what makes it appeal to you?
- Gxhabhashe once buried Lindiwe "Mangcobo" Xulu and Mxolisi alive: what do you think about *Uzalo's* portrayal of ruthless violent behaviour?
- In terms of television violence; what are your views about *Uzalo*, *Yizo-Yizo*, *Tsotsi* and *Mapantsula*? Or even films such as *GoodFellas*?
- As young person or an adult does *Uzalo* offer any educational value to you? Please explain.
- In your opinion, is there a need to further regulate television violent contents apart from showing the age restriction? Please discuss your answer.

KCAP
KWAMASHU COMMUNITY ADVANCEMENT PROJECTS

Kwa Mashu Community Advancement Projects (K-CAP
*Positive Arts***)**
@ *Ekhaya Multi Arts Centre (EMAC)*
B25 Giya Road
Kwa Mashu 4360
(031) 504 6970
kcap@mweb.co.za
(Reg. No. 1T/1116/95) (012-391NPO)

13 April 2016

Authorization to do research at Ekhaya Multi Arts Centre

Musa Mpanza
Centre for Communication, Media and Society (CCMS)
School of Applied Human Sciences
College of Humanities
Howard College Campus
University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)

Dear Mr Musa Mpanza (Student) and Dr Lauren Dyll-Myklebust (Supervisor)

RE: Gatekeeper Permission to Conduct Research

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research using KwaMashu Community Advancement Projects (K-CAP) as the location to recruit from and conduct focus group provided ethical clearance has been obtained.

We note the working title of your dissertation is:
Representation and identification with gangsterism and violence in South African television: A case study of Uzalo.

It is noted that you will be gathering data and constituting your sample by audio-recording the session of about 7-12 participants both males and females between the ages of 18-35 years, selected on the basis of purposive sampling. We acknowledge that the session will take a maximum of 90 minutes. Lastly, we are aware that an *Uzalo* episode is to be screened at the start of the 90mins so that it is a discussion point.

Data must be collected with due confidentiality, as stipulated in the informed consent form to be provided to interviewees.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf K-CAP
Ms T. Ximba
Administrator

1

higher education
& training

Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Thekwini TVET College
Opening doors to your future!

Enquiries: PA to the Principal	*Telephone: 031 250 8400*	*Date: 23-05-2016*
Imibuzo: Ms N Dlamini	*Fax Number: 031 250 8404*	*Usuku:*
Navrae:	*Address:*	*Datum:*

Mr. M Mpanza

Dear Sir

RE: REQUEST FOR USING COLLEGE AS SITE OF RESEARCH

Thekwini TVET College has no objection to you using our College as a site of research on the **Representation and identification with gangsterism and violence in South African television: A case study of Uzalo.**

However, the following conditions for external research apply:

- The College will have right to approve content with regard to research instruments and research analysis.
  - The relevant documents must be forwarded to the College Principal and approval of usage will be given by the College Principal in writing.
- The name of the College or any of its sites cannot be used in any documents
- The name/s of staff employed by the college cannot be used.
- The use of any findings that reflect negatively on the College, its partners or any related body must be approved in writing by the College Principal.

Please note that the failure to comply with all of the above conditions will result in the necessary legal action against you.

Your cooperation in this regard will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

Mr. NE Mchunu

College Principal

I have read the content of this letter and I accept the conditions

KMB Mpanza   25 May 2016

NAME   SIGNATURE   DATE

Appendix 6

UNIVERSITY OF ™
KWAZULU-NATAL

**INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI**

10 June 2016

Mr Khethelihle Musa Brian Mpanza 216024736
School of Applied Human Sciences
Howard College Campus

Dear Mr Mpanza

Protocol reference number: HSS/0723/016M
Project title: Audience interpretation of the representation of violence and gangsterism in South Africa television: A case study of *Uzalo*

Full Approval – Expedited Application
In response to your application received 01 June 2016, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

....
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

Cc. Supervisor: Dr Lauren Dyll-Myklebust
Cc. Academic Leader: Dr Jean Steyn
Cc. School Administrator: Ms Ayanda Ntuli