Chapter 12
Articulations and Rearticulations:
Antagonisms of Media Reform in Africa

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ABSTRACT

The adoption of western models of journalism is a hallmark of media democratization movements in post-conflict, transitional or developing nations. However, media strengthening programs have received wide criticism from critical development scholars. This chapter interrogates the assumptions that underlie media development projects in Africa, which work to establish or reform journalism practices, by drawing on a case study of media strengthening in Rwanda. Drawing on discourse theory, it maps the discursive field that forms the basis for international assistance to build media capacity in developing and post-conflict regions. It also highlights the ways dominant development models are resisted in and through discourse, thereby drawing attention to the fluid and contingent operations of power that manifest in such institutionalized sites of knowledge production.

INTRODUCTION

The adoption of western models of journalism is a hallmark of media democratization movements in post-conflict, transitional or developing nations. In the summer of 2007, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) introduced its new *Model Curricula for Journalism Education for Developing Countries and Emerging Democracies* at the World Journalism Educators Congress (UNESCO, 2007a). The model curricula serve to provide a guide for implementing journalism education pro-

grams in economically impoverished or politically unstable regions. Such programs, which are often institutionalized in formal journalism and mass communications programs at the university level, are premised upon one of the fundamental assumptions underwriting western journalism: a vibrant media system is the key to a robust civil society and is fundamental to wider political democratization. In so-called developing or transitional regions, the progression toward democratic forms of government is linked to the ability of the media to provide objective and credible information to the people who will then make informed choices

on policies that affect public life. As such, building and reforming national media systems through the development of standards of journalistic practice and communications policies related to freedom of expression is considered a key component in wider efforts to build democratic capacity.

Media education and reform projects in Sub-Saharan Africa, many of which explicitly rely upon, or at least gain legitimacy from, UNESCO's recommendations, have received an array of criticisms. The most salient critiques derive from critical development theory (Escobar, 1995; Ferguson, 1994), which purports that such projects assert modernization perspectives of development, and related theories that question the applicability of normative media models derived from western socio-historical contexts to African countries (Kasoma, 1996; Shah, 1996; Banda, 2009; Murphy and Scotton, 1987). Another line of criticism, one that has gained less currency in the academic literature and is often marginalized by studies that focus on evaluating the potential feasibility of journalism reform projects in Africa, focuses on the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of such projects. This critique derives from discourse theory and attempts to articulate the following questions: What are the epistemes (Foucault, 1970) that form the basis for intervention in national media systems by external donors and international organizations? Which interpretations of the social world are privileged? What alternative interpretations are marginalized? Where is power located and, more importantly, how is it resisted or challenged?

This chapter will interrogate the assumptions that underlie media development projects in Africa, which work to establish or reform journalism practices, by drawing on a case study of media strengthening in Rwanda. It does not aim to provide an evaluation of the feasibility of such programs, or to determine whether is it appropriate for outside actors to contribute to reforming the media sector in countries where press freedom still faces great challenges. Rather, its purpose is

to map the discursive field that forms the basis for international assistance to build media capacity in developing and post-conflict regions, and to outline the ways dominant development models are resisted, in order to draw attention to the fluid and contingent operations of power that manifest in such institutionalized sites of knowledge production.[1] This chapter draws on critical discourse analysis and related theories that focus on the discursive production and reproduction of power and knowledge. Specifically, it relies on Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) "confrontational strategy" to examine the antagonistic relations between dominant or hegemonic discourses, such as the one UNESCO provides, and alternative or counter-hegemonic models to explicate the ways power is created and assured, as well as reformed and contested in socially mediated texts. The discourse theories of Laclau and Mouffe, Howarth, Fairclough and Foucault in combination with literature that focuses on media development, media democratization and alternative media (Downing, 2001; Rodriguez, 2005; Carroll and Hackett, 2006; Howley, 2009), are drawn upon to provide a close reading of the dominant media development models promoted by the UNESCO document and to contrast it with alternative media models and journalistic reform movements. While there are a number of alternative media models, including development/emancipatory journalism, the focus here is on the participatory-democratic model (Carpentier, 2001) advocated for in community or citizens media movements. The following analysis will put two different types of text into confrontation with one another–A *Rwanda Media Strengthening Program* (2009) request For applications, project proposal and work plan produced by the International Exchange and Research Board (IREX) and funded by USAID, and declarations on media reform produced by organizations promoting alternative media development in Africa, such as The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), Search for Common Ground (SFCG) and Communication

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