

***AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE JOURNALISTIC IDENTITIES OF NEWS  
WORKERS AT THE STATE OWNED LENTSOE LA BASOTHO/LESOTHO  
TODAY NEWSPAPER***

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in  
Journalism and Media Studies**

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## **Dedication**

*To the love of my lifetime, 'Mota and our princess Mpoi*

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*This work wouldn't have been possible without the support of a countless number of people. I may not be able to mention each and everyone of them by name but to all of them, I am highly indebted.*

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## **Abstract**

Informed by the political economy framework and the public service role of media in democracy, the main objective of the study was to use in-depth semi-structured interviews to understand news-workers' professional journalistic identities in relation to their status as government employees and the understanding of their public service role as outlined in the paper's mission statement.

The main interest was to understand the complexity of negotiating these role identities. Through reference to the theories of journalism professionalism, the study highlighted the extent to which news-workers in the small newsroom of *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* see themselves as public service journalists in a democratic country. The interest was borne partly out of the views of the paper's critics who see it as not serving the public but rather promoting the activities and policies of the government of the day, thus falling short of its democratic role.

The contention of the study was that as a public service newspaper, the paper should have news-workers who do impartial journalism and reflect the public's right to know in their reporting. The findings of the study suggests that news-workers at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* continuously have to strive to negotiate the potential conflict between being a professional and working for a government-controlled newspaper. While they sometimes lay claim to being journalists, the reality is that in their political coverage they end up adopting the role of government mouthpieces.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

### **1.0 Introduction**

This study is premised on a hypothesis that:

Media texts do not merely mirror realities but constitute versions of reality in ways that depend on the social positions, interests and objectives of those who produce them.  
(Fairclough 1995:103)

Based on Fairclough's statement, my argument in this study is that news-workers in a government-controlled newspaper like *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*, out of fear and respect of the government as their employer, produce news that politically supports the views of the government. In this way, their role as news-workers is concomitant with an identity as government mouthpieces rather than professional journalists, although this does not stop them from also trying to lay claim to this latter identity. My contention is that the power of the government to employ and to fire creates a situation where the news-workers engage in self-censorship and as thus leave some stories and skew the content of others. This study assumes that as the news-workers try to please their employer and secure their jobs, their own journalism professionalism is threatened, and their relationship with the government becomes that of a puppet on a string. To cope with the conflicting demands within their profession the news-workers become government spokespersons and eventually the content they produce is characterised by announcements, reports and speeches of their employers. Because of these characteristic features, the paper is then perceived to publish distorted information particularly about the government and this threatens its integrity and Lesotho's young democracy as it means that scores of people who might not necessarily see eye to eye with the government are sidelined.

### **1.1 Context of the study**

Informed by the political economy framework and the public service role of media in democracy, the study focused on the news-workers' professional journalistic identities in relation to their status as government employees and the understanding of their public service role as outlined in the following excerpt from the paper's mission statement (See Appendix A):

Our mission is to serve as a vehicle for democracy, cohesion and progress through the publication of accurate, factual and independent stories whilst also acting as a mechanism for public accountability. (Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology: 1998)

Political economy constitutes one of the main theoretical frameworks employed in media studies research. It attempts to understand the power relations that structure the distribution, consumption and production of communications resources (Mosco 1996:25, McQuail 1994:82). The political economy model critiques the media for leaning towards dominant elites, either political or economic in society (Schudson 2000:179). According to this approach, media content is primarily determined by who owns and controls such media. While political economy focuses on both political and economic control, the former as theorised by Lee (2000) and Kupe and Ronning (2000:168) is the main focus of this study. This is partly because in Lesotho, the economic variant is directly political as media sustainability relies on the government as the chief advertiser (Foko 2000:17). In addition and of primary significance *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* is owned by the state, and appointments especially for senior positions are controlled by the government of the day.

Political economy theory is relevant to this study because, as Curran et al posit, it “searches for the answers to the question of the power of the media in the analysis of their structures of ownership and control” (1987:66). Thus, it foregrounds the factors that link media to dominant power structures. This will then include professional understandings and ideologies which form part of the focus of this research. The contention here is that the news-workers will serve the interest of whoever controls them.

So what happens to democracy when the state owns a newspaper and the government controls the advertising and is also through the state the employer of news-workers? To understand this, it is important to map out the role of media in democracy and use this standard to understand how state ownership and control working through the news-workers, can enhance or deform the ideal of a “free press”, a cornerstone for a viable democracy (McCullagh 2002:75). The relationship between media and democracy, as Hyden and Okigbo suggest, is complex and interwoven (2002:29). Due

to reasons of focus in this thesis, I have not looked at all the roles but have specifically focused on the public service role.

The public service role of media in democracy is viewed in relation to Habermas' concept of the public sphere (Habermas 1992). According to Habermas the public sphere is an ideal space where public opinion is formed and expressed. The understanding is that a democratic society thrives when there is critical discussion open to all in the public sphere. The theory is premised on the understanding that media content belongs to the nation. It acknowledges that the government may act as the guardian of the nation but should be kept at arms length from the day-to-day operations of media organisations (see Mendel, 1988, and Boyd-Barrett and Newbold 1995).

The idea behind public service media is the provision of a universal service of excellent content while maintaining public legitimacy through editorial independence from both the government of the day and commercial interests. Universal also means content that covers a full range of genres, from information through to education and entertainment (Fourie 2007:13). The role of public service news-workers to this end is to share the goals of public service media and immerse themselves in these core editorial values so as to produce content which balances the social and political forces in society. While the literature on public service media mostly concentrates on broadcasting services (Mendel, 1998; Raboy 1996; Betzel and Ward 2004; Mbaine 2003, and Berger 1997), I argue that the essentials of public service broadcasting (PSB) can apply to print media as well, especially state-owned print media. This depends in part on how editorial independence is defined by news-workers and how they see themselves as professionals in the context of their organisations. This is based on Nyamnjoh's argument that in order to perform its role in democracy, the media needs to be ethical and professional in its approach to journalism (2005:21).

Curran et al posit that the study of media professionalism is theoretically rooted in the sociology of professions (1987:76). This theory argues that journalism's claim for professionalism has developed from its beliefs, values, and guidelines derived from the democratic tenets of "freedom of expression and the public's right to know" (Curran et al 1987:67). These values include journalism's commitment to impartiality

objectivity and fairness. It is through these values that journalists have a particular ethos and can identify themselves as journalists and not lawyers or doctors. To this end I draw on the theory of identity in cultural studies. According to Barker, this theory explores how people come to be the kind of people they claim to be (2000:11). Identity then means how one describes himself or herself. In their identification process and depending on the understanding of their roles, journalists adopt different names. For instance they may call themselves watchdogs, advocates, disseminators of information or neutral observers to mention but a few (see Tuchman 1971 and Janowitz 1975). Needless to say, if employed by the state, the identity of news-workers becomes even more complex as they also have to embrace their role as civil/public servants (the two terms are used interchangeably in this thesis).

Public service journalism is supposed to be independent of the state, while civil/public service in the bureaucracy is clearly not. However, civil/public servants are usually distinguished from other state employees - people who are transient appointees related to the incumbent government. While civil/public servants in a democracy are expected to implement policies of the government of the day, they are also supposed to be accountable to the public in the sense of not discriminating between members of different political parties. In this regard, the impartiality required of civil/public services can be linked to the impartiality required of public service journalism - especially that which is based in institutions that are funded by public resources and with a public mandate, i.e. most state-owned media.

## **1.2 Research methods**

Since the study aims at understanding how news-workers at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* see themselves as professionals in light of their state employee status and civil/public service mission, the qualitative approach to research was used. Denzin et al argue that in qualitative research, “researchers seek to explain the world rather than to measure it” (2000:6). Taking into account Trow’s advice that “the problem under investigation properly dictates the methods of investigation” (1957:33), the qualitative data collection method that I employed in this thesis was in-depth interviews.

As a qualitative research technique, in-depth interviews have been called “one of the most powerful methods because they allow the investigator to step into the mind of

another person to see and experience the world as they do themselves” (Jensen 2002: 237). The interviews helped me get individual self-definitions concerning the news-workers’ journalistic identity relationship with reference with how they view their relationship with their employers. The idea was to access the subjective understanding of the news-workers, particularly their personal conceptions and the role categories they identify with.

### **1.3 Research context**

The object of my study in this thesis has been the news-workers at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*. During the period of this research the paper’s newsroom had nine news-workers. This newspaper in 2009 is a bilingual weekly paper published by the Department of Information in the Ministry of Communications, Science and Technology (MCST). The first half of the paper is printed in Sesotho and the content is then re-produced in the second half of the paper in English. It has a print run of 5000 copies. Like all public servants in Lesotho, the paper’s employees are recruited by the Ministry of Public Service. However, for management positions MCST can override the public service recruitment procedure and employ candidates it feels are fit for the position (Public Service Act 2003). This means that some management positions are filled by political appointees who then leave such positions once their political parties leave government.

In its mission statement, *Lentsoe La Basotho/Lesotho Today* claims to serve as a vehicle for democracy, cohesion and progress, whilst also acting as a mechanism for public accountability. The paper also sets out its role as being to assist the public in making sense of the world whilst also bringing government programmes and policies closer to the people (see Appendix A for the complete mission statement).

#### **1.3.0 Why study the newspaper**

The history of the press in Lesotho dates back to 1833 when the first missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (P.E.M.S) arrived in the country (Switzer and Switzer 1979:21-22). As part of their efforts to intensify dissemination of information pertaining to their missionary activities, they established *Leselinyana la Basotho* in 1863 as an eight page newspaper. The first state publication *Basutoland Times* was established in the early sixties and named *The Times* after independence in

1966 (Lejakane 1997:11). Over the years, this state-owned newspaper adopted different names and in 1985 it took on its present form of *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*.

The newspaper is significant to study for two reasons. First, it is seen by some as falling short of its professed democratic role (Selinyane 2008:166 and Lejakane 1997:12). For its critics, it does not serve the public, but rather promotes the activities and policies of the government of the day. Secondly, the paper is relevant to the debates around the role of media in democracy which have basically neglected state-owned print media and focused mostly on broadcasting, particularly the conversion of government-controlled broadcasters into public broadcasters. The paper's context however needs to be situated within Lesotho's political and media landscape as it is this context that impacts on the ideal normative role that *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* can be measured against.

### **1.3.1 Lesotho's political landscape**

Since gaining independence in 1966, Lesotho – a small mountain kingdom, a sovereign Southern African state landlocked by the Republic of South Africa with a population of 1.8 million people – has had different political stages, mostly characterised by unstable political situations from which the media has not been immune. According to Kasoma (1992), modern politics in Lesotho started in 1952 when the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) was formed by Ntsu Mokhehle. He further adds that Lesotho's first legislative council was introduced in 1956, while in 1959 a constitution that granted limited power of self-government was also introduced. The country's first election was held in 1960 and was won by the BCP. This then led to the drafting of the pre-independence constitution in 1964 (Kasoma 1992). In 1965 Lesotho held its second elections and they were won by the Basutoland National Party (BNP). The country attained independence on October, 4 1966. Four years later elections were again held and the opposition BCP won. This caused the then Prime Minister Leabua Jonathan and leader of BNP to declare a state of emergency and suspend the constitution (Breytenbach, 1975). The BNP reportedly refused to hand over power to the BCP alleging that BCP had rigged the election results (Gumbi 1995). Gumbi, however, reveals that the validity of this allegation was

never tested as BNP had already closed the legal channels through the suspension of the constitution and the use of armed forces to prevent a change in government.

In 1973 an interim assembly began work on a new constitution, but the BCP still under the leadership of Mokhehle refused to participate. This led Prime Minister Jonathan into accusing BCP of attempting to stage a coup and consequently the party was outlawed and hundreds of its members were reportedly killed while scores others fled the country (Khaketla 1971). The members of BCP left in Lesotho had two options: they could either remain silent or join the BNP. During this time the state, which had up to now only had a newspaper, made a new acquisition in Radio Lesotho which was the only national radio station in Lesotho. Bereng (2001) posits that Radio Lesotho was used by the BNP to legitimise their governance, by means of content made up of government speeches especially after the news and during prime time broadcast. Tau (2001) says the station gained more audience when BNP banned all other publications which opposed the government.

In January 1986, the head of the military, Major General Metsing Lekhanya, launched a military coup that toppled BNP. According to Gumbi (1995), through the coup the military claimed to return the country to democratic rule through the process of national reconciliation. Lesotho remained under military rule until 1993, first under Major General Lekhanya (1986-1991) and then later under Major General Elias Phisoane Ramaema who spearheaded the first democratic elections in March 1993.

The elections were won by BCP with a landslide victory and the party's late leader Ntsu Mokhehle became the Prime Minister. Mokhehle's victory also saw Lesotho's media being relatively free as airwaves were opened and the newspapers that were banned under BNP rule functioned again (Motlamelle 2004). Despite the changes brought by democratic rule, Lesotho experienced major incidents of political instability between 1994 and 1998. These include, amongst others, conflicts between army troops and the dissolution of Parliament by King Letsie III. The ruling party (BCP) during that time split to form Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) under the leadership of the late Ntsu Mokhehle. In 1998 the second democratic elections were held and they resulted in political turmoil in the country as major opposition parties BCP, BNP and the Marematlou Freedom Party (MFP) contested the victory of

LCD. This resulted in burning and looting in three major towns in the country and the loss of many lives.

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) troops intervened to return the country to stability. Through international support and national dedication to peace and democracy, the third democratic elections were held in May 2002, based on the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) Representation Model (Motlamelle 2004). This election led to 10 political parties getting into parliament with the LCD under the leadership of Prime Minister Mr Pakalitha Mosisili as the majority party and hence the government. In October 2006, the then Minister of Communications Science and Technology, Motsosahae Thabane, defected from the ruling party to create his own party, the All Basotho Convention (ABC). This threatened LCD's majority in parliament as 17 parliamentarians joined Thabane. As a result the Prime Minister called snap elections for February 2007. The elections were won by LCD although this time around it was not by a landslide victory as Thabane managed to scoop 17 of the constituency seats while LCD still got a majority 62 seats, with one constituency seat going to the All Congress Party (ACP). Through the MMP model, 12 more political parties joined LCD, ABC and ACP in Parliament.

Although there have been four changes in government since independence, each of these governments has kept control of the newspaper (Machobane 1990 and Selinyane 2008). Apart from owning a newspaper, the state also owns the only television station and news agency in Lesotho as well as two of the nine radio stations available.

### **1.3.2 Lesotho's media landscape**

Lesotho's population stands at 1,8 million and according to the African Media Barometer, 2008, the country currently has 65 registered publications (newspapers and magazines). These publications are either weekly or bi-weekly. Some of these publications can be categorised as state-owned, for instance, the government, the military and the police have their own publications. Then there is the privately-owned press and also the political press owned by individual political parties. There is also the church press which offers religious news and perspectives whilst sometimes also venturing into the political arena (African Media Barometer 2006). Apart from owning a newspaper, the state also owns the only television station and news agency

in Lesotho, as well as two of the nine radio stations available. There are also six registered internet service providers in the country.

There is no record as to how many publications are still in operation, but the media coordinator for the Lesotho chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), Thabang Matjama, in an interview with me on August 18, 2009 said 21 publications are still in circulation. He said most have had to close shop because of financial difficulties which he said are largely caused by the dependence of advertising from the government. He mentioned however that others have ceased to operate in a bid to run away from lawsuits totalling to millions put against them by the government. A case in point here is a privately owned newspaper *The Mirror*, which was sued over R2 million for allegedly publishing defamatory remarks about the Prime Minister. He said another newspaper *Public Eye* also suffered for a while during the period between December 2007 to September 2009 when the government withdrew advertising from the paper. According to Matjama, the withdrawal of advertising was the government's attempt to silence the paper which was often in critique of the government. He said the consequences were dire as the paper had to retrench six of its reporters just to get by during the period, adding that the paper was lucky to have a strong marketing base.

Talking about publications owned by political parties, Matjama (2008) mentioned that the government has a political paper, *Mololi*, which thrives from government advertising because of its alliance to the ruling party, while one of the opposition parties BNP which had a thriving newspaper, *Mohlanka*, while it was still in power, now only publishes during the election campaign period. He mentioned that when it was in power, BCP also had a paper, *Makatolle*, but the paper has had to close down because it was not getting advertising from the government of the day.

Matjama (2008) also pointed out that historically the church-owned press has also been politically aligned with Lesotho Evangelical Church (LEC) owning one of the oldest newspapers *Leselinyana la Basotho*, and being tied to the congress parties, while the Roman Catholic Church (RCC)'s *Moeletsi oa Basotho* is linked to the national parties. Since the ruling party came into power, the government has favoured

the LEC-owned paper whilst the RCC paper survives because it has its own printing press, and has high sales figures.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the research**

This research is for all those journalists who are working in a state-owned newspaper and often engage in overt self-censorship to try and overcome the demands of their employers whilst they also feel they need to satisfy the demands of their readers. It is also for decision-makers in government who are holding on to the media for all wrong reasons. Through this research I invite all my colleagues working for *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* and other government-controlled media houses with the same characteristic traits, to rethink their professionalism and ask themselves if they are doing any justice to democracy. I invite them to fight for their professionalism and rise above their control challenges so as to inform and educate the masses, thereby giving them an opportunity to make informed choices. In the same vein I remind the ‘powers that be’ that democracy goes further than just democratic elections.

#### **1.5 Objectives of the research**

Informed by the political economy theoretical framework, the public service role of media in democracy, and cultural studies insight into journalistic identities, the main goal of the research is to critically examine how news-workers at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* understand themselves as media professionals fulfilling public interest objectives vis-à-vis them being public servants and fulfilling the interests of the government of the day.

#### **1.6 The thesis outline**

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The current one has introduced the thesis and summarised Lesotho’s political situation since independence, from military rule until the advent of democracy. It has also outlined Lesotho’s media landscape with a particular focus on the background to the establishment of *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*. This has been done with the understanding that the understanding of the professional identities of news-workers should be prefaced with an appreciation of the structures within which the news-workers operate. The chapter has also presented the purpose of the research, as well as its objectives.

The second chapter provides the theoretical framework and literature review that informs this study. The third chapter outlines my research methodology and sets out the approaches taken in the research, the methods and tools of data collection and analysis as well as the sample selection. In chapter four, I describe the key findings of the research while in the fifth chapter I analyse these key finding in light of the literature review and theoretical perspectives outlined in chapter two.

The last chapter, chapter six, offers recommendations in light of the study findings and concludes the thesis by situating professionalism of news-workers at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* within the theoretical approaches to journalism professionalism whilst also arguing that the news-workers' behaviour does not justify their being called professional.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **2.0 Introduction**

Chapter one introduced this thesis and outlined its aim, which is an attempt to understand how news-workers at the small *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* newsroom negotiate the potential conflict that may arise between being a media professional and working for a government-controlled newspaper as distinct also from being in the civil service. Implicit in this aim is my argument that news-workers' professionalism and identification is shaped by the economic, political and ideological context. Building on this premise, this chapter reviews the literature that focuses on the factors that should influence the news-workers' understanding of who they are and what they are doing.

I begin the chapter by setting out the political economy framework which broadly informs this study. This framework helps me to understand how the affiliations of the news-workers are streamlined with those of their managers. Because *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* operates within the context of a democracy, I look at the role of media in democracy particularly focusing on the public service role. The public sphere theory becomes central to the debates that I put forward and this is because of its affinity with state-owned media with a public service mandate. The public sphere theory also assists me in understanding how *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* can be transformed from a purely government-controlled newspaper into a public service medium and what would be the roles of the news-workers in that respect. I specifically give prominence to the values of editorial independence and public accountability. These two core editorial concepts help in distinguishing public service media from state, government or commercial media.

Towards the end of the chapter I deliberate on journalism as a profession and its ethical considerations. I then spend time on the role of public servants as well as the public service code of conduct, and how these interface with being employees of the particular government of the day. The idea is to tease out the complexity of negotiating the role identities of the news-workers.

## **2.1 An overview of the political economy framework**

Political economy constitutes one of the main theoretical frameworks employed in media studies research. It attempts to understand and investigate the power relations that structure the distribution, consumption and production of communications resources (Mosco 1996:25). This approach seeks to understand how economic and political relationships, interests and affiliations determine the nature and functioning of media institutions (McQuail 1994:82) and critiques the media for leaning towards dominant elites, either political or economic in society (Schudson 2000:179).

The political economy approach is derived from classical Marxism with its reasoning that “all means of production, including media production, determine the nature of society” (Fourie 2007:135). The Marxist analysis argues that the ‘economic substructure’ determines the ‘ideological and political superstructure’. For Marxism, economic power is reflected in political power (in who controls the state), and power in institutions and ideas. Translated to the media it means the media serve the interest of whoever controls it, be this business people interested in profits or governments interested in political control (Curran et al 1987:67).

In developed countries, one of the main influences that saw the development of political economy in media studies has been the transformation of the media from modest family owned enterprises into major businesses of the twentieth century. In developing countries, the approach grew in response to the expansion of the state as producer, distributor, consumer and regulator of communication (Mosco 1996:73). “Who owns the media?” is political economy’s point of departure (Fourie 2007:139). The specific questions it investigates include the owners’ political, economic, social and cultural affiliations. It also pays great attention to the funding models within the media, especially how such funding mechanisms impact on the ideology of media organisations and eventually on media content. These principles are especially relevant to state-owned media in developing countries, where state power is also directly economic as well.

For political economists, media is not autonomous, but is closely linked to the dominant power structures through ownership and funding models, legal regulation, values and professional ideologies (Curran et al 1987). While the approach does not outline the precise mechanisms by which this happens, it proposes that the link

between ownership and funding models of the media on the one hand and media content on the other can be sought in the professional ideologies and work practices of news-workers. In this regard, news-workers are seen as the channel through which media ownership with its economic imperatives exercises control over content. The framework also looks at how the news-workers' affiliations are aligned with those of their owners (Fourie 2007:138). This latter aspect of the approach informs this study.

In the words of Herman and Chomsky, political economy in media studies “traces the routes by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalise dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public” (2002:45). Murdock and Golding (1977:35) posit that in an attempt to satisfy the dominant interests, the media will avoid risks and underwrite certain predominant values, beliefs and institutional procedures that benefit certain persons at the expense of others. This then means that state or corporate ownership of media production and distribution affects society as it manifests itself in news biases and homogenisation of content.

A political variant of the political economy approach has direct relevance to Lesotho's media context where the economics of much media are also directly political. The state owns the newspaper under study *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* - and at the same time the paper is directly controlled by the government of the day. Moreover, and of significance, because of the weak private sector, media sustainability in the country relies on the government as the chief advertiser (Foko 2000:17). As theorised by Lee (2000:4), the political variant of the political economy theory helps in explaining media trends in third world countries like Lesotho where the state plays the primary role in influencing the means of production as compared to private capital. Thus the government, even irrespective of ownership also controls the largest portion of the advertising pie.

The danger of this, as one of the private proprietors – Thai (2008) – contends, is that to attract state advertising tends to mean that a newspaper has to dance to the tune of the ruling party. This then threatens the integrity of the media as it fosters a media that is characterised by fixing the premises of discourse and interpretation as well as the definition of what is newsworthy in the first place. Such media can hardly claim to represent the public interest (Picard 1989:11). Control of the media by the

government then becomes a key freedom of expression issue, and runs counter to the notions generally accepted in democratic societies. As asserted by Lee (2000), under state ownership and direct government control as is the case of *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*, the government of the day possesses the right to decide what gets reported. Lee (2000) also contends that under private ownership the owner possesses the right to choose what and how to report, but the government may still induce media bias by paying for it through subsidies or advertisements to the private owner.

It is in this context that one can go further and investigate what the significance is for democracy when a government with both the economic muscle and direct political ownership controls a major newspaper? A simple response would be that such a media falls short of its democratic tasks. However, to understand how this works, it is important to map out the role of media in democracy and use this standard to understand how state ownership and governmental control, as well as government power over advertising, impacts on how the news-workers can enhance or deform the ideal of a “free press”, a cornerstone for a viable democracy (McCullagh 2002:75).

As discussed later in this chapter, political economy in its Marxist form usually tends to characterise journalistic professionalism as an identity that serves those who own the media. In the *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* case, however, control over the news-workers makes it even difficult for them in practice to subscribe to a full and consistent journalistic identity because this would entail editorial independence from the government. In this way, actual journalism professionalism at this newspaper is not part of power, but would instead be a counterbalance to employer power over the news-workers there.

## **2.2 The role of media in democracy: an overview**

A number of conceptions and ideals have been put forward regarding the role of media in democracy. Universally, one starting point for defining such a role has been Article 19 of the 1948 Declaration on Human Rights which states that “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” In the same vein in Southern Africa,

the Windhoek Declaration adopted in 1991 puts emphasis on the significance of a free press for the development and maintenance of democracy in a nation. During the course of this study, that is March to July 2009, Lesotho did not have a media policy and press freedom was only indirectly recognised in the constitution in Chapter II-14 through the freedom of expression clause. This clause states that “every person shall be entitled to, and shall not be hindered in his enjoyment of, freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to communicate ideas and information without interference.”

In mapping out *Lentsoe La Basotho/Lesotho Today*'s role in democracy, this paper takes as its starting point Ocitti's view that the media is a critical ingredient in the transition of society from authoritarianism to democracy and that it reflects the nature and level of democracy as no other social indicator can (1995:5). Important to note here is that the media is in turn affected by the maturity of that democracy. From Ocitti's viewpoint I deduce that *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* is important to democracy in as far as the paper could be expected to epitomise the unfettered freedom of expression of ideas and opinions in the society and as thus acts as a thermometer of measuring the democratic body temperature in Lesotho.

But what is democracy? Acknowledging Berger's minimal definition of democracy as “participation by means of a real electoral choice in matters of government” (1998: 600), I adopt Woolf (2005)'s broader definition that views democracy as a system of governance with four key elements. First, a political system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections; secondly, active participation of the people as citizens in politics and civic life; third, the protection of human rights; and fourthly, a rule of law, in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens (this latter condition is particularly relevant to a case described later in this thesis of non-coverage of a prominent government official appearing in court).

One may also bear in mind the statement by Lesotho's Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili who describes democracy with the time-honoured phrase “the government of the people by the people” (see his state of the nation addresses for 2006 and 2007). All definitions however, attest to the fact that democracy (at least in Southern Africa)

is based on the rule by the majority of the population in a fair and equitable society. Part of the role of democratic institutions like the media in this case, is - at minimum - to freely empower citizens to make electoral decisions in a context that respects human rights (including the public's right to know) and the rule of law. For this to happen, the news-workers need to understand their democratic roles.

Hyden and Okigbo suggest that the relationship between media and democracy is complex, interwoven and difficult to disentangle (2002:29). For instance political economists like Murdock (1990:72) perceive the media's role in democracy as a negative one in being the purveyors of dominant capitalist ideology. The contention is that the media will serve the interest of whoever controls them. This view operates from a paradigm of structure and determination, as distinct from the normative argument that focuses on what should be, rather than on explaining what is. Berger argues that in its normative dimension journalism has "an organic intrinsic link to democracy" (1999:3). His view not only places journalism in a role that makes it a powerful motivating force that can survive regardless of all complications, but which also serves as "an important standard by which the purpose and performance of journalism can be assessed" (1999:3). Within this paradigm, Berger identifies four broad versions of journalistic practice: liberal democratic, neo-liberal, social democratic and participatory. He explains that these versions can operate largely in combination with one another despite minor contradictions between them (1999:4).

The liberal conception sees media's role in democracy as being watchdogs of the state. As watchdogs, media guards citizens' rights and represents the broad public in holding the powerful accountable to society (Berger 1999:5). The precondition here is editorial independence. In the neo-liberal approach, the role of journalism is perceived as providing a platform for debate between many divergent and independent voices as posited in the Windhoek Declaration (Berger 1999:6). This view is closely linked to the Habermasian concept of the public sphere which will be discussed later in this section. Journalists in this view are not messengers but neutral referees in the contest of political forces. Politics is a commodity and their duty is to ensure equitable exposure for what is on offer to the consumers. Journalistic ethics here stress balance and impartiality (Berger 1999:6). In the social democratic view, journalism is seen as a public stewardship with obligations towards the public that include a range of

journalistic responsibilities (McQuail 1994:116). While the watchdog role addresses itself to the state and the power centres, in the social democratic role the journalist faces the citizens. Journalists here are perceived as neutral educators and are closely linked with public media institutions.

Distinct from the liberal, neo-liberal and social-democratic ideal roles of journalism in democracy, is the participatory view. The participative mission aspires to make freedom of speech a reality for the masses and its value base is that journalism should serve not only the information-rich but also and especially the information-poor (Berger 1999:8).

These roles are all relevant to understanding the notion of representation within the Habermasian concept of the public sphere (Habermas 1992; Dahlgren and Spark 1991). According to Habermas, the public sphere is an ideal space where public opinion is formed and expressed. The understanding is that a democratic society thrives when there is critical discussion open to all in the public sphere. Public sphere adherents like Garnham (1990) and Keane (1995) place the formation of rational and critical public opinion at the centre of true democracy. For citizens to confer in an unrestricted fashion, that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions about matters of general interest, they need to have a medium (Habermas 1989: 350), and this is where the media comes in. The media then becomes a means for transmitting information and influencing those who receive it. As a public sphere, media also becomes an institutional entry point for untrammelled national debate (Dahlgren and Spark 1991: 40).

In this approach, the media – and particularly state-owned media – are perceived in line with the provision of a common forum for political debate and deliberation that in turn should empower public opinion and in a way allow for democratic influence on the exercise of the state and other sources of power (Mpofu 1996). The public sphere paradigm becomes relevant in this study because of its inclination towards state-owned media with a public service mandate and its call for the transformation of government ‘propaganda’ media into proper public media (Berger 1998). The aspect of public participation makes the public sphere concept a useful tool in assessing the role and relevance of state-owned newspapers in a democratic society. The link

between public sphere and socio-democratic and neo-liberal roles is discussed in section 2.2.1.

Evidently, there are a number of notions regarding the role of media in democracy, but the different scholars have an understanding that the media becomes the backbone of democracy in as far as (1) it supplies political information that voters can base their decisions on, (2) it identifies problems in the society, and (3) serves as a medium for deliberation whilst also uncovering errors and wrongdoings by those who have power (Kellner 2004; McQuail 2000). It is through performing these functions that the media then differs from political or religious institutions. To this end, media freedom becomes critical to the continuity of a democracy and serving the public, rather than supervision by the state, becomes the litmus test of democratic media.

Measured from the afore mentioned ideals, particularly the public sphere approach, *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today's* news-workers should take on a normative democratic role by demonstrating professionalism that allows for free flow of information and ideas from across the broad diversity that is to be found in the society.

In light of the ideal roles of media in democracy as has been outlined, it is important to examine what happens when the government controls the media. In doing so, I draw from my own personal experiences as a reporter working for the state-owned newspaper in Lesotho for five years (2000-2005). I also use insights from the literature that I was introduced to as a media studies student. It is through these experiences both as a reporter and a scholar that I can argue that government control of the media leaves little scope, if any, for dissenting opinions, and therefore public debate. My argument is based in part on the postulation of Gurevitch and Blumler (1995) that access to information is essential to the health of democracy for at least two reasons. First, it ensures that citizens make responsible, informed choices rather than acting out of ignorance or misinformation. Second, information serves a checking function by ensuring that elected representatives uphold their oaths of office and carry out the wishes of those who elected them. When government controls the media, it follows that the role of mediation between the state and all facets of civil society remains to some extent minimal.

To this end, within the context of supporting democratic transitions, the goal of media development generally should be to move the media from one that is directed or even overtly controlled by government and/or or economic interests, to one that is more open and has a degree of editorial independence and serves the public interest Lee (2000:56). Gauthier (2000:199) defines the public interest as: “representing a plurality of voices both through a greater number of outlets and through diversity of views and voices reflected in one outlet”. As discussed in the next section, such is the ideal nature of a public service media - to which I fully adhere. This kind of media is also supportive of democracy in as far as it is accountable and editorially independent.

### **2.2.1 The role of public service media in democracy**

As mentioned in the previous section, the public service role of media in democracy is viewed in relation to Habermas’ concept of the public sphere (Habermas 1992). The public sphere theory is premised on the understanding that media content is a public good belonging to the nation and should not be exploited for private or sectarian gain, either monetary or ideological (Kupe 2003:201-202). It acknowledges that the government may act as the guardian of the nation but should be kept at arms length from the day-to-day operations of media organisations. The government’s responsibility to this end is to create an enabling environment for a free press and to ensure that there is a level playing field for all sectors (see Mendel 1988; Boyd-Barrett and Newbold 1995). For this to happen, one starting point would be for governments to ensure that all their advertisements are placed by a commercial agency so that media organisations may in principle be eligible to get advertising from the government even if they may not share similar views. For reasons of transparency, this agency can be selected through a tender process.

Much like the other territories held in the public trust, for instance, public schools, public toilets and public libraries to mention but a few, public media’s purpose is to serve the public good. The question is: how can this purpose be best achieved? How do we articulate the mission of public media and identify the editorial standard and ideals that best guide it in fulfilling this mission? How should the news-workers behave in relation to it – bearing in mind the question of power as pointed out by political economy theory? While there might not be any right or wrong answers, I believe the solution lies in the professional understandings of the news-workers. Such

understandings should be directly linked to Berger (1999)'s democratic roles of the media as I will now elaborate.

In this thesis I strongly advocate for the neo-liberal and social democratic ideals which are both closely linked with public media institutions. I do so in full recognition that from the neo-liberal perspective, the news-workers should be neutral referees, i.e. balanced and impartial. They should service the political system by providing information and debates on public affairs. In the social democratic ideal, the news-workers ought to be messengers that enlighten the public so they can self govern. Also important is for the news-workers in this regard to be able to highlight government policies and engage in political education regarding democratic principles and civil and political rights. Both the social democratic and neo-liberal views' precondition is that the news-workers should serve the public and not bow to political or economic interferences. The liberal and participatory roles, on the other hand, are not usually central to public-service media.

Most of the literature on public service media concentrates on broadcasting services (Mendel 1998; Mpofu 1996; Raboy 1996; Betzel and Ward 2004; Mbaine 2003; Berger 1997). This paper however, argues that the essentials of public service broadcasting (PSB) can apply to print media as well. There is no consensus on what PSB entails amongst scholars and policymakers, and the role this form of broadcasting plays in society not only differs from country to country but is not static as well (Mpofu 1996: 34). It is for this reason that any attempt to define public service media becomes a back-breaking exercise as the concept embraces a whole array of factors.

However, it can be said that the conceptualisation of PSB originates in the experience of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and its founder Sir John Reith; hence BBC still stands as a model of PSB although it is increasingly being re-interpreted to accommodate national specifications and politics in different countries (Rosenthal 1974:150). This form of broadcasting is linked to a system that is non-profit and non-commercial and primarily supported by public funds (see Dlamini 2003; McQuail 2000).

For Southern Africa, the need to change government controlled broadcasters into public service media is emphasised in part II of the African Charter on Broadcasting

of 2001 and the African Commission on Human and People's Rights Declaration on Principles of Freedom of Expression. The Declaration was adopted in 2002 in recognition of the importance of freedom of expression as an individual human right, a cornerstone for democracy and a means of ensuring respect for all human rights and freedoms. The Charter was adopted by media practitioners in Namibia to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic Press. It recognises that transforming government-controlled broadcasters into public service media can usually be through ensuring that such broadcasters are accountable to the public through the legislature rather than the government, in accordance with the following principles:

- Public broadcasters should be governed by a board which is protected against interference, particularly of a political or economic nature;
- The editorial independence of public service broadcasters should be guaranteed;
- Public broadcasters should be adequately funded in a manner that protects them from arbitrary interference with their budgets;
- The public service ambit of public broadcasters should be clearly defined and include the obligation to ensure that the public receive adequate, politically balanced information, particularly during election periods.

With these principles in mind, PSB has been loosely defined as a means of providing all citizens, whatever their wealth or geographical location, equal access to a wide range of high quality entertainment, information and education. It is also seen as a means of ensuring that the aim of the programme producer is the satisfaction of a range of audience tastes rather than only those tastes that show the largest profit (Garnham 1990:13-14). The basis of PSB revolves around the provision of a universal service of excellent programming while maintaining public legitimacy through editorial independence from both the government of the day and commercial interests. The safe-guarding of independent, appropriately-funded public service broadcasting institutions is deemed essential to the functioning of the media in a democratic society (Scannell 1990:12).

Universal not only implies programming which covers a full range of genres, but such programming should be for the widest possible audience covering the most geographical spread. The caveat to this definition is that PSB must be carried out within the means available to the public broadcaster. It is at this point, when the pragmatism of limited financial means meets with the idealism of an all-encompassing mandate that a contradiction with PSB becomes apparent (Opoku-Mensah 1998; Mendel 1998). As posited by Smith, the understanding of PSB is that broadcasting takes place in the public sphere and we come to it as consumers and citizens (1990:34).

For PSB's, the key editorial values are editorial independence and accountability (Berger and Jjuuko 2007; Mpofu, 1996; Mbaine, 2003). These key editorial values aid in distinguishing a public broadcaster from a state broadcaster, government broadcaster or a commercial service broadcaster. In the next section I will discuss the key editorial values as well as what they mean to *Lentsoe la Basotho/ Lesotho Today*. It is through studying the news-workers that one can understand what the core editorial values mean in the context of the newspaper.

### **2.3 Transforming *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* into a public service newspaper**

For the purposes of this thesis, by a state-owned newspaper, I mean a newspaper that is not only owned by the state but also directly controlled by the government of the day, which is the position in Lesotho. While I propose that the idea of PSB be adapted to state-owned print media, the challenge is to work out which tenets of PSB will be appropriate to the newspaper.

In 2005, media stakeholders from Southern Africa attending a meeting convened by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung agreed on a memorandum on the transformation of state-owned newspapers into public service newspapers. For the purpose of convenience in this thesis, the (unpublished) memorandum will be referred to as the '2005 Understanding'. This memorandum stated amongst others that state-owned newspapers as legitimate tools of government's communication purposes, "have outlived their purpose in view of the multitude and plurality of independent media

voices”. They called for governments to let go their ownership and control powers in newspapers so that such newspapers can perform the public service mandate.

The 2005 Understanding proposed that most newspapers in Southern Africa are still in the hands of the government, because of the argument that governments need to own newspapers primarily because of their responsibility to keep the citizens informed on government policies, activities and initiatives. The argument is that such activities are, after all, “undertaken on behalf and for the benefit of the citizens”. Acknowledging this responsibility, participants pointed out that this purpose, however noble, would be better served if the message was put across through reputable carriers. Publication in government-controlled papers, they argued, is likely to compromise the message and make readers dismiss or ignore it as mere self-serving public relations exercise. Government information, the 2005 Understanding states, should be communicated to the public and the media in a professional manner by information or public relations departments.

The 2005 Understanding further calls for the placement of all state-owned newspapers under public control rather than government control and intervention. Such public control, it says, should be exercised through a board appointed with the full participation of civil society, independent from government and accountable to the public as a whole both with regard to content carried and the use of public funds. According to the 2005 Understanding, publicly-controlled newspapers will be held to the same standards of professional journalism, editorial independence and accountability as privately-owned newspapers. To this end certain requirements concerning professional standards and the upholding of editorial independence should be set. Creation of a monopoly or near monopoly situation must be avoided, the 2005 Understanding proposes.

### **2.3.1 Editorial independence**

Independence is crucial for a public service newspaper. The Concise Oxford English dictionary (2006) defines being independent as: “being free from outside control and not depending on another for livelihood or sustenance”. Independence for *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* will therefore involve being autonomous, and having the ability to act and make decisions without being controlled by anyone else. This is the

kind of independence attributed to PSBs (Dlamini 2003, cited in Jjuuko 2005). To this end, *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* and all the decisions taken therein should be free from any form of pressure on journalists and the content they produce.

Editorial independence, according to Jjuuko (2005), can be analysed at four different levels:

First, it protects the rights of news-workers to make day-to-day decisions regarding editorial matters. Barker contends that editorial independence at this level gives news-workers the right to make decisions based on professional criteria such as relevance and newsworthiness, and in accordance to the journalistic codes of ethics (2000:6).

Secondly, editorial independence can also mean independence of the editorial as a whole from the economic variables of media organisations, particularly from those news-workers responsible not for the integrity of editorial content, but for generating revenues for the business (Jjuuko 2005:11). Thirdly, editorial independence can also be analysed in view of the extent to which reporters have a degree of independence from their editors. This relates to the professional autonomy and responsibility of each rank-and-file journalist (Jjuuko 2005:11). At the fourth level, editorial independence can be attributed to the debates around the independence of journalists from their sources (see Berger 1997).

Within the whole context, the independence of news-workers is framed in terms of their professional practices. This issue will be discussed in section 2.3.4 which deals with journalism as a profession. Foregrounding these levels of editorial independence is the institutional independence from the power centres of government and commercial interests.

### **2.3.2 Accountability**

Soloski (1997) mentions that accountability of the media is theoretically implicit in the commercial relationship with its consumers whose dissatisfaction can be demonstrated by ceasing to buy or pay attention. In other words, media is accountable not only to itself but to the audiences it serves. This explanation makes it clear that if a media organisation is accountable, it shall be viable because it shall have consumers

supporting it. This form of accountability, however, is not always seen as entirely adequate, and so other systems are often suggested as well.

Berger (1997) puts forward that journalists are accountable to their own consciences and corresponding interpretation of the ethics of the profession. Berger and Jjuuko (2007:94) posit several other ways in which accountability can happen. It can be through a public board of governance which is appointed with the full participation of civil society. These board members need to account to the public rather than the government. A second form of accountability is through responding to criticism, including participation in industry complaints bodies (Berger and Jjuuko 2007:94). Thirdly, accountability can be through regulation.

For journalists to fulfil their public service mandate, they need to adhere to above-mentioned core editorial values. This however, depends in part on how they define the editorial values and how they see themselves as professionals in the context of their organisation. This observation is based on Nyamnjoh's argument that in order to perform its role in democracy, media needs to be ethical and professional in its approach to journalism (2005:21). *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* journalists are not just any journalists: they are also supposed to be public service journalists and some of the characteristic features of public service media are the normative elements as discussed in the next paragraph. This point is worth illustrating because for news-workers at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* to take over the role of public service journalists, further complicates the professional identity question even before I come to the civil service and government employee issues.

At the normative level, the content characteristics of public service newspapering will be based primarily on the news-workers' duty to inform the public in an accurate and fair manner. For the case of *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*, this involves – in addition - giving the public content in the two official languages: Sesotho and English, and having content that includes an array of informal educative topics ranging from social, political and economic issues. Such content should also enrich the cultural heritage of Lesotho by supporting both traditional and contemporary artistic expression. The content should also cater for the disadvantaged groups in society including women, youth, children and the disabled.

## **2.4 Journalism professionalism**

Much ink has been spilled over arguments about whether journalism is a bona fide profession. Even more ink has been used by scholars who have attempted to identify the criteria that make an occupation a profession (Soloski 1997:138).

The idea of being a journalist, a servant, becomes again a source of pride, and that in turn feeds on itself contributing all the more to the reader-centred perspective. And journalism becomes not merely something that one *does*, it becomes something that one *is*. It is not merely a job; it is a commitment to service that one professes (Hodges 1986:35 cited in Mayiga 2008).

The above quotes are significant in the study of journalism professionalism as they present some of the arguments for and against journalism as a profession. The study of journalism professionalism is theoretically rooted in the sociology of professions which argues that journalism's claim for professionalism has developed from its beliefs, values and guidelines derived from the democratic tenets of "freedom of expression and the public's right to know" (Curran et al 1987:67-68).

### **2.4.1 Theoretical approaches to journalism professionalism**

Although journalism professionalism has been construed from within the sociology of professions, the question of journalism as a profession has also gained impetus within the liberal-pluralist, Marxist and most recently the radical-democratic approaches to the study of mass media (Curran et al 1987:68). These approaches will be discussed in the next sections.

### **2.4.2 The liberal-pluralist approach**

The liberal-pluralist approach concludes that journalism, particularly public service journalism, has a strong claim to autonomy derived from the democratic tenets of freedom of expression and the public's right to know. This approach also concludes that media's professional ideology is committed to the values such as: objectivity, impartiality and fairness. It accepts that these principles operate as guidelines for the work practices of public service news-workers whilst also acting as regulators of their professional conduct (Bennett 1982: 40-41).

This interpretation presents a positive view of journalism professionalism by pointing out that, for the media to promote pluralism and diversity in society, they need to be

guided by professional values that will in turn insulate them from pressures and influences prevalent in society. Liberal pluralism as such does not deny that there are pressures, but looks at professionalism as the guarantee against such pressures. Contrary to the liberal-pluralist approach, the Marxist approach as discussed in the following section dismisses any assumed capacity of the media to contain external pressures.

### **2.4.3 The Marxist approach**

The Marxist interpretation of journalism professionalism is rooted in the Marxist approach to media studies which centres on the question of power, and thus on who has the power and how is the power exercised. Marxism challenges the validity of public service journalists' claims on the notions of objective and impartial work practices (Curran et al 1987:68). The argument of Marxism is that such claims are limited and mask the professionals' subservience to the dominant ideology. Marxism dismisses journalism professionalism as no more than a ploy for subjugating the practitioners to the dominant will through the notions of objectivity and impartiality. Its understanding is that through professionalism, dominant forces are able to strip journalists of their autonomy and clone them into robotic agents of the dominant will (Merrill 1986:58).

Contrary to liberal-pluralism's viewpoint that the media promotes pluralism, the Marxist conception of the media is of a promoter of monopolistic domination. In Marxism, the media is perceived as an agent of dominant forces, not autonomous but merely "a set of institutions clearly linked to the dominant power structure through ownership, legal regulation, the values implicit in the professional ideologies in the media, and the structure and ideological consequences of prevailing modes of newsgathering (Curran et al, 1987:64). The next section explores a rather radical approach to professionalism in media studies that sees communication as a right for all.

### **2.4.4 The radical-democratic approach**

Unlike the liberal-pluralist and the Marxist approaches that I have already discussed, the radical-democratic approach is less traditionalised. In the journalism professionalism debate, it becomes a major perspective because it offers a different

view of communication as a function of democracy. In this view, communication enables the citizens to participate in common political action through democratic exchange and discussion of ideas.

The journalist as communicator, here, is not separate from the community and its discourse, but is seen as a participant in the discourse. As Bekken (1998:25) mentions, such communicators are not detached professionals, but “advocates fighting as best as they could to advance the public good”. The challenge of democratic communication as proposed by the radical democratic approach is to come up with realistic strategies of organising and mobilising publics to engage in the production and dissemination of ideas, in cultural production.

Like Marxism, this approach rejects journalism professionalism and regards it as a strategy for legitimating dominant institutions, and constitutionally, as a violation of the fundamental human right, the right to inform and be informed.

For the purposes of this study I align myself with the liberal pluralist position inasmuch as journalism professionalism is what would be needed to fend off the pressures of the employers. The lack of actual journalism professionalism in consistent form at the paper, is however, explainable by Marxist reasoning about the influence of the state and economic power in the definition of professionalism at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*. The radical democratic approach does not shed much light on the news-workers at the paper except inasmuch as highlighting that whatever else they may be, they do not occupy the roles of mobilising publics from within. As will be shown, one respondent even points to an apathy about whether the paper is actually sold or not.

I argue along with Birkhead (1986:41) that a professional becomes a journalist who is capable of adhering to the system, right from defining news to conforming to the news style. I also put forward that the professional ideologies such as objectivity, balance and impartiality are the tools that *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* news-workers use to the service of dominant powers. In my view the Marxist interpretation is a mirror of reality at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* and offers a critical glance into the validity of the core values that define and justify journalism professionalism.

My stance is further supported by a comparative study of 21 countries which was undertaken by Weaver (1998). He concluded that journalists share similar characteristics and speak of similar values in the context of their daily work, but apply these in a variety of ways to give meaning to what they do. In Weaver's words, "Journalists in all media types, genres and formats carry the ideology of journalism" (1998:457). The reference to ideology here is not exclusively in terms of a dominant capitalist worldview that is to be toppled through class struggle as is done by Marxists (Gauthier 2000) but it is pertaining to an intellectual process over time, through which the sum of ideas and views of a particular group is shaped. This view is also shared by Stevenson who looks at ideology as a process by which other ideas and views are excluded or marginalised (1995:37-40). Thus ideology is generally referred to as a dominant way in which news people validate and give meaning to their work. Journalism's ideology has, for example, been analysed as a 'strategic ritual' to position oneself in the profession vis-à-vis media critics and publics (Tuchman 1971).

It is through journalism ideology and values that journalists have a particular ethos and can identify themselves as journalists and not lawyers or doctors. Russo (1998) suggests that journalists identify themselves more easily with the profession of journalism than with the media organisations that they work for. In the next section I explore the sub- ideology of public service journalism which is the kind of journalism central to this study, and which is a normative ideal that can be re-interpreted to accord with the kind of professional behaviour as identified by the Marxist approach as outlined above.

## **2.5 Public service Journalism**

While a public service journalist is indeed still a journalist *per se*, public service journalism can be tied to both the neo-liberal and the social democratic role of the media discussed earlier. Here, the public journalist is expected to be a messenger and guide-dog of the society, distinct from such a journalist being a political watchdog as in the liberal role (see Berger and Barratt 2008). The public service journalist also has to be a neutral referee and his/her duties in this regard will be distinct from those of journalists working under the participatory notion where journalists are deemed as active promoters of democratic participation (Berger and Barratt 2008:152). The

ethical considerations of a public service journalist include allegiance to objectivity, impartiality and balance.

The obligation of the public service journalist is to ensure that the public receive adequate and politically balanced information, particularly during election periods.

Since the goal of the thesis is to understand how news-workers at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* understand themselves as media professionals in relation to the ideal of public service journalism, but in the context of government-control, it is important to not only look at professionalism but also the role identities they should identify with. In the next section I draw from the cultural studies to understand the news-workers' roles and identities.

### **2.5.1 News-workers' roles and identities**

Identity is an important aspect of the human quest for understanding the self. It connotes the process of identification, but the structure of identification is created through the splitting between that which is and that which is the other (Hall 1992).

The process of identification assists a person in defining who he/she is by developing the perception that he/she shares the same identity with other members of his/her category (Hall 1996). Identities, whether cultural or occupational, are based on an imagined sense of belonging to the 'us' and 'them' type of relational categories. They are also predicated on differentiation both at the level of the group and that of the individual. Part of the focus of this thesis is to map out how news-workers at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* approach the multiplicity of their identities (in this case public service journalistic, other journalistic, government mouthpiece and civil servant) and how they adapt these to the conditions in which they practice. How do they negotiate these senses of who they are? How does the contestation between these identities work? This thesis will specifically look at how the news-workers' expressed perceptions relate to the public service model of journalism.

Informing this thesis is the recognition that around the world, contextual and cultural influences affect how journalists perceive their roles (Nyamnjoh 2005:77). For example, when news-workers are employed by the state, there is a contestation of identity constructions depending on the roles played by the news-workers at any given point.

My position in this thesis is that the news-workers at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* need to identify themselves more with the public service journalism role as outlined in the paper's mission statement presented in the previous chapter. This means that their relationship with the state should have some degree of autonomy.

## **2.6 Journalism ethics**

Like any other profession, journalism has its own set of ethics. Journalistic codes of conduct or ethical codes are linked to specific historical and cultural contexts: firstly, they have been seen and developed as part of a process giving journalism a professional status; secondly they have been seen as part of an increasing self-awareness by journalists that they belong to a profession with its own set of rules, forms of education and learning (Kasoma and Ronning 2002:5).

These ethics, particularly from the neo-liberal and social-democratic perspective of media in democracy, are in recognition of the kind of journalism that contributes directly to public problem-solving through engaging with and supporting the efforts of citizens to play their democratic role in the community. The ethical considerations here include seeking and reporting the truth, and acting independently – thus being free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know. They also include accountability not only to the readers but to themselves. The understanding of the neo-liberal and social-democratic journalist should be the need to remain neutral whilst also educating the public as shown in section 2.4.1.

## **2.7 Public Servants**

The identification process becomes complex in light of the fact that the civil service also has a set of ethos and guidelines that need to be followed and which are different from the guidelines and values of journalism professionalism and distinct also from being a government employee who has to remain partial and manage the reputation of the said government.

Chapter VIII of Lesotho's constitution states that a public servant is a person who is employed by the state. Such a person, whom by nature has to be neutral, remains a civil servant regardless of the political party which is in government at any point in time. This categorisation excludes all people employed by the government of the day

who protect its policies and manage its reputation and leave office once the government changes.

The power to appoint persons to hold or act in offices in the public service, including the power to exercise disciplinary control over individuals in such offices, according to the constitution (Chapter VIII) is vested in the Public Service Commission (PSC). Members of the PSC are appointed by the King with the advice of the Prime Minister. Chapter VIII of the constitution further stipulates that “the public service commission may, by directions in writing and subject to such conditions as it thinks fit, delegate any of its powers to anyone or more members of the commission or, with the consent of the Prime Minister, to any public officer”. In the Ministry of Communications for example, the said public officer would be the Principal Secretary who is coincidentally a government employee.

The Principal Secretary then, has the power to override the public service recruitment procedure and employ candidates he/she feels fit for the position (Public Service Act 2003). This in turn makes civil service employment difficult to separate from government employment and as a result the identities of the news-workers become even more complex and hard to separate.

The power of the Principal Secretary also extends to transferring employees between departments under his ministry without any formality and warning. This is not only perceived as facilitating the free flow of staff between departments but also facilitating re-organisation within the government. This means working for a department is fluid as some employees have found themselves working for an entirely different department at only a few hours notice. For instance there is nothing strange in being employed as a messenger today and finding yourself behind the microphone the next day because the Principal Secretary feels you have the right voice. I personally can attest to this after having worked for the Communications Ministry in all its departments even though I initially was employed to work for the newspaper.

Lesotho’s constitution Chapter VIII further indicates that the functions of the Principal Secretary include the overall supervising of the ministry, setting direction, objectives and appropriate guidelines and strategies for the ministry under his/her supervision and assisting in the initiation, formulation and implementation of the

policy of the ministry. The Principal Secretary reports to the Minister. Important to note here is that the Principal Secretary is directly appointed by the Prime Minister.

The functions of a public servant as outlined in the constitution include supporting and maintaining the government of Lesotho according to the constitution and other laws, serving the people and promoting their welfare and lawful interests and performing all duties that may be assigned to him/ her impartially, efficiently and without undue delay. The constitution is however silent on the role the public servant plays in the promotion of democracy. In this respect, the identity of civil service is conspicuously different to that of journalism which invariably prescribes democratic roles in varying shapes and forms. While journalism leans towards disclosure of all relevant information, a civil service identity could lend itself to partial information. In as much as civil service roles overlap with public journalism roles, however, this is in regard to common ethics that require fairness and political impartiality.

### **2.7.1 Code of conduct in the public service**

Public servants are guided by a code of conduct. This code of conduct is in recognition that disciplined public officers are instrumental in carrying out government policies (Public Service Act 2005). This code of conduct states that it is made “in the conviction that employment in the public service places a public officer under a moral obligation to work conscientiously to earn his or her living and look upon his or her work as a contribution to making the economy of Lesotho strong and healthy”. As in the constitution, the Public Service Act of 2005 does not make any reference to the making of the Lesotho’s democracy strong and healthy.

It outlines how a public servant is supposed to behave and cautions against unacceptable behaviour. Significantly, the Act also emphasises the need for public servants to be politically impartial. This then creates a tension between those employees at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* who see themselves as public servants (and journalists) rather than government employees.

### **2.8 The government employee**

As I have mentioned in the last section, the identification process of news-workers at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* is further made complex by the fact that there is an

element of being a government employee that also exists within them. As government employees, the news-workers become public relations tools.

Bereng (2001) posits that as public relations tools, government employees use all forms of media and communication to build, maintain and manage the reputation of the government of the day. They communicate key messages, often using third party endorsements, to defined target audiences in order to establish and maintain goodwill and understanding between the government and the citizenry.

Government public relations officers, Bereng (2001) adds, are central figures that contribute significantly towards maintaining the government's strength and prestige. This then means remaining partial and promoting the government of the day and this is in direct conflict with one being a public service news-worker who has to be neutral and impartial and being a civil servant who also needs to be impartial and neutral. While journalists and civil servants are not normatively supposed to "spin" information, this is a key part of public relations activity.

Needless to say, when the journalistic, civil service and government employee identities are conflated at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*, the news-workers are pulled in various directions. Sometimes they need to be fair as per the civil service, and public service journalistic roles, instead of propagandist as per government identity status. It is how they negotiate these normative roles, in the context of power and practice that is the focus of this study.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that how news-workers perceive their own professionalism can be determined by a range of factors. Broad economic, political and ideological forces shape identities of news-workers and their sense of what their role is. News-workers negotiate their own professionalism by constructing their own ideologies and values of how they are supposed to behave within parameters. Their predominant routines and practices that arise from the negotiation more often than not, support the interest of the 'powers that be'. This chapter has also spelt out what conditions would be needed for public service newspapering. It has put emphasis on the social democratic and neo-liberal roles as the ideal roles that a public service journalist should play whilst also exploring the tensions that might exist between the different

journalistic roles, all the journalistic roles and the public service media roles, as well as the civil service roles and all the mentioned roles vis-à-vis the government propaganda role.

In the next Chapter, I look at the research methods and procedures employed in trying to explore the tensions and how the news-workers resolve this dilemma. The idea is to understand how the news-workers at *Lentsoe La Basotho/ Lesotho Today*, negotiate public service journalistic identities vis-à-vis their government control status and their place as also being in the civil/public service.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

In investigating the individual professional understandings of news-workers at the state-owned *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* in the context of their organisation and their public service journalistic role as outlined in the paper's mission statement, this thesis has followed a qualitative research design as noted in chapter one. I believed that since my objective was to get inside the news-workers' identities and to map out the conflict that may exist between professional norms and ownership expectations, the kind of knowledge I sought would be best captured through individual in-depth interviews. These interviews enabled me to gain thick descriptions and explanations that facilitated my understanding of the contextual and political factors that structure the professionalism and identity of the news-workers. In exploring the professional understandings of the news-workers, I also kept in mind public service journalism as the ideal kind of journalism that might be appropriate for a state-owned newspaper with a public service mandate. In this light, the two major questions that foreground this study were:

- How do the news-workers understand their journalistic professionalism in light of the government-control context as well as their status as public servants?
- What does their interpretation mean for the public service role of media in democracy particularly in Lesotho?

In this chapter, I present my research methods, including the research design, method of data collection, the research procedure and my approach to data analysis and presentation.

#### **3.1 Qualitative research in media studies**

Opposing epistemological assumptions about the nature of human societies and cultural phenomena have encouraged an ongoing debate amongst social science

researchers and theorists as to the relative merits of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Quantitative methods, such as the questionnaire, survey or laboratory experiment, provide data that is easily reducible to statistics. While such methods may produce large quantities of statistical data, there is much debate on the validity of such data when it is taken into account that the laboratory or the survey cannot reproduce the intricacies of the social settings in which media messages are ordinarily received, and that numbers in themselves explain very little when it comes to understanding the meanings that people make of the complex social worlds that they inhabit in their daily lives (Bryman 1988).

The qualitative research tradition which is aimed at accessing “inside” perspectives characteristic of members of a culture (Priest 1996:103) has also had its fair share of criticisms. It has been critiqued for being too subjective, difficult to replicate, having problems of generalization and lacking transparency (see Bryman 2001:282). However, Priest (1996: 106-107) argues that when the goal is to understand the “insider’s” perspective as I will in this study, a quantitative design is not the way to go, as the researcher requires an holistic approach which provides the opportunity to develop descriptive, rich understanding and insight into individuals’ beliefs, concerns, motivations, aspirations, life styles, culture, behaviour and preferences. These kinds of descriptions can be obtained through qualitative research.

According to Christian and Carey, the starting point of qualitative studies is the hypothesis that, in studying humans, researchers are examining a creative process whereby people are responsible for the production and maintenance of forms of life and society as well as the systems of meaning and value (1989:358). It is to this end that qualitative studies are dedicated to attempting to recover human agency: the ways persons live by intentions, purposes and values (Christians and Carey 1989:359). The *sine qua non* is a commitment to seeing the social world from the point of view of the people being studied (Bryman 1988:77).

It is the characteristic patterns of qualitative research, namely “seeing through the eyes of” contextualism and flexibility which, have also made me consider the qualitative research design as ideal for this study. Seeing “through the eyes of” signifies qualitative research’s commitment to viewing events from the perspective of the people who are being studied (Bryman 2001:277). My aim was to see

professionalism through the eyes of the news-workers who have multiple identities. They are on the one hand, news-workers with a public service journalistic mission and can thus relate to themselves as neutral observers and so on, while on the other hand they also have to embrace their role as both public servants and as government employees who are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that is befitting, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Contextualism in qualitative research puts emphasis on the need to interpret what is going on in terms of the understanding of the whole society and the meaning it has for the participants (Bryman 2001:277). For my research purposes this meant that while I studied the news-workers, I needed to understand that the meanings that they ascribe to their own behaviour are set in wider social and historical context. Flexibility is also characteristic of qualitative research and refers to a research strategy which is not rigid, and for me as a researcher this meant an opportunity to be fluid, remaining cognisant for the possibility of new issues arising during the course of my research.

Although qualitative research is often multi-method in nature, my research question did not warrant the use of multiple methods. Taking into account Trow's advice that "the problem under investigation properly dictates the methods of investigation" (1957:33), the qualitative data collection method that I employed in this thesis was semi-structured in-depth interviews. I thought about doing an observation but since I was not interested in the newsroom practices per se, I thought observations will not justify my main aim of engaging with the news-workers.

### **3.1.1 News-workers at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*: a case study**

One way of capturing the inside view and the thick descriptions demanded by qualitative research includes case studies (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:2; Bryman, 1984:78). Yin (1994:6) argues that 'how' and 'why' questions are more explanatory and likely to lead to the use of case studies, histories and experiments as the preferred research strategies. My question, how the news-workers understand and negotiate their identities, thus pushes in the direction of a case study. Yin also notes that what defines a case study is its scope, and the way in which it marshals different methods to a focal point. Noting its particular value for investigating a contemporary phenomenon, he writes:

(y)ou would use the case study method because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions - believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study. (Yin 1994:13)

Case studies can be undertaken as being of intrinsic interest in themselves, or in order to illuminate a wider issue and provide insight into an external interest. I argue that news-workers at *Lentsoe la Basotho/ Lesotho Today* form one such case. They form a bounded group defined largely by its choices of activities and characteristics. Although case studies are generally associated with a qualitative methodology, and have become a common way of conducting qualitative enquiry (Eisenhardt 2002, Stake 2003), their validity and reliability as a research method has not escaped criticism (see Bryman 2001 and Stake 2003). A frequent criticism of case study methodology is that its dependence on a single case renders it incapable of providing a generalising conclusion (Yin 1994:16).

This research sidesteps such criticisms because my aim is not arriving at a predictive theory or universal statement concerning professionalism of news-workers in state-owned newspapers. My research interest is rather in exploring the ways in which my research subjects understand and interpret their own professionalism in the context of their civil service and government-control status and their public service journalism mandate as outlined in the paper's mission statement. I argue along with Yin that the merit of a case study depends on its being able to create plausible interpretations for what is found, to construct a worthwhile story or argument and to convey this convincingly to an audience (1994:65).

In a similar vein, Lindlof argues that:

In the final analysis, qualitative reports are all about perspectives of lived experience. The researcher must decide what kind of author he or she will be, and what sort of story to construct of the facts of the case...qualitative research involves the production of knowledge, not its discovery (1995:24-25).

Following Flyvbjerg (2001:73), I put myself in the shoes of a researcher who believes that predictive theory in the social sciences is far from being achieved. I believe that concrete, context-dependent knowledge is more valuable than a vain search for elusive generalisations, and have chosen to "keep eyes and look carefully at

individual cases - not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something”.

### **3.1.2 Semi-structured in-depth interviews**

As a qualitative research technique, in-depth interviews have been called “one of the most powerful methods because they allow the investigator to step into the mind of another person to see and experience the world as they do themselves” (Jensen 2002: 237). These interviews helped me get individual self-definitions concerning how *inter alia* they view their relationship with identity requirements related to the specific character of the owners of their newspaper. The idea was to access the subjective understanding of the news-workers, particularly their personal conceptions and the identity and role categories they identify with.

Kvale says simply: “if you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them?” (1996:1). He notes that when one does this, he/she believes an interview is “literally an *inter view*, an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest” (1996:2). The challenge the interview presents is to conceive it as a research mechanism shaped by the role of the interviewer. Kvale uses the metaphors of ‘miner’ and ‘traveller’ to explore this role (1996:3). The miner metaphor conceptualises knowledge as found or ‘given’, whereas the traveller metaphor implies that knowledge is constructed through the interchanges that take place on the journey and in the retelling of the tale on the traveller’s return (1996:3-5). Each proposes a different ‘theory of knowledge’: the former implies a positivist view in the social sciences, and is consistent with how most journalists view the world; the latter is associated with an interpretivist approach to knowledge, concerned more with “meaningful relations to be interpreted” (Kvale 1996:10). In part, I adopt this latter perspective precisely because it is the news-workers who form their own identities in the context of their organisations. It is their responses about journalistic professionalism and the identities and roles they take on as civil servants as well as employees of the government that constitute the object of my research.

Morley notes that “the interview method...is to be defended...not simply for the access it gives the researcher to the respondents’ conscious opinions and statements, but also for the access...to the linguistic terms and categories through which

respondents construct their words and their own understanding of their activities” (1992:181). It is to this end that I found semi-structured in-depth interviews suitable for me to use in this study.

As Deacon et al (1999:65) argue, semi-structured interviewing abandons concerns about standardisation and control, but seeks to promote “an active, open ended dialogue”. In the interviews, I probed the respondents’ understanding and interpretation of their professionalism in light of their control status. In probing their interpretations, I was in line with Jensen’s (1982:240) argument that “respondents’ self-conception, opinions, and world views must be inferred from their languages (and other system of communication) and their argumentative structures, cultural themes and narratives”.

While I subscribed to qualitative research’s flexibility characteristic, I also exercised limited but necessary control of the discussion through an interview guide. According to Deacon et al (2007:66), the interview guide “sets out the issues to be covered during the exchange”.

Deacon et al (1999:138) further mentioned that it is important for a qualitative researcher using an interview guide as the main tool of data collection, to pilot his/her research before embarking on full-scale data collection. Their contention is that an interview schedule cannot be easily adjusted in the course of the data collection process. To this end I piloted the study using one of the reporters a week before collecting data on a full scale.

The pilot study helped me identify some of the problems I had not foreseen when drawing up the interview questions. For starters, I realised that I had too many questions that took too much time and yet did not yield the kind of texture that I wanted. The pilot interview took an hour and twenty minutes. Secondly, I realised that I needed to translate the questions into Sesotho or put them in much simpler terms as asking them in English posed some problems during my pilot study where I had to explain a lot and in the process lost the momentum of the questions. The pilot study therefore helped me identify areas of confusion in the terminology of the questions and I consequently ironed out such areas.

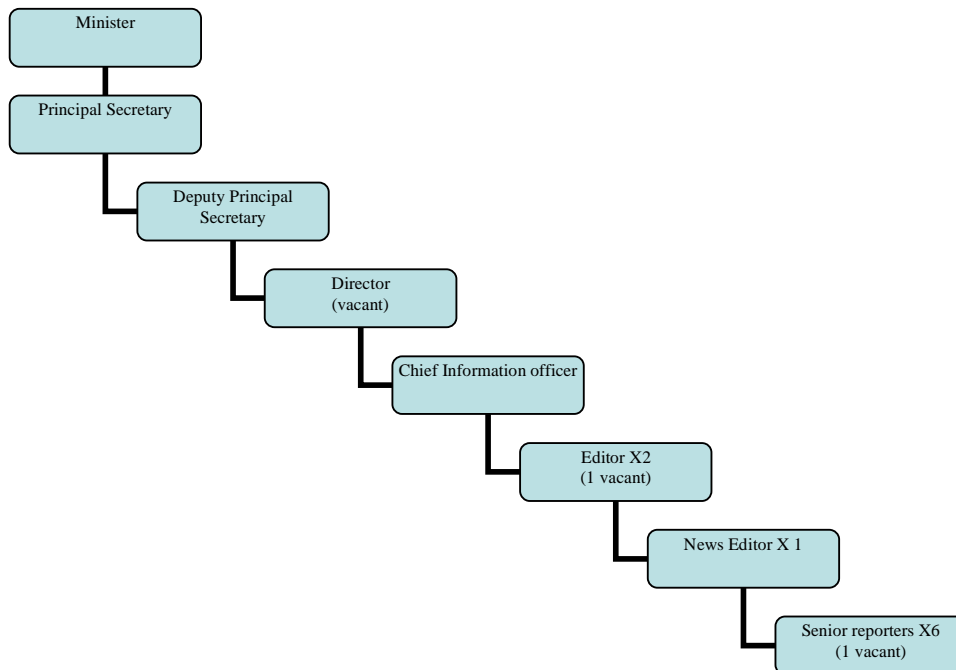
### **3.2 The interview guide**

From my understanding of the theoretical readings and consultations with my supervisor, I generated an interview guide which I hoped would elicit information concerning my respondent's feelings and understandings of their experiences as news-workers, civil/public servants and government employees (see Appendix A for the full interview guide). The questions were basically on their employment status, civil/public service understanding versus government control, professionalism and identities. Some of the themes that were explored included:

- Understandings of professionalism and the public service role of media in democracy
- Relationships between government and the news-workers
- Identity formation
- Ethics and code of conduct
- Professional values

These themes follow directly from the theoretical perspectives of this study.

### **3.3 Sampling of interviewees and interview procedure**



**Figure I**

Throughout this thesis I have continually mentioned that my interest is in understanding the perceived professionalism of the news-workers at *Lentsoe la Basotho/ Lesotho Today*. By newswriters I meant all the people who are directly responsible for content production at the newspaper. The structural composition of the newspaper is rather complex as the newspaper falls under the Department of Information which in turn is placed under the Ministry of Communications Science and Technology. I have outlined the structure in *Figure I* above. This structure is what was operational during the period of my research, which is March to June 2009.

Taking into consideration that the *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* newsroom is small I interviewed all the news-workers taking into consideration the roles of such news-workers in news organisation and position of authority as well as their involvement in news production. Thus all the employees who had a range of characteristics that added value and were relevant to my research (Dominick and Wimmer 1995:72) were taken. I interviewed the Chief Information Officer who was acting as the Director. The position of Director was left vacant when the person who was the incumbent was appointed as the Deputy Principal Secretary in April, 2005. I also interviewed the editor, a news editor, and five reporters excluding the reporter who was my pilot study. All in all I interviewed nine news-workers.

The interviews ran from April 15<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> May. I conducted them on Wednesdays and Thursdays each week and interviewed one person per day. The reason for taking this decision was that I was aware that the newspaper was ‘put to bed’ on Tuesdays hence Mondays and Tuesdays were busy days. I dropped the Fridays after two of the interviews that were scheduled on a Friday were cancelled. While the interviews took around 45 minutes to an hour each, I did not conduct two or more at a time as my interview subjects had requested that I use only their lunch hour which starts at one and ends at two o’clock. All interviews were face-to-face and were conducted in the office of the Director as it was not being occupied at the time. This then gave the news-workers an opportunity to speak freely. The news editor however was on leave and asked to be interviewed at his home.

Before the interviews, I constructed a table with a column of questions and a row of the interviewees (see Appendix B). The interviews were recorded while I also took background notes in the process. Instead of transcribing the interviews, I listened to

the responses of my subjects and then filled in the table with their responses. Some questions needed further investigations depending on the interviewees and since such probing was not catered for in my table, I wrote down such points. I then used “natural meaning units” as an analysis technique. According to Kvale, this technique involves reading the subjects’ responses without prejudice and thematising the statements from my theoretical viewpoint as a researcher and then interrogating the meaning units in terms of the specific purpose of the research (1996: 194).

### **3.4 Reflexivity**

Researchers in qualitative research stress the importance of acknowledging the place of the self in the research process (see Deacon et al, 1988). Reflexivity includes being aware of the implications of one’s research methodology. My methodological stance has already been discussed in the previous sections. In addition, I was aware that my own professionalism as a journalist who worked for the state-owned newspaper for five years has not only influenced my choice of research subject and my interpretations, but probably also to some extent the responses of my research. I was also aware that my academic position as a final year Masters student made me academically senior to my research participants, hence the interview was not a professional conversation between equals but, as suggested by Kvale (1996:5), a conversation driven by myself as a researcher with a particular purpose in mind.

Since the Editor and two of the reporters had known me as a colleague, it was very easy for me to schedule appointments with them. One of the reporters I had known became my pilot study. It was rather difficult to arrange interviews with the other reporters as they were sceptical about my intentions in the beginning. However I assured them I would not use their names nor would I share the information they gave me with anyone without their consent. However when I eventually conducted the interviews I found that it was easier for the conversation to flow with them and this allowed me to probe more. They explained everything to me like they would to someone who has never been in their newsroom before and this facilitated the rich thick descriptions that I had envisaged.

In qualitative research, one interviews people to gain insight, information and descriptions that are normally unavailable for observation, and this requires one to

foster trust and, most importantly, to understand a sensitive or intimate relationship (Lindlof 1995:5). Probing journalistic professionalism in a government-controlled newspaper is to some extent sensitive as it involves politics. The politics that I am referring to here are the politics of hiring and firing and the politics of allocating positions, as this by implication points to who has the power. In recognition of the sensitive nature of some of the questions, the names of the interviewees are not revealed. Instead, the interview subjects are referred to as respondent one, two and so on. In cases where I felt that even referring to the respondents in digital codes is risky, I opted to just mention that the view comes from one or two of the respondents. I assured them beforehand that whatever they said would be treated with outmost respect and personal confidentiality.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have explored the methodological issues that guided this study. I argued in favour of the qualitative approach which informs this study as the broad methodological approach, and I also explored the specific methods that were employed. In the next chapter I describe my findings as a prelude to Chapter Five where they are analysed in light of the political economy framework, public service theory, media professionalism and journalistic identities. These theories form the relevant framework for analysing the implications of this study for the democratic role of media in Lesotho, which is discussed in Chapter Six.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DESCRIPTION OF KEY FINDINGS

#### **4.0 Introduction**

In chapter three I presented the research methods used in this study, including the methods of both data collection and analysis. I mentioned that the interviews were my main research tool and they ran from April 15<sup>th</sup> to May 7<sup>th</sup> 2009. There is no intrinsic reason why I chose this moment rather than its ordinariness; that is, it is not significant in the annual cycle and marks no particular event. However during this period an incident occurred that made news beyond the normal reporting of news. There was an attempt to assassinate the Prime Minister Mr Pakalitha Mosisili at the state house on the morning of April 23. This ignited a particular interest in me and formed part of my journey in this thesis as my concern was on how the newspaper would cover the incident.

In this chapter I describe the key findings of the study. The findings are described in light of the theoretical perspectives of this study, predominantly on the understandings of professionalism and the tensions that may arise between being a professional journalist, a government mouthpiece and a civil servant. The descriptions also include the ethical considerations, professional values as well as the relationship between news-workers and their employers. These descriptions, as I have already pointed out, are deduced from the views and experiences of the eight news-workers who (in addition to the Chief Information Officer) were my respondents in this study, and are derived specifically from my interaction with them.

For my comprehension, I divide the in-depth semi-structured interviews into two components. The first focuses on professionalism, mainly looking at the tensions that arise and the constraints interlinked with political and ownership issues. The second focuses on the news-workers' reactions to these constraints and to what extent they negotiate their professional identity in response to the limitations.

#### **4.1 Subjective perceptions of the general understanding of professionalism**

My respondents' understanding of professionalism revealed different responses but most said a professional must be a trained person, although what training encompassed differed from one news-worker to the other. Some of the news-workers perceived training in terms of going to school and obtaining a diploma or degree to the effect that one has completed a particular course and is therefore a member of a certain profession. Others said that in journalism, unlike in other professions such as accounting and law, a certificate is not a necessary requirement as news is all about talent which can only be complimented by being trained in the house style of the particular news organisation one works in. The contention here was that with or without training one can become a professional journalist as long as he/she has a passion for journalism, is a good writer and has a good sense of news.

Interestingly, even the news-workers who said training is not a pre-requisite in being a professional journalist had aspirations and desires to enhance their writing and reporting skills. As said by respondent six:

Although I don't necessarily subscribe to the idea of formal journalism training, I think it would be nice if we were sent to courses now and again, just to sharpen our skills.

Describing how journalism professionalism is introduced at a technical level at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*, one respondent who has been with the paper for over three years said:

It is very simple, on the first day, you are given the house style, on the second day you are given a juggled up story you have to un-juggle. If you get that right, it shows you are ready to go to the field and that's it. (Respondent Six)

The need for professional training that goes beyond skills and into identity was strongly emphasised by respondents from the management side of the newspaper. In particular, Respondent One mentioned that "lack of journalism training is a problem, we have to deal with people who don't even know what being a journalist means." This interviewee added that because of lack of training the news-workers generally see themselves more as civil servants than professional journalists and this in turn led to the news-workers becoming government communication tools. This person further noted that "most of the news-workers do not even have the basic Journalism 101 training and are clueless about news". According to this respondent, the civil servant

perception of the news-workers comes with a certain behaviour and understanding where the news-workers feel they are part of the system and should always protect it. “We manage to fill the newspaper pages every week but mostly with ‘sunshine’ kind of journalism where the Minister says and if it is not the Minister doing something, it is the Prime Minister or other officials in government.” This meant that the paper was filled up with government notices, reports and announcements. According to the same individual, this is, however, understandable because no one cares about the calibre of people that should be employed to work in the newspaper.

Every year the Ministry of Public Service dumps one or two employees with us, we never know their educational background nor their passion, we are just told they are our reporters or editors whatever the case might be, and we never ask questions. (Respondent One)

Respondent Two, shared similar sentiments but felt that the training the news-workers needed was one that would make them understand that although they are journalists per se, they are not the classic watchdog type journalists who need to engage in investigative reporting and hold public officers and institutions accountable to the society. This person mentioned that sometimes the news-workers come with stories indicative of the fact that they have forgotten whom they work for. Elaborating more on the issue, the interviewee said that at one point, one of the reporters came with a whole story outlining one of the opposition party’s plan of action following the 2007 general elections. “I don’t know what she was thinking,” the respondent said, adding:

If they (news-workers) need to conform to the behaviour of a particular canine, then they should be lap-dogs and protect their employers and in this case, it is the government. In so doing, it is guaranteed their jobs will be safe. (Respondent Two)

Asked if this does not make the news-workers into government mouthpieces, this respondent said there is nothing like being someone’s mouthpiece in a democratic country like Lesotho where he said everyone who had a platform was free to express his/her views. The source continued that the “keyword is platform” and stated that the “government newspaper is the government’s platform” which should be respected as such. In the eyes of this respondent, the news-workers are first and foremost civil/public servants and need to abide by the public service regulations. It was further pointed out that this meant that even if as journalists they might want to publish

certain stories, they cannot publish stories that will allow the opposition to oppose the government. For Respondent Two, it was apparent that there was no distinction between a civil servant and government mouthpiece role.

Questioned on how they got into journalism, my respondents' answers ranged from having a passion for writing and being inspired by other great journalists while three even enrolled in tertiary institutions to study journalism. The highest education level attained by the news-workers is an undergraduate degree. "I graduated from Namibia in Media Studies and Broadcasting," one respondent said, while on the same question one responded "I am so passionate about writing there is nothing else I could do except become a journalist." In a remark that jars with the ethics of professional journalism, the respondent added: "I was also inspired by a friend of mine who was a journalist and always came home with freebies."

The definitions of professionalism included the "possession of specialised knowledge and skills that puts one in a certain cadre" as Respondent One said, while Respondent Eight explained professionalism more in terms of behaviour and said "professionalism entails behaving in a certain manner that makes you part of a group with similar qualities". What came out strongly though, is the news-workers' professed allegiance to the professional values of journalism, namely accuracy, balance and fair reporting. All the eight respondents claimed to adhere to at least one of these professional journalistic values and this then became a yardstick for their claim to journalism professionalism.

The limited extent of actual allegiance to some of the principles of professionalism, however, became evident as my respondents acknowledged that working for a government-controlled newspaper means adopting the routine behaviour and practices of the organisation and how this kind of adaptation frequently collides with their view of professional journalism standards as well as their understanding of their civil/public service roles.

The contention here was that the dilution of journalism professionalism in a government controlled-newspaper is so naturalised that as one enters the organisation, he/she already knows and understands what is expected of him/her. Respondent Eight mentioned that with a degree in communications and a module in journalism coupled

with experience as a journalist in a privately owned newspaper, this individual was clear what being a professional journalist entailed and how it is practiced. The interviewee acknowledged however that at the time of applying for work in the Ministry of Communications, knowing that a shift in mindset would be needed in relation to getting into a different newsroom altogether.

I understood that I would have to protect the government. Yes if I were to be asked by anyone what my profession is, I would still say I am a journalist although deep down in my heart I knew that I would not be your average everyday kind of journalist but a public servant just like any other public servant. The difference only being that unlike public servants in the Ministry of Trade, I am going into the Ministry of Communications, where I am going to be something like a government spokesperson. (Respondent Eight)

Again, there was a conflation of the roles of civil/public servant and government mouthpiece. Respondent Eight, like most of my other respondents, disclosed that reporters were never really inducted into the newsroom, while others said the only induction they ever received was being told that for their stories to be published, they need to report “responsibly”. Thus: “I was never told what reporting responsibly means, but over the years I have since learned that it means downplaying some of the stories, exaggerating others and ensuring that whatever I report is not critical of the government of the day.” Respondent Eight added that it is “funny” how one learns quickly to play around with words. This person explained that after working for a private newspaper where “hot” stories were those in critique of the government, there were personal doubts about surviving in the government media. But the individual reported having learned the tactics of the trade, to the extent of being called a “master” of them. The respondent further reported being approached by some of the news-workers for hints in handling stories that may have the potential of discrediting the government. This interviewee was, however, also quick to point out that amending stories does not mean such stories are inaccurate, but simply demonstrates a little “creativity” on the part of the journalist.

Explaining further on this, the respondent said: “We add salt there and there to ensure that the government is always protected”. By so doing, the person added, supporters

of the ruling government could be informed and educated about government policies and other developments within the government of the day.

Queried on why they became journalists within the public/civil service as distinct from being in the private media, all but two of my informants pointed out that they joined the government-controlled newspaper for job security and a stable salary. They say the private media in Lesotho survives on shoe-string budgets, hence reporters working for private-owned newspapers and radios are given paltry salaries.

One respondent, who worked for one of the privately-owned newspapers before taking on a career path at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*, said: “At the newspaper where I used to work, we would sometimes go for a month or even two without salaries” This respondent continued to explain that generally in the private media it is almost normal for one to go without a salary for a month, explaining that payment of salaries there (the private media) largely depends on the extent of other expenses incurred by the organisation and the income generated through advertisements. This respondent went on to show that working in the civil/public service has given some sense of security as there is a steady income coming in every month regardless how little. The respondent stated that in a government-controlled newspaper, advertising space is not an issue, and added that no one even cares if the paper sells or not.

Two of my informants revealed that both news-work and working for the civil/public service media for them is not intentional. One of them studied law and the other has a degree in agriculture. The informant with a law degree explained that it was not possible to find a job elsewhere and that the person was therefore pushed into government employment. The person further acknowledged that this did not have to be the Department of Communications, but their family had connections there. ” I was hired without any hassles,” contended this interviewee. “A job is a job,” were the words then added. “Would you rather be unemployed at home than to work for the government?” asked this respondent.

## **4.2 Perceptions of professionalism as an applied practice**

Practicing professionalism at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* is easier said than done and the root of the problem stems from the news-workers’ understanding of their

roles in the paper and how they describe the paper in the context of the demands of their government-control status.

In one of my questions I asked if it was fair to describe *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* as government propaganda. Some of the respondents said it was justifiable whilst others refuted the allegation, citing amongst others that people love the paper as it reports nothing but the truth and does not sensationalise stories as is done in the private media.

One respondent who said they could not really say whether the paper is propaganda or not, mentioned that the paper gives priority to the Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers. Explaining further, this respondent said stories likely to feature on the first page of the newspaper are those involving the Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers. I probed further into the matter and asked what would happen if hypothetically the paper had a story of the Prime Minister closing an agricultural workshop and one where scores of opposition party followers got massacred during a political rally. The response was that the story of the opposition party followers would most probably be on the first page provided the Prime Minister or any other government official makes a comment on the issue. The respondent disclosed that in terms of the newsworthiness of the story, the story of the opposition party followers carries more weight and added that whoever writes the story about the opposition followers would have to balance it out with the government side. Underscoring the point this respondent said: “The headline to the story would probably be something like I told you so, PM says as scores of opposition followers die.”

Those respondents who did not mince words in saying it is justifiable to say the paper is government propaganda, mentioned that stories that might offend the government of the day hardly ever get published. One of them drew my attention to a case where the former Minister of Communications defected from the ruling party to begin his own party. “Hundreds and hundreds of people attended the launch but when I reported the story, my editor said reporting that hundreds of people were present is exaggerating the issue.” The respondent explained that the story had to be dropped as the editor and the reporter could not agree on the wording as the editor insisted that it was a handful of people.

Another respondent mentioned an incident where a reporter covered an opposition-led press conference aimed at announcing a stay-away soon after the 2007 general elections when the opposition parties were crying foul over the allocation of seats in Parliament. The reporter wrote the story but the editor requested that the government spokesperson be contacted for the government side of the story so as to balance it. This was done and the Minister of Communications, who is the government spokesperson, made a comment was added towards the end of the story "...you know, as a 'meanwhile' sort of thing".

The editor then asked the reporter to begin the story with the government side and add the press conference as a "meanwhile". This informant pointed out that although this did not make sense, the reporter ended up doing what the editor had asked to do. The interesting point here is that the journalistic professional value of balancing stories only applies when the story is made by the opposition. The respondent in this instance mentioned having never come across a case where the government says something and the editor requests that another side of the story should be explored. "It is more like what the government says, goes, and there are no other views that can be put in," the person explained.

In the wake of an attempt on the Prime Minister's life, I noticed that the paper had not reported on the story in its issue that came out a day after the incident happened and that this contradicted a professional understanding of what entails news. Hence I decided to get more insight from my respondents on the issue. I felt the news-workers' responses in this regard would help me to better understand their application of journalistic professionalism and how they understand their roles in the newspaper.

Interestingly, all of my respondents were aware of the story but masked their behaviour of not reporting it, by noting that they could not just report it before the government said anything on it. As argued by Respondent Two, they waited for the government to make an announcement so that they could get their facts right. "We are professionals, and work in a professional news organisation not a fly-by-night paper that will just write sensational stories based on hearsay," this interviewee said, adding that if they had written the story before government commented, they would have

missed important points which only the government knew as the Prime Minister was the one who was attacked.

On the same issue, Respondent One also reiterated Respondent Two's words and said it is only fair and professional to wait for the whole story to unfold rather than publishing half the story. The contention was that they could not just run with a story that says there was an attempt on the Prime Minister's life without having the details of the whole incident. I then asked Respondent Two whether the reporters could have gotten the story through other means rather than waiting for the government to say something thereby destroying the character of news to be timeous information. The response was that the government was the only credible source in the matter as everyone else was not there when the incident occurred. "It does not make sense to rely on second-hand information when with just a little patience we can get the whole story from the horse's mouth."

It is important to note here that private media, particularly radio stations reported on the matter as it happened and as the news unfolded they kept the listeners enlightened about the event throughout the day. For instance I first heard about the incident on a privately-owned radio station People's Choice FM at 5 O'clock in the morning, Radio Lesotho - the government-controlled radio station - did not say anything about the incident in their first news of the day at 6 O'clock and only reported about the incident late that afternoon and even then the radio station did not say what happened but only said the Prime Minister was safe. Nothing was ever said about the army officers who guarded the state house and were injured although one even lost his life.

In an attempt to understand how the news-workers understand and practice journalism professionalism, I also queried them on their feelings on the issue of overtime without pay. This was significant in this study as it helped me understand the lengths my respondents would go into becoming professional journalists as against them perceiving themselves as civil/public servants with prescribed working hours. There were a lot of conflicting responses as five of the respondents said the official working hours within the government are 0800hrs to 1630hrs from Monday to Friday. Two of the respondents, however, felt they could work any time as long as there is a story that needs their attention while another respondent explained that a civil servant "is in the real sense of things a servant of the people for 24 hours, seven days of the week".

To further understand the news-workers' understanding of journalism professionalism it was important to explore their relationship with their employers as discussed in the next section. The idea was to see how the relationship contributes to or impedes their overall understanding of professionalism.

### **4.3 The politics of ownership and control**

While the news-workers mostly negated being members or even supporter of the ruling party or any other political party and identified themselves with a wider journalistic community, their feelings generally seemed to acknowledge the conflict between professional journalism norms and the expectations of their employers. Some of these tensions are already evident in the responses of the news-workers as I have shown in the previous section.

While my respondents said that they have never been told to leave certain stories and focus more on others, they say they learn about ownership expectations during their daily practices, and in the end they begin to engage in self-censorship as they have an idea of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. As said by Respondent Seven, "I have never been told which stories to drop but I know the editor cannot let me write stories that are anti-government", adding that it is always "safe" to write stories that may not cause any problems.

Asked more about the problems likely to occur, this respondent mentioned not wanting to end up in a disciplinary hearing. The person, however, said that as far as they know, no reporter from the newspaper has ever been taken before a disciplinary hearing because the news-workers always play safe, unlike their colleagues in broadcasting who are often hauled before management for deviating from the 'normal' way of doing things. The respondent said that one of the news reporters for television was suspended for three months without pay for failing to cover a speech of a Minister who was opening a workshop. According to this respondent, the reporter had opted to rush to cover a foiled cash-in-transit heist that had turned bloody.

It is not clear if the reporter was suspended because the Minister complained or because management thought the workshop was much more newsworthy than a foiled cash-in-transit heist, but what we know is that someone was punished for not covering the minister. (Respondent Seven)

In describing the political and economic relationship of the paper with the present government, the news-workers mentioned that the relationship impacts to some extent on the kind of content produced by the paper. Their responses ranged from those who believed they work for a government-controlled newspaper and should write only what is supportive of the government, while others believed that the relationship of the paper only starts and ends with the government funding. As said by one of the respondents:

I think we are a state-owned newspaper through and through, the vast numbers of our adverts come from the government, we are paid by the government and the editor keeps reminding us that we serve the government of the day. We don't publish stories that oppose the government unless we balance the story with the side of the government. (Informant Four)

However, on the same question, Respondent Six mentioned that the relationship with the government does not impact in any way on what gets reported and said the government gives reporters the freedom to report whatever is newsworthy. Respondent Eight however believed that control by the government impedes the paper from living up to its public service mission as outlined in its vision statement. This observation is however, problematic because of the eight respondents; only five had ever seen the paper's vision statement while two did not even know of the existence of such a statement. Of the five who knew of the statement, only two knew what it entails.

Questioned on whether there are any politically-coloured pressures on them to cover some stories and not others, Respondents One, Two, Three and Five said there were not any pressures to cover some stories, as at *Lentsoe La Basotho/Lesotho Today* all news-workers are free to cover whatever they feel is newsworthy and even cover press conferences by members of the opposition parties. These press conferences, they added, are normally critical of the government. The rest of my respondents, however, acknowledged that there are pressures to cover some stories. One respondent said they have to sometimes make compromises. This person related an incident when a reporter covered a press conference called by the opposition Basotho National Party (BNP) to outline its plan of action following its dismal performance in the 2007 general elections, but was told to write the story in just two paragraphs as

giving the BNP story more space would look like the reporter themselves supports BNP.

Compromises, according to the respondents, are normally around issues that are anti-government whilst at other times some respondents disclosed that they have had to exaggerate a bit on some issues just to make their 'masters' happy. Still on the same issue, another respondent made yet another reference to the events that ensued after the 2007 general elections when the opposition parties were voicing their dissatisfaction over the allocation of seats in parliament and arguing that the ruling party was given more seats than it actually deserved. The respondent cited the issue of the public stay-away that was called by the opposition parties aimed at garnering support from the voters on the issue.

The respondent disclosed that a day before the scheduled stay-away, the management of the Communications Ministry was called by the Minister to try and strategise on ways to foil the stay-away. "When our bosses came back from the meeting, they bluntly told us that the success or failure of the strike was on us". This respondent mentioned that they were then given free airtime and were told to report on radio, from their respective residential areas about the general atmosphere the next morning. The interviewee also said that on taking to the streets that morning there was no public transport and it was abnormally quiet, but on switching on the radio one could hear one of the bosses reporting from the same area and alleging that it is business as usual. (When there are important events happening in the country, for instance the King's birthday celebrations or general elections *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* reporters, are given airtime to report on radio – and it appears that this stay-away had the same treatment). The interviewee said that more reports then started coming in and all the reporters said the planned stay-away was a huge flop as everything was normal. The respondent explained that what made the reporting even more confusing was that other radio stations were saying the stay-away was successful as businesses were not open at 0800hrs and there was no public transport that morning.

This respondent suggests that, because of the power of the government media in Lesotho, when people heard the reports they started preparing themselves for work.

As a result, while the day started out slowly, it soon became close to normal and by the afternoon the opposition had nothing much to do except to call off the strike.

The news-workers' views on professional ethics, code of conduct and their understanding of their public service roles also became central in understanding professionalism, hence my next area of questioning as discussed in the next section.

#### **4.4 Views on professional ethics, code of conduct and understanding of public service roles**

In talking about journalistic professional ethics and codes of conduct, most of my respondents had an understanding that as journalists they belong to a profession with its own set of rules. The respondents realised that they have ethical considerations they have to take into account when dealing with stories, and mentioned such considerations as, amongst others, the public's right to know, remaining neutral whilst also educating the public, seeking and reporting the truth and being accurate. My respondents revealed that journalism can only be called journalism in as far as it informs the citizenry, builds the community and enlightens public discourse.

Respondent One mentioned that the public's right to know needs to be in line with the professional values of journalism, namely accuracy, independence, fairness, transparency and professional responsibility. Asked to explain more on professional responsibility, this respondent said:

The role of news-workers at *Lentsoe* is to reflect the professional standards of high quality, good taste and genuine regard for others. We have to be accountable to the values we profess and have to always do our best to ensure that the ends of journalism and democracy are best served when adherents of opposing points of view discover means of effective communication. (Respondent One)

Respondent Two disclosed that, as news-workers in a democratic country, their obligation is to give everyone regardless of political differences a fair chance to voice their opinions, positive or negative, in the public domain. This person, however, said the news-workers do not have this kind of luxury of being editorially independent as independence depends on the employers, and added that there is nothing as absolute independence.

I do not think the reporters are editorially independent. They abide by the public service regulations. Although as journalists they might like to publish certain stories, it is not that easy. They cannot publish stories that will allow the opposition to oppose the government. You cannot bite the hand that feeds you (Respondent Two).

Respondent Two, however, also agreed that for the government, democracy starts and ends with carrying out “free and fair elections”, adding that working for a government with this kind of mentality, the media as a cornerstone for a viable democracy is just a phrase as good as the paper it is written on.

Some of the respondents, however, showed little if any consideration to ethical issues in their daily work. Because of this, the news-workers’ approach to ethical dilemmas depended mostly on individual decisions based on what was done the last time, what a colleague suggests, what the editor wants and what was considered as possible to get away with. To this end while the respondents noted the importance of acting independently from any other influences that may hinder the public’s right to know, they acknowledged that they sometimes felt that the stories are too anti-government and dropped them even before discussing them with the editor.

A respondent cited a story where the Magistrates Court sentenced the police commissioner, Mrs Malejaka Letoane, to six months imprisonment without an option of fine for contempt of court. Mrs Letoane had failed to honour the court’s order to appear before it and explain why she should not be convicted for releasing a stolen vehicle to its alleged owner while investigations into the matter were still continuing. This respondent says it was the public’s right to know about the incident, but it was also definitely what the editor did not want. The respondent said the story was further made complex by the manner in which the government through the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions tried to contain the matter thereby diverting from procedure.

We left the story to the private media, we couldn’t even think of reporting on such a prominent figure, this story was never even discussed in the newsroom. No one had the guts to bring it up, it was just one of those no-go territories.

The respondents, however, had an understanding that in as far as political impartiality is concerned, the journalistic and public service roles should be in partial harmony.

Their argument was that the Public Service Code clearly stipulates that a public servant should not show his/her political stance while in office. The idea is that when one is a civil/public servant he/she works for the state, and governments will come and go. They also explained, however, that with all the hierarchy and red-tape within the government it was almost impossible to remain politically impartial especially when the managers - the people they directly take orders from - are political appointees who promote the ruling party.

How can I be neutral when the powers that be (Minister and Principal Secretary – my insertion, M.K) have been appointed by the ruling party and even don the party's colours during rallies? I may not be a member of the ruling party but at least at work I have to pretend I am. If someday one of the opposition parties becomes the ruling party, I will also have to protect them as they will also have their people in management positions.

Another respondent said: "I know and understand what I should be reporting, but organisational politics also drive me towards reporting in a certain manner." This view was shared by most of the news-workers and attests to the tensions between being a professional journalist, a civil servant and a government mouthpiece. The experiences of the news-workers amidst these conflicting identities will be discussed in the next section.

#### **4.5 Negotiating the conflicting identities of being journalists, government communicators and civil servants**

As has been clear in the above sections, the experiences of the news-workers are a testimony of the tensions that exist between being a professional journalist, a public/civil servant on the other, and a government communication tool. As professional journalists, the news-workers have an understanding that accuracy and fairness are essential ingredients for good reporting and that in a democratic dispensation they have to hold the government accountable to the society whilst also accommodating different voices and views in the society. As public servants, they know that they work for the state and should be guided by the public service code of conduct which requires them to be neutral referees and detach themselves from any political sides. However, the government of the day has the power to employ and to fire, and their's is to ensure that they promote the interests of the government. The

status of public/civil servant therefore can easily flow into the power relationship of current employer and employee. This gives rise to the third identity where the news-workers feel they are government communication tools. Their understanding here is that they speak for the government and protect it. They then shelve democracy and remain partial towards the government of the day, often over-riding any other conflicting views.

The news-workers acknowledged the complexity of identifying themselves in this triangle as they said the journalist and public service roles require some level of impartiality whilst the employee role has no room for impartiality but is based on them being biased towards the government of the day. For the purpose of my study it was important that I understand how the news-workers then negotiate these conflicting identities. In probing the matter, I asked them how they would deal with a tip-off of a case of corruption in government which implicates some of the Ministers. Most of the respondents said the story will be tough to handle and pointed out that the possibility of such a story being published in the government-controlled newspaper is next to nothing.

Talking about the issue of the attempt to assassinate the Prime Minister, a respondent said as a journalist this person knew the story would double the sales of any newspaper, but still there were many other factors to consider. One key factor that was taken into consideration was how the Prime Minister would feel, if 'his' newspaper ran with the story that there was an attempt on his life, when neither he himself nor the government spokesperson had said anything on the matter. Waiting for an official comment on the matter is indicative of the news-workers' identity as government spokespersons and defeats the notion of the immediacy of news as part of the make-up of being a professional journalist.

Asked if there were not any other sources that could be quoted on the issue, my respondents said this was beside the point, as the story involved the top-most man in government and would only be fair and balanced if it came out from the government. As civil servants, the news-workers have to follow an informal protocol where even if they are in possession of the Minister's mobile numbers, talking to the Minister requires them to go through the government communications department which then

informs the Minister's personal aide who will then inform the Minister and the response will again go through the similar channels. Even the Department of Communications has its own protocol, hence it may take days for the spokesperson, whom in April 2009 was the Minister of Communications, to even know that there is a reporter who wants to talk to him. The private media, however, are not subjected to the same protocol and can call the Minister directly to get his views. As employees, the news-workers are all too familiar with the red-tape, and the fact that they need to be patient because government officials always take their time to respond to matters. This, however, is again in direct conflict with the urgency of news that is generally practiced by a professional journalist.

The experiences of my respondents in handling the Prime Ministerial assassination attempt made it clear that they only become journalists in as far as whatever they are reporting is not in conflict with the government of the day. In effect, they become government communication tools. The tension between being a government communication tool on the one side and a journalist on the other is further complicated by the roles of my respondents as public/civil servants, but this is usually over-determined by a sense of being a government mouthpiece.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has tabled my findings in light of the theoretical perspectives of this study. It has highlighted the news-workers' perceptions and experiences as professionals working within a government-controlled newspaper with its set of rules and organisational needs, while also acknowledging the complex nature of the news-workers' roles as they are also civil/public servants who have to remain impartial, with the understanding that while they work for a government ruled by a certain party today, the status quo may change at a different time. In the spirit of journalism professionalism these news-workers also need to be fair and impartial but then again as employees who feel vulnerable to dismissal by the government, they are government communication tools and see their job as being to safeguard the image of the government.

So what happens to democracy, when the government with the economic and political power controls the news-workers? How should the news-workers behave and where

do we draw the line? These questions are explored in the next chapter where I interpret the findings of this study in light of the theoretical framework and literature review.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF KEY FINDINGS

#### **5.0 Introduction**

My goal in this study was to examine how news-workers at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* understand themselves as media professionals fulfilling public interest objectives vis-à-vis them being public servants and employees of the government of the day. The previous chapters have not only contributed towards building the general theoretical foundation of understanding the complexity of negotiating these identities but have also mapped out my journey throughout the study. In this chapter I attempt to analyse and interpret my key findings in light of the theoretical framework and literature review. I first explore the news-workers' understanding of journalism professionalism and then map out the perceptions of their own professionalism amidst their government control status and to what extent this then leads to their understanding of who they are and what they are doing.

#### **5.1 News-workers views on journalism professionalism**

As I have shown in the previous chapter, most of the news-workers expressed an understanding that to be a professional involves to a certain degree some level of training. Whilst some of the news-workers perceived such training in terms of formal institutional training, others felt that formal training is not really necessary as all they need is an opportunity to attend short courses so as to enhance their writing and reporting skills. A clear understanding, however, was that while it may be difficult to classify journalism with some of the traditional professions such as medicine and law, a professional journalist is one who knows the basics of reporting and understands the code of ethics and guidelines for journalism practice.

Institutional formal training as a basis for any journalistic professionalism was however emphasised by one respondent who felt that without proper training it becomes knotty for the news-workers to understand their roles in the newspaper. For this respondent, training is the basis of all journalistic practices and without proper training the news-workers cannot understand what they are supposed to be doing. This respondent added that it is lack of relevant journalistic training that drives *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* news-workers towards constructing their identities

with the next closest thing they can relate to. The person suggested that by the nature of being employed by the government, *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*, news-workers relate more to the government-control status and thus cannot be classified as professional news-workers but rather as public/civil servants. Another news-worker differed with this opinion on the basis that to become professionals the news-workers do not need formal institutional training but need more guidance on what is acceptable to report and what is not, bearing in mind that they (news-workers) work for the government of the day. These conflicting views are indicative of the two schools of thought that subsist within *Lentsoe la Basotho/ Lesotho Today* which also in part affect journalism professionalism within the paper.

The one school of thought consists of those who have been with the organisation since the BNP rule. This group has worked within a propagandist ideology from 1965 to 1986 when the paper served as a mouthpiece for the government. Noteworthy here is to mention that, during the BNP rule, people were hired only if they could produce membership cards to prove that they were indeed members of BNP (refer to chapter one). During this time, the BNP even went as far as shutting down all publications that criticised their governance or held any opposing views. Most of these news-workers have not received any kind of formal training on journalism and even during Lesotho's transition into democracy they were not made to understand the implications of the transition and thus their mindsets have remained within the authoritarian paradigm. The government has changed but they are still practicing 'journalism' as they knew it then. This supports the propagandist ideology. Perhaps this behaviour can also be attributed to my own perception that they have never been exposed to professionalism in a different context as they have never worked for privately-owned media and all governments that came into power after the BNP have also enjoyed using the newspaper as a powerful communication tool. They however refer to themselves as professionals on the basis of experience and their claim that they possess enough skills to put them within the boundaries of journalism professionalism. That the reality of this practice is different does not mean necessarily that their self-perceptions are insincerely held.

Running parallel is another school of thought consisting of those who do not subscribe to this propagandist ideology but nonetheless also perceive themselves as

professionals. Most members in this group have gone to school to train in journalism and as thus understand what is acceptable and what is not and try to be objective in reporting although they are often stifled by the demands of the organisation. These organisational requirements affect their perception of what constitutes fairness, of which stories are important and whose views are legitimate enough to include in their stories.

They want to be identified with the journalistic professionalism and not feel they can be called government propaganda tools. They however have a belief that their role is only to inform the public of government affairs and to enlist their support. This, however, goes against the notion that professional journalists need to have full independence from the government and to provide an impartial political forum. Again, these perceptions are not necessarily insincerely expressed. In the next section I try and interpret the news-workers' professionalism in the context of *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*.

## **5.2 Interpreting professionalism at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today***

My respondents' responses attested to the fact that journalism professionalism is severely diluted at *Lentsoe la Basotho/ Lesotho Today*. From their responses, I came to an understanding that although no one has ever come out blatantly to give an instruction that some stories cannot be covered while others can, it is the paper's ideology mainly introduced through how the paper is perceived from the outside that fuels this state of affairs. The news-workers admitted that they came into the newsroom with a clear understanding of what is expected from them, hence they practice the kind of news-work which they feel is acceptable in the newspaper. Take for example, the respondent who had worked for the privately-owned media but understood that employment in a government-controlled media organisation meant that journalism practice would never be the same again. This person said that since working for *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*, they had learned the tactics of the trade and now knows how to handle which stories with caution, how to underwrite others and which voices to promote. This respondent knows that there are some stories that can never be published in the paper whilst others can be published but only if the government side of the story is given prominence.

Another respondent mentioned that journalism professionalism in a government-controlled newspaper is thinned by ownership expectations which form the basis of how stories get reported. This person volunteered a feeling that there is an unexpressed view that working for a government-controlled newspaper is self-explanatory in itself and to say ‘government-control’ already on the surface of it, describes the kind of ideology the paper promotes.

The news-workers’ claim to professionalism, is seemingly, made hollow by the government control status. While all the news-workers claimed to adhere to at least one of the professional values of journalism, two aspects that lie at the heart of public service journalism practice – political neutrality and the public’s right to know - was often neglected. For instance from the handling of the opposition party planned stay-away I deduced that the news-workers were trying to contain a situation which was likely to impact the government in a negative way. My interpretation is that for the news-workers, the success of the stay-away would have meant that the government is losing its power and the voters are now rebelling against it. Containing a crisis for government is the role of government communication tools. It therefore becomes unprofessional if news-workers may at any point feel obliged to contain stories in the name of trying to safeguard peace and stability in the country.

However, the story of the attempt to assassinate the Prime Minister revealed how news-workers tried to put up a claim to journalistic professionalism as they said they did not cover the story timeously because they sought to uphold the journalistic value of accuracy. The viewpoint of one of the news-workers is that it took a week to publish the story as the paper sought to give the public the full picture of what really transpired that day. This however can also be interpreted as hiding information as the paper could have said something about the incident while it was still new and then inform the readers that they will have more on the issue in the coming editions. At least this is how the privately-owned media (such as *Lesotho Times* and MoAfrika FM) covered the story.

My data also revealed that journalism professionalism at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* is only practiced when stories covered cannot harm the government in anyway, but when the status quo is challenged, then professionalism is put at stake. For instance, one of my respondents mentioned that the journalistic value of balancing

stories only applies when the story is from the opposition. This person said these were the only times they were ever asked to balance a story. Balancing the story here meant getting the government side. This respondent also pointed out that stories where the government is criticising the opposition are left to run as they are.

### **5.2.1 Editorial independence**

Every organisation has its guidelines that employees have to abide by and this in essence then makes freedom not to be absolutely free. Journalism however, is supposed to be relatively independent and accountable to journalistic ethics that are greater than the organisational guidelines of a specific media institution. The fact that editorial independence is not absolute, however, opens the door to a boundary being crossed at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* where editorial independence depends on the interests of the government that controls the news organisation. To attest to this, Respondent Two said the reporters were not editorially independent as they had to abide by the public service regulations, and could not bite the hand that fed them.

Lack of editorial independence was demonstrated by a news-worker who reported the case of the 2007 general elections where members of the opposition parties were crying foul over the allocation of seats in Parliament and were calling for a national stay-away. To balance the story the news-worker was asked to get the side of the government, and then to begin with the government's comment on the issue and then add the rest as a "meanwhile". Thus the views of the opposition party leaders then became subordinated to those of the government. So while the government only had to comment on what leaders of the opposition parties were saying, the story ended up being the government's story while the opposition leaders were downgraded within the story.

In another incident, a news-worker resorted to dropping a story altogether after the editor asked for certain compromises on reporting. This news-worker had covered a press conference where the opposition Basotho National Party (BNP) was tabling its plan of action. The news-worker was then asked by the editor to write the story in just two paragraphs as giving the story more space would look like the reporter was supporting the opposition party.

The handling of the story involving the Police Commissioner is also indicative of lack of editorial independence at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*. It was in the public interest for the story involving the sentencing of the police commissioner to be published but due to lack of editorial independence which can mostly be attributed to the fear of exposing authority, the paper did not run the story. This is even despite the news-workers' acknowledgement that the story would have boosted sales. In other words, political considerations overrode economic ones in determining news content in this instance. The story on the police commissioner should have been reported as it was news-worthy and the public had the right to know that in the spirit of democracy no one is above the law. As public service journalists, it was the responsibility of the news-workers to report the story, and even to go further and educate the public about its significance in terms of democracy and the rule of law. Leaving the story altogether untouched, when many other newspapers and radio stations covered the issue could serve to threaten the journalistic credibility of the paper.

### **5.3 Perceptions of Journalism professionalism and the public service status**

As public service journalists, my respondents have to derive their autonomy from the public's right to freedom of expression and right to know. They also have to be editorially independent and to commit themselves fully to the values such as political impartiality and fairness and these values need to act as the regulators of their professional conduct. The need to abide by public service regulations and code of conduct, as put forward by one of the respondents, however, also complicates the claim to journalism professionalism or allegiance to the civil/public servant role. The latter is seen as understanding that he or she serves the government of the day and shall only behave in a way that is deemed fit and appropriate that does not put the said government into disrepute. The political impartiality required of civil/public servants is not mentioned by the respondents. It is this complexity in identification, which then makes it difficult for the news-workers to interpret professionalism in the context of *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*.

The news-workers are not only to abide by constraints within the newsroom but also work within the constraints of the Lesotho Public Service Act (1995:149). The Lesotho Public Service Act stipulates that civil servants are not expected to "engage

in conduct that brings the public service into discredit, disrepute or contempt”. Important to note here is that the Act talks about the reputation of the public service, not of the government, but since the news-workers draw a thin line between government and the public/civil service, there is a conflation of the two identities at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*. The ethos and treatment of news-workers as government mouthpieces denies them freedom to service the political system by providing information on public affairs as advocated by the neo-liberal perspective.

Thus *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* news-workers cannot be editorially independent as long as they are also subjected to the same rules and regulations governing civil servants which require them to be, to some degree, loyal to the government of the day. These rules and regulations become problematic when one takes into consideration that the public/civil service code of ethics requires a degree of political impartiality and non-discrimination even while implementing the policies of the government of the day. This lack of editorial independence experienced by the news-workers denies public participation in public discussion thereby restricting the free flow of information.

#### **5.4 Views on journalism professionalism and the government control status**

The government control status puts yet another pressure on how the news-workers identify themselves. Private media in Lesotho survives on shoe-string budgets, and this translates into salary issues. Thus working for the government then means more secure and higher earnings. This also means that government-controlled media appears to be the largest single employer within the communications and media sector in Lesotho. However, there are no statistics as to how many news-workers are employed by the state, as some of the news-workers are direct government employees who are employed on contractual terms and leave office once the government of the day ceases to hold office. In the case of *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*, two news-workers are employed under such conditions. While the expectation would be that those employees who are not directly appointed by the government would have some degree of autonomy, the news-workers who are employed permanently by the state also fear that they may lose their jobs if they challenge the status quo. These news-workers then become biased towards the government and this consideration overrides

reporting on views that may be critical of the government. They devise mechanisms/tools to write stories in a way that will ensure that the government is protected. Trying to foil a stay-away called by opposition parties is also relevant here, as it shows news-workers taking up an identity of government communication tools and then giving the public inaccurate information.

### **5.5 Negotiating conflicting identities**

From my data, it was clear that some of the news-workers have conflicting identities. On the one hand, some feel they should be perceived as professional journalists as they cover and write stories which are subsequently published in a newspaper which is sold to the public. These stories, they argue, are accurate and fair and this further supports their claim to professionalism. However this claim is subjective as accuracy and fairness as the respondents revealed depend in part on the type of story being reported on.

Some of the news-workers suggest that they want to be seen as part of the wider journalistic community and do not want to be referred to as government propaganda tools, but the behaviour of the group as a whole is generally tilted to the latter. They have succumbed to the paper's ideology which is introduced through how the paper is perceived from the outside and by the perceived power of government to hire and fire. By their own admission, they entered the *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* newsroom with a particular understanding of what is expected of them. The news-workers are then government information disseminators. In the end, while the news-workers' understand their professional obligations, there is also that unwritten code that they do not bite the hand that feeds them.

Even if as professionals the news-workers claim to be guided by ethics and a code of conduct that amongst others advocates for accuracy, independence, fairness and transparency in reporting, it is clear that in general they are prompted to compromise when they are caught in the conflict between professional journalistic standards and expectations from their employers. Although these expectations are not written out anywhere, they are perceived as the norm. To negotiate the demands of conflicting and complex identities, the news-workers mainly use self-censorship. It is through self-censorship then that they do not even attempt to cover some stories while they

reconstruct others to suit the government's own view. This is clearly seen in, amongst others, the way the story of the attempted assassination of the Prime Minister was handled. Because the story concerned the top-most man in government, respondents felt it would be insensitive to break the story while the government had not said anything about the matter.

As noted earlier, this stance clearly overrides the value of news that it should be timeous and immediate in order to respect the public's right to know. When choices are made in the newsroom about which stories to cover, the news-workers would generally go for 'safe' stories that do not in anyway implicate the government. Such stories are deemed easier to cover as they do not require the news-workers to go against their journalistic professionalism, or be subjected to interference from the authority.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that government control of *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* is mirrored in the news-workers practice of journalistic professionalism and this is largely due to the news-workers' perception that reporting and publishing stories that challenge the policies of the government of the day will put their jobs on the line. Although the news-workers may want to be seen in terms of the whole journalistic community, their journalistic professionalism is questionable as it does not come out when stories are potentially critical of the government of the day.

In the next chapter I conclude the thesis by presenting what all these points mean to *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* and Lesotho's democracy.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **6.0 Introduction**

This thesis set out to probe the identity construction of news-workers in a state-owned newspaper, *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*. The main objective was to understand how the news-workers see themselves, amidst conflicting identities where they are, on the one hand media professionals, on the other hand public servants whilst they also sometimes have to take on the identity of becoming government communication tools. This issue speaks to the heart of journalism professionalism particularly in the debates around the role of media in democracy and how state ownership and control impedes on such role. Control of the media by the state is always susceptible to lending itself to be government propaganda machinery. *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* has not escaped such criticisms. Informed by the political economy framework and the public service role of media in democracy the study was premised on the hypothesis that while Lesotho is a democratic country, the power of the government to employ and fire strips news-workers of their autonomy as professionals. Since my main interest was to understand the complexity of negotiating the news-workers role identities, I employed the use of semi-structured in-depth interviews as pointed out in chapter three, to achieve this. In this chapter, I conclude the study by situating it within the political economy framework and the role of media in democracy and tie it in with the news-workers' understanding of what they are doing.

#### **6.1 Lentsoe la Basotho and the political economy model**

As presented in chapter two, the political economy framework criticises the media for leaning towards dominant elites, either political or economic in society (Schudson 2000:179). In this study, I have followed political economists that media is not autonomous but is closely linked to the dominant power structures through ownership and funding models, values and professional ideologies (Curran et al 1987). Political economy arises from the analysis of developed capitalist economies, and analyses professionalism as being part of capitalist power. However, in the context of *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*, the power configuration is not the same as in developed capitalist countries. It is primarily, political power, not economic power. Professionalism in this context is therefore a counter-balance to political power, not

part of a power bloc dominated by capitalist forces. The experiences of the news-workers within the newsroom showed to a great extent how this political power translates into control where the news-workers sometimes need to cease to become professionals and take on the role of being government propaganda tools.

The power the government has over the employees also translates into the government being not only the producer but regulator of communication resources. It is the government that sets the agenda. For instance, one of my respondents pointed out that working for a newspaper which is controlled by a particular government means “adopting the routine behaviour and practices of the government”. Another respondent even admitted to “adding salt there and there to ensure that the government is always protected”. This idea of protecting the government then impedes the public service role of the news-workers and threatens media’s role in democracy to promote freedom of expression of ideas and opinions in society. It is for this reason then that some of the respondents professed that it is justifiable and fair to describe the paper as government propaganda. The paper has also been seen by some as falling short of its professed democratic role (Selinyane 2008:166 and Lejakane 1997:12). For its critics, it does not serve the public, but rather promotes the activities and policies of the government of the day.

As admitted by one of the news-workers, the paper prioritises the Prime Minister and other Cabinet Ministers and stories likely to appear on the first page of the newspaper are those involving the two. The news-workers also pointed out that stories that might offend the government of the day hardly ever get published. It is also for this reason that the paper becomes government propaganda and the news-workers become tools to that end.

It is also noteworthy to mention that all respondents revealed that they have never been told to leave some stories and focus on others during their induction into the newsroom, but find themselves corrupting news values and skewing content to suit the government’s own view on the assumption that it is the right thing to do. The news-workers, however, pointed out that there are sometimes, politically coloured pressures to cover some stories and not others. This, they revealed, happens when the story criticises the government or when it promotes one of the opposition parties.

Trying to avoid an identity as government mouthpieces, the news-workers sometimes then cover such stories but the technique is to also (im)balance them with the government side as the primary part of the story. For example, one of the respondents mentioned that she once covered an opposition-led press conference but had to start the story with the government's viewpoint on the matter while the side of the opposition then came towards the end of the story as a "meanwhile".

In some instances, the news-workers explained that they have had to drop stories because the editor felt publishing them would mean the news-workers are promoting the interests of the opposition parties. Clearly then, *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* being controlled by the government also becomes a key freedom of expression issue. This is in line with political economy's viewpoint that a medium that leans on politics will most likely corrupt news values (Murdock and Golding 1977:33).

In the context of *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*, the reasons for the news-workers' fears and favours is likely because they perceive their superiors as exercising power over them that is pro-government. For instance some of my respondents mentioned that the editor always reminds them that they work for the government of the day. While the editor is in that position because of his credentials, the news-workers are also directly supervised by the director who is a political appointee. (The director is the one with the final say on all decisions made within the newsroom). Although it seems that most of the pressures on the news-workers come from their employment status, rather than the advertising, one of my respondents made reference to advertising and this can perhaps become a background factor affecting their role on the paper. If there was not this power, the news-workers might be more independent. Newsroom relationships and the identity of "journalism" constituted by the paper are critically mediated by the director's power.

While the editor may know what is the acceptable professional journalistic behaviour, the ethics of his profession are over-ridden by the views of the director who is not necessarily interested in professionalism but in ensuring that the government's policies are promoted. Being subjected to the direct management of a political appointee, the editor then has to follow suit. My data demonstrated that as professionals, the news-workers had an understanding of the need to be fair and objective in reporting, but the requirements of the government as an institution with

its own tendencies affected their perception of what constitutes fairness and which stories to report and how. Schudson (2000:28) argues that “journalists who question the dominant discourse find that they are deprived of the support mechanisms which would otherwise be available to them”. Moreover he also argues that a journalist who violates the dominant discourse “becomes subject to discursive sanctions” (2000:28). The news-workers, however, described such sanctions in terms of verbal warnings given to them by the editor while in some cases the management even has the power to suspend them from work without pay.

For instance, one of my respondents pointed out that a colleague at the state-owned television station was suspended for three months without pay for failing to cover a speech of a minister who was opening a workshop. The reporter had opted to rush to cover a foiled cash-in-transit heist that had turned bloody. Measures like this taken against reporters who violate the organisation’s practices make it difficult for news-workers to work outside organisational constraints.

Failing to cover stories that may not resonate well with the government is tantamount to denying the public the rights of expression to voice their opinions and participate as informed citizens in the public sphere. This then violates the notion of forum in democracy. Critics of the political economy model critique it for being too deterministic as it denies agency in that journalistic outcomes are not always determined by who their owners or managers are: the relationship is not simply that of a puppet to a string, as there is a great deal of slippage (Grossberg 1995). In this thesis however, I feel *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* cannot even be subjected to these criticisms as the power of the government over the paper makes the relationship between the employer and the employees very imbalanced.

## **6.2 *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*’s role in Lesotho’s democracy**

As indicated by Gillwald (1994), the transition to democracy will happen not only through constitutional change but should go beyond the limits of formal politics to meet a number of substantive ends in society. The mass media are central to this process of democratisation. They represent the major resource for effective citizenship without which people are not able to make informed decisions crucial to democracy. In spite of the “significant role of the media in the development and consolidation of democratic governance in (Lesotho), there has been comparatively

little about their democratic significance” (Selinyane 2008:5). It is therefore, in this context, that in this study I explored the extent to which professionalism of news-workers at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* is able to enhance democracy development in Lesotho. It has to be noted that although journalists in Lesotho are said to enjoy freedom of expression, as observed by Kasoma, Lesotho’s constitution does not make any mention of freedom of the press (1992:38).

While the usefulness and potential power of the mass media to develop and maintain influence is widely recognised (Tettey, 2001), the role and impact of *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* in Lesotho’s democracy is still critically constrained by an underlying current of state impediments which in this case is largely government interference. This interference starts in appointments, management and content decision making. The government strategically puts ‘their own’ – those who support the government – in decision-making positions within the newsroom making it impossible for the junior officers to freely cover news. At *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*, this would be the director.

As Occitti puts it:

The African leaders are still too deeply steeped in the politics of uniformity-of-views, and not in the habit of tolerating policy criticisms. With a generally weak opposition, the media in most of these countries are the only ones left to punch holes into ill-conceived policies and expose corrupt practices that permeate much of what we call Africa’s new democracies (1999:41).

With the power relationship existing between the news-workers and their current employer, it is difficult for government criticisms to be published or for any exposure of corrupt practices, as the news-workers lean towards the interests of the government. While this study has been premised on the idea of democracy, my main concern was that, within the context of supporting democratic transitions, the goal of media development generally should move the media from one that is directly or even overtly controlled by government and/or economic interests to one that is more open and has a degree of editorial independence and serves the public interest. Gauthier (2000:199) defines the public interest as: “representing a plurality of voices both through a greater number of outlets and through diversity of views and voices

reflected in one outlet”. This should be the nature of *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* – a public service medium.

Viewed in relation to the Habermasian concept of the public sphere (Habermas 1992), the role of *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* in Lesotho’s democracy should be to “become an overall representative of the people” (Foko 2000:1). The role of media in a democratic society is to serve the needs of the entire society. Thus media should be equally accessible to all members of the society. This means embracing all in the society including the opposition parties.

True democracy results when diversity of opinion is exercised in the development of unity of purpose. Without diversity of opinion, democracy cannot exist. Despite a homogenous culture and language and the absence of tribal diverse groupings, Lesotho society is divided along political lines. Media’s role in such a country is in part to provide an arena of public debate by reconstituting private citizens as a public body in the form of public opinion. This view is echoed by d’Entreves (1989) who states that unity can be achieved by sharing a public space and a set of political institutions not necessarily some set of common values. This will only be achieved if *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* is transformed into a public service newspaper.

### **6.3 *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* as a public service newspaper**

As a public service newspaper, the role of *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* should be to serve the public good. This demands, on the part of the news-workers, a behaviour that is closely linked to the neo-liberal (providing a forum) and the social democratic (educational) ideals. Leaving the government to set the news-agenda, as in the case of the story about the attempt to assassinate the Prime Minister, violates the neo-liberal and social-democratic ideals. Such violations contradict the obligations towards professional autonomy within the organisation according to most paradigms of media and democracy, within which an understanding of professionalism can be located (i.e. liberal, neo-liberal, social democratic). These ideals also stress that the news-workers should set the agenda and not leave it to politicians to control debates. Skewing content to fit the government is also in direct conflict with both the neo-liberal and social-democratic ideals whose pre-condition is that news-workers should serve the public and not bow to political and economic interferences. While the

question of power as pointed out by the political economy theory is a challenge for the news-workers, playing down stories also leads to the organisation losing its credibility. Editorial independence then needs to be a pillar that should guide *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* as a public service newspaper.

#### **6.4 Public service newswriters or public servants?**

Ideally, a public service news-worker should ensure that the public receive adequate and politically balanced information (Berger and Barratt 2008:95). The study confirmed that the news-workers are not editorially independent. They seem to feel that they have to compromise their journalistic standards of impartiality by giving the government prominence in news reporting. Moreover, opposing views are not normally published in the newspaper and even when they are, they are neutralised with primary presentation of the government's stance on the matter. This then goes against the concept of the public sphere which requires the media to be an arena of public debate. Media as a public sphere in democracy has to advocate for greater diversity, plus serve the public and minority interests, and reflect dissenting viewpoints.

Although *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* is sometimes used as the mouthpiece for government, as a public sphere it is expected to become a space between government and society in which private individuals exercise formal and informal control over state. Given the changes in political systems, from authoritarian, military and into democracy, the assumption was that the paper would also adapt to the changes. For the purposes of this study, this would also translate into the news-workers becoming public service news-workers. In their identification process depending on the understanding of their roles, journalists adopt different names. For instance, they may call themselves watchdogs, advocates, disseminators of information or neutral observers to mention but a few (see Tuchman 1971 and Janowitz 1975). Needless to say, if employed by the state, the identity of news workers becomes even more complex as they also have to embrace their role as public servants.

Closest to the public servant roles, the news-workers role in democracy should be linked to the neo-liberal and social democratic ideals which both stress the importance of being neutral and impartial. While some of my respondents had an understanding

that to be a public servant also demands some level of impartiality, the practice was to the contrary. Within the newsroom my respondents moved more towards becoming government employees and distanced themselves from both the public servant and professional journalistic roles. The general feeling was that their role is to protect the government and, as some of the respondents said, this view is further fuelled by both the director and the editor who always remind them that they work for the government of the day. For instance, the news-workers disclosed that although they practice the journalistic value of balancing stories in a bid to be impartial, this only applies if the story is primarily about the opposition or something that may not augur well with the government. One of the respondents mentioned that they are never told to balance stories that are primarily on the government. The news-workers at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*, however, also nevertheless see themselves as journalists as they adhere to some of the journalistic values such as balancing stories and accuracy. These professional ethics are meant to insulate them from pressures and influences of the government, but evidently this is not a sufficiently strong part of their identity for them to assert it.

The news-workers therefore have mixed and shifting identities. They take on a particular identity depending on the story at hand and in some cases find themselves having to face a tension between identities which they resolve by submitting to the government public relations status. At other times, however, this public relations identity is denied, as the news-workers see themselves more as professionals. Negotiating identity then also becomes even more complex as the news-workers also on occasion appear to subscribe to the identity of public servants who need to remain unbiased. While the news-workers need to be accountable to their own consciences and interpretation of the ethics of profession (Berger 1997), at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* government control is translated to the news-workers feeling the need to be accountable to the government of the day. They then fail in their duty of becoming public service journalists whose duty is to inform the public in an accurate and fair manner.

## **6.5 Recommendations**

There is a need for the paper to be removed from the control of the government, and this can be done by amongst others transforming it into a public service newspaper.

As a public service newspaper as I mentioned in Chapter two, the paper will be accountable to the public, and editorially independent with a public service scope that includes the obligation to ensure that the public receive adequate and politically balanced information that will enable them to make informed decisions. The moral basis for the news-workers freedom to gather and disseminate information, should be the public's right to know. To become a public service newspaper, the paper has to have a public board of governance that will ensure that the news-workers are only answerable to the public. This board will also have the role of ensuring that the public gets information which is in their interest and that encompasses everyone in the society. And *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* can play a crucial role in the development of a democracy, by acting as an independent "check" on Government.

As in the case of Ghana, Lesotho's constitution may also designate a national media commission to make sure that the state-owned media is impartial. This commission may also be tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that all mechanisms are in place to ensure that the state-owned media houses operate on public service lines and are not reducible to government mouthpieces. To better negotiate their identities, the news-workers can also navigate their professionalism with their editor, by guiding themselves with the constitution and their public service conditions as per the public service code of conduct, as well as their democratic media roles.

I also recommend that professional media organisations like the Media Institute of Lesotho (MILES) should be more active in the state-owned media houses (newspapers, Lesotho News Agency and Lesotho Broadcasting Services) so as to support the news-workers as they aspire to become professionals.

## **6.6 Further research**

This study particularly investigated the journalistic identities of news-workers at the state-owned newspaper *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*. The study was situated within the context of a democracy and was not aimed at looking at the credibility of the newspaper, nor its role and relevance to democracy. This then points to an area for further research. It will be interesting to assess the content of the paper from the point of view of a public service interpretation, and to explore if the paper is credible to

readers, as well as more detail on what would be an alternative within the framework of media and democracy in Lesotho.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

This study concludes that news-workers at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* are in a dilemma of negotiating three conflicting identities. They are public servants and they also have to be professionals within the journalistic field, but at the same time they are also government employees who often have to take over the role as public relations officers. In this way, the study has shown that there is a difficult transition of media from authoritarian rule to democracy. This is evident by the lack of media laws and policies that would enable editorial independence of the news-workers. The news-workers at *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*, are accountable to the employer, rather than to the ethics of self-regulation and respect for the requirements of a civil servant and public service journalism identity. Drawing on Hyden and Okigbo (2003), the study therefore concludes that Lesotho, like many African countries, still has a long way to go before it attains democracy.

The media, whether print, audio or visual in Africa today are still going through a process of learning. They have not yet acquired the sensibilities that are necessary for making a lasting contribution to democratisation. For instance, whether state-owned/private, these media have a long way to go before they can serve as partial dispensers of information that allow them to play the vital role of “fourth estate” in political governance, as they operate, Now, they are often too partisan to serve the public interest (Hyden and Okigbo 2003:49-50).

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## **APPENDIX A**

### ***Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* mission and vision statements**

Less driven by the desire to make profit, *Lesotho Today/Lentsoe la Basotho* aspires to be a credible alternative to private media and will address private media's weaknesses of fostering unrealistic expectations, heightening anxieties about conditions of Lesotho, having inaccuracies, misinformation, shallowness, political bias and partisanship which are driven by the private media's thirst for profits.

Based on all these factors, *Lesotho Today/Lentsoe la Basotho* is challenged to be a credible paper, a paper more people will read, a paper which is fair and balanced and this will only be possible if content is managed effectively. It is in this respect that our mission is to serve as a vehicle for democracy, cohesion and progress, through the publication of accurate, factual and independent stories whilst also acting as a mechanism for public accountability.

Our role is to assist the public in making sense of the world whilst also bringing government programmes and policies closer to the people. All this we do with the understanding that we need to keep the citizens aware of what is going on around them by providing accurate, factual and timely information at all times. We will thus warn and alert the public of impending danger, interpret events or provide information needed by the public to make everyday decisions that will make them participate actively in the political, economic and social activities of the community.

The Paper will also assist the public in making sense of the increasingly complex world while at the same time bringing government programmes and policies closer to the people.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Interview questions**

#### *Background*

- How did you get into journalism? Why?
- How did you get into the public service? Why?

#### *Mapping Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today's identity*

- If you were to describe *Lentsoe la Basotho* politically what would you say? (Do they see it as an absolute government public relations tool or does it serve the interests of the masses i.e does it inform, educate or entertain?)
- Do you think it is fair/justifiable to describe *Lentsoe la Basotho* as government propaganda? Why do you say so?
- How do you understand the role of *Lentsoe* as a state-owned newspaper in Lesotho's democracy? Is it relevant?
- Do you think *Lentsoe* has a particular role to play in the context of other media? (Pause) For instance, Radio Lesotho? (Pause) Public Eye?
- How can you describe the political relationship of the paper with the present government? What about the economic relationship? Do you think this relationship impacts in anyway on the kind of content produced by the paper? Elaborate - are the funding and advertising mechanisms of any significance?
- Do you think the paper lives up to its public service mission as outlined in its vision statement - "*Lentsoe la Basotho/ Lesotho Today* will serve as a vehicle for democracy, cohesion and progress, whilst also acting as a mechanism for public accountability..." Elaborate reasons?

#### *The identities of the journalists*

- What is your understanding of professionalism?
- What is your understanding of journalism as a profession, and how does it differ from other forms of mass communication? Do you see yourself as a journalist? Why/ why not? As a journalist what do you think is your role in society?
- How is your journalistic professionalism different from being a PR officer for the government? (pause) or an information officer in the civil service?
- Do you have any ethical considerations in writing news stories? What are they and do they have any impact on what you produce? For instance, let's say you got a news tip about corruption or divisions within the government, how would go about tackling the story?
- Are there any POLITICALLY-COLOURED pressures on you to cover some stories and not others? How do you deal with that?
- What about economic pressures? And how do you deal with them?
- Do you ever think sometimes you need to make compromises on your own practice as a journalist on the one hand and a government employee on the other? What sort of compromises? Around which kind of issues?
- What is your approach to overtime without pay?
- Do you think the control and ownership patterns of the newspaper impact in any-way on your ability to operate as a journalist?

- As a journalist do you feel you fit into *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today*?

For the editor

- How can you characterise the politics of the paper
- What do you think is your role as an editor? Do you think this role changes depending on if you are employed by the state or not?
- How would you describe the identity of the paper? Do you think it needs to change
- Do you think the criticism of *Lentsoe* as government propaganda is justified? Why/ why not?
- Do you think state ownership impacts in anyway on the content of the paper?
- What is the public service mission of the paper? Do you think the paper adheres in any way to the core editorial values of accountability and editorial independence?
- Do you feel the paper is relevant to Lesotho's democracy? How so
- Do you think the paper attracts journalists with a particular political orientation? How would you describe this?

For the director

- What do you think is the role of *Lentsoe la Basotho/Lesotho Today* in Lesotho's democracy?
- Since the paper is less driven by profits, how do you think it can become a credible alternative to private newspapers like Public Eye?
- Do you think criticism of *Lentsoe* as government propaganda is justified?
- What is your role as the director? How is it different from that of the editor?
- Do you ever feel the need to see the dummy copy before the paper goes to print? Why/ why not?
- Have you at any point felt the need to "spike" some stories for broadly political reasons? Why? Why was the story on the Prime Minister's assassination attempt not covered?
- In serving the public, what exactly should *Lentsoe* doing?

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW RESPONSES

	Chief information officer	Editor	Sub Editor	Reporter One	Reporter Two	Reporter Three	Reporter Four	Reporter Five
How did you get into journalism and why				I have always loved journ, and studied communications for my degree and took an extra module in Journalism	I graduated in Namibia in Media studies and broadcasting	I did not have a job and used to be a singer for LCD and then one of the members of parliament in my constituency approached me for a job	I have a degree in English literature and fate has landed me into journalism	Passionate about writing. Inspired by a friend who has been in journalism for a while
How did you get into the public service and why				I couldn't find a job elsewhere so I was pushed into gov employment so to say	I registered with the public service for employment and got placed at the newspaper	Like I said, a member of parliament from my constituency gave me the job	I registered for employment with the public service since I did not want to go and teach	Job security, worked for a private newspaper morpheme for a month
Do you think it is fair to				To some extent yes. because we	It is justifiable because there	No, not at all. People	I don't really know what that	Yes because you cannot

describe lentsoe as gov propaganda				are cautious in writing stories that may offend the government	are limitations to what I cover. Stories that are oppose government are avoided	love the paper very much	means but at Lentsoe priority is given to the Prime Minister and his cabinet	criticise the government in the paper
How do you understand the role of Lentsoe as a state-owned paper in Lesotho's democracy				Educating the nation about government	Keeping the people abreast of the policies and programs of government	Informing the public about gov's activities	The paper should be for the entire public and this means it has to have stories for each and every member of the society	It should inform the public but the problem is that most stories are from the government and we are not all LCD followers
Do you think Lentsoe has particular role to play in the context of other media				Personally I think the paper needs a complete makeover so as to play an effective role	If I was one of the decision makers in gov, I would do away with the paper as it is a complete waste of taxpayers money	Yes it has to report the truth unlike the other private newspapers which are always distorting the facts	Yes the paper has to educate the citizens about the government's policies unlike other private media houses which are always critical of the gov	It needs to educate and inform the citizenry and to this end it needs an overhaul
How can you describe the				I think we are a gov owned	Stories that are pro-	The government	The government funds the paper	The government

<p>political and economic relationship of the paper with the present gov? do you think this relationship impacts in anyway on the kind of content produced by the paper</p>				<p>newspaper through and through, the vast numbers of our adverts are from the government and the editor keeps reminding us that we serve the government of the day. We don't publish opposition stories unless balanced by the government</p>	<p>government are always given a priority. If any member of cabinet says something, that is a story. Sometimes they even call us on our phones and ask us to ask them questions</p>	<p>gives the reporters the freedom to report whatever is newsworthy</p>	<p>and this is as far as the relationship between the two goes. You do not have to be affiliated with the ruling party to be employed at the paper</p>	<p>uses the paper as a platform to promote its activities, and this then leads to newswriters censoring themselves on some issues and writing only what may not necessarily offend the government</p>
<p>Do you think the paper lives up to its public service mission as outlined in its vision statement</p>				<p>I haven't even seen the mission or vision statement of the newspaper...will ask about it</p>	<p>No the paper does not have a mission/vision statement</p>	<p>Yes, it provides fair balanced reporting covering all aspects of the society</p>	<p>The paper does not have a vision or mission statement</p>	<p>No , the paper is always avoiding risks because I think the government has too much control on it</p>

What is your understanding of professionalism				The possession of specialised knowledge and skills that puts one in a certain cadre	Having skills that put you into some professionalism	Being professional means doing what is expected of you	Professionalism means the ability to behave in a certain manner with the skills and expertise to behave in such a manner	Behaving in a certain manner that makes you part of a group with similar qualities
What is your understanding of journalism as a profession and how does it differ from other forms of mass communication? Do you see yourself as a journalist				Journalism professionalism has a set of rules and ethos distinct from that of other forms of mass communication. For instance in journalism was has to be fair, transparent and accurate in reporting	Journalism professionalism entails, accuracy, balance and independency in reporting. There is no room for biasness	Since I don't have any background in journalism per se, all I can say is that the truth always counts in journalism	Journalism as a profession entails reporting in a balanced and accurate manner	I consider myself a professional journalist although I often work as the mouthpiece of the government
Lets say you got a news tip about corruption or divisions within the government, how would you go about				That is a tough one, I would have to talk with my editor and he will tell me what to do with the story	I wouldn't even bother covering the story, the private media is there to take care of such stories not us	Where will the news-tip come from, you know there are people out there who	It depends, if my editor wants me to cover the story, I will cover it, if not, tough luck	I would cover the story and the editor will decide what to do with it

tackling the story						just want to disturb peace in the ruling party		
The attempted assassination of the Prime Minister what do you make of it				The coverage was generally very lacking because we had to wait for the government to issue out statement before we could say anything	Well that was a big story and unfortunately we couldn't give it a proper coverage as we had to wait for a statement from the government and when it eventually came all media houses even international ones had scooped us	That was very sensitive and I am glad the assassins have been brought to book	It was a sensitive story and since the editor never pushed us to cover it, we did not bother until the government spokesperson who is also the Minister of Communications, issued a statement	Coverage of that particular story was generally bad as no one wanted to be the first one coming up with the story, surprisingly, the editor was also very quiet, he never asked
How did the paper cover the story				We only said what the press statement of the Prime Minister's office said	We said what the prime minister's information office said	We covered the story intensively as we had all the facts from the information	We only reported what was said in the statement	We only said what the press releases from the government were saying

						office		
The issue of allocation of seats in Parliament has always been contentious with opposition parties crying foul and the government saying the seats were properly allocated, tell me about the paper's side				Well in the beginning I covered the story but my editor spiked it saying I should begin with the side of the government which was not easily available.	This is another sensitive issue that we have always been afraid to cover lest we offend the government.	The seats were properly allocated, its just that the opposition parties are always looking for trouble..they are greedy they want more seats	Yes this has been going on since the last elections in 2007. A SADC mediator was called in, and the fiasco was still not solved, this days we only cover the story when the government has something to say on it	We have always tried to explain to the public that the seats were allocated properly... the government cannot be blamed you know
Are there any politically coloured pressures on you to cover some stories and not others? How do you deal with that				Of course there are compromises we have to make, like I said in the beginning, you cannot bite the hand that feeds you. I attended a press conference by the opposition a week ago but that story did not	Yes indeed..stories that are anti government seriously edited. In one incident I covered a BNP press conference where they were outlining their plan of	No, at Lentsoe, all reporters are free to cover whatever they feel is newsworthy. For instance when the opposition parties call press conferences,	Yes, we cannot cover the opposition especially when they are critical about the government. But when the opposition has internal problems we are free to cover them	We may continually deny this but the fact of the matter is the government of the day is the story..our sources are from the government

				see the light of day because it was critical of the government	action but the editor said I should just write three paragraphs as writing a detailed story would look like I was promoting BNP	such stories are covered		and even our headlines are pro-government
Do you ever think sometimes you need to make compromises on your own practice as a journalist on the one hand and a gov. employee on the other?				A lot of the times...when there is a story which is anti government I am always reluctant to cover it and even if I do I will begin with the government's side of things and then do a meanwhile thing towards the end displaying what the government was commenting on	Yes many times. What I have seen is that stories that are balanced are always stories that are anti government. You can write a story about the government criticising the opposition and no one will ever ask you about the opposition's stance	I don't know because I am a government employee first and a journalist after	Yes because whilst a journalist is at liberty to cover each and every story, as a government employee my role is protect the policies of the government of the day	Almost all the time even on small things..for instance I was asked to make a layout of page 2 in the last issue and I used a picture of the Deputy Prime Minister. In the picture he had not buttoned up

								his shirt properly, this caused uproar
What sort of comprises around which kind of issues?				Well like I have said it is normally around issues that are anti government whilst sometimes I exaggerate a bit on issues that are pro-government.	Political issues, corruption within government, elections and many others. The government is always right	There are no comprises	I need to make compromises on issues that may not sit well with the government	I guess as reporters we need to always remember that whatever is pro-government makes the headlines and like the editor always says, we work for the government of the day
What is your approach to overtime without pay?				I can never work overtime without pay	I don't mind, as long as there is a story I go to work	As a government employee, you work 24 hours seven days of the week	Luckily we have stipulated working hours, that is from 8 to 430	My working hours are from 8 to 430 from Monday to Friday

Do you think the control and ownership patterns of the newspaper impact in anyway on your ability to operate as a journalist				You cannot bite the hand that feeds you...Can you?	Yes I cannot write stories that are critical of government, I don't want to be in trouble	No	Yes I think to some extent being owned by the government always makes us to self censor ourselves before embarking on any story	Yes I have to always censor myself even when there is no need to do so
How were you mentored into the Lentsoe newsroom				Well I don't know if I should call this mentoring but for my first day I read the housestyle then on the second and third day I had to go to coverages with the senior reporters and a week later I was covering stories by myself	I was given the house style and told to go on a coverage with one of the reporters and we wrote the story together but after that, I was all on my own	Writing stories is not very difficult, I went out the first day got a story from the Minister of Transport on increasing taxi fares and since then I have never looked back	I was given the house style and after reading it I went along with other reporters to cover stories and when I became confident, I went out on my own	Because I had experience working in the private media I just went on to cover stories as I got into the newsroom. I only learned about the do's and don'ts as I went along
Are you affiliated to any political party?				Yes I am affiliated to some political	Cannot commend on that	Its better I do not commend	Yes but I cannot discuss that with you	Of course but I am not at liberty to

Do you think there is anyone in the newsroom who is affiliated to the ruling party?				party but I cannot tell you which one...I know most people in the newsroom, belong to the ruling party		on this one		say which political party
<b>For the editors</b>								
How can you characterise the politics of the paper		It depends on which government is in power as the paper protects the government of the day.	The paper is pro the ruling party (LCD)					
What do you think is your role as an editor? Do you think this role changes depending on if you are employed by the state or not?		As an editor I am the gatekeeper and decide what gets reported and how	My role in the paper is insignificant as everything is decided upon by the Minister and the Principal Secretary					
How would you describe the		Yes in accordance	The identity of the paper					

<p>identity of the paper? Do you think it needs to change</p>		<p>with world wide trends the paper has to be moved from government-control</p>	<p>seriously needs to change if we are to be taken seriously. We really need to move from the sunshine journalism we are currently practising</p>					
<p>Do you think criticism of Lentsoe as government propaganda is justified? Why/why not</p>		<p>To some extent no. The problem is that most people judge the paper basing themselves on what the paper used to be and not what it is today</p>	<p>Yes it s justifiable. Imagine buying a paper where all the pages have nothing bad to say about the government?</p>					
<p>Do you think</p>		<p>Yes, by</p>	<p>I really don't</p>					

<p>state ownership impacts in anyway on the content of the paper</p>		<p>virtue of being state-owned there are it means there are stories that can be covered while others can never see the light of day</p>	<p>think so. I think it is more about the mentality of those in management. The government could not care less about what Is in the newspaper.</p>					
<p>What is the public service mission of the paper? Do you think the paper adheres in anyway to the core editorial values of accountability and editorial independence</p>		<p>The problem of the public service mission is that it is subjective. You can read it anyhow but what remains is the fact that the news-workers are accountable to the</p>	<p>Well sometimes the paper has very good stories where the government is seemingly not setting the agenda. But this happens rarely</p>					

		profession						
Do you feel the paper is relevant to Lesotho's democracy? How so?		No the paper is not relevant to Lesotho's democracy	Sometimes it is relevant but sometimes it is no					
Do you think the paper attracts journalists with a particular political orientation? How would you describe this		No not really	I don't think so					
<b>For the director</b>								
what do you think is the role of Lentsoe la Basotho in Lesotho's democracy	The role of Lentsoe is to educate the masses about the policies of the government and to protect the government where such							

	a need arises							
since the paper is less driven by profits, how do you think it can become a credible alternative to private newspapers like public eye	The paper only reports the truth and hence many people buy it. It is a very credible alternative							
do you think criticism of Lentsoe as government propaganda is justified	No it is not justified, the thing is the government needs a platform to voice its views and there will always be people criticising this							
what is your role as director? How is it	As a director I am the							

different from that of the editor?	overseer of the paper and I have the final say on content							
do you ever feel the need to see the dummy copy before the paper goes to print? Why/why not	Yes when there is some hot story doing the rounds							
When the prime minister and minister bought their official Mercedes benz kompressors for M4,000 Lentsoe was silent, was there any reporting done? Why not? If there was, why didn't it see the light of day	This was none of our business but the truth of the matter was that the Minister's, deserved some token of appreciation							
in serving the public, what	Lentsoe should							

<p>exactly should Lentsoe be doing? (is the director prioritising educational or propaganda role)</p>	<p>teach the masses about the government</p>							
<p>Wouldn't the paper serve the public more through distancing itself from the government and even raising critical issues and voices sometimes?</p>	<p>No, the government needs the media and the media also needs the government</p>							