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Contested spaces: an analysis of the ANC government's approach to the promotion of media development and diversity in South Africa, with a particular focus on the policy process that led to the formation of the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MIDDA).

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Chapter Two
Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

To inform, to discuss, to challenge, to bind, to judge, and to entertain – these are the important functions of the media in any free country. In fact, theorists claim, these are the qualities that ensure a rich democracy with an informed and participating citizenry (Curran & Seaton, 1991; Keane, 1992; Curran, 2000; Hadland & Thorne, 2004). Further, theorists claim that for democracy to thrive a diverse media system with a number of outlets, representing a variety of groupings with a variety of views, is critical. (McChesney, 1998, 1999, 2004; Curran, 2000; Bagdikian, 2004) The purpose of public policy, then, is to ensure that such a media system is nurtured.

Although most theorists (and lay people) would agree that these are the ideals, it is interesting that very different traditions of promoting them have developed. Generally, newspapers have been seen as part of the market, while broadcasting has been regulated in order to achieve at least part of this vision. However, in the 1980s there was a revolution in official thinking, driven in particular by the United Sates. It was argued that broadcasting ought also to be managed by the market. The state was now seen by some as having a dead hand, and regulation was seen as an impediment to innovation (Curran & Seaton, 1991; McQuail *et al.*, 1992; Curran, 2000) Policy experts argued that entrepreneurs seeking to maximise their own profits were more likely to produce a broadcasting (and print) service genuinely sensitive to what audiences wanted. By the late 1980s market theorists had gained the upper hand (Curran & Seaton, 1991; Keane, 1992; McQuail *et al.*, 1992). And their power has expanded ever since (Bagdikan, 2004; McChesney, 2004).

2.2 Definitions of Key Terms

Internationally there has been rigorous discussion as regards the term “diversity”. Two theorists Napoli (2001) and Einstein (2004) have put forward particularly comprehensive

definitions.

The policy theorist Napoli (2001) points to the dual nature of the communications industry. He claims that its role cannot be reduced to either a purely social or economic function – both are in play. He argues that media policy regulators need to take account of this. It is within this context that he puts forward his particularly detailed definition of diversity.

Napoli (2001) claims that the primary components of diversity can be organised into three broad categories – *source diversity*, *content diversity*, and *exposure diversity*. Napoli claims that *source diversity* has traditionally been operationalised by policy makers in three different ways: in terms of ownership or media outlets; in terms of diversity of ownership of content/programming; and in terms of the diversity of the workforce within individual media outlets. Napoli (2001) explains – that, for example, when assessing ownership diversity in cable TV it is possible to focus on the owners of the cable systems (outlets). It is possible to focus on the owners of the individual channels that are carried on the cable channels (a second level of outlet). It is possible to focus on the producers of the programmes that run on the individual cable channels (content producers). Finally, it is possible to focus on workforce diversity. Napoli argues that "within the context of workforce diversity all personnel ranging from management down to secretarial staff are considered components of the source of information and thus all [can] fall under the purview of the diversity principle" (Napoli, 2001:132).

Content diversity is the second critical link in the diversity chain. Napoli claims that policy makers are generally concerned with format-programme diversity, demographic diversity and idea diversity. Format-programme diversity refers to the general category designations given to radio formats, cable channel formats, and individual TV programmes. So, for example, policy analysts might look at the range of different types of TV shows (documentaries, drama, news, etc.) that a viewer can choose from during an hour of prime time. Demographic diversity refers to the racial, ethnic and gender diversity of the individuals featured within the electronic and print media. As Napoli (2001:143) argues, "A typical concern among those focusing on the issue of demographic diversity is whether minority and other groups are portrayed . . . in reasonable proportion to their prevalence in society." Finally, idea diversity refers to the diversity of viewpoints and of social, political and cultural perspectives represented within the media.

Napoli (2001) claims that idea diversity is the most elusive but ultimately the most critical component of diversity. Generally, the assumption is that the various sub-categories of source diversity and content diversity will nurture idea diversity.

Exposure diversity is the third critical link. Napoli (2001) claims that despite its importance exposure diversity is the most neglected diversity dimension. The diversity of content *received* is central to this notion. Napoli argues that analyses of exposure diversity seek to answer questions such as: how many different sources are audiences exposed to in their information consumption? Are audiences exposing themselves to a wide range of political and social views? Are they consuming diverse types and formats of programming? What factors affect the levels of exposure diversity among audiences? Napoli argues that implicit within this concept is the assumption that audiences – who are provided with a diversity of content in fact consume a diversity of content.

The media policy theorist Einstein (2004) adopts a similar approach. She says that, despite the fact that diversity is a notoriously difficult concept to define, policy makers have "coalesced around [the terms] source diversity, outlet diversity and content diversity" (Einstein, 2004:8). According to Einstein source diversity has two components – diversity in terms of the actual number of people creating programmes, and diversity in the types of people who produce that programming. She claims that outlet diversity is about increasing the number of channels through which information is distributed to the public. Content diversity, she claims, refers to increasing the variety of programming and points of view.

Both Napoli and Einstein concur that the ultimate diversity goal is to increase the variety of programming – and in particular the variety of points of view.

South African diversity definitions reflect international perspectives but with some key differences – the main one being the fact that South African definitions are strongly and specifically linked to the concept of development. The most comprehensive South African diversity definition appeared in the *Media Development Agency Discussion Document, November 1999*. Government argued that media diversity should not merely be about having a diversity of owners; it should also be about the public having full access to different viewpoints and sources of information. The document argued for a

"democratic public discourse". This was explained as "the interaction of a diverse range of viewpoints across the media spectrum, and within individual media entities" (GCIS, 1999:8). Then taking the diversity concept a step further, the document stated that it was important for all citizens to have "access to means for the articulation and expression of opinions and viewpoints" (GCIS, 1999:8).

This definition however was later pared down in the final MDDA legislation (Act No.14 of 2002). The MDDA Act (Section 1 (vi)) defined diversity as "access to the widest range of sources of information and opinion, as well as equitable representation within the media in general". It is interesting to note that the issue of citizens' active participation in the media was dropped. Further, specific reference to a diversity of opinions and viewpoints was excluded.

"Media development" is a particularly critical term in the South African media context. The democratic challenges facing media in the country have been acute, both in terms of the country's lack of development and its new developmental and democratic tasks. In the South African context, in fact, media diversity is dependent on the equitable development of media infrastructure, goods and services.

Major debates have been held within government and the community media sector about how to define this critical term (Interview, Pillay, 2004). Eventually a number of definitions were adopted. It was agreed that at its most basic level "development" could be used in the context of "development of" new media entities. At another level, it could be defined in terms of "media for development". The media's developmental role in society, and the issue of developmental content are key here. (Interview, Pillay, 2004).

In the *MDDA Draft Position Paper 2000* both aspects of development were included and the term "development communication" was explored. The document stated that the MDDA should support projects that enabled media to promote "democratic and socio-economic rights through their operations and/or content such that the public and communities are empowered to actively participate in development" (GCIS, 2000:12). However, in the MDDA legislation (Act No. 14 of 2002) the term was restricted to "the development of the media environment and infrastructure so that historically disadvantaged communities and persons have access to the media as owners, managers, producers and consumers of media" (Section 1 (ix)) The issue of developmental content

was dropped from the final definition.

2.3 Analytical Paradigms

As discussed there are two major schools of thought that dominate the literature on media, democracy and media policy issues. One is the more market-driven liberal pluralist school, and the other is the critical political economy of the media school. Both schools have interesting insights, but I believe that the critical political economy of the media school has the greater explanatory power.

2.3.1 The liberal pluralist school

2.3.1.1 Basic tenets

The liberal pluralist school grew out of a critique of the "mass society tradition". The mass society tradition had a pessimistic view of new emerging democracies in Europe and the United States, and an overwhelmingly negative view of the popular commercial media and its role (Bennett, 1982). One of the early liberal pluralist theorists, Edward Shils, turned the negativity of the mass society tradition on its head. He argued that the weakening of traditional ties and the reduction in the power of established hierarchies tended to strengthen the democratic process rather than undermining it. Further, he declared that it was positive that the masses had moved from the periphery to the centre of political life. Finally, in an important move, he redefined the term "masses" as not a simple mass but as "a hotch potch of differing regional, ethnic and religious groupings" (Bennett, 1982:40).

Joseph Schumpeter further developed the contours of liberal pluralism. He argued that although democracy was a system of government by elites, the majority retained the right to periodically determine which elite should govern. Democracy worked, he said, because a wide range and variety of competing interest groups constantly checked and limited one another so as to prevent any one group from dominating (Bennett, 1982).

These theoretical realignments had marked consequences for the way in which the media was viewed. As Bennett (1982:40) argues, "Once viewed as the villains of mass society, they came to be viewed as the unsung heroes of liberal pluralism". The commercial media were no longer seen as monolithic. Liberal pluralists claimed that the clash and diversity

of the views contained within them contributed to the free and open circulation of ideas. This enabled the media to play a powerful "fourth estate" role. Governing elites could be pressurised and reminded of their dependency on majority opinion through the media.

2.3.1.2 Liberal pluralist approaches to media development and diversity

The overarching assumption of liberal pluralists is that the development of the free market is critical for the deepening of media development and diversity. Their focus is thus on consumers rather than citizens. They claim that "consumers are the best judges of what is in their interest" (Curran & Seaton, 1991:337). Media policy, therefore, should be geared to creating an open marketplace with vigorous competition in which consumers can exercise sovereign control. This, it is claimed, produces a media system which gives people what they want – that is a varied and diverse output from which to choose (Curran & Seaton, 1991; Keane, 1992; Curran, 2000)

State intervention, from this perspective, is generally viewed with suspicion (Curran & Seaton, 1991; Keane, 1992; Curran, 2000a; Golding & Murdock, 2000). However, perspectives are not uniform. There is a split within this camp between *free market liberals* who "oppose [any] regulation beyond the 'normal lie of the land' and *social market liberals* who favour limited public intervention to secure specific public goals" (Curran & Seaton, 1991:335). I will explore both perspectives.

Since the press in most western democracies is organised along free market lines, most *free market liberals* see no need for reform. However, when it comes to broadcasting they tend to adopt a radical stance (Curran & Seaton, 1991; McQuail, 1992). In terms of public service broadcasting, free market liberals claim a number of defects. They claim that it is "unresponsive to popular demand; is dominated by a small elite; and, is vulnerable to government pressure as it relies on state sponsored privileges (i.e. the license fee)" (Curran & Seaton, 1991:337). Also, some argue that public service broadcasting provides a protected haven for radicals. They claim this is in "marked contrast to the competitive environment of the press where the consumer is sovereign and where, consequently, unpopular radical views get short shrift" (Curran & Seaton, 1991:337). Free market liberals argue, therefore, that broadcasting should be deregulated and reconstituted along the free market lines of the press. They argue that publicly owned broadcasting should be privatised and that regulation of commercial broadcasting should be abolished. "Broadcasters should be subject, like publishers, only to the law of the land" (Curran &

Seaton, 1991:338).

Free market liberal arguments have been substantially boosted by recent technical developments in the media. Free market liberals have claimed that the old technical justification for public service broadcasting, based on the need to allocate and regulate scarce airwave frequencies, has been overtaken by events (Curran & Seaton, 1991). The emergence of multi-channel cable and satellite TV has resulted in there being many more channels than national newspapers to choose from. "In short", Curran and Seaton (1991:338) claim, "It is now possible to remodel broadcasting along the competitive, unregulated lines of the press". Free market liberals have claimed that this has created maximum diversity and real choice (Curran, 2000; Keane, 1992; McQuail, 1992).

Free market liberals have campaigned strongly and very successfully for the removal of specific media development and diversity regulations and policies. Their argument has been that these regulations are ineffective and counter-productive. They have argued that interventions to advance media diversity in fact lead to control of media content and subversion of media independence. In line with this thinking, TV channels in the United States were "freed" from the "Fairness Doctrine" that required them to cover important issues and present alternative views (Curran, 2000). The argument put forward was that "the burdens of the Fairness Doctrine were [actually] leading broadcasters to provide less coverage of controversial issues than they might otherwise have provided" (Napoli, 2001:145). In addition, free market liberals fought for the relaxing of the Financial Interest and Syndication (Fin-Syn) rules designed to limit the "Big Three" United States TV networks (ABC, CBS and NBC) from controlling television programming (Napoli, 2001). The goal of these rules was to encourage the development of a diversity of programmes through diverse and antagonistic sources of programme services. However, free market liberals claimed that a diversity of programmes had not been created, they thus called for these policies to be scrapped (Einstein, 2004). Further, free market liberals campaigned for the relaxing of media concentration regulations. In terms of anti-monopoly controls they called for regulations to be set aside in order to promote investment in new television outlets and greater choice. Media mogul Rupert Murdock has argued, "Cross-ownership of the media is a force for diversity" (quoted in Curran & Seaton, 1991:340). Reflecting this thinking, Brian Pottinger from South Africa's print industry body, Print Media South Africa, stated, "Media development happens when capital is allowed to roll over from one media form to another" (Interview, Pottinger,

2004). Several theorists, notably Steiner (1952), have hypothesised that media monopolies are actually more likely to produce diversity than a multitude of players.[5]

Finally, free market liberals have condemned content regulations. They want to "press the detonator button destroying all agencies regulating content" (Curran & Seaton 1991:340). They argue that a broadcaster's only obligation should be to operate within the legal framework which "governs taste and decency and protection of privacy" (Curran & Seaton, 1991:340). Regulation of content, they claim, leads to dull, worthy, patronising and dangerously pro-government content (Keane, 1992). They claim that these restrictions ultimately lead to a lessening of diversity and a straight-jacketing of thought.

Social market liberals broadly endorse the core assumptions of the free market approach but they differ from traditional free market liberals in that they stress that "public intervention is needed to off-set some market distortions" (Curran & Seaton, 1991:342). The more interventionist among them also argue that "a laissez-faire policy is inherently incapable of producing the range of choice that free market theory promises" (Curran & Seaton, 1991:342). Consequently, they favour public intervention to enlarge choice. This is usually justified with reference to the wider political or cultural role of the media. Social market liberals have noted with alarm the gradual disappearance of the non-elite political press across the world. They have argued that with the disappearance of this press a whole spectrum of left-wing, development-focused, pro-citizenship ideas has vanished (Curran & Seaton, 1991; McChesney, 1998, 1999, 2004).

Traditionally, social market prescriptions have been more developed in relation to the press, although these proposals are equally valid for broadcasting (Curran & Seaton, 1991). Three main policies have dominated: "legislation to curb concentration of ownership; public finance to assist the launch of new publications; and public measures designed to assist the survival of weak publications" (Curran & Seaton 1991:342).

Generally, social market liberals have opposed the free market liberal stance regarding

[5] The scenario is described as follows: "If there are three radio channels and three producers, the three producers are all going to compete to attract the largest audience. If most people like situation comedies, for instance, at least two of the channels are going to be programmed with situation comedies to attract the largest audience. If, however, there is only one monopoly exhibitor in the market, he or she is likely to programme two channels with different types of programming to achieve the largest audience overall" (quoted in Einstein, 2004:3).

anti-monopoly legislation. In contrast to free market liberals, social market liberals have assumed that a concentrated media industry does have an adverse effect on the diversity of the communications landscape. They have pointed to the fact that media owners who own a number of radio or TV stations or a number of publications will use the same newsroom, same reporters, and so on, and will syndicate programming and articles (Bagdikian, 2004). Social market liberals, therefore, have called for government intervention in media company mergers, the sale of independent media entities to dominant conglomerates, and so on (Curran & Seaton, 1991; Keane, 1992).

Social market liberals have also highlighted the importance of dealing with cross-ownership and ownership of the sources of news (Curran & Seaton, 1991). They have argued that joint control of television, radio and newspapers (cross-ownership) should be prohibited by law as a way of promoting media diversity. Further, they have argued that the sources of news should be divorced from the news carriers. They have claimed that "This would inject new variety into the press by encouraging a much-used news service to develop more autonomous (and diverse) news values" (Curran & Seaton, 1991:345).

Both the launch of new publications and public measures to assist the survival of weak publications has traditionally been dealt with through the launch of press subsidy schemes. These have been particularly prevalent in Western and Northern Europe but have also been launched in Australia and a number of developing countries including South Korea, Singapore and India (GCIS, 2000; Pillay, 2003a) The kind of mechanism used to promote diversity has varied depending on the country. Mechanisms have included direct subsidies for newspapers including general subsidies[6], selective subsidies[7], once-off aid packages[8], assistance funds for important general and political interest provincial newspapers with low advertising income, and so on. Indirect subsidies have included tax concessions, limiting advertising on state television, joint distribution rebates for newspapers that share distribution, grants for research and journalist training, reduced tariffs for postal delivery and rail transport, and so on (Murshetz, 1999; GCIS, 2000, 2001; Pillay 2003a). As Curran and Seaton (1991) claim, the rational behind these proposals has been that high market entry costs need to be off-set if under-represented groups with limited funds are to gain a voice. However, free market liberals have

[6] General subsidies include telecommunications, postal rate and carrier advantages.

[7] Selective subsides are given for example to strengthen newspapers with low advertising rates.

[8] Once-off aid packages for example are given to strengthen the financial position of the press.

vehemently opposed these interventions. They have argued that struggling media entities should be allowed to die a "natural death".

In conclusion, then, the liberal pluralist perspective focuses on the media in capitalist societies. Liberal pluralists perceive capitalism as essentially positive, although not perfect. They believe that while democracy is a system of government by elites, the majority retain the right to "determine periodically, precisely which elite should govern" (Bennett, 1980:40). The free market, commercial media is seen to play an essentially positive, "fourth estate" role in this democratic system. The "clash and diversity of views contained within them", it is argued, contribute to the free and open circulation of ideas (Bennett, 1980:40). Further, liberal pluralists claim that free market media is the kind of media that is most receptive to audience needs. It thus has the potential to create the greatest diversity of ideas.

The liberal pluralist perspective (particularly its free market strand) is linked very closely to a conception that the media industries operate as any other industry – the focus is on traditional economic indicators (Curran, 2000a; Golding & Murdock, 2000). This perspective assumes that communication goods are like any other – the best way of ensuring adequate distribution and production is through the market, "unfettered as far as possible by government regulation" (Golding & Murdock, 2000:73). The focus is thus on consumers rather than on citizens. The concern is with "focusing on maximizing the number of distinct participants in the idea marketplace" (Napoli, 2001:25). The emphasis is thus rather on media pluralism – that is, numbers of media entities rather than the actual diversity of content – although the assumption is that the former will contribute to the latter.

There are certainly strengths to the liberal pluralist perspective. Liberal pluralists highlight the fact that government regulations are not unproblematic. They also highlight some of the key problems in public broadcasting systems. These include the fact that such systems are not always directly responsive to audience needs, and that public broadcasting content can be patronising, politically correct and sometimes downright propagandistic - and that this can ultimately place severe constraints on diversity. (See Nyamnjoh, 2003; Kupe, 2003; Hills, 2003 for discussions regarding the problems with public/state broadcasting models in Africa.) However, this approach also has a number of major weaknesses. These weaknesses are discussed in detail below.

2.3.2 The critical political economy of the media school

2.3.2.1 Basic tenets

In line with liberal pluralists, critical political economists of the media also focus their analysis on the workings of capitalist societies. However, they have a less favourable view of capitalism. Golding and Murdock (2000:72), for example, argue that capitalism is "dynamic and problematic" and "substantially imperfect". McChesney (1998:8) says, "The workings of capitalism – with its invariable push towards strong class inequality and possessive individualism – has a distinctly anti-democratic edge".

In contrast to liberal pluralists, however, critical political economists of the media start not from a premise of "competing elites" but with "the constitution and exercise of power among social classes" (Golding & Murdock, 2000:70). Critical political economy of the media takes a broadly neo-Marxist perspective (McChesney, 1998; Golding & Murdock, 2000).

Golding and Murdock (2000:70) claim that what distinguishes a critical political economy of the media approach from other approaches is its "focus on the interplay between the symbolic and economic dimensions of public communications". Critical political economy "sets out to show how different ways of financing and organizing cultural production have traceable consequences for the range of discourses and representations in the public domain and for audiences' access to them" (Golding & Murdock, 2000:71). A central concern is citizens' "unequal command over material resources and the consequences of such inequality for the nature of the symbolic environment" (Golding & Murdock, 2000:72).

Golding and Murdock (2000:72) argue that this perspective "assumes a realistic conception of the phenomena it studies". Critical analysis is centrally concerned with "questions of action and structure, in an attempt to discern the real constraints that shape the lives and opportunities of real actors in the real world" (Golding & Murdock, 2000:72). This emphasis on the "real world" ensures that critical political economy of the media – as opposed to earlier, more rigid formulations of political economy – is careful to avoid the twin temptations of "instrumentalism" and "structuralism" (Golding & Murdock, 2000).

Instrumentalists focus on the ways that capitalists use their economic power to ensure the flow of public information in line with their interests. They see the privately owned media as instruments of class domination (Chomsky, 1998). However, this approach overlooks the contradictions in the system. "Owners, advertisers and key political personnel cannot always do as they wish. They operate within structures that constrain as well as facilitate, imposing limits as well as offering opportunities" (Golding & Murdock, 2000:74).

Structuralists conceive of structures as "building-like edifices – solid, permanent and immovable" Critical political economists of the media, however, see structures as "dynamic formations that are constantly reproduced and altered through practical action" (Golding & Murdock, 2000:74). Thus they see economic determination in a more flexible way. "Instead of holding to Marx's notion of determination in the *last* instance, with its implications that everything can be related back to economic forces, [they] follow Stuart Hall in seeing determination as operating in the *first* instance" (Golding & Murdock, 2000:74). This allows critical political economists to think of economic dynamics as playing a central role in defining the key features of the communications environment but not as a complete explanation of that activity.

Finally, critical political economy of the media has a historical dimension (McChesney, 1998, 1999, 2004; Golding & Murdock, 2000). The approach is interested in how:

> The fast moving time of events, the subject of traditional narrative history relates to the slow but perceptible rhythms that characterize the gradual unfolding history of economic formations and systems of rule (Burke, 1980, cited in Golding & Murdock, 2000:74).

2.3.2.2 Critical political economy of the media approaches to media development and diversity

Four historical processes are central to a critical political economy of the media analysis. These include "the growth of the media, the extension of corporate reach, commodification and the changing role of state and government intervention" (Golding & Murdock, 2000:74). Each of these processes is explored below.

In terms of the *growth of the media* and the *extension of corporate reach*, McChesney (1998) argues that for most of industrial capitalism's first century, much of what is now

considered the communications industry was not part of the capital accumulation process. Publications were generally small and independent, and displayed a rich diversity of views and opinion (McNair, 1998). Advertising was limited and competition was strong (McChesney, 1998; McNair, 1998). However, all this began to change towards the end of the nineteenth century due to the emergence of monopoly capitalism. “The ascendant economic organization became the large corporation and its playing field was the oligopolistic market” (McChesney, 1998:5). Advertising became a key funding source in the media. “The newspaper industry became organized in chains and became vastly less competitive as the largest newspapers were able to bury their rivals” (McChesney, 1998:5).

This stable, controlled media landscape was transformed in the 1980s and 1990s by the diffusion of new communication technologies driven by international capitalism. “Fibre optic cable, high powered satellite digitalization, personal computers and the internet offered new communication pipelines into the home” (Curran, 2000:130). Technologies also broke free from national boundaries and moved internationally. For a time it seemed that real choice and diversity was in reach.

The response of leading media companies, however, was swift. “They used a well judged combination of political lobbying and market adaptation” (Curran, 2000:130). They pressed for relaxation of anti-monopoly controls by arguing initially that market expansion diminished the need for regulation, and subsequently that concentration was necessary in order to compete effectively in the global market. Out of market fragmentation there developed a new pattern of multi-media concentration (McChesney, 1998, 1999, 2004; Bagdikian, 2004).

Golding and Murdock (2000:75) claim that corporations now dominate the cultural landscape in two ways:

> First, an increasing proportion of cultural production is directly accounted for by conglomerates with interests in a range of sectors from newspapers and magazines, to television, film, music, and theme parks. Second, corporations that are not directly involved in the culture industries as producers can exercise considerable control over the direction of cultural activity through their role as advertisers and sponsors.

So what does this mean for diversity and development? Curran (2000), taking a critical

political economy perspective, argues that the giant media corporations bring enormous resources to bear in terms of limiting competition and managing demand (see also Bagdikian, 2004). One of the outcomes of this concentration is high market entry costs. For instance, in Britain £20 million is required to start a new national broadsheet; more is required to start a television channel (Curran, 2000). Of course, there are media sectors where costs are low but these tend to be marginalised or have low audiences. "A lone website on the internet is practically free but it does not have the same communicative power as owning a mass television channel or newspaper" (Curran, 2000:128). One of the outcomes of this system is that social groups with limited resources (often with marginalised views) are excluded from competing as producers in the main media sectors.

Further, the extension of corporate reach reinforces the process of commodification in cultural life. (Keane, 1992; McChesney, 1998, 1999, 2004; Golding & Murdock, 2000). As Golding and Murdock (2000) claim, commercial communication corporations have always been in the business of commodity production. At first their activities were confined to producing symbolic commodities that could be consumed directly, such as newspapers. Later, with the rise of new domestic technologies such as the telephone and radio, cultural consumption required consumers to purchase the appropriate machine. "This compounded the already considerable effect of inequalities in disposable income, and made communicative activity more dependent on ability to pay" (Golding & Murdock, 2000:75). Today, more and more sophisticated machines are required to access communications including computers with high-speed internet access, DVD machines etc. Inequalities are thus further accentuated.

Golding and Murdock (2000) point out that at first sight advertising-sponsored broadcasting seems to be an exception to this trend since anyone who has a receiving set has access to the full range of programming. However, this analysis ignores a critical point: audiences themselves are a commodity. The economics of commercial print and broadcasting revolves around the exchange of audiences for advertising revenue (Keane, 1992; McChesney, 1998). The price that corporations pay for advertising spots on particular programmes is determined by the size and social composition of the audience attracted by the programmes. In primetime, the premium prices are commanded by shows that can attract and hold the greatest number of viewers and provide a symbolic environment in tune with consumption (Keane, 1992; Golding & Murdock, 2000). These needs inevitably tilt programming towards familiar and well-tested formulas and formats,

away from risk and innovation, and anchor them in common-sense rather than alternative viewpoints (Keane, 1992; Golding & Murdock, 2000; Einstein, 2004). “Hence the audience’s position as a commodity serves to reduce the overall diversity of programming and ensures that it confirms established mores and assumptions far more than it challenges them” (Golding & Murdock, 2000: 75).

The main institutional counter to the commodification of communications has come from the development of institutions funded by taxes and oriented towards providing cultural resources for the full exercise of citizenship (McChesney, 1998; Golding & Murdock, 2000). The most important and pervasive of these have been public broadcasting organisations, typified by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The BBC has distanced itself from the dynamics of commodification by not taking spot advertising and by offering the full range of programming equally to everyone who has paid the basic annual license fee (Golding & Murdock, 2000; Nyamnjoh, 2003). However, recently this ideal has been substantially undermined. Across the world public broadcasting has come under attack. Governments have started to cut back on public broadcast funding by, for instance, not increasing the license fee (McChesney, 1999, 2004). Public broadcasters have thus been forced to expand their commercial activities (Golding & Murdock, 2000; Nyamnjoh, 2003). So, for instance, “In a marked departure from its historic commitment to universal and equal provision, the BBC has started to launch subscription channels for special interest groups” (Golding & Murdock 2000:76).

The commercialisation of public broadcasting has lead to a situation where public broadcasters, in their desperate search for advertising and sponsorship, have been forced to mimic the programming trends of commercial broadcasters. (Nyamnjoh, 2003; Kupe, 2003) That is, they, too, have started to adopt “well-tested formulas and formats” anchored in “common-sense rather than alternative viewpoints”. As a result, the overall diversity of views and opinions across the media landscape has contracted. There has been a convergence towards the middle ground. (McChesney, 2004; Einstein, 2004).

Finally, there have been shifts in the *role of government and state intervention*. As Golding and Murdock (2000) claim, despite the fact that states in capitalist societies have started to pull back from funding public service media, ironically they have assumed a greater role in managing communicative activity – and not necessarily in the public interest (see also Keane, 1992). Critical political economists of the media claim that

governments have started to intervene more frequently in the decisions taken by public broadcasters. For instance, Golding and Murdock (2000) point to increased public attacks on the BBC as regards the impartiality of its news. And the British government's interventionist role has intensified with the Bush-Blair "war on terror" (McChesney, 2004).[9]

Further, ironically given free market liberals' proclaimed fear of state intervention, governments and the commercial media have become increasingly intertwined. Curran (2000:123) argues:

> Media organizations are in general more profit-orientated, have more extensive economic interests and have more to gain from business friendly government. In turn governments are now more in need of government-friendly media because they have to woo and retain mass electoral support.

In this situation the corporate media are encouraged/induced to focus on entertainment, to turn a blind eye to state incompetence, lack of service delivery, corruption – and even human rights abuses (Keane, 1992; McChesney, 1998, 1999, 2004; Curran, 2000; Bagdikian, 2004). Diversity, particularly of critical political, social and economic opinion, has substantially contracted.

In conclusion then the critical political economy of the media approach points to a number of flaws in commercially-driven media systems. Critical political economists of the media argue that commercially driven free market media do not represent the plurality and diversity of different voices and opinions in society in an unproblematic way. Generally, free market media operate in oligopolistic fashion, limit the entry of new publications, radio and television channels, and exclude as consumers those who are minorities, and particularly those who are poor. (The problem is that advertisers are not interested in these groupings.) In terms of content issues, free market media in the main exclude marginal, anti-consumerist and anti-establishment views. Programming gravitates to safe, centrist, mass-appeal themes. Finally, critical political economists point to the fact that public service media has also started to adopt commercial values. It, too, has started to move away from its original commitments to serving all views, languages groups, geographical areas, and so forth. It too has started to adopt populist, human interest,

[9] The BBC came under sustained attack at the Hutton Commission of Inquiry (2003). BBC journalists were accused of operating unprofessionally when they claimed that government had "sexed up" a report on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

entertainment values

2.3.2.3 A critical political economy media diversity and development blueprint

A central problem for critical political economy of the media theorists has been the issue of determining what media system would be more democratic than that provided by the market (McChesney, 1998). The alternatives for much of the twentieth century were the state-controlled media systems in communist countries. However, these systems were "singularly unattractive from a democratic perspective" (McChesney, 1998:9). Critical political economy of the media theorists, therefore, turned to the ideas of scholars such as C. Wright Mills and Jurgen Habermas. In particular, Habermas's notion of the "public sphere" – meaning a place where "citizens interact, a place that is controlled by neither business nor the state – was seen as attractive. (McChesney, 1998: 9) This notion of the public sphere has provided a useful operating principle for democratic media. McChesney (1998: 9) argues:

> Following this logic, the policy trajectory of much political economy research in communications is to establish a well funded non-profit, non-commercial communications sector that is decentralized and controlled in democratic fashion.

McChesney (1998) argues that even if on principle one aspires to remove communications as far as possible from the capital accumulation process, there are many ways to do this. Ideally, he claims, it should be done through public debate. He argues that critical political economists should "develop models for democratic communications that emerge organically from its critique of the commercial media system" (McChesney, 1998:9).

Along these lines, the theorist James Curran has put forward a media development and diversity model. In constructing the model, Curran (2000: 140) argues that it is important to "break free from the assumption that the media are a single institution with a common democratic purpose". He argues instead that the media should be viewed as having different democratic functions within the system as a whole. "This calls for different kinds of structure and styles of journalism" (Curran, 2000:140). Curran's model embraces a core public service sector constituted by general-interest, mass-based television channels. The core sector is then fed by "peripheral media sectors that specifically

facilitate the expression of dissenting and minority views" (Curran, 2000:140). These sectors include civic,[10] social market,[11] and professional[12] sectors. A commercial media sector is also proposed as an important component.

This model is important in terms of highlighting a number of key issues critical for the deepening of diversity and development. First, the model calls for diversity at the systems level i.e. for a number of different media sectors. This is an important point. Second, Curran calls for a strong, developed, independent public service media sector with stable funding to be nurtured at the system's core. Curran argues there are several reasons for the public service media's centrality. These include the fact that, traditionally, public service television has been governed by fairness and access rules, it has promoted public information as a central objective, and has prioritised serving all citizens. (See also Nyamnjoh, 2003) Further, it has specifically prevented the creation of a group of second-class citizens excluded by price. Curran (2000: 141) argues that to protect this sector from government control the following needs to be implemented: "independent funding through a license fee, a block on unmediated government appointments to broadcasting authorities, the dispersal of power within broadcasting organizations, and a climate of freedom supported by a written constitution". Third, Curran's model prioritises subsidies. Community media and small commercial media sectors require subsidies to survive and thrive.

Finally, the model does see an important role for a commercial media sector. Curran argues that this sector is important because it ensures that the media system as a whole is more responsive to popular pleasures and that it balances centrist and left voices by covering more right-wing perspectives. However, contrary to free market liberal perspectives, Curran does see a role for government intervention. He sees an important place for anti-monopoly legislation to ensure robust competition. He calls for the fostering of greater devolution of power within commercial media corporations in order to shield journalists from compromising corporate interests, and from the "pressures for

[10] The civic media sector supports organisations that are the "life force of democracy" These include political parties, trade unions, new social movements, interest groups, and sub-cultural networks (e.g. gay and lesbian groupings) (Curran, 2000: 141)

[11] The social market sector takes the form of minority commercial media, operating within the market, and supported by the state. The European press subsidy scheme is the model for this sector.

[12] The professional media sector is composed of media that are the under the control of professional communicators, or organised in a form that gives staff maximum freedom. The sector should be publicly funded but free of public service requirements.

uniformity generated by concentration of ownership" (Curran, 2000:142).

2.4 Conclusion

Although the liberal pluralist perspective does have some interesting insights – for example, highlighting certain problems regarding government intervention – the critical political economy of the media approach offers a richer and more substantive critical framework. If we look back at the diversity and development definitions discussed at the beginning of the chapter, it is interesting to note that the critical political economy of the media perspective in fact engages more rigorously with the definitions put forward by Napoli and by Einstein. To recap, Napoli's three broad categories included source diversity, content diversity and exposure diversity.

A liberal pluralist perspective (particularly its free market liberal strand) would leave the creation of diversity, at all these levels, up to the market. A social market strand would call for some state intervention at the level of source diversity. This would include anti-monopoly legislation, employment quotas to ensure diversity in the workforce, and so on. In terms of content diversity, social market liberals might – if pushed – call for interventions regarding format-programme diversity but would generally shy away from enforcing demographic diversity and certainly would be fearful of enforcing idea diversity. The hope would be that if a diversity of outlets, staffed by a diversity of people, existed then a diversity of content would be the outcome.

However, a critical political economy of the media perspective would not assume this. Critical political economists would look directly at the issue of political and economic structures and their impact on the generation of content. To remedy inequalities, they would look at various strategies such as anti-monopoly regulations, state subsidies to struggling media sectors, local content quotas (particularly in terms of developing world countries flooded with developed world content) and so on. Further, critical political economists of the media would strongly support a non-commodified, citizenship-oriented, inclusive public service media sector.

Finally, in terms of exposure diversity, liberal pluralists would focus more on the *numbers* of people watching programmes and reading publications. Critical political economists of the media would tend to analyse the *characteristics* of these citizens and

the impact of their “unequal command over material resources” for their reading and viewing patterns – and most importantly they would be concerned about what could be done to remedy it (Golding & Murdock, 2000:72).

One final point is important. Original South African media development and diversity definitions fell squarely within a critical political economy of the media model. However, seemingly subtle shifts in definitions and approaches moved media development and diversity thinking towards a more liberal pluralist perspective. The concern was more about developing a plurality of media entities owned by a plurality of owners than on ensuring an actual diversity of views. The chapters that follow will explore why this new approach was adopted and its implications.