

The Linguistics of Blame in Media Discourse: Language, Ideology and Point of View in Media Reports on the 1998 Lesotho Conflict

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The perception that the media play a very important role in society is already too familiar. The present study examines the role of the English Language press (in Lesotho and South Africa) in the 1998 Lesotho political conflict. The study is concerned with the ways in which news reporters (including news editors) manipulate the resources of language to put across specific ideological perspectives and viewpoints in reporting events. The study is not so much concerned with the 'truth' of reported events since the establishment of this may prove too elusive. The paper focuses, instead, on variations in the degrees of neutrality or bias, which are inscribed in the linguistic choices which news reporters make. Through its analysis of lexical, metaphorical and rhetorical choices used by different newspapers to report the same events, the paper concludes that news reports can ideologically encode varying degrees of access to the truth of things.

Introduction

The perception that the media, that is "the institutions of communication which comprise of [sic] various forms of sound, vision and print, but principally television, radio and the press" (Dutton, 1986:1), play a very important role in social, political and economic affairs of every society is already too familiar. Several researchers on media studies have commented on a variety of roles that the media play so as to influence public opinion on various issues of public/national interest. To liberal theorists of media studies, for example, the media organize public understanding on a wide range of sociopolitical and

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ideological issues. To Marxist-leaning media analysts, the media reports represent the views of certain social classes or interest groups. The latter analysts contend that the overall interpretations that the media provide in the long run "are those which are most preferred by, at least challenging to, those with economic power" (Curran & Seaton, 1988:240). Despite differences of opinion about the potential beneficiaries of media reports, however, there is no denying that the media have a huge responsibility in the dissemination of information/knowledge. This kind of responsibility thus places the media in the spotlight, especially at times of major sociopolitical upheavals.

Recent research on media studies has shown the media as increasingly instrumental in shaping sociopolitical changes in the 20th century. In western societies, for example, the media have been instrumental in propping up or destroying political institutions, or even political figures, through their reporting which is often imbued with certain biases towards particular political ideologies to which most media tycoons subscribe. A good example is the pivotal role played by the media in the recent Clinton-Lewinsky affair which resulted in the impeachment trial of President Bill Clinton, threatening not only his presidency but also his entire political career.

While this study recognizes the interdependence of various kinds of media in information dissemination – television, radio and newspapers (for example, news reported on television and radio also usually appears in the press, and vice versa), the paper will only focus on the press (in both its print and electronic forms). This study uses a corpus of 150 news reports, 32 of which are news editorials, while 48 are from news correspondents/columnists of individual newspapers, and the remaining 70 are contributions by various writers. Articles used are those from Lesotho newspapers - *Mopheme/The Survivor*; and the newly established *Public Eye*; and from South African newspapers, such as *The Star*, *Business Day*, *Mail and Guardian* (to be referred to as *M&G*), and very few articles from the *Citizen*; and internet publications such those by *Pan African News Agency* (PANA), *Media Institute of Southern Africa* (MISA), *All Africa News Agency* (AANA), and *Woza Internet*. All these publications appeared between May 1998 to February 1999.

Language, Ideology and Point of View: Theoretical Perspectives

In order to understand the notion of the 'linguistics of blame', it is worth examining one of the central theories in the creation and interpretation of meaning in any spoken or written text – that of ideology. Within systemic linguistics, the term 'ideology' means that "whatever genre we are involved in, and whatever register of the situation, our use of language will also be influenced by our ideological positions: the values we hold (consciously or unconsciously), the biases and perspectives we adopt" (Eggins, 1994: 10). About how language encodes ideology, Simpson (1993:6) argues that:

As an integral form of social behaviour, language will be inevitably and inextricably tied up with the socio-political context in which it functions. Language is not used in a contextless vacuum: rather, it is used in a host of discourse contexts, contexts which are impregnated with the ideology of social systems and institutions.

In critical linguistic analysis, on the other hand, a text is seen as a product of a particular ideological persuasion that determines the *why* and *how* of saying in the text. Lee (1992) gives an example of *The Guardian* and *The Times* reporting the same incident in South Africa, where the former had as its headline, "Riot police shot and killed 11 African demonstrators", whereas the latter ran the following headline, "Rioting blacks shot dead", the difference of the labels *demonstrators* and *rioters* reflecting the opposite ideological angles of reporting by the two newspapers. In persuasive genres such as newspapers and other media forms, therefore, the relationship between language and ideology is even more crucial to the reader's interpretation of meaning. On ideology and the press, Love & Morrison (1989:143) argue, for example, that "The ideological positions of many newspapers are fairly well-established and the stances they take towards different groups and institutions are moderately predictable", and contend that, although it may not always claim to be the voice of a specific group, a newspaper, "can usually make assumptions about the social and political position of the majority of its readership, and its editorial voice usually reflects those assumptions". Many linguistic studies of media reports show how ideological biases in newspaper reports are almost inevitable, despite the usual claims of journalistic ethics. The following statement

expresses this view:

Although there is a widespread journalistic ideology that facts and opinion should be separated, many news reports have implicit or explicit information that has evaluative dimensions ... Opinion in that case need not be personal, although it is necessarily political and ideological, because it presupposes beliefs and attitudes about rules and laws of a social, political or cultural nature (Van Dijk in Carter, 1988:8)

The argument being advanced above is that the 'truth' of any event is something that is given, but such truth may not be accorded the same interpretation by all reporters – that is where ideology becomes important. This paper, therefore, illustrates how lexical and rhetorical choices in news reports can ideologically encode varying degrees of access to the truth of things. The notion that people encode their world-view into language using its 'ideological function' legitimises a linguistic investigation with the aim of exploring this world-view. Closely related to ideology, and in fact determined by it, is the concept of 'point of view' in text, in which language is seen:

as representation, as a projection of positions and perspectives, as a way of communicating attitudes and assumptions. The elusive question of the 'truth' of what a text says is not an issue here: rather, it is the 'angle of telling' adopted in a text (Simpson, 1993:2).

It is from the above premise that the present study focuses on the notion of 'blame', and how this is inscribed in the linguistic choices which reporters make to express the preferred angles of their newspapers. Thus while the focus of the present study is on linguistic choices, the paper also contends that such choices are to a large extent determined by the political/ideological systems to which individual newspapers subscribe.

A Brief Background to the Conflict

The 1998 political conflict in Lesotho followed in the wake of the May 23 general elections, whose results gave the Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) a total of 79 out of the overall 80 constituencies, only one constituency

of Bobatsi falling to the BNP. The dissatisfactions which had been simmering long before the elections with claims of irregularities in voter registration resulted in three political parties – the Basotho National Party (BNP), the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) and the Marematlou Freedom Party (MFP) – filing a legal suit demanding the postponement of the elections. Unfortunately, the three political parties lost the case and the elections went on as planned. It was upon the realization that the LCD had won by landslide that the dissatisfactions erupted into open conflict in the form of protest marches by supporters of three opposition parties mentioned (later to be known as the Opposition Alliance), who demanded the annulment of the elections, and a dissolution of government by the King, this reaching a crisis point with the protesters thronging the royal Palace in Maseru from the 4th August, 1998, for about two months. When the King could not act, the Opposition Alliance called for various types of civil disobedience, for example, the public stay-aways, which when largely ignored by the public, were physically enforced through, for example, intimidation of workers in public and private sectors, the closing down of businesses, and the hijacking of government vehicles, which were then taken to the royal palace. The Opposition Alliance appealed to President Mandela, the then Chairman of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to act in the solution of the dispute. The SADC gave this responsibility to Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe (to be referred to as the SADC troika), which then set up a Commission of inquiry, headed by the South African Judge Pius Langa, to investigate the allegations of ‘irregularities’ in the Lesotho May elections. When the report of the Commission (known as the Langa Commission report), was released, it found out that although there were some irregularities in the handling of the election materials by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), there was no evidence of fraud, and therefore, the elections could not be annulled. This report, which was indeed very vague in some of its conclusions, created a great deal of confusion - it was interpreted differently by the Opposition and LCD supporters, and created intense anger and frustration among the opposition, which concluded that the SADC had ‘rewritten’ the report in favour of the LCD government. It was particularly as a result of the delayed release of the report that the protests intensified; and it became clear that some members of the Lesotho security forces (both the army and the police) were behind these protests. Commenting on the situation at the

palace at the time, one news reporter observes: "The royal palace was this week jointly guarded by Lesotho Defence Force (LDF) members and heavily armed civilian marshals from among the opposition protesters" (*M&G*, September 18, 1998). This was a strong indication of a breakdown of law and order, culminating in an army mutiny in which about 28 senior army officers were sacked by their juniors. As one paper observes: "The four-month-old election protests have plunged Lesotho's administration into chaos and brought the economy to a virtual standstill, with the army now the only visible sign of governance" (*M&G*, September 18, 1998). It was in the midst of this anarchical situation that the SADC intervened militarily on September 22, 1998.

It was against this background of allegations of election fraud, violent protests, a total collapse of administrative and security structures, and the subsequent SADC military intervention, that the articles used as data for this study were published.

Language and 'Blame' in the Press: Issues and Perspectives

As has already been argued that a common tendency for newspapers is to present and interpret information to meet the perceived demands of the readership, usually 'facts' are wrapped up in very persuasive rhetoric reflecting a specific ideology and point of view of the newspaper. Because of the ideological inclinations of the paper, at times "the public are bribed with a very good newspaper into an acceptance of the biased, the misleading, and the status quo" (Curran & Seaton, 1988:240). When this happens, unfortunately, it is not easy even for the most sceptical of readers to separate 'truth' from mere journalistic subjective interpretation of events. The result is that many a times 'truth' and 'assumption' tend to blur, making it almost impossible to separate fact from fiction.

From the articles collected for this study, one could not help but notice two main ideological groupings or alliances of news reports, categorized on the basis of conflicting language choices between these groups in the reporting of the same events, one category preferring one specific type of lexical and rhetorical glossings, but not the other, to express obvious ideological

presuppositions. For ease of reference to the reports, the category which appeared to oppose the results of the May 23 elections in Lesotho as well as the SADC intervention, will be referred to as the Anti-Intervention News Alliance (AINA); and that which accepted both the election results and the SADC intervention will be referred to as the Pro-Intervention News Alliance (PINA). It is also worth noting at this point that the first category of news reports appeared immediately after the elections; whereas the latter category appeared only after the SADC military intervention, probably as a response to a barrage of criticism against the SADC by the AINA press. The majority of PINA articles, therefore, contained press statements by South African political and military officials (e.g. Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Ronnie Kasrils, Nelson Mandela, etc.), whose main focus appeared to be that of counteracting the AINA criticisms by providing justifications for the military intervention. It is also worth pointing out that views expressed in most of the articles categorized under AINA appeared consistent with the editorial sections of the newspapers in which these articles appeared, suggesting that the articles were in themselves representative of the newspapers' ideological positions vis-à-vis events. Since most of the language of blame is concentrated in the AINA press reports, the bulk of the analysis in this paper is therefore on the language of the latter category.

Although it was possible, on very rare occasions to find both the AINA and PINA types of reports in a single newspaper, it was obvious that certain newspapers published exclusively one category and not the other. For instance, about 95 per cent of the AINA reports used in this study were found in the *M&G*, *Mopheme* and the *Public Eye*. While these were not the only newspapers carrying the AINA reports, they were certainly on the forefront of the opposition struggle. As Roger Southall notes about one *M&G* correspondent, William Boot, "His constant, uncritical repetition of opposition accusations that the election was 'rigged' is founded not only upon a dismal appreciation of Lesotho's politics, but upon a quite alarming failure to understand the mechanics of first-past-the-post electoral systems" (*M&G*, October 5, 1998). The PINA category, on the other hand, was distributed across various newspapers such as *The Star*, *Business Day* and the *Citizen*; and only a couple in *Mopheme* and the *Public Eye*.

The Ideology of 'Blame' in the News Headlines

It is an undisputed fact that a good headline 'sells' a newspaper: it is a sensational headline that catches the eye of the reader. This influential role of the news headlines is also evident in radio and television where news bulletins begin with headlines. Many media analysts show how very often journalists carefully choose very attitudinal words in the glossing of headlines in order to capture the interest of the reader without much regard to the relevance of such headlines to the rest of the articles. One can cite an example of a television interview of the then Labour leader, Neil Kinnock on BBC in 1987, where he was asked to speculate as to what he would do, as Prime Minister, if a non-nuclear Britain were threatened by an aggressor who possessed nuclear weapons. To this, Kinnock replied:

In those circumstances, the choice is again posed – and this is the classical choice – of either exterminating everything you stand for and, I'll use the phrase 'the flower of your youth', or using resources that you've got to make any occupation totally untenable, untenable. And of course, any effort to occupy Western Europe, or certainly to occupy the United Kingdom, would be utterly untenable and any potential force knows that very well and are not going to be ready to engage in attempting to dominate conditions that they couldn't dominate." (Montgomery, et al. 1989: 179)

The very next day, this reply was taken up by various newspapers, given headlines such as 'Guerilla war a deterrent, says Kinnock' (*Daily Telegraph*); and subsequently headlines such as 'Kinnock's Gaffe', 'Kinnock advocates a policy of take to the hills', and 'Guerilla resistance to the invasion of Britain'. Such headlines totally displaced the precise content of Kinnock's original statement, and were later used as anti-Labour propaganda. It was this negative reporting of Labour's Defence policy that, many researchers believe, caused the party the 1987 general elections.

The glossing of the news headlines discussed above is evident in the lexical and rhetorical choices making the headlines in papers reporting the Lesotho political conflict. The most interesting choices are those by the AINA press, particularly those in the *M&G*, which appeared immediately after the May 23 elections. A good example of a glossed headline is:

1. Tensions high after Lesotho election fraud (August 7, 1998)

If one takes the above headline at face value, for example, one gets a firm impression that the existence of *fraud* in the elections was indeed an established certainty, whereas the article proper reports only allegations of fraud by the Lesotho opposition parties.

Following the September 22 SADC military intervention in Lesotho, the *M&G* ran articles with the following headlines which expressed strong misgivings about the intervention:

2. South Africa botches the invasion (September 23, 1998)
3. Clumsy Pretoria adds to Africa's troubles (September 24, 1998)
4. South Africa's Lesotho blunder (September 25, 1998)
5. SA's crippling arrogance (October 9 to 15, 1998)
6. Was Lesotho sacrificed to appease Mugabe? (October 12, 1998)

The news headlines above express very negative opinions on the SADC military intervention. In 2, for example, the intervention is described as a 'botched invasion'. Instead of using a more neutral expression such as 'badly handled' to describe the intervention, the headline chooses a stronger evaluative term 'botch' to express the writer's distaste about the military option as a solution to the Lesotho conflict. In other headlines, the intervention is described as 'clumsy' (3), a term which collocates with 'botch' above, and as a 'blunder' (4). In its report on the same issue, Headline 5 accuses South Africa of 'crippling arrogance'. The fact that the headline uses 'crippling', to describe the arrogance of South Africa, indicates the writer's own negative attitude towards South Africa. The last headline (6) uses a very powerful religious metaphor. This headline depicts Lesotho as a victim that was 'sacrificed' for the purpose of appeasement. In religious practices, something precious is sacrificed for the sole appeasement of a particular deity. In this case, Mugabe (the President of Zimbabwe, responsible for security issues in the SADC region) is portrayed as a deity thirsty for 'blood'. In this manner, the anti-Mugabe sentiments are being stirred up by this headline.

The *Public Eye* also joined in the frenzy of anti- SADC campaign. The following are a few examples of many of its telling headlines:

7. SA soldiers guilty of misbehaving (1-15 November, 1998)
8. LCD axe hangs over disloyal forces (1-15 November, 1998)
9. SANDF victim expresses his indignation (15-29 November, 1998)

In the same way as other AINA reports, the above headlines make no secret of their writers' opposition to the SADC intervention. In the headlines, the SANDF soldiers are found 'guilty of misbehaving' (7), and of claiming a 'victim' (9), this being a portrayal of the SANDF as an undisciplined and brutal force. The negative attitude towards the SANDF is also extended to LCD; the latter depicted as holding a 'hanging axe' over the Lesotho Defence Force (8). The metaphorical expression of a 'hanging axe' portrays a picture of continuing warfare between the LCD government and the army, a ticking time bomb due to explode at any given time.

Despite this negative view of the SADC intervention by the AINA press, there appeared a few articles representative of the PINA camp, such as the following from *The Star* newspaper:

10. Mbeki slams critics of Lesotho intervention (September 29, 1998)
11. Lesotho action: history will nod (October 2, 1998)
12. It was intervention not an SA invasion (October 6, 1998)
13. Lives lost should not hide noble purpose (October 6, 1998)
14. Be proud we acted to block bid by military junta to rule Maseru (October 6, 1998)
15. Defending regional democracy (October 14, 1998)

From the content of the PINA headlines as well as the dates when these appeared, there is no doubt about their intention to repair the damage caused by negative reporting in the AINA press, and thus restore the shattered image of the SADC. The PINA reports have chosen lexical words/phrases which carry positive evaluation of the intervention, expressed in metaphorical expressions such as 'history will nod' (11), 'noble purpose' (13), and 'defending regional

democracy' (15). In addition, critics of the intervention are not tolerated - they are 'slammed' by Mbeki (10). There are also two direct addresses to the readership (both from Mangosuthu Buthelezi): 'It was intervention not an SA invasion' (12) and 'Be proud we acted to block bid by military junta to rule Maseru' (14). While the purpose of the former can be seen as a refutation of the AINA negative label, *invasion*, which is replaced with a more positive term, *intervention*, the latter appears to be a 'clarion call', appealing to the public to support the military intervention which is meant to prevent an undemocratic force - the 'military junta' - from usurping power in Lesotho.

From the 15 headlines above, one realizes a very stark contrast in the way each category of reports uses language to express a particular point of view on the conflict. The headlines are very cleverly constructed lexically and rhetorically, in order to persuade the reader to accept the angle of reporting being advanced.

Discourse and 'Blame' in the Evaluation of the May 23 Elections

Much of the conflict in Lesotho has been blamed on the results of the May 23 elections in Lesotho. The words used to describe the results range from *gross irregularities*, *election rigging*, *worrying anomalies*, *inefficiency*, and perhaps downright *fraud*. All these terms are evident in the AINA press, particularly from the *M&G*, *Mopheme* and *Public Eye*. From the articles published in these papers, there is evidence of a strong belief in the existence of foul play in the Lesotho elections. To give an example, in the 70 different accounts of the election process/results by the AINA reports, the word *rig* appears in 42 sentences, 21 of these being from the newspapers' own correspondents/columnists and editorials. The use of this word appears exclusively popular in the above mentioned papers. In the *M&G* (September 29, 1998), for example, Ka'Nkosi alleges that junior officers in the LDF sacked their senior officers because the latter, "conspired with the ruling Lesotho congress for Democracy (LCD) to *rig* the outcome of the general elections in May...", while Smith (*M&G*, September 23, 1998) reports one woman as saying that "she believed the May 3 [sic] poll was *rigged* in favour of the LCD", and Mda (*M&G*, October, 9-15, 1998) claims that most people in Mafeteng, "insist that the elections were *rigged* by the Lesotho Congress for

Democracy (LCD)". Even though the latter two articles report other people's views, and not those of the writers, in the rest of the articles, the writers' own interpretations of events clearly support these allegations of *election rigging*. These are not the only writers supporting claims of election rigging. For example, Boot, (*M&G*, August 7, 1998) makes a very bold statement, "*The evidence is all but irrefutable: the May 23 elections were rigged*", and also refers to "*the apparent rigging of the Lesotho poll*" (*M&G*, July 31, 1998). The writer also alleges that, "Votes in nearly half the country's 80 constituencies were recounted this week. It has been found that the ruling Lesotho for Democracy (LCD) won only 12 seats, less than a third of the total" (*M&G*, August 7, 1998). Interestingly, this article seems to have appeared prior to the actual recounting of the ballots, which took place from August 29, 30, 31 and on September 1, 1998 (Langa Commission Report, 1998: 8).

What is even more amazing is that the AINA reports do not stop at allegations of rigging by the LCD, but go further to blame the party for a higher level crime – that of outright fraud. Examples can be drawn from Boot's articles in which he shows that the opposition parties in Lesotho "have banded together to call for the annulment of the election results and to accuse the LCD of *massive electoral fraud*", and in the same paper argues that the registration forms which were found abandoned in Leribe "represent the thin edge of a huge wedge of *electoral fraud*" (*M&G*, May 29, 1998); whereas in a subsequent article he claims that, "a belated recount *reveals evidence of election fraud*" (*M&G*, August 7, 1998). In latter article, the writer makes very strong claims of patterns of "inexplicable ghost-voting" in the Lesotho elections, and ends with the question, "Fair or *fraudulent* result?" Surely after such strong allegations, the question cannot be seen as information seeking; rather, it is an affirmation of all allegations of fraud advanced in the article.

The lexical and rhetorical choices of blame in relation to the election process above, call into question the credibility of those charged with the supervision of the electoral process. There also appears a theme of suspicion about the impartiality of the judicial system in this whole election saga. Reports running across the AINA press complain of the legal institutions' failure to support efforts to expose the alleged fraud. This emerges very clearly in Boot's criticism

of the High Court ruling against the Opposition Alliance's court application, "In deciding this the court *flew in the face* of no fewer than three sworn expert testimonies, without evidence being led to rebut them" (*M&G*, May 29, 1998). The metaphor *fly in the face of* has connotations of irrationality, arrogance and defiance shown by the High Court judges. This feeling is also echoed by one columnist who observes, "Massive irregularities were discovered in the 32 constituencies, but the probing team was *clamped down*" (*Mopheme*, December 8, 1998). This depicts an image of an unfair judicial system in Lesotho.

It was against this background that, in a desperate search for answers to the questions asked, someone had to shoulder the blame for the conflict. The discussion below attempts to establish the identity of the alleged 'culprits/villains' to whom the apportionment of blame for the conflict is directed.

Ideology, Discourse and Naming the 'Villain'

Naming has been seen in linguistic research as a powerful ideological tool. Thus different names for an object represent different ways of perceiving it. One writer asks: "How do you refer to a person who seeks political aims using aggression? Is s/he a terrorist, guerilla, freedom-fighter, rebel, or resistance fighter?" (Clark, 1992:209). Different connotations of legitimacy and approval for the above labels are ideologically determined. The kind of referential expression used in the naming/labelling of various participants in the Lesotho political conflict works in a similar way.

According to the AINA press, there appears to be two major 'villains' in the Lesotho conflict – the LCD and the SADC troika. It is worth noting that South Africa in particular carries the brunt of the blame for its role in the SADC intervention. How each of the 'villains' in the conflict is referred to, as well as how its actions are described is discussed below.

The Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD)

Taking into consideration that these political protests arose because of a

'flawed' election, it is not surprising that the government that had ascended to power through the results of the same election would not be recognized as legitimate by the opposition, a fact which explains the ample use of negative terms with reference to such a government. A good example of this opposition to the LCD government is summed in the following extract from a letter by one Matete, to the South African High Commissioner in Lesotho:

I am entreating you to assist in the speedy cessation of all *hostile acts* which appear to derive from an *obnoxious propaganda campaign* waged by *Lesotho's political vampires* whose principal objective is to use South African forces to *obliterate* from the face of this country all views opposed to their own *misguided and morbid conceptions* about the political process. Theirs is a *vicious and intolerable onslaught* against democratic tenets, at a time when even *the most rampant of political thugs* would wish to have themselves classified as champions of democracy (*Public Eye*, 15-29 November, 1998: 8)

From the extract above, the writer makes no pretence about his negative feelings against the LCD government. He labels LCD leaders as 'vampires', a powerful metaphorical expression deriving from the notion of a corpse who drinks blood of the living. The LCD leaders are said to wage an 'obnoxious propaganda' with the objective of 'obliterating' their opponents. In addition, the leaders have "misguided and morbid conceptions about the political process". In articles of a similar nature in the same newspaper, the LCD government is given negative labels such as 'traitors' for usurping power from BCP, "a government that has been proved to have been irregularly and fraudulently put into power", and a weak and helpless regime as in the following terms: 'the pet regime', 'the country's embattled government', and a government which is being 'propped up' by the South African government (*Public Eye*, 15-29 November, 1998). The LCD government is also blamed for its 'brutality'. A good example is the Opposition Alliance's press statement about a police search at one opposition leader's residence, in which it is stated, "The incident is just part of the catalogue of acts of harassment and intimidation meted on the Opposition Alliance by the *pseudo-government* of Professor Pakalitha Mosisili who enjoys succour from the protective aggression of the SANDF and the government of Pretoria..." (*Mopheme*, November 17,

1998). The brutality of the LCD government is also expressed in allegations of 'an alarming increase in violence and intolerance' and 'its stranglehold on the media' (*MISA*, November 17, 1998), and also that the government 'has armed its supporters with AK47 rifles' (*M&G*, August 12, 1998). The third basis for blaming the LCD government is that of rampant corruption. Among many examples given to support this allegation is that "About two weeks ago the LCD government used a special fund to buy a farm near Ladybrand in the name of the defence force chief..." (*M&G*, August 14, 1998). The allegations of the LCD government 's corruption which is found in many AINA press reports is succinctly summed up in Selinyane's observation that, "The LCD is simply a cornered burglar caught with loot and lashing in all directions to resist arrest by the community" (*Public Eye*, 7-21 February, 1999).

From the above examples of the expressions used in the apportionment of blame to the LCD, one sees an angle of reporting that is blatantly negative to the LCD. As has been argued earlier, the LCD was believed to have rigged the elections, and therefore, one could not expect positive referential and descriptive labels for it. The last metaphor of "a cornered burglar caught with loot..." creates in the mind of a reader a very negative image of the LCD government. Looking at this negative picture painted by the AINA press above – an illegitimate, weak, brutal, and corrupt government - it is evident that the LCD is a government that is unfit to govern any country in the world.

The SADC Troika

If the LCD has been 'blacklisted' through linguistic expressions of blame by the AINA reports, criticism against the SADC troika is no less harsh. There seem to be two major reasons for blaming the SADC for the conflict: its failure in diplomacy (especially the handling of the Langa Commission report) and its military intervention in Lesotho. The bitterness of the opponents of the SADC's involvement in the conflict comes across very clearly in negative expressions used by the AINA press to refer to the SADC, and to describe its activities in Lesotho.

The SADC and the Langa Commission

The diplomatic manoeuvres by the SADC to find a solution to the Lesotho conflict, such as the establishment of the Langa Commission and its subsequent handling of the report of this Commission, were seen as a complete disaster by the Opposition Alliance. As one of the leaders states, "It is to be regretted that the so called mediators from SADC have displayed dishonest brokering – starting with the treatment of the Langa Commission Report" (*Mopheme*, November 17, 1998). Many AINA reports express strong suspicions of the SADC 'tampering' with the Langa Commission report prior to its release. The reports make claims of the existence of an 'interim report', which never saw the light of day. Rumours in the Opposition Alliance corridors suggested that the original report indicated overwhelming evidence of election fraud, and called for the holding of a new poll. However, the report that was released was completely different as illustrated by the following extract:

We are unable to state that the invalidity of the elections has been conclusively established. We point out, however, that some of the apparent irregularities and discrepancies are sufficiently serious concerns. We cannot however postulate that the result does not reflect the will of the Lesotho electorate (Langa Commission Report, 1998:28).

This vague and 'contradictory' conclusion, thus fuelled allegations that the report had been 'rewritten' at the Mauritius SADC summit (September 13-14, 1998). As Boot claims:

What was agreed was that the initial report of the Langa commission – which sources at the time confirmed merely flashed out the contents of the interim report – would have to be rewritten. Those sections which questioned the legitimacy of the LCD government and called for re-elections under an interim government of national unity would have to be excised (*M&G*, October 9-15, 1998)

Similar reports appeared across the AINA circles, with a very interesting metaphorical term to express this collusion by SADC – that of '*doctoring*'. This is summarized in one reference to the original report: "It initially discovered damning malpractices in 98 per cent of the constituencies, but the final report which was expected to be so explosive, was *doctored* and could

neither establish fraud nor exclude it" (*Mopheme*, December 8, 1998). The suspicions resulted in bold allegations such as that by Boot: "The suspicion that the Langa report *was doctored* before it was released is more than just opposition paranoia. Only weeks ago, passages and details from the interim report of the commission leaked from the locked rooms where it was being compiled" (*M&G*, September 25, 1998); and in a later report alleges that, "The name of the rewriter is known to the *Mail & Guardian*" (*M&G*, October 9-15, 1998).

The above allegations portray the SADC troika as having collaborated with the LCD government in the rigging of the May 23 elections by falsifying the findings of the Langa Commission in an attempt to keep the LCD government in power. With reference to the Langa report, what started as mere speculation ended up in many AINA reports reported as an objective fact this indicated by the reports' use of very assertive statements of fact many AINA reporters made.

The SADC and the Lesotho Military Intervention

The SADC military intervention in Lesotho caused widespread criticism from many Opposition leaders/supporters in both Lesotho and South Africa. It was indeed at this time that even those papers which had so far been very subtle in expressing ideological viewpoints, changed to very blunt linguistic choices which blatantly expressed their unwavering criticism of the intervention, particularly the role of South Africa and Zimbabwe, and to a lesser extent, that of Botswana in the military intervention.

Various descriptive terms were used with reference to the intervention, for example, 'a terrible mistake', 'clumsy intervention', 'the Lesotho shambles', 'ill-conceived operation', 'the Rambo approach' an 'invasion', 'ultimate occupation', 'aggression' and 'chauvinistic expansionism', and 'South African foreign policy about-turns and blunders', (see *M&G*, *Mopheme* and *Public Eye*, for the use of most of these terms). To look at the rhetoric of blame, in context, which pervaded the AINA press reports, the following are only a few of the many examples: "the *devilish and bloody invasion* of Lesotho by the South Africa troops" (*Mopheme*, November 17, 1998); "a military intervention

(cloaked though it might have been in the SADC blanket), complete with *murder, rape and pillage*" (*M&G*, October 12, 1998); and - "The trail of *misery and suffering*...began with *merciless butchering* of our unsuspecting and sleeping soldiers at the Katse Dam" (*Public Eye*, 7-21 February, 1999).

The open hostility towards the SADC military intervention expressed in lexical and rhetorical choices above also extends to names/labels used to refer exclusively to South Africa. An article by Thaanyane (*Public Eye*, 29 October – 1 November, 1998) is a good example of negative depiction through labelling. The writer observes that: "South Africa is a sick man suffering from the deeds of statutory crime syndrome"; and about South African leaders, he says, "Apartheid grinding wheels did a lot of havoc on the minds of these people – their very exalted president included"; whereas the mentality behind the military 'invasion' is compared to "a male sexual organ in complete dysfunction". Many AINA reporters in Lesotho blame South Africa for ignoring the important role played by Lesotho in the anti-apartheid struggle. To express this view, Thaanyane laments, "Now we are being given vinegar for wine and a bucket of s..t for food as thanks". This is a very interesting expression of a biblical metaphor bordering on obscenity - 'vinegar for wine' and 'a bucket of s..t for food', a very powerful metaphorical combination.

Despite the bitterness discussed above, there were still reports that saw the military intervention in a positive light. While hailing SADC for opting for a military solution, and evaluating the intervention as a success, the PINA press reports also blamed the critics of the SADC military operation (code named BOLEAS). For example, Buthelezi accuses South African opposition leaders of playing 'mean politics' (*Business Day*, September 23, 1998); and Mandela dismisses critics of the intervention as 'ignorant' (*Business Day*, September 25, 1998); while Pahad accuses the South African opposition leaders of 'political opportunism' and of being 'prophets of doom and gloom' (*Woza Internet*, November 4, 1998). One reporter, Makhanya accuses critics of the intervention of "indulg[ing] in an orgy of political opportunism", and sees former apartheid government officials (now turned opposition) as "latter day converts to righteousness who have been standing on lofty platforms". He says that Tony Leon (Democratic Party leader) "has appointed himself champion of the

Lesotho opposition parties and has been regurgitating every iota of hot air coming from that camp" (*The Star*, October 2, 1998).

The above examples of lexical and rhetorical choices, and of accusations and counter-accusations between the AINA and the PINA, are a very clear indication of how public opinion was divided on the issue of SADC's involvement in the political conflict of Lesotho, particularly on the military option as a solution to the conflict.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has examined the role of the press in the Lesotho political conflict from a linguistic perspective. The analysis has indicated that the press did indeed play an important role in the conflict through its dissemination of information as well as its provision of ideological presuppositions in the process of reporting. It is worth noting that through starkly different choices from the language system in interpreting the same events, the two categories of reports (the AINA and PINA) projected their own political and ideological positions with the purpose of persuading the reader to accept each camp's angle of reporting. Taking into consideration, for example, the difference between the AINA choice of the term 'invasion' or 'aggression', and that of 'intervention' preferred by the PINA reports, with reference to the same event, it is obvious that the two categories of reports' angles of reporting represent two opposite poles of the ideological divide; and hence the reader is given varying degrees of access to the truth of events. It is also worth noting that while some reports' ideological presuppositions were very subtle, others made no pretence at journalistic objectivity, by choosing a very blatant manner of expressing their ideological positions.

From the analysis of language use in press reports, the paper has shown how the lexical and rhetorical choices are very significant in the examination of the relationship between language and ideology. The choices used for the analysis in this study show that language is a vehicle through which man expresses the culture of the social systems and ideological institutions to which he owes allegiance.

In conclusion, it can be argued that the press played a major role in its reporting of events during the conflict. However, it should be noted that the different angles of reporting which the AINA and the PINA press adhered to, did nothing to reconcile public opinion. Thus, in keeping with a partisan piece of writing, the reporters on either side of the political and ideological divide, did not pause to consider possible counter-arguments to issues raised. What the papers seem to have encouraged was a complete polarization of public opinion. This is indeed not surprising since, the papers themselves represented opinions, viewpoints, and ideological stances of society, which were, and still are, indeed very polarized, on the events surrounding the Lesotho political conflict.

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Newspapers and Reports

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Business Day

Citizen

Mail and Guardian

Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA)

Mopheme

Pan African News Agency (PANA)

Public Eye

The Star

The Langa Commission Report

Woza Internet



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