

## **An Investigation of Negative Representation in Media: A Case Study of Scrutator**

*Mokhoele A. Hala-hala\* and Mabileba A. Kolobe\*\**

### **Abstract**

*The aim of this paper was to investigate negative representation of the National University of Lesotho (henceforth NUL) by the Scrutator in the weekly newspaper, the Lesotho Times. With a view that negative representation is a form of the media framing which seems to be increasingly taking up different dimensions worthy of attention for further conceptual understanding, we set out to examine the phenomenon. We set out with an assumption that the findings of the study would shed light on media operation, in general, and also help the media audiences observe how one of the local print media houses, the Lesotho Times, represents certain groups of Basotho society. The concept of negative representation is probably one of the phenomena which have drawn much attention from scholars of different disciplines within the social sciences, linguistics and communication studies. Adopting Content Analysis as a research instrument in selected issues of the Lesotho Times from 2010 to 2011, we investigated the Scrutator's negative representation of the NUL community in this particular newspaper. We, therefore, observe that negative representation is a perspectival projection of the newspaper; it is probably a strategic tool of manipulating people and making them develop a certain attitude towards the University as well as the University community despite its role as a leading tertiary institution in the Kingdom of Lesotho.*

**Keywords:** *media production, negative representation, framing, agenda-setting, gate-keeping, manipulation*

### **Introduction**

This paper aims at investigating negative representation of the NUL community by *the Scrutator* in the weekly newspaper, *the Lesotho Times*. We approached the analysis from the perspective that the concept of negative representation is one of the most pervasive phenomena which have drawn much attention from scholars of different disciplines within social sciences, linguistics and communication studies. In this light, we decided to critically examine the manner in which *the Lesotho Times* as one of the media houses tends to represent the NUL, one of the higher learning institutions in the Kingdom of Lesotho. In order to conceptualise

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\* Lecturer, Department of English, National University of Lesotho, P.O. Roma 180 Southern Africa, Lesotho, E-mail: [hmokhoeleaaron@yahoo.com](mailto:hmokhoeleaaron@yahoo.com)

\*\* Lecturer, Department of English, National University of Lesotho, P.O. Roma 180 Southern Africa, Lesotho, E-mail: [mb.kolobe@gmail.com](mailto:mb.kolobe@gmail.com)

media production, and indeed the media as *the Fourth Estate* institution which performs different functions in society (O'Shaughnessy & Staddler, 2002), we looked at some theoretical frameworks of the media as shown in the following sections.

### **Media Production**

The nature and the role of media production have attracted the attention of many scholars not only in media circles, but also across the spectrum of academic scholarship. The media, also known as the mass media, can be described positively as being able to forge solidarity with ordinary people. The concept also comprises such catchwords as mass movement, mass action and mass support (McQuail, 1987, in Steinberg, 2007). The concept of mass media involves multiple and mass production of messages which are designed for very large, anonymous, amorphous and indistinguishable audiences. The mass media communication also involves mechanical and technological electronic devices and social institutions such as newspapers, radio, TV, film, the Internet and so on. As the extension of interpersonal communication, the mass media are a mediated rather than being a face-to-face communication. Here, the audiences are far in time and space from the mass communicator (Steinberg, 2007; Fourie, 2007). Besides, the mass media are considered an ideal and a very powerful tool used to influence people's thoughts and opinions; they are a propaganda instrument which reflects attitudes, thoughts and values of writers (*The ABET Trainer Series, 1997*). As will be shown below, different theories are put forth regarding this type of communication.

### **Gate-keeping**

Associated with the mass media is the notion of gate-keeping. Gate-keeping is considered a filtering process and involves a team of different people who engage with different, but work-related categories. In this view, the team exercises power to select, reject, interpret and change as well as influence the content intended for the general public. This team usually includes, among others, boards of directors, managers, editors, reporters, layout artists, photographers, law, ethics, economics; that is, advertisers, and other stakeholders all of whom jointly produce media texts (*The ABET Trainer Series, 1997*; Steinberg, 2007).

### **Agenda-setting Theory**

As the gate-keeper, the media also set agenda for public attention. The theory of agenda-setting is concerned with what the media consider to be of public interest. On many occasions, the media select what the public should know and think about rather than report and comment on everything happening around them. In their agenda-setting, the media

consider as news worthy, for public consumption, such topical issues as crime, rape, AIDS, corruption and/or any other bad news in a particular situation. For example, on one occasion in 2001, the media considered four anthrax reports as a newsworthy item, and even associated those particular cases with terrorism, following *the September 11, 2001* (O'Shaughnessy & Staddler, 2002).

### **Framing**

Also typical of media production is framing. The concept of framing is one of the most important features in news making by the mass media. Framing procedures include selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration of a particular news item, making it salient and worthy of reporting (Steinberg, 2007). Frames may be viewed as the schematic interpretation through which individuals are able to locate, perceive, identify and label issues and events. As interpretative schema, frames make sense of and discuss, as well as simplify complex issues, usually transferring abstract issues into concrete aspects. With frames, journalists often craft interesting and appealing news reports and make prominent certain considerations and arguments over others. People use words as triggers and frames to negotiate meaning through the lens of existing cultural beliefs and worldviews. Frames are also invoked in terms of negative attributes of certain groups or individuals in society, be they, gangs, politicians, financiers, or new laws. Frames help communicate why an issue might be a problem, who or what might be responsible and what should be done. Once resonating with a particular audience's interpretative schema, framed messages often influence the public. As such, frames result in different responses, depending on terms used to describe the problem or visual context in messages (Fourie, 2001).

Furthermore, frames' perceptual lenses or world views, which include religious beliefs, political partisanship, or ideologies, are acquired through a long-term socialisation process or other types of social learning. In order to better understand the concept of framing, one would observe the role of the media in influencing the audiences, policy makers and other societal actors, in terms of shaping their judgments and decisions (Nisbet, n.d.). In this way, media reports and comments are usually intended to promote a particular news angle or slant for public consumption. Most importantly, framing, and indeed, interpretation of reality by the media, purports to cultivate a particular attitude on the part of their audiences towards selected topical issues in society at large; framing is therefore, a feature of meaning construction which is tantamount to cultivation theory (Steinberg, 2007).

## Representation

As the interpretative schema of meaning making, the concept of framing is also closely linked to the media representation. According to Greer (2008: 38), the “media content nearly always reflects values and ideology (a framework of ideas and beliefs) of the communicator”, in media representation. From the critical media perspective, the concept of representation involves different ways in which people are collectively thought of, usually in negative overtones by the media. In this view, representation can be understood in two main ways: how the media represent or portray certain events and groups of people in a particular society (cf. Branston & Stafford, 1999, cited in Fourie & Karan, 2001).

The media representation of specific people and groups is, itself, a terrain of stereotyping. Fourie & Karan (2001: 480) define a stereotype as “a prejudiced, generalised, simplified conception of a person and/or a group which could be either negative or positive, but which usually implies negative consequences”. In Greer’s view, stereotyping denotes a shorthand method of representing different groups of people (Greer, 2008). Stereotyping has been studied from different theoretical perspectives, which include cognitive psychology, sociolinguistics, anthropology and sociology. In Greer’s (2008) view, non-westerners are described as barbaric, savage, wild and primitive, uncivilised, animal-like, servants and so on. Stereotyping has, since the 16th and 17th centuries, been a guiding principle of categorising people by the Western theologians. According to this view, people’s groupings were continental: Europe was the place for Joseph’s children; Asia for Shem’s children, and Africa, the place for Ham’s children, and it was considered to be the place for slaves. In addition, from Hegel’s perspective, Africans were also considered as having no history. Hegel’s stereotyping theory has been very influential over the past decades.

The concept of stereotyping which is associated with Levi-Strauss’ theory of binary opposition, can be examined from the mythical perspective in that it constructs two oppositional entities at a time. For Levi-Strauss, the most important oppositional dichotomies are good *vs.* bad, rich *vs.* poor, order *vs.* chaos, intellect *vs.* emotion and so on. He regards every society as possessing different symbolic forms, typifying diverse worldviews, behaviours and values. For him, media reports and editorials, which include a political content, are often constructed by means of manifest and/or latent stylistic devices to reflect such dichotomies.

The binary opposition, therefore, represents different groups: the “us” and “we” victims, and “them” and “they” criminals. In this view, the former in each pair of the above dichotomies, is usually stereotyped in positive overtones, and the latter in negative overtones. The case in point is the

Apartheid South African discourse during the White minority government (Fourie, 2007). Drawing on Barthes' theory of social myth, the socially constructed stereotyping was universalised and imposed by one group on others. Here, the popular culture of the status quo was portrayed as if natural or as a way of life by the media. At the time, the Afrikaners were stereotyped as capable and hardworking, on the one hand. The Blacks were framed as incapable and lazy, also being labelled as thieves, labourers, servants and murderers, on the other hand (Fourie, 2007).

Elsewhere, studies were also conducted on media stereotyping. The media sociologists of the Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG) studied the news content surrounding industrial relations between the government and the unionists in the 1980s in Britain (Glasgow Media Group, 1980). The GUMG found the media stereotyping in which the employees were portrayed negatively, with the employers being portrayed positively in their industrial relations, at the time. The similar study was also conducted by Lobban who analysed female gender stereotyping by the mass media (Haralambos and Horlborn, 1991). Equally significant were the studies conducted by van Dijk which focused on racist discourse in mainstream sources such as the press, political speeches, school textbooks, scientific and corporate discourses (van Dijk, 1987, 1991, 1996).

The studies conducted by van Dijk examined lexical items which were used to frame minority ethnic groups in terms of "us" and "them" polarity. Observations made by the studies revealed that, the groups, be they, immigrants, were often marked as outsiders. While those descriptions were sometimes factual and accurate, the chosen positive painting of European-born children and negative painting of those of the other non-European communities or immigrants purported to influence the perceptions and attitudes of the readers. For example, the British TV tended to stereotype Nigerians as an invading army thereby invoking the fear of and resistance to such immigrants on the part of the locals. Similarly, *the Sun* represented outsiders in criminalising terms, the stereotypical frames which reflect a particular ideological stance (Cameron, 2001). While the literature reviewed informs this study in a number of ways, it remains to be observed how the local media represent certain groups in the context of Lesotho. In this light, we analysed the column, *the Scrutator* in the *Lesotho Times* for any stereotyping of the NUL.

### **Media Context in Lesotho**

The *Lesotho Times* is part of the mediascape, more especially the print or the press, in the Kingdom of Lesotho. The print media are dated as early as 1863, with the introduction of the Sesotho publications, *the Leselinyana*, *the Little Light*, and *the Moeletsi oa Basotho*, *the Advisor* in 1922, both of

which are under the auspices of two main Christian mission churches in Lesotho respectively (Gill, 1994; Weisfelder, 1999). As noted above, *the Lesotho Times*, the English weekly, published from the Capital, Maseru, forms part of the growing media pluralism and diversity in the country of about 1.8 million people (*Bureau of Statistics*, 2010). Like any other print media, *the Lesotho Times*, is probably one of the very important role players as conveyors of information or educators, news interpreters as well as entertainers of the general public in the Kingdom. Using this newspaper, as a readily available public discourse, for purposes of data collection, we adopted content analysis, and encountered no ethical challenges. In the next section, we look at the NUL as a research context for the study.

### **The National University of Lesotho**

The origin of the NUL can be traced to the 8th April 1945, when the Catholic University College was founded at Roma by the Roman Catholic hierarchy of Southern Africa. The College was established to provide both academic and moral needs of post-matriculation students, following the decision made in 1938 by the Synod of Catholic Bishops in South Africa. The University, which started as Pius XII University College, then University of Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland (UBBS), and University of Botswana Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS), is situated at Roma, some 35 kilometers southeast of Maseru, the Capital of Lesotho. The University site, which is approximately 90 hectares, is almost encircled by rugged mountains, the features which make the population of about 12, 000 enjoy relatively temperate conditions throughout the year in the Roma Valley.

Having started conferring the first degree courses in 1967 as UBBS, and UBLS offering the first-five degree courses, 11 diploma and certificate courses and four postgraduate courses in 1974 respectively, the NUL is growing and striving towards meeting the needs of Lesotho, Southern African region and the world. With the additional campuses based in Maseru and other districts to cater for more educational demands, the NUL is currently offering various programmes at certificate, diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate levels under the following faculties: Education, Humanities, Law, Social Sciences, Science and Technology, Agriculture and Health Sciences. The NUL, which at present has a student population of about 10,000, has as its mission and vision to serve as a leading African university for learning, teaching and research (*National University of Lesotho Calendar*, 2006). Having examined the literature on the concept of media production, and briefly sketched the background of the research context, we turn to the methodology of the study in the next section.

## **Methodology**

In this study, we adopted qualitative content analysis. Content analysis (CA) is a research tool which is designed to analyse, among others, propaganda of the textual content which includes documents such as letters to the editor in newspapers, advertisements, political speeches, annual reports and editorial statements. The term also refers to “words, meanings, pictures, symbols, themes or any other message that can be communicated” (Mouton, 2001: 165). As a more specialised tool with its qualitative design, CA investigates recurrent patterns, themes, chronological aspects of data as well as descriptive statistics. Qualitative content analysis is also particularly useful for any research which involves large volumes of text with underlying meanings of the phenomena under investigation (Mouton, 2001). The tool is, therefore, used to unpack denotative, latent and ideological meanings of media texts.

Many studies used CA for analysing the media content. For example, Furnhen and Farragher’s (2000) study found sex-role stereotyping in advertisements greater in New Zealand than in British TV (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006). In another study, it was discovered that the impact of agenda-setting, for example, prominent political issues covered by the radio and TV was on the increase among the daily media users (Kim, Scheufele, and Shanahan, 2002, in Wimmer and Dominick, 2006). The GUMG sociologists used the CA to study news reporting on industrial disputes in the 1980s (Glasgow Media Group, 1980). Using the CA, van Dijk also analysed racist discourse in the mainstream sources such as the press, political speeches, school textbooks, as well as scientific corporate discourses (van Dijk, 1987, 1991, 1996). With the CA, all these studies examined the lexis used to frame majority vs. minority ethnic groups, in terms of “us”-“them” dichotomies. Considering the previous studies, we used the CA to examine selected texts under *the Scrutator*, for stereotyping, with a focus on qualitative aspects of negative representation by *the Lesotho Times*.

Using only the qualitative content analysis for textual aspects of the phenomena rather than covering the whole story, our study may be criticised for being methodologically inadequate. However, we have been able to unpack the supposedly deep perceptions of *the Lesotho Times* and their attitudes towards the NUL. As van Dijk (1997) observes, attitudes and perceptions are not often easily uncovered with other methods. The qualitative content analysis, has, therefore, highlighted a stereotypical representation of the NUL community by *the Scrutator* during this particular period. Perhaps, the issue of considering other instruments, be they, interviews, observations or mixed methods as well as the effects of stereotyping on audiences and the NUL community, could be worth

researching in future. As Vuuren, Maree and de Beer (1998) suggest, the manner in which replication of any study could be carried out is by applying different methods and theories to address the same phenomenon, the feature which is particularly true about the mass media.

### **The Lesotho Times Background**

The *Lesotho Times* is owned by *the South African Holdings*, which is based in Johannesburg, South Africa. The newspaper was established in 2008 and merged with another weekly, *the Mopheme*, which later adopted the Sesotho insert within the English written *Lesotho Times*. This English publication targets Sesotho-English bilinguals and other English speakers in Lesotho and beyond its borders. It is an A3-size paper, the tabloid format which has been criticised for its sensationalist and promotional tone. The paper bears different categories of articles which include news reports, features, opinion pages as in comment and analysis, letters, cartoons, entertainment, advertisements, sports, as well as the column known as *Scrutator*, which was analysed in this study. As a mouth piece of the collective media organisation, *the Lesotho Times* clearly has an exclusive access to and control over a public discourse which possesses the symbolic power to categorise different groups in society. With the *Scrutator*, the newspaper stereotypically represents the NUL community in certain ways. While it may be difficult to attribute this representation to any individual source, given this typical mass media production, it suffices to use the name *Scrutator*, or the *Newspaper* interchangeably throughout this article. As Greer (2008:38) observed, the concept of media representation suggests that, “media content nearly always reflects values and ideology (a framework of ideas and beliefs) of the communicator.”

### **The Scrutator**

Typographically, *the Scrutator*, as a genre, is an opinion article found on page 12 of *the Lesotho Times*. It is positioned separately from the opinion pages under the label: *Column*. The column has no *byline*, *dateline* and *lead* most probably because of its editorial character, rather than a news story. The *Scrutator* is also reported to be coming from Qacha's Nek, the most southern district, about 200 km from the Capital, Maseru. *The Scrutator* is the *persona* who is represented by the third person pronoun *She* throughout the extracts from this column. The column mainly bears the top banner headline with a large font-size across the page. Below it is the reduced label *Scrutator* in a blue-shaded bar to attract readers' attention. Its large headings, headlines and word choices are some of the most significant devices used to show the interests and values of *the Scrutator* in this newspaper. As *the ABET Trainer Series* (1997) observed, the layout of the paper is value-laden and can significantly influence the meaning of an article in a given context. Other typographical features

include serial sub-headed comments ordered consecutively within the rectangular box. Within this box, are contact details: physical address, telephone and facsimile numbers, a mission statement, and the names of the two tabloids: *the Lesotho Times* and *the Sunday Express*, the Thursday and Sunday editions respectively.

### **Sampled Texts**

Like any other genre, *the Scrutator* is a text in form and meaning which represents a social act or a social practice in Fairclough's terms (Fourie, 2007). It is a discursive practice based on a particular historical, social and cultural context. It is premised on social and power relations within the orders of discourse across the media organisation. With their exclusive access to and power over discourse, *the Lesotho Times* through *the Scrutator* could be seen as setting the agenda about framing, and stereotyping the NUL both covertly and overtly. The column apparently popularises its agenda from a particular ideology and policy of *the Lesotho Times* as a corporate media house. We set out with an assumption that *the Lesotho Times* subtly devalues the intellect of the NUL graduates and categorises the NUL community: students, lecturers, administration in certain overtones as demonstrated below. We selected some Thursday editions published during the period from 2010 to 2011 focusing on only those covering the NUL in the column. Our purpose was to find out about any stereotyping by the newspaper and its extent or trend over these two years. We examined linguistic features which consist of key words, phrases and sentences with semantic and thematic relationships, and indeed the ideology of the newspaper. Attention was mainly drawn to the nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs as key/content aspects of the selected texts. Drawing on GUMG's and Lobban's content analyses of the media coverage of the then industrial relations and gender stereotyping of females, we found the following stereotypes from the selected extracts. As noted earlier, our analysis drew attention to the qualitative aspects, thus unpacking textual meanings of the themes observed from the extracts in this particular study.

### **Findings and Discussion**

Our attention was drawn to a systematic pattern or a set of related texts, ideological significance of surface textual features and the silences all of which hint at and presuppose prejudice and stereotyping of the groups under review. On this premise, we assumed that any lexical pattern is not just accidental; instead, it involves a systematic choice of overtly ideological attributes of the phenomenon, in this particular case, the NUL as an institution. We considered these lexical patterns as, therefore, deliberately chosen to foreground and purport to naturalise certain attributes of the NUL giving a particular view or reality about the

institution. In the next sections, we present the findings which include a systematic choice of different lexical patterns reflecting a certain stereotyping of the NUL.

In the first place, *the Scrutator's* framing involves challenging the moral behaviour and intellectual capability of the NUL students in a very stereotypical manner. This dominant metaphor frames the students as indulgent of taking *booze from the watering hole* [the public bar]. The behaviour is, further, exaggerated, trivialised and metaphorised by labelling the students as *standard 7 pupils*, and *half-baked graduates* who are just *dumped onto the market* (sic). The above metaphors, for example, ...*watering hole, standard 7 pupils and half-baked graduates*, evoke McLuhan's (1969) view that words and concepts are metaphors used to translate sense experience into vocal and visual symbols as a useful means of understanding a new or problematic situation in terms of already familiar situations. The graduates are, further, negatively labelled as the *demythified bunch of graduates, so-called graduates, failures who don't understand*. They are deemed as having *nothing of substance, but half-baked graduates, and dunderheads who cannot construct [a] coherent argument*.

In the case of law graduates, the NUL is dehumanised with animalistic traits as in *giving birth like a pig to piglets and spewing out lawyers*. These graduates are economically challenged as follows: Here, *the Scrutator's* framing evokes a ridiculing categorisation of these graduates. The graduates are stereotyped as *poor*, thus deserving a *charity fund*. This framing is heightened with the following attributes: *poor lawyers can't afford M500, miserable lot, wretched lawyers, reduced vagabonds, a swarm of mostly incompetent lawyers who invaded Lesotho, without any market-value competence*. Note that the frame not only evokes incompetence and low standards of the NUL products, but it also purportedly devalues the NUL graduates; in Fowler's (1991) terms, the framing trivialises and marginalises the actions and objectives of the graduates rendering them senseless and irrational, though some people might consider the NUL and its graduates highly valued.

The immorality frame is carried further, and coupled with corruption among the NUL students. They are stereotyped as *perennially drunk students, immature, [with] vitriolic comments, and hurling insults*. These students are labelled as the *bitter ignoramus [es]* who *cling on to a destroyed legacy*. They are also associated with such "immoral" acts as attending the *bizarre contest[s]* which are typical of *moral debauchery*, and [a] *shrine of decadence*, at which they wear *barely long skirts, with barest bottoms, bulky bottoms and [a] skinny bottom*.

Equally striking is *the Scrutator's* stereotypical frame of students in terms of *irrational, intolerant and violent behavior* (sic). Here, the students are portrayed as having such attributes as in *offended, accusatory*, those who *threatened violence*, and likely to *strip naked, protest* as well as people who are just *churned*. Besides, they are depicted as having an *astounding vim, the battalion of misdirected graduates lynching their reputation*; they are considered *illiterate and bitter* with *low standard* and are *allergic to criticism*.

On the other hand, the NUL staff is another category of predominantly negative framing by *the Scrutator*. Typical abstractions include such descriptive attributes as *incompetence, disorder, nepotism, laziness* and *underqualifications*. For example, the academics are also framed as *those spoiled brats, indolent educators, and lazy lecturers*; they are teachers who *ganged-up, with vitriolic comments, and the bitter ignoramus* with a *discredited notion. The Strutator*, further, downgrades and jeers at the NUL's career structures and employment policies in that: *teachers canvass for deanship or headship positions*, and those lecturers are *given plum jobs without suitable qualifications and knowledge*. This stereotyping goes as far as seeing lecturers as having *embarrassingly few books and scarce academic papers*.

Moreover, the dominant frame continues to dehumanise the NUL, and considers it responsible for its sub-standards and collapse. Here, *the Scrutator*, categorically positions *the NUL* as having *plunged to the lowest levels, run itself aground, and deteriorated with the poor management*, which is typified by *unending bickering and lack of vision*. Also noted are such other stereotypical labels as: *mess, chaos, pathetic embarrassment, ineptness, mediocrity and laziness*. The Institution is considered as *dubious, the national embarrassment*, and "famine" of *analytical thinking*, and is compared to the sick and helpless patient in *the intensive care unit*.

Furthermore, in the following extract, *the Scrutator* trivialises the status of the NUL in predominant metaphors. This denigration is achieved through a systematic choice of the following phrases: the NUL is *a school, high school masquerading as university; that school...that high school, the high school in Roma*, welcome to *the high school, madam, their college, mess at college, college gone to the dogs, de facto kindergarten*. Apparently, *the Scrutator's* framing is intended to appeal to the sentiments of the economic and biblical authorities. The NUL, therefore, is labelled as a *spendthrift and hypocrite* who *gobble[s] hundreds of millions of taxpayers' money every year*. The Institution is implicitly accused for *hypocrisy killing our beautiful Kingdom* and *relentless sinning*.

Equally notable is *the Scrutator's* systematic dichotomy which involves *us* and *them* and *our* and *their* polarity. To construct this categorisation, *the Scrutator* uses personal pronouns which evoke some degree of a social distance between the newspaper and the NUL. This negative stereotyping significantly appears to give *the Scrutator* a prerogative and comfort to distance herself from and clearly disown the NUL, and probably from the regular and/or potential readers of the newspaper also by positioning them as out-group members with *the Scrutator*. The following third person pronouns, possessive and demonstrative determiners or adjectives are illustrative: *their* NUL, *their* college, *their* university with such gusto, *that* institution. *They* attribute *their* failure to the government. Such is the hypocrisy that is killing *our* beautiful Kingdom. *The Scrutator will, forever, criticize* (sic) *it*. While *the Scrutator's* positioning of the NUL may be ambivalent, it clearly depicts the *us* and *them* polarity, and subtly instills into the audiences (readers), a negative perception of the Institution. This divisive ideology or attitude in which *the Scrutator* apparently alienates the NUL; that is, *the Scrutator is* associating the NUL with the *them* or *they*, thus putting the Institution in a bad light. This conceptual category is consistent with the Afrikaans mainstream press during the Apartheid era in South Africa, in the 1990s where the *African National Congress* was negatively represented and *the National Party* positively represented (Fourie 1991, in Ooithuizen, 2001).

Besides, *the Scrutator* may be interpreted as systematically representing the NUL graduates as incompetent and intellectually challenged. This stereotyping covertly belittles or demeans the ability of the NUL graduates, seen as being unable to cope with the professional challenges facing Lesotho. This categorisation also evokes a particular class of people with otherwise little knowledge and irrelevant technical skills despite their academic experience. The categorisation may also suggest a resourceless community who are not ready to resolve developmental challenges facing the nation. *The Scrutator*, further, foregrounds the "NUL graduates' problem frame", thereby invoking negative overtones and perceptions about the Institution, the NUL community as well as its alumni. In the final analysis, *the Scrutator's* descriptive overtones bring into focus the "arrogant" and "ignorant" behaviour of the NUL, thereby positioning the Institution as having to transform itself so as to be relevant to the needs of the country. The Institution is seen as needing a *total shake-up to be relevant*. While the effects of such stereotyping may be a subject for another study, it could be argued that, this media representation probably demonstrates the *Lesotho Times'* attitude towards and perception of the NUL. We may wonder whether through this foregrounded representation, *the Scrutator* strives towards cultivating, constructing or popularising a

certain reality or promoting a preferred meaning, as pointed out Hartley (1982) in the Kingdom of Lesotho.

### **Conclusions**

In this paper, we have looked at the ways in which the media constructs versions of reality that purport to construct people's identities. We have realised how the media representation not only mirrors cultural practices, but how it also creates cultural practices and ways of thinking, thus creating any "reality TV", hence print media texts, into a new, mediated-form of "reality". The stereotyping of the NUL by *the Lesotho Times's* through *the Scrutator* may be seen as both overt and covert. *The Scrutator* presents the "NUL graduates problem frame" thereby invoking negative overtones and perceptions about the whole institution. We have observed how the NUL graduates are intellectually challenged, devalued overwhelmingly and viewed as incompetent and incapable of coping with the challenges facing Lesotho. Even equally intriguing is the way in which the academics are also stereotyped, being considered resourceless in their workplaces and redundant for the nation at large.

Arguably, we may wonder whether the University has not had any successes and achievements for which the newspaper could commend over the past years. Instead, we have observed the ideological reality construction being foregrounded thereby probably exposing a high degree of prejudice towards the NUL on the part of *the Scrutator*. *The Scrutator* could not only be interpreted as naturalising a particular reality of the NUL, but she also appears to be cultivating a perception of general incompetence of the institution, the institution which, in their coverage, merely offers programmes which are irrelevant to the national needs. Moreover, the *Scrutator* also essentialises the NUL community, confining their identity to the NUL working environment ignoring whatever 'positive' roles they each play in society at large. As such, this overwhelmingly stereotypical discourse is subtly meant to appeal to the sentiments of the populace, calling for their reasonable response and legitimate action to redress this supposedly problematic situation. The systematic metaphorical and hyperbolic lexis and other trivialising and dichotomising devices used to stereotype the NUL in the selected texts may make one wonder whether, *the Lesotho Times* as the Media house, has any conspiracy theory intended to instill a particular endemic view of this Institution. While *the Scrutator's* stereotypes may be conspiratory, they are consistent with Wood's (2009) view. For Wood, stereotypes are predictive generalisations about people and situations as they may be accurate or inaccurate based on facts which are generally true of a certain group. In his view, stereotypes are sometimes based on prejudice or assumptions without considering individualistic traits or characteristics

even if one is part of the group so typified. Therefore, it is unethical to just generalize or stereotype groups in communication. In fact, in as much as generalisations may be useful, they tend to be misleading in some respects (Wood, 2009). On this basis, we argue that while *the Lesotho Times*, like any other media, may be informative about the NUL, it is inclined towards misrepresenting or framing the NUL in order to cultivate a particular negative perception of and attitude towards the Institution among the Basotho.

### **Recommendations**

As a result of the study like this, we could, without necessarily being exhaustive, recommend as follows: It is worthwhile for media workers to consider changing stereotypes as a way of being self-critical of their own representations. Media workers should, therefore, be seen to be feeling for others. Employment policies by media organisations should also constitute mixed staff members. Furthermore, the media should give their audiences a right to reply and have such responses placed in the same conspicuous pages as the criticisms or stereotypes made by the media concerned. Even more importantly, media organisations should have their own individual and collective codes of conduct, the instrument which could help them guard against any stereotyping, and any other anomalous forms of media representation. For language practitioners, the paper highlights, among others, what Dalton-Puffer (2007), labels “discourse in content and language-integrated learning”. The language use in this particular context marks aspects to which learners, at different levels, should draw attention for a socially situated language, stereotypical media discourse, in this particular case. In the final analysis, both the media organisations and their audiences should be familiar with different forms of media representation including such stereotyping as one unpacked in this particular column of *the Lesotho Times*. On the whole, we hope, the analysis will be one of the ice-breaking pieces of work on which future studies will draw in the Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho.

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