Political Economy Approach as Complementary to Cultural Studies Approach in the Study of Contemporary Mass Media

Abdissa Zerai *

Abstract: In contemporary communication scholarship, political economy and cultural studies approaches to the analysis of the mass media have often been at loggerheads. As a reaction to the reductionism and economism of the political economy approach, for the last several years, the cultural studies approach has made audience agency and, hence, audience reception study the central focus in its critique of the mass media, thus making convergence between the two approaches more difficult. By laying out the locus of the difference between the two approaches and the merit of the political economy approach in the analysis of the mass media, this theoretical paper stresses the need for cultural studies scholars to go beyond using the shortcomings of the political economy approach as an excuse for not seriously engaging in a consistent and meaningful articulation of political economy with cultural studies. This paper calls for the convergence of the two approaches through the adoption of Kellner's 'multiperspectival' approach for a better and more comprehensive understanding of the way the mass media works in contemporary society.

Key Words: political economy, cultural studies, Marxist view, pluralist view, multiperspectival approach, reductionism, economism

Introduction

In contemporary mass media scholarship, there has been an emphasis on the analysis of how the audience interprets and receives media texts, thereby placing a premium on

* Assistant Professor, School of Journalism and Communication, Addis Ababa University

the agency of the audience (Kellner 1997). Particularly, in the cultural studies approach to the study of the mass media, this analytical perspective has become virtually an established tradition. On the other hand, there is a tendency in many scholarly cultural studies to place the politico-economic analysis of media in the periphery. More often than not, many cultural studies scholars use the reductionism and economism of some dominant versions of the political economy approach as a justification for downplaying politico-economic analysis in their scholarship. This paper aims at articulating the important place the political economy approach can occupy in the critique of the mass media and argues for deploying the approach synergetically with the cultural studies approach for a better understanding of the way the mass media works in contemporary society.

There is no denying the fact that in any historical period, the media exists in a particular socio-economic and political arrangement. As is the case with any social institution existing in any historical period, media institutions not only interact with other institutions but such interaction makes them susceptible to the influence of the socio-economic and political environment in which they have their abode. However, when it comes to analysis of the nature of the relationship between politico-economic institutions and the institutions of media, there has been a considerable lack of consensus among scholars. In light of this, it seems important to provide an overview of two key contending perspectives and the locus of their differences with respect to the conceptualization of the interaction between the mass media and politico-economic institutions.

Marxist vs. Pluralist Views of the Mass Media

Contemporary mass media study is often filtered through two contending views; the Marxist and the Pluralist views of the mass media. The study of mass media that subscribes to the Marxist perspective pays particular attention to the examination of the relationship between the media and the institutional structures and interests in their environment. Such a perspective is akin to the domain of the political economy approach, since it is interested in scrutiny of the relationship between media institutions and the political and economic institutions of society. In this perspective,

the media are regarded as "being locked into the power structure, and consequently as acting largely in tandem with the dominant institutions in society" (Curran, Gurevitch, and Woollacott 1982:21). As a result of this, the media are said to reproduce "the viewpoints of dominant institutions not as one among a number of alternative perspectives, but as the central and 'obvious' or 'natural' perspective" (Curran, Gurevitch, and Woollacott 1982:21).

On the other hand, the Pluralist perspective considers that the mass media tends to emphasize the mutual dependence between media institutions and other institutions. It contends that while the media is dependent on the central institutions of society for their raw material, these institutions are at the same time dependent on the media to communicate their views to the public(Curran, Gurevitch, and Woollacott 1982; Grossberg et al. 2006). In opposition to the Marxist perspective, the Pluralist perspective accords the media a semi-autonomous power in relation to other power centers in society. In the section that follows, I discuss the Frankfurt School's theorizing of the mass media as representative of the Marxist perspective, whereas I discuss the British Cultural Studies' conceptualization of the mass media as representative of the Pluralist view.

As argued by Tomaselli (2013:21), however, there is no one way of doing cultural studies internationally as cultural studies is not a monolithic approach but a diverse intellectual enterprise that comes in different shapes and colors across the globe dictated by the particularities of local conditions. Hence, it is important to acknowledge such diversity before taking up the discussion of the British variant as an exemplar of the pluralist perspective.

Richness of Cultural Studies Traditions

Although the Anglo-American traditions (with their differences and intersections) often loom large in our mind when the subject of cultural studies is raised, other works in Latin America, Australia, Scandinavia, Asia and Africa testify to the richness of cultural studies traditions. For example, as Ferguson and Golding (1997:xvi) argue, American cultural studies sprang from concerns specific to its own history. Rationalizing the particularity of the American variant, Carey (1997:4) notes that "the

culture, intellectual and otherwise, in which it was embedded was distinctive." Explaining the unique feature of American cultural studies, Carey (1997) argues that it differs on the basis of its political culture and national mythology. Unlike in the UK, for example, class is a largely absent category in American public, private or scholarly discourse. According to Carey (1997), this elision is due not only to the lingering legacy of the Red Menace, Marx and the Evil Empire but also to shared beliefs that almost everyone is 'middle class.' The absence of class analysis is also attributed to American 'exceptionalism' as defined by the absence of a strong labor movement or socialist party, which also explains the marginalization of 'class' in US cultural studies. Thus, Carey (1997:4) cautions that the US model is "useful only in those places where positive science is paradigmatic of the culture as a whole."

On the other hand, the Latin American variant of cultural studies took a different detour. According to Ferguson and Golding (1997:xvii),

> In Latin America, scholars have traced the distinctive image of their countries' popular cultural practice based on adaptation and transformation of a mixture of indigenous and imported…popular culture products. Much of the research and theoretical literature developed is in response to the search for answers to questions about media and democracy, and the creation of a more multi-vocal public sphere.

What is more, Ferguson and Golding (1997:xvii) argue that the Latin American scholarship avoided old theoretical dualisms of power-holder and the powerless. Rather it engaged in employing analytical categories such as syncretism, hybridization and *mestizaje* (mixing of Indian and Spanish heritage) in order to clarify processes of cultural appropriation, adaptation and vocalization in the mediation between cultural practice, popular culture, and democratic media and politics.

In the Australian context, the policy element is a substantial strand in cultural studies (Ferguson and Golding 1997). Cultural studies scholars in Australia believe in a more widespread policy practice as cultural studies is committed to examining cultural practices in terms of their interaction with and within relations of power, and, hence, the relevance of policy study for understanding the politics, economics and total culture of Australia's media and cultural industries, journalism and regulatory regime

(Ferguson and Golding 1997).

Although cultural studies has yet to spread its tentacles wide in Africa, its emergence in South Africa has spanned a few decades, and its evolution has been influenced by the local context. According to Tomaselli (2013:19), "the way that CMS travelled 'to' and spread 'within' southern Africa…is little different from its trans-Atlantic mutations, and the trajectories and emphases it assumed in Australia, Scandinavia and Asia." The University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) was the first to systematically introduce cultural studies to South Africa, although elements of the approach had been there prior to that (Tomaselli 2013). As argued by Tomaselli (2013:15),

> The UKZN project arose out of the 1976 Soweto uprising, when a group of students and academics coalesced around the question: Why had resistance in South Africa failed in comparison to elsewhere? They had wanted to establish something like the transdisciplinary CCCS that was theorizing the relationship between domination and resistance.

The South African variant of cultural studies early on incorporated a social justice approach by working alongside, with and through, civil society and faith-based organizations. Later on, however, it moved into other areas, such as development, public health and development communication, etc. (Tomaselli 2013), as noted by Tomaselli (2013:15), "Action research and critical indigenous methodological applications offered praxis orientated solutions for a newly democratizing society." Furthermore, indigenization of theory and methods, the study of African philosophers, and the social usefulness of the work done have been some of the elements seen as/*or*/to be crucial in the South African context. The same could be said of the Scandinavian as well as the Asian variants. However, the purpose here is not to provide an exhaustive discussion of all the variants of cultural studies carried out across the globe, but to acknowledge the existence of such variations by providing some examples. Consequently, I now turn to the discussion of the Frankfurt School's theorizing of the mass media as a representative of the Marxist perspective and the British Cultural Studies' conceptualization of the mass media as a representative of the pluralist view.

Frankfurt School as Exemplar of the Marxist View of the Mass Media

Since the contemporary dominant theories of communication that fall under the rubric of "critical theories," in one way or another, have their roots in Marxist thoughts, and it is these same thoughts that have become a point of dissent among scholars with Marxist bent, one cannot help but start with the key arguments advanced in Marxist theorizing in relation to society, economy, and culture. According to (Marx and Egles 1976:38),

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it.

What could easily be discerned in the above argument is the fact that the economic base of society constitutes the forces and relations of production in which culture and ideology (belonging to the superstructure) are constructed to help secure the dominance of ruling social groups. In this view, the cultural ideas of an epoch serve the interests of the ruling class by providing ideologies that legitimize class domination. Culture was seen by Marx as something that elites freely manipulated to mislead average people and encourage them to act against their own interests.

For Marx, as Baran and Davis (2006) note, the hierarchical class system was considered at the root of all social problems and must be ended by a revolution of the workers, or the proletariat. Such a revolution should result in the masses seizing control of the base, i.e., the means of production, and control over the superstructure, i.e., culture and ideology, would naturally follow suit. Marx did not see the possibility that reforms in the superstructure could lead to social transformation, for he was convinced that the elites would never give up their privileged position voluntarily. Thus, power must be taken from the elites by force. Without a radical overhaul of the existing system of relations in such a way that the base of society or the means of production fell under the control of the working class, little purpose would be served by making minor or cosmetic changes in the cultural and ideological realm.

Successive scholars, both non-Marxist and those who have been inspired by the Marxist thought, have often accused Marx of attributing primacy to the economic structure over the superstructure in his theorizing of the development of human history. As a result, they have called his theory "economic reductionist" and even "vulgar Marxism." Despite its reductionism and economism, however, his theory has generated a wealth of scholarship in intellectual circles both from the left and the right. Hence, the contribution of Marx's theory in understanding society is undeniably profound. One of the most important contributions of Marx's conceptualization of society in the realm of communication, which can be said to have significant currency, in our contemporary scholarship though sometimes in a contentious way, is the notion that culture always arises in specific historical situations, serving particular socio-economic interests and carrying out important social functions.

As time went by, the revolutionary working class or the proletariat seem to have failed to start a revolution and overthrow the bourgeoisie as had been envisaged by Marx (*one wages a war but not a revolution!*). The First World War in particular, proved the failure of the working class in that regard. In the meantime, a neo-Marxist school known as the *Institute for Social Research* was founded in 1923 in Germany, and later became known as *The Frankfurt School*, whose intellectual commitment was known as *Critical Theory* (Miller 2005). Miller (2005), citing Huspek 1997) asserts that the Frankfurt School was committed to the critical analysis of society's current state as well as to the development of normative alternatives which might enable humans to transcend their unhappy situation through critical thought and action.

According to Miller (2005), the School clearly grew out of Marxist ideology in its emphasis on critique. However, it departed in several ways from orthodox Marxism of that time period. Most important, the School did not embrace the materialist theorizing characteristic of Marx. The Frankfurt School did not follow the school of Scientific Marxism, which attempted to use positivistic research method to determine the law through which the economic substructure was related to the cultural and psychological superstructure. Neither did Frankfurt School scholars advocate political revolution as the primary means for achieving emancipation. In fact, as Eagleton (1991) notes, the Frankfurt School scholars, such as Adorno dismissed the concept of a Marxist Science, and refused to assign any particular privilege to the consciousness of the

revolutionary proletariat. Instead, they embarked on a journey of "revolutionary praxis," which would first involve the critical self-consciousness of historical subjects in a struggle fought in the realm of culture and consciousness. It was hoped that from the base of this critique, scholars could work toward liberation through discourse by creating a linguistic space free and protected from the contaminations of commercial culture (Miller 2005).

The theorists called attention to a critical examination of the 'culture industry,' the process of the industrialization of mass-produced culture and the commercial imperatives that drove the system in a capitalist society. The underlying assumption behind the Frankfurt School theorists was that the bourgeois class, who owned the means of cultural production, was using the culture industries' to manipulate and dupe the masses in a bid to maintain the prevailing structure of class domination, and the masses were unconsciously participating in their own exploitation and domination. In this sense, the Frankfurt School shared the classical Marxist view of ideology as false consciousness and distortion. In order to emancipate the masses from such ideological distortion, the theorists believed that scholars should take the lead in uncovering the ruling class's ideological distortions and raise the consciousness of the masses. The masses were considered as having no agency and, hence, passive, helpless victims of the ruling class ideology, which circulated through the mass culture. The theorists' central locus of scrutiny was on the production and distribution processes of the culture industry and their effects on the masses.

However, the problem with the Frankfurt School's theorists was that they took insufficient account of the economically contradictory nature of the process of the mass production of culture, and their tendency to see the industrialization of culture as unproblematic and irresistible. The contemporary advocates of the political economy approach to the analysis of the mass media pay homage to the intellectual legacies of the Frankfurt School. Thus, several scholars, (see Garnham 1986; Murdock 1989; Kellner 1990; Schiller 2000; McChesney 2003; Willis 1991), strongly argue the importance of putting the analysis of macro-institutional structures at the heart of mass media studies, and decry the cultural studies' preoccupation with audience reception studies and the analysis of the ideological effect of the mass media at the expense of

the political economic analysis.

British Cultural Studies as Exemplar of the Pluralist View of the Mass Media

On the other hand, during the 1960s and 1970s, an important school of neo-Marxist theory emerged in Great Britain: *British cultural studies* (Baran and Davis 2006). The first important British school of cultural studies was known as the *Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies* formed at the University of Birmingham toward the end of 1960s. British cultural studies combines neo-Marxist theory with ideas and research methods derived from diverse sources, including literary criticism, linguistics, anthropology, and history (Hall 1980). It attempted to trace historical elite domination over culture, to criticize the social consequences of this domination, and to demonstrate how it continues to be exercised over specific minority groups and subcultures.

It should be noted that British cultural studies was never satisfied with the classical Marxist theorizing. As (Hall 1999:100) himself acknowledges, "there never was a prior moment when cultural studies and Marxism represented a perfect theoretical fit." Cultural studies recognized early on the theoretical "inadequacies…the resounding silences, the great evasions of Marxism" when it comes to "culture, ideology, language, the symbolic", which were all the privileged object of study for cultural studies (Hall 1999:100). According to Hall (1999:100), Marxism's failure to adequately address these phenomena "had imprisoned" it "as a mode of thought, as an activity of critical practice." In other words, this failure of Marxism had negatively shaped "its orthodoxy, its doctrinal character, its determinism, its immutable law of history, its status as a meta-narrative" (Hall 1999:100). In Hall's (1999:100-101) own words, therefore, "the encounter between British cultural studies and Marxism has first to be understood as the engagement with a problem….It begins through the critique of a certain reductionism and economism…; a contestation with the model of base and superstructure…unending contestation with the question of false consciousness."

In critiquing the Marxian base/superstructure model, (During 2005, referrring to Williams), for example, argues that shifts in economic structures cannot explain shifts

in cultural organization and cannot explain content in anything like the requisite amount of detail. Cultural forms and events are more various, the specific possibilities available to cultural workers more abundant than any reference to economic foundations can account for. Paraphrasing Williams, During (2005)further notes that the base/superstructure model under-emphasizes the materiality of culture itself, since culture consists of practices that help shape the world. In this sense, they (cultural practices) too are material. By citing Hall's catchphrase, During (2005:21) affirms that: "The word is as material as the world." British Cultural Studies decries the separation of the base from the superstructure, as it sees both base and superstructure as aspects of a larger social whole that continually interacts with others and constantly mutates.

In similar token, British cultural studies was equally critical of the earlier Frankfurt school's theorizing which emphasized the distinction between high and low culture, in which the high culture was valorized and the low culture was denigrated. Cultural studies scholars also did not agree with the Frankfurt school's elitist and paternalistic theorizing that denied any agency to the working class. As Baran and Davis (2006) stress, British cultural studies instead criticizes and contrasts elite notions of culture, including high culture, with popular everyday forms of culture and other subcultures. They challenge the presumed superiority of all forms of elite culture and compare such forms of culture with useful, meaningful forms of popular culture. According to Baran and Davis (2006), British cultural studies critique of high culture and ideology was an explicit rejection of what its proponents saw as alien forms of culture imposed on minorities. Thus, they defend indigenous forms of popular culture as legitimate expressions of minority groups. Such a strong stand on the part of British cultural studies scholars to defend the cultural experiences of the subaltern class as legitimate may have been influenced by their own social background, since most of the important theorists, as Murdock (1989) argues, came from the lower social strata.

Informed by the works of structural Marxists, such as Althusser (1971) and Gramsci (1971), and critical social theorists, such as Habermas (1971, 1989), contemporary British cultural studies scholars, such as Hall (1981:31), re-conceptualized the classical Marxist understanding of culture or ideology as "those images, concepts, and

premises which provide frameworks through which we represent, interpret, understand, and make sense of some aspects of social existence." What is more, in contrast to Frankfurt schools' conceptualization of the mass media as a potent and homogenizing instrument for the domination of the masses by the elites, the British cultural studies' view was that the mass media in liberal democracies can best be understood as a *pluralistic* public forum in which various forces struggle to shape popular notions about social existence. In such a forum, new concepts of social reality are negotiated and new boundary lines are drawn between various social worlds (Baran and Davis 2006). What is embedded in such a conceptualization is the notion of a *pluralist*, as opposed to a totalizing, view of society. During (2005)notes, that the British cultural studies model that Hall and his colleagues worked with is a model that takes account of a pluralist and de-centered society. In such a model, significant recognition is given to the fact that the social and cultural fields, such as the economic, political, and cultural are in constant and constantly changing interaction with one another, without any one field determining the others, although the economy continues to provide the constraints within which the others move (Hall 1996). In this pluralist model, argues During (2005:22),

> Particular interactions between social fields are local, and need not have implications for society as a whole. Rather, each interaction has power effects insofar as it conditions individual lives. Furthermore, individuals have a number of different, often mutable identities rather than a single fixed identity, and this spread of identities, and the occasions for invention and recombination that it throws up, form a ground for political and cultural agency.

From the preceding discussion, it could be seen that on the one hand, the political economy's primary focus on the analysis of the material realities of the context in which cultural products are produced and consumed, and its insistence on seeing the media primarily as processes of material production where their (the media's) ultimate determination rests upon the economy, and on the other hand, the cultural studies' emphasis on the micro-analysis of the lived experiences of the audience and the resistive potential the media offers to the audience, and its refusal to accept the economic determinism thesis of the political economic argument as well as its view of the media as a site of ideological struggle, have pitted the former perspective against the latter standpoint, making the convergence of the two difficult. In fact, as (Baran

and Davis (2006) note, such polarization between the two perspectives has led the political economy theorists to work in relative obscurity compared with cultural studies theorists.

Political Economy as Complementary to Cultural Studies

There is no denying the fact that there are some legitimate arguments in the cultural studies' critique of the political economy approach to the study of the mass media. Some of such critiques, for example, include the political economy's tendency to gravitate towards economism; its class reductionism; its failure to see internal contradictions in the contemporary capitalist system; and its overlooking of audiences' potential for exercising agency.

The central question, however, is whether the shortcomings of the political economy approach are sufficient to downplay or give lip-service to the validity of the approach to the analysis of the mass media, as currently the case with cultural studies engagement with political economy. This paper argues that the political economy's shortcomings cannot justify downplaying the theoretical value of the understanding of the mass media. In fact, acknowledging the theoretical merit of the political economy approach and considering the approach as complementary to the cultural studies' approach, and consequently integrating both approaches in our analysis of the mass media can better provide a more comprehensive understanding of the way the mass media work in the contemporary society than we have so far been able to achieve by employing the two approaches in isolation. Thus, in the section that follows, an argument is advanced to demonstrate how relevant and complementary the political economy approach is to the cultural studies approach in the analysis of the mass media.

To begin with, it is important, for the purpose of clarity, to elaborate on what the phrase 'political economy' means as it applies to culture. As is apparent, the phrase is made up of two words: *political* and *economy*. The references to the terms 'political' and 'economy' call attention to the fact that the production and distribution of culture takes place within a specific economic system, constituted by relations between the

state, the economy, the media, social institutions and practices, culture, and everyday life. Political economy hence encompasses economics and politics and the relations between them and the other central dimensions of society and culture. In the context of a capitalist society, for instance, cultural production is largely shaped by the imperatives of profit and market orientations, since the dominant mode of production in a capitalist society calls for commodification and capital accumulation. As Douglas (Kellner 1990) argues, the forces of cultural production are deployed according to dominant relations of production which are important in determining what sort of cultural products are produced, how they are distributed and consumed. The system of production often constrains the type of cultural artifacts produced, the nature of structural limits to be placed with respect to what can and cannot be said and shown, and what sort of audience expectations and usage the text may generate.

On the other hand, we recognize the existence of a symbiotic relationship between institutions of culture production, such as the mass media organizations, and their environment, which includes powerful sources of information (Curran, Gurevitch, and Woollacott 1982; Herman and Chomsky 1988). Such symbiosis is necessitated by economic imperatives and the reciprocity of interest. According to Curran, Gurevitch, and Woollacott (1982), the mass media institutions draw on such relationship not only for their economic sustenance but also for the 'raw materials' of which their contents are made. For instance, the mass media need a consistent and dependable flow of the raw materials of news. They have daily news demands, and it is imperative that they meet these news schedules. But as Herman and Chomsky (1988) argue, the mass media cannot afford to have news crews at all places where important stories may break. They have to make a choice as to where they should mobilize their limited resources. Consequently, "they concentrate their resources where significant news often occurs, where important rumors and leaks abound, and where regular press conferences are held" (Herman and Chomsky 1988:18-19). Such sites are usually political institutions, military institutions, business corporations and trade groups. Such bureaucratic institutions make available a large volume of material that meets the demands of news organizations for dependable and timely flows. What is more, by virtue of their status and prestige, sources from such institutions have the privilege of being recognizable and credible. The appearance of such recognizability and credibility of the sources is important to the mass media. The rationale, as Fishman

(1980:143) observes, is that

> Newsworkers are predisposed to treat bureaucratic accounts as factual because news personnel participate in upholding a normative order of authorized inside knowledge within society. Reporters operate with the attitude that officials ought to know what it is their job to know… In particular, a newsworker will recognize an official's claim to knowledge not merely as a claim, but as a credible, competent piece of knowledge. This amounts to a moral division of labor: officials having and giving facts; which reporters merely receive.

The media's reliance on official sources, and their use of these sources as the basis for legitimate news reporting, serves the media organizations' utilitarian purposes in terms of practice, having the important added benefit of making news fairly easy and inexpensive to cover, since all the media organizations have to do is to put reporters where official sources congregate and comfortably report what these sources have to say. However, the limitations of such reliance upon official sources are self-evident. As McChesney (2003) stresses, such practice gives those in political office and, to a lesser extent, in business office, considerable power to set the news agenda by what they speak about and, just as important, by what they keep quiet about. According to McChesney (2003), if one wants to know why a story is getting covered, and why it is getting covered the way it is, looking at sources will turn up an awfully good answer a high percentage of the time. It is not just about whether a story will be covered at all, but, rather, how much attention a story will get and the tone of the coverage. He further argues that in view of the fact that legitimate sources tend to be restricted to political and economic elites, this bias sometimes makes journalists appear to be stenographers to those in power.

The central argument is that the interaction between media professionals and the authorized institutional knowers serving as news sources, shapes what ultimately becomes the news. In other words, it is at the interface between the media and the institutions that supply its raw materials that news is generated and shaped. As Curran, Gurevitch, and Woollacott (1982) rightly point out, such contact at the interface constitutes a critical part of the production process, and an important area for investigating the ways in which external inputs into the production process are

managed.

Several scholars (see Inglis 1990; Thompson 1990; Fairclough 1995) are of the opinion that the economics of an institution is an important factor that affects its practices and its texts. The funding system of the media institution can, for instance, constrain the extent of the media's engagement with a particular issue, and thereby shape the interactions between media professionals and the objects of the reporting, and this in turn can shape the texts that are produced. Similarly, the intensely competitive commercial environment in which the contemporary media operates has a bearing on media practices and texts (Inglis 1990; Thompson 1990).

A cursory look at the press and commercial broadcasting in contemporary capitalist society easily affirms the fact that they are pre-eminently profit-making organizations; they make their profits by selling audiences to advertisers, and they do this by achieving the highest possible readerships or listener/viewer ratings for the lowest possible financial outlay. As (Fairclough 1995) argues, media texts and programs are, from this perspective, symbolic, cultural commodities, produced in what is effectively a culture industry, which circulate for profit within a market, and they are very much open to the effects of commercial pressures. For example, the ratings battle among media institutions often lead to an increase in types of program with high audience appeal. This typically involves, in broad terms, increasing emphasis on making programs entertaining. When it comes to news, this means systematically avoiding complex storylines in favor of simple and uncomplicated narratives, despite the fact that such dilution of news might have serious repercussions when it comes to enabling the audience to fully understand the issue under consideration.

In the contemporary world of unprecedented corporate mergers and consolidations, the issue of media ownership is another area that demands serious examination, since patterns of media ownership is an important element in exerting influence upon media discourse. By virtue of the fact that ownership is increasingly in the hands of large conglomerates whose business is the culture industry, Fairclough (1995)is of the opinion that the media is becoming more fully integrated with ownership interests in the national and international economy, intensifying their association with capitalist class interests. According to him, this manifests itself in various ways, including the

manner in which media organizations are structured to ensure that the dominant voices are those of the political and social establishment.

The preceding discussions demonstrated that there are still legitimate reasons for the political economy approach to have resonance in improving our understanding how the mass media operates in contemporary capitalist society. The cultural studies tendency to focus on audience reception studies and the over-romanticizing of audience agency as well as the overemphasis on the analysis of ideological effects has left the 'body' of the field conspicuously disproportionate.

Along the same lines, D. Kellner (1997:116), for example argues,

> …while emphasis on the audience and reception was excellent correction to the one-sidedness of purely textual analysis, I believe that in recent years, cultural studies has overemphasized reception and textual analysis, while underemphasizing the production of culture and its political economy. Indeed there has been a growing trend in cultural studies toward audience reception studies that neglect both production and textual analysis, thus producing populist celebrations of the text and audience pleasure in its use of cultural artifacts.

Continuing his argument, D. Kellner (1997:116) warns that such an approach, taken to an extreme, would lose its critical perspective and would lead to "a positive gloss on audience experience of whatever is being studied." Furthermore, such studies also might lose sight of the "manipulative and conservative effects of certain types of media culture and thus serve the interests of the cultural industries as they are presently constituted and the dominant social forces which own and control them."

One can, thus, argue that the way cultural studies is currently practiced is inadequate for providing a comprehensive understanding of how the mass media works in contemporary society. This means that there is a legitimate need to integrate cultural studies with political economy. It should be clear here that this is not to imply that there is not any attempt at all on the part of cultural studies scholars to integrate cultural studies with political economy. At least Hall (1980) in his encoding/decoding theory has attempted to ground cultural studies in a Marxian model of the circuits of

capital (production-distribution-consumption-production). In his theory, Hall (1980) begins cultural studies with production and recommends traversing the circuits of capital. What is being argued here is that there is a conspicuous lack of consistent integration of cultural studies with political economy in such a way that one sees significant numbers of cultural studies scholars deploying political economy in their works; the works of even those (such as Hall) who tend to recognize the importance of considering political economy in the mass media critique still remain overwhelmingly audience reception centered.

In order to avoid its current shortcomings, therefore, cultural studies should develop what Kellner (1992) calls a "multiperspectival" approach. As touched upon earlier, "one of the reasons for hostility of those in cultural studies against political economy is because of the reductionism and economism of some dominant versions of political economy and the failure of this tradition concretely to engage texts and audiences" (Kellner 1997:109). Such blind spots can be addressed by mediating political economy with the engagement of actual texts and audiences.

On the other hand, situating the artifacts of media culture within the system of production and the society that generates them can help illuminate their structures and meanings, and thereby enrich cultural analysis. An adequate analysis of media culture requires multiperspectival readings to analyze their various forms of discourse, ideological positions, narrative strategies, image construction, and effects (Kellner 1997). In order to capture the full political and ideological dimensions of an artifact of media culture, therefore, "one needs to view it from the multicultural perspectives of gender, race, and class, and deploy a wide range of methods to explicate fully each dimension and to show how they fit into textual systems" (Kellner 1997:110).

A multiperspectival approach, hence, calls for an investigation of a wide range of artifacts interrogating relationships in the following three dimensions: the production and political economy of culture, textual analysis and critique of its artifacts, and the study of audience reception and the uses of media/cultural products. Such multiperspectival approach could enable cultural studies scholars to approach culture from the perspectives of political economy and production, textual analysis, and audience reception. In that sense, economic analysis can complement and enrich

cultural studies' readings and textual analysis, audience reception and political economy would not be seen to be antithetical (Kellner 1997). The adoption of a multiperspectival approach could, therefore, help not only to avoid the bifurcation of the two perspectives but also to enrich our understanding of the way the mass media works in contemporary society.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for providing valuable comments that have helped improve this paper. I am also indebted to the editorial board members who have made efforts to find relevant reviewers for the piece.

References

Althusser, L. 1971. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 127–86. London and New York: Monthly Review Press.

Baran, S. J., and D. K. Davis. 2006. *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment, and Future*. 4th Editio. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.

Carey, J. W. 1997. "Reflections on the Project of American Cultural Studies." In *Cultural Studies in Question*, edited by Marjorie Ferguson and Peter Golding, 1–24. London: Sage Publications.

Curran, J., M. Gurevitch, and J. Woollacott. 1982. "The Study of the Media: Theoretical Approaches." In *Culture, Society and the Media*, edited by M. Gurevitch, T. Bennet, J. Curran, and J. Woollacott, 11–29. London and New York: Methuen.

During, S. 2005. *Cultural Studies: A Critical Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge.

Eagleton, T. 1991. *Ideology: An Introduction.* New York: Verso.

Fairclough, N. 1995. *Media Discourse*. London: Edward Arnold.

Ferguson, M., and Peter Golding. 1997. "Cultural Studies & Changing Times: An Introduction." In *Cultural Studies in Question*, edited by Marjorie Ferguson and Peter Golding, xiii–xxvii. London: Sage Publications.

Garnham, N. 1986. "Extended Review: Bourdieu's Distinction." *The Sociological Review* 34 (2): 423–33.

Gramsci, A. 1971. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers.

Grossberg, L., E. Wartella, D. C. Whitney, and J. M. Wise. 2006. *Media Making: Mass Media in a Popular Culture*. 2nd Editio. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Habermas, J. 1971. *Knowledge and Human Interest*. Boston: Beacon.

———. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Hall, S. 1980. "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse." In *Culture, Media, Language*, edited by S. Hall, 117–27. London: Hutchinson.

———. 1981. "The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media." In *Silver Linings*, edited by G. Bridges and R. Brundt, 89–92. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

———. 1996. "The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees." In *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, edited by S. Hal, D. Morley, and K. Chen, 25–46. New York: Routledge.

———. 1999. "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies." In *The Cultural Studies Reader*, edited by S. During, 2nd editio, 97–109. London: Routledge.

Herman, E.S., and N. Chomsky. 1988. *Amazon.com Find in a Library All Sellers » My Library My History Books on Google Play Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Huspek, M. 1997. "Toward Normative Theories of Communication with Reference to the Frankfurt School: An Introduction." *Communication Theory* 7 (4): 265–76.

Inglis, F. 1990. *Media Theory: An Introduction. London: Blackwell.* London: Blackwell.

Kellner, D. 1990. *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*. Boulder: Westview Press.

———. 1992. "Toward a Multiperspectival Cultural Studies." *Centennial Review* 261: 5–42.

———. 1997. "Overcoming the Divide: Cultural Studies and Political Economy." In *Cultural Studies in Question*, edited by Marjorie Ferguson and Peter Golding, 102–20. London: Sage Publications.

Marx, K., and F. Egles. 1976. “The Ruling Class and the Ruling Ideas Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works Pp. 39-42. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers.” In *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works*, edited by M. G. Durham and D. Kellner, 39–42. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers.

McChesney, R. 2003. “The Problem of Journalism: A Political Economy Contribution to an Explanation of the Crisis in Contemporary U.S. Journalism.” *Journalism Studies* 43: 299–329.

Miller, K. 2005. *Communication Theories: Perspectives, Processes, and Contexts*. 2nd editio. New York: McGraw Hill.

Murdock, G. 1989. “Critical Studies: Missing Links.” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 6: 436–40.

Schiller, H. 2000. *Living in the Number One Country: Reflections from a Critic of American Empire.* New York: Seven Stories Press.

Thompson, J. B. 1990. *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication*. Translated by Stanford University. Stanford, CA.

Tomaselli, K. G. 2013. “Alter-Egos: Cultural and Media Studies, 26: 1, 14-38.” *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies*, 26: (1): 14–38.

Willis, S. 1991. “Unwrapping Use Value.” In *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works*, edited by M. G. Durham and D. Kellner, 334–350. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publ. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers.