CONSTRUCTING OTHERNESS:
SOCIALLY EMBEDDED MECHANISMS OF CREATING AND SUSTAINING STEREOTYPES AND PREJUDICES IN THE MEDIA.
THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSE: Negative stereotypes and prejudices towards stigmatised social Others have always existed in macrosocial discourses, created and proliferated by popular narratives, macrosocial institutions and scientific discourses. The invention of the mass media provided an optimised version of the previous mechanism for their mainstreaming and enhanced processes of marginalisation, stigmatisation and social exclusion. The paper aims to propose an analytical framework for the analysis of media stereotypes and construction of the image of the Other. METHODS discuss a possible synergy between Discourse Studies, Critical Media Political Economy and Critical Media Cultural Studies for deconstructing media stereotypes, analysing language, the social context and socially embedded relations of ideological and economic power. RESULTS focus on the mechanisms of Othering, involving different theories of prejudice, stereotyping and stigmatisation, as means and strategies of justification, as well as how they relate to media ownership and socio-economic performance. CONCLUSIONS further advance the proposed theoretical synergy and its possible application to fill in certain gaps in Economic Sociology.

Key words: Othering, negative media stereotypes, prejudices, theoretical synergy, Discourse Studies, Critical Media Political Economy, Critical Media Cultural Studies.

INTRODUCTION

Prejudices and stereotypes towards stigmatised social Others have always existed in macrosocial discourses. Different popular narratives, the oral tradition of the majority and religion were the traditional sources and channels for the proliferation and legitimation of the negative image of various social groups stigmatised as "Others" throughout history. Nevertheless, as a concept, stereotypes are a product of modernity and developed as a response to many of its problems (1). The advent of the modern nation state facilitated such processes, applying different means of discipline, classification and control, representing the Foucauldian knowledge/power nexus (2). In more recent history, the invention of the mass media provided an improved and optimised version of the previous technologies of power for mainstreaming and enhancing already existing prejudices and stereotypes, legitimising processes of marginalisation, stigmatisation and social exclusion. The media became the terrain for struggle over different meanings for articulating and constituting Otherness in new historical contexts.

The paper aims to propose an analytical framework for deconstructing the power of the media in constituting the image of the Other. An argument will be made for the need to create a synergy between Discourse Theory, Critical Media Cultural Studies and Critical Media Political Economy to study processes of stereotyping and Othering in the media. This involves analysis on the one hand (2), of the nexus between language, knowledge and power in the epistemological tradition, of the articulation of particular meanings, contradictions and hegemonic effects in Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory (3, 4), and on the

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other, as suggested by Hall (5), of the "social forces" and the historical context, which further implies the functioning of the mass media as important institutions in the capitalist economy. Therefore, the main argument that will be sustained is that the negative media representation of Otherness in discursive terms should not be taken in isolation from the socio-historical, political and economic contexts and practices of media production, from the institutional setting and relations between institutions and different actors, as well as from audience reception, but studied as embedded in social structure. Despite the existence of certain obstacles regarding different epistemological positions, the proposed synergy will be viewed as providing working critical arguments at most levels of analysis. The poststructuralist concept of articulation, for instance, is treated as a means of avoiding interpretations in strictly deterministic or reductionist terms (6), deconstructing power relations.

The article will present first the different theoretical stands of the proposed methodological synergy and their application in existing research. Next, the mechanisms of Othering will be discussed critically through different theories of stereotyping and stigmatisation, analysing the strategies of justification and the way articulated meanings can be further related to media institutional practices, ownership and socio-economic performance. Finally, the conclusion will further advance the proposed theoretical synergy and its possible application to fill in certain gaps in Economic Sociology.

METHODS
TOWARDS A THEORETICAL SYNERGY
Discourse Studies: Laclau and Mouffe's Poststructuralist Theory
Interpretative methods in sociology argue that the world is only knowable through language, which organises the power/knowledge nexus (7). The epistemic approach presupposes that phenomena are treated not as they are, but as they have been produced discursively (7). In such terms, poststructuralist discourse analysis can be defined as: "an epistemological system by which subjects and objects are produced" (7). Poststructuralism helps to look at locally produced meanings in a broader aspect, in other words, to situate them in a specific historical context in terms of power (7). It is a specific way of seeing; a "filter" or rules for what can be uttered and accepted, produced by discursive

practices (7). The subject for poststructuralists is decentred, meaning that it is a discursive category, (rather than a person), a product of experience, or "an expression, embodiment, reification of social processes and structures" (8) The subject position is not a personal position, but can be occupied by different individuals under certain conditions through interpellation, according to Louis Althusser, involving both "a process of ideological coercion and personal identification" (8).

A particular understanding of articulation in poststrucruralist analysis is related to its treatment as "a sign to avoid reduction" (Chen 1994 in 6). Laclau and Mouffe define (3) articulation as "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. Therefore, discourse is for them a structured totality, being the result of articulation (3). By comparison, articulation, as understood by Stuart Hall, is "unity in difference" (5), providing a link "between the articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, (but need not necessarily), be connected" (5). Politically, articulation is related to power and structures of domination and subordination, while epistemologically, to a play of "correspondences, non-correspondences and contradictions," elements that constitute unities (6).

The practice of deconstruction, following Laclau and Mouffe (3), can start with the identification of certain common nodal points serving as key signifiers in the organisation of discourse; of chains of equivalence (concepts concerning individual and group identity representation), and concepts for conflict analysis (the presence of floating signifiers, antagonism and hegemony) (4). Floating signifiers can be defined as "signs that different discourses struggle to invest with meaning in their own particular way" (4). Social antagonism, on the other hand, occurs when different identities collide and exclude one another, requiring hegemonic intervention to reconstitute unambiguity by force, achieving fixation across contradictory discourses (4).The intention of the whole practice is to unravel the constant struggles over meaning of different discourses and their attempt to fix a particular view of society and identity (4) that looks natural and convincing. This also presupposes analysis of the *field of discursivity,* the

exclusion of all other possible meanings that the sign could have had in its relation to other signs in order to create a unified system of meaning (4).

Stereotyping as a process works through the discursive representation of collective identities, which can be analysed as constituted by the effects of power (9), embedded in particular social relations and historical contexts. The degree of fixity, homogenisation and naturalisation, presupposed by the nature of stereotypes (1), can be deconstructed by applying discourse theory, namely Laclau and Mouffe's poststructuralist analysis. Stereotypes can be related to an ideology and a hegemonic order (10, 11). For Laclau and Mouffe, when particular articulations and nodal points start to obtain social dominance, this can be defined as hegemony (12) that forms social consensus. The identities constituted by them politically form a "common project" and hegemony serves to stabilise nodal points with the purpose of providing social order (12).

Poststructuralist theory, especially when applied to media practices, has been blamed for uncritically ignoring the material, extra-discursive nature of power relations and social injustice (13). On the other hand, discourse theory has attempted to stay away from reductionist and deterministic approaches in the political economy field. Stereotypical representations, when produced by particular media or media networks, can be seen as socially and institutionally embedded, associated with certain techniques of power and legitimised by the overall system. Therefore, it is suggested, that from a poststructuralist perspective, we can study stereotypical representations as institutionally embedded, laying particular emphasis on the effects produced by them (e.g. justification and naturalisation). Foucault, for instance, advises to start analysis from the micro-physics of power, study the mechanisms and techniques of power, and consider further the way they provide economic and political advantage to certain elites or institutions, or eventually correspond to particular class interests in non-reductionist terms (14). It should be made clear that for Foucault (and similarly for Laclau and Mouffe) (4), power is not to be analysed in a descending order, neither as related to institutions and classes that subordinate individuals, nor to an overall system of domination (14). It is not something possessed or exercised, but productive, constituting the social (4). Quite on the contrary, Lincoln Dahlberg (15) maintains that "discourse theory should not abandon a political economy analysis". For him, "a radical political economy critique of global capitalism, and the media-communication systems supporting it, is very much needed to support critical analysis of how global exploitation is taking place and how counter-hegemonic contestation may be possible" (15). Robert Babe also considers that "reintegrating cultural studies and political economy is of some urgency", referring to deficiencies related to its discursive turn (13). Therefore, the proposed theoretical synergy between Discourse Theory, Critical Media Political Economy and Critical Media Cultural Studies, although overtly rather oppositional and contradictory in nature, can fill the existing gaps in the analysis of various aspects of power/knowledge in media studies. A socially embedded context-specific approach can further account for: the role played by media institutions and significant actors in the network society; for the institutional context in which the media operate, (i.e. the functioning of the judiciary, the application of the rule of law, and etc.); for existing media relations (including those with politics and ideology); for the level of freedom and democratisation of society and articulate the media in general as key institutions in consumer society and the neoliberal capitalist economy.

Critical Media Political Economy and Critical Media Cultural Studies
Critical Media Political Economy is predominantly a Marxist-influenced approach defined by Mosco as "the study of the social relations, particularly power relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources" (Mosco, 1996 in 16). It is interested in history, capitalist enterprise, public intervention and in "moral questions of social justice, equity and the public good" (Golding and Murdock, 1991 in 16). Nicholas Garnham analyses the role of the media in the production of surplus value, exercising political and ideological power through the economic (Garnham 1979 in 16). Dallas Smythe, one of the key proponents of Media Political Economy, stresses the economic functioning of the media, the process of selling audiences to advertisers and their treatment as commodities (16). Further problems discussed by Media Political

Economy involve processes of commodification and commercialisation, media expansion and different forms of integration (horizontal, vertical and diagonal), market concentration and globalisation, as well as power relations with the state. Within radical functionalism, Herman and Chomsky expose power relations exercised through a decentralised informal media propaganda model serving the needs of particular elites in the US, while the work of Robert McChesney analyses the concentration and commercialisation of the US media, functioning in the global neoliberal capitalist economy and the way they undermine the quality of democracy. In British Cultural Studies, Graham Murdock, Peter Golding and James Curran study communications as industrial and commercial organisations involved in the production and distribution of commodities, following largely the critical tradition set by the Frankfurt School. Marxist approaches within Cultural Studies in general seek to establish the link between ownership, cultural content and media production (18). For Stevenson (18), the analysis of modern cultural forms needs to start from institutional structures of production, the "structured relations of power embedded within relations of ownership and control" and the impact of public and commercial institutions on discursive practices within particular historical contexts. The analysis of institutional practices combined with analysis of media content, bias and the discursive formation of identity is represented by the work of the Glasgow University Media Group (GUMG) and Stuart Hall (18). British Cultural Studies explores non-reductionist visions of Marxism, influenced mainly by the work of Althusser and Gramsci on ideology and hegemony, playing a central role in media discourse analysis. Poststructuralism, especially Laclau and Mouffe's theory, have served as major sources of inspiration in Stuart Hall's work and the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Hall's contribution to mass communications is related to the analysis of dominant discourses, as well as the limited range of meanings that media institutions provide as key ideological institutions of capitalism to maintain hegemonic consensus (18). Naturalisation and the common sense nature of ideology are seen as the effects of "reality", "objectivity" and "truthfulness" that they construct. Hall also stresses the plurality of audience interpretations based on their social background.

Similarly to media explorations in Britain, the French scholar Michele Mattelart (17) analyses Latin American *Telenovelas* and the production of women as audiences, their targeting by advertisers and audience battles between TV channels. She studies commercial factors, the functioning of the cultural industries and the ideological role performed by them in reaffirming the status quo.

Douglas Kellner developed Critical Media Cultural Studies in the United States in line with European developments to describe analysis related to texts, audiences, media industries, politics and socio-historical contextualisation (19). As a critical project, it deconstructs the role of the media as an impediment or advancing democracy, respectively either by reproducing reactionary discourses and different forms of prejudice, (such as racism, sexism, ageism, classism and etc.), or by promoting the interests of oppressed groups (19). For Kellner, the media produce texts that can be considered neither "vehicles of dominant ideology", nor innocent representations, but "complex artifacts" embodying social and political discourses that necessitate the analysis of their "embeddedness in the political economy, social relations and the political environment" (19). Media Cultural Studies in Kellner's view needs to analyse the production of media texts by particular institutions and the social relations of production, as well as audience reception, influenced by social relations and culture (19). The latter is understood further in terms of the material effects produced by media texts and culture on audiences, as well as the possibility of resistance and counter-hegemonic struggles (19). Critical media literacy is another term associated with Media Cultural Studies, related to misrepresentation and stereotyping, which disadvantage marginalised groups by dominant representations (20). Therefore, the naturalness of such representations needs to be questioned and their effects analysed, as they lead to subordination (20). Critical media literacy is an emancipatory project intending to "empower audiences through critical thinking" and challenge preferred dominant readings (20). In other words, it is a deconstructive process of the way media create and sustain dominant discourses, which involve understanding of the socio-economic, institutional and semiotic

production of misrepresentations and stereotyping, their ideological naturalisation in media discourse, as well as audience reception (20).

RESULTS
THE MECHANISMS OF OTHERING - THEORIES OF PREJUDICE, STEREOTYPING AND STIGMATISATION

The mechanisms of Othering are related to prejudiced and stereotypical misrepresentation of different identities. Researchers most frequently refer to Gordon Allport's classical psychological definition of prejudice as "antipathy based on faulty and inflexible generalisation" (21), which can be felt, expressed or directed towards an individual or a whole group. In contrast with the entirely negative character of prejudices, Allport defines a stereotype as a generalised (positive or negative) view of a group, which is a "culturally shared form of justification" that may often turn out to be false (21).

Categorisation, Simplification and Ordering of Reality

Stereotypes perform sense-making functions through classification and categorisation. The functioning of stereotypes and prejudices is related to complex process of group attribution, mechanisms of rationalisation and ideological justification in a particular context. Categorisation is central to understanding cognitive processes. In Chapter 12 entitled "Stereotypes in Our Culture", Allport explains categorisation as a fundamental process in human cognition underlying prejudice and stereotyping. Similarly, Tajfel (23) focuses on cognitive mechanisms of classification underlying group attributions, which help to identify and understand objects. They are seen as a means of "maximising cognitive efficiency" (22), making an easier and better picture of the world. Walter Lippmann, the American journalist, writer and intellectual, who is considered to have coined the term "stereotype", also defines its social function in a similar manner as a "'short cut' simplification of reality" (10). Nevertheless, sociologists are critical of such processes of normalising stereotypes as inherent to human cognition and beliefs (1). Neither are they supportive of theories that tend to pathologise stereotypes and associate them with marginal and deviant figures, deficient in education, or maintaining extreme beliefs, such as Nazi anti-Semitic attitudes (1). From a sociological point of view,

the particular ordering of reality by stereotypes is seen as power-ridden by social-constructivists. For Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (24) those occupying dominant social positions have more resources to impose a particular vision of reality, which is a simplified form of representation, easy to grasp and comprehend (10).

Stereotypes, Boundaries, and Group Formation

The principles of classification and attribution are related to social comparison, group and identity formation. Henry Tajfel's social identity theory emphasises the role of social cognition and the formation of group identity by means of attributing certain stereotypical characteristics to out-group members (25). He proposes that groups give identity to individual members. In a world divided into "us" and "them" members of social groups tend to boost their self-image by increasing the status of the group they belong to and discriminate against other groups (25). Stereotyping, is therefore, perceived as a normal process of classification based on cognitive tendencies to group things together, during which we tend to exaggerate attributed qualities of in- and out-groups (25).The problem with such theories, however, is that they tend to normalise stereotyping as a natural process in group formation, seen as "cognitively universal", rather than lead to the understanding that it is namely the process of stereotyping that naturalises and universalises group identities (1).

Means and Strategies of Justification

Stereotypes apply cognitive and ideological means of justification to legitimise different forms of knowledge. They may direct the attention to particular issues, "colour" the provided information through the process of interpretation and influence processes of retaining this information in memory (22). Stereotypes shape individual judgments and future actions and serve as favoured and tested hypotheses in the interpretation of new information, since they can elicit the same behaviour from the target person, which confirms biased expectations (22). The mechanisms of rationalisation and justification of stereotypes may vary according to the degrees of proximity, similarity or interaction with the group. Allport himself stresses the strong rationalising and justifying function of stereotypes, rather than their mere reflection of group attributes (22).

The tendency to ascribe particular attributes and perceive certain social groups (especially ethnic or racial ones) as a natural kind, i.e. to essentialise ethnic differences, are typical of processes of categorisation (22), especially applied by primordialists, who see them as unchangeable and persistent through history. Processes of essentialising group attributes facilitate inferencing, the making of "sweeping generalisations" and the creation of "intuitive theories" (22). They make way for easy explanation of differences and justification in terms of access to meaningful resources and opportunities (22). Stereotypes may further serve to justify and explain not only individual or group, but also institutional forms of prejudice on the basis of which particular members can be accepted or rejected. The justificatory function of stereotypes and prejudices may expand well beyond the micro level. Jost and Hamilton, for example elaborate on Allport's psychological contribution and his followers by adding certain structural elements in the discussion on prejudices, such as the maintenance of systems of social inequality and preserving the status quo. For them, "[t]he overwhelming effect of both categorisation and justification processes is that the existing forms of inequality tend to be reinforced and perpetuated" (22). The process of justification is seen as working on three levels (25): as a means of "ego justification", "group justification" and "system justification." "Ego-justification" is related to individual or group's need to feel good about them, while derogating others and boosting their self-esteem. The second one, of "group justification", is the one developed by Tajfel, which has a function of legitimising actions directed at others and may serve to rationalise discrimination against out-group members, while providing a sense of in-group positive feelings and distinctiveness (22). Finally, "system-justification" is a function seeking to justify the existing *status-quo* (i.e. capitalism, apartheid, patriarchy, etc.). For Jost and Banaji (25), the function of stereotypes in such cases legitimises particular institutional forms of discrimination and rationalises prejudicial ideologies. Essentialism is seen as having the strongest "system justification" function, providing legitimacy to particular ideologies, such as patriotism, nationalism, or social dominance, aiming to justify a group's superior or inferior position in society (22).

Critical Social Theories on Stereotypical Representations

Problems with early definitions of stereotyping, such as their pathologisation, or uncritical association with ordinary cognitive processes and processing of information in late-20th century psychology, need to be offset, since they lead to their normalisation (1). Critical social theories relate processes of stereotyping to power relations and interpret them as ideological forms of representation (1). They perform hegemonic function in system justification and the maintenance of social inequality. Following Gramsci's understanding of ideology, it can have a common sense component (e.g. the stereotype that "Gypsies are good at music"), but could also be developed as a particular philosophy that is part of a coherent system (e.g. 19th century ideas about "race" or Nazi "race" ideology), or belong to a dominant or hegemonic ideology (e.g. racism), when it legitimates social division in society (11). By connecting all three elements, as they are frequently related in reality, we could trace the making of a common-sense racist remark within the context of well-accepted racist philosophies and racism as a hegemonic ideology (11). Therefore, within this theoretical framework, we could study the way stereotypes operate in a hegemonic order and create consensus about certain values and social groups (10). Racial and ethnic stereotypes, as part of racist discourses, construct different subject positions of dependence or resistance which rely on the 'fixity', easy proliferation and the ideological construction of Otherness, providing veracity and probabilistic truth (27). Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory can account for such processes of naturalisation and fixation of meaning, creating hegemonic effects through articulation.

Critical Media Theory and Discourse Theoretical Radical Political Economy

In what ways are stereotypical representations embedded in media production in a political and economic sense in the global capitalist economy? The way the media perform discursively, the technologies of power employed by them, may serve to utilise particular economic and political interests, as noted by Foucault (14), which are embedded in institutional relations and market performance. Tabloidisation, for example, or clickbait journalism, with their emphasis on sensationalism, have direct reference to

boosting circulation figures, increase programme ratings, website traffic and media market share. The effects of media economic performance are also seen in the way they target mass, usually undifferentiated audiences with popular (usually global) media genres to attract advertisers, such as reality formats and soap operas, affecting quality and diversity. The pressure from media owners, especially when not transparent, editorial control, or from other sources of media funding, on the other hand, results in self-censorship among media professionals and relates directly to the freedom of speech. This means that a journalistic discourse within such an institutional setting may perform hegemonic effects. The articulation (also of stereotypes), can be related to media preferred institutional encoding, while different ways of decoding media content reflect embedded audience structural positions, allowing for th**e** floating of the signifier. Media expansion and convergence, nevertheless, are known to affect pluralism, diversity and the freedom of speech, i.e. providing for more stagnant meaning fixations of stereotypical representations across different discourses. This overtly serves to promote negative stereotypes, limit or exclude alternative interpretations and counter-hegemonic narratives. When organised by a particular ideology or in the guise of "scientific" discourse, embedded in institutional settings and supported by authorities, negative stereotypical articulations may serve to legitimise the marginalisation, segregation and the social exclusion of stigmatised social groups. Such groups are often turned into surrogate victims for the existing social and moral troubles created by the crisis of modernity, an example set for the majority (1) (28). If projected on certain internal Others, stereotypes may serve to legitimise institutional or state policies, or conceal existing structural inequalities, treating them as scapegoats for the existing systemic crises and deficiencies. This directs the attention to applying a synergy of discourse theory and political economy, not juxtaposed as "enemies", but in the suggested discourse theoretical radical political economy by Dahlberg and Phelan (15), intended to provide "a means by which to understand how media practices not only contribute to the hegemonic understanding of the economy and the advancement of capitalism, but also support the contestations of such hegemony." Additionally, it "can show how media practices are themselves resourced, legitimated, and

institutionally organised through hegemonic conceptualisations of their role in society and the economy" (15). By such means, the proposed discourse theoretical radical political economy by Dahlberg, can serve to deconstruct systemic legitimation through media practices and institutions, but also explain systemic failure and conceal existing social inequality by scapegoating those not fitting well the neoliberal frame. The very act of such deconstruction can be conceived as an act of resistance, allowing for the inclusion of the stigmatised and for producing new forms of disarticulation.

CONCLUSION
The paper had as its objective to propose an analytical framework for deconstructing the power of the media in constituting the image of the Other. A theoretical synergy was proposed for this end between Discourse Theory (Laclau and Mouffe's poststructuralism), Critical Media Cultural Studies and Critical Media Political Economy. Alternatively, it foregrounded Dahlberg and Phelan's discourse theoretical radical political economy as a means of deconstructing the discursive articulation of the economy and of capitalism, situating the media as providing hegemonic legitimacy of the system and concealing social inequality by stigmatising and scapegoating certain socially vulnerable groups, projecting on them the existential fears and anxieties of the majority. This serves consensus purposes to release social tensions and divert attention from the crisis of late modernity. As a sociological method applied to deconstruct the functioning of the economy and capitalism, such analysis may add fruitful contribution to the existing "gaps" in Economic Sociology (29), directing the attention to previously undermined aspects of social inequality, precarity, stigmatisation and processes of racialisation within a system of racial capitalism. This is in line with Laclau and Mouffe's radical imaginary and Dahlberg and Phelan's view that "media practices not only contribute to the hegemonic understanding of the economy and the advancement of capitalism, but also support the contestations of such hegemony" (15), leading to "counter-hegemonic economic formations [and] the "extension of democracy to economic relations", "rearticulating capitalism by such means (15). Stereotyping and stigmatisation presuppose domination and subordination and the application of different technologies of

power, which, however, can turn emancipatory if exposed as embedded in social relations and systemic functioning, disarticulating stigma and allowing for the free floating of the signifier and its new positive resignification.

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