Radio Listening Habits among Rural Audiences: An Ethnographic Study of Kieni West Division in Central Kenya

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This dissertation titled
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ABSTRACT

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In the 1990s, the liberalization of the media industry in African countries such as Kenya was faced with the challenge of continuing to provide much-needed information to the African population. One segment of particular interest in Kenya was the rural audience that makes up 80% of the country’s population. This is a research on the role of radio in rural listeners’ everyday lives within a liberalized media environment. Using the media ethnography method, I examined the radio consumption habits of rural people of the Kieni West Division, Nyeri District, Kenya. How do they choose content from the stations that are available? What type of content do they seek and how does this relate to their daily lives? Data was collected using interviewing, focus-group discussions and observation methods. In addition, documents relating to radio broadcasting in Kenya were analyzed.

This research found that radio is the most important and accessible medium in Kieni West and that vernacular radio stations are the most preferred ones. Kieni West listeners use radio to obtain information about what is happening locally and beyond. They use radio to access information on health and agriculture. In addition, listeners rely on radio for social interactions, civic engagement, and as a platform where they can take some of their problems and seek solutions. This research concludes that media liberalization and commercialization of radio in Kenya has led to a number of outcomes.
to rural listeners. These include emergence of a competitive radio industry that provides multiple outlets and a wide variety of content from which people can choose. Secondly, the rise of vernacular radio stations has provided access to broadcasting in various local languages which allows for diverse content to a wide section of the population. Vernacular stations demonstrate sensitivity to the needs of rural audiences and therefore higher acceptance.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: THE KENYAN MEDIA INDUSTRY</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road to research and the challenges</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The challenge of choosing the topic in a changing media and political environment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiating the term “vernacular”</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An overview of radio in Kenya</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcasting media in Kenya: A historical perspective</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of media in Kenya from 1927-1990</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The print media</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is radio relevant?</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of the study</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the problem</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research questions</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classifying radio in Kenya</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification based on broadcasting philosophy and funding: Public, commercial, and community radio</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State-controlled public service radio stations</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Commercial radio stations .................................................................................... 32
Community radio stations ..................................................................................... 34
Classification using language: Mainstream and vernacular stations .................... 36
Mainstream radio stations ..................................................................................... 36
Vernacular radio stations ...................................................................................... 37
Classification by reach: National and regional stations ............................................ 39
  National radio stations .......................................................................................... 39
  Regional stations ................................................................................................... 40
Classification based on content: Split, religious, and entertainment/music programmers ............................................................................................................. 41
  Split programmers ................................................................................................. 41
  Religious programmers ......................................................................................... 42
  Entertainment/ Music programmers ..................................................................... 42
Chapters Summary ........................................................................................................ 45
CHAPTER TWO: UNDERSTANDING RURAL RADIO LISTENERS ......................... 48
  Audience ethnography research in African settings ............................................. 48
  Language use and media in Kenya ........................................................................ 56
  Mapping Kenya rural areas economic and social conditions .............................. 63
  Application of mass media in the developing world .......................................... 68
  Information communication technologies access in the rural settings ............. 72
  Chapter Summary .................................................................................................... 74
CHAPTER THREE: DOING AUDIENCE ETHNOGRAPHY IN KIENI WEST .......... 77
  Audience ethnography method .......................................................................... 77
Data Collection ............................................................................................................. 81

The Research Site: Kieni West Division ................................................................. 83

The people of Kieni West ......................................................................................... 86

Researcher’s position in the field ............................................................................ 93

The research assistants as co-researchers ............................................................ 104

Specific Data Collection Methods ............................................................................ 107

Questionnaires ......................................................................................................... 107

Interviews .................................................................................................................. 109

Semi-structured preliminary interviews .............................................................. 110

Semi-structured conversational interviews ......................................................... 111

In-depth interviews ............................................................................................... 113

Observational methods .......................................................................................... 115

Focused group discussions .................................................................................... 117

Document analysis ................................................................................................ 120

Chapter Summary .................................................................................................... 122

CHAPTER FOUR: THE ROLE OF RADIO IN LISTENERS’ EVERYDAY LIFE .... 124

Radio as a source of information and education .................................................. 125

Farming Information .............................................................................................. 131

Health Information ................................................................................................ 136

Radio and companionship ..................................................................................... 138

Radio as a social platform ...................................................................................... 144

Radio for civic engagement .................................................................................... 160

Radio and problem solving .................................................................................. 164
Chapter Summary .............................................................................................................. 167

CHAPTER FIVE: RADIO PROGRAMMING FORMAT AND CONTENT AND AUDIENCE LISTENING HABITS ...................................................................................................................... 170

Broadcasting format and content ...................................................................................... 170

The traditional broadcasting format .............................................................................. 171

The vernacular broadcasting format .............................................................................. 175

The urban broadcasting format ...................................................................................... 176

Audience listening habits ............................................................................................... 179

Content and program choices among listeners .............................................................. 185

News ............................................................................................................................ 186

Humor ........................................................................................................................ 188

Religion ....................................................................................................................... 190

Listening trends among Kieni West audiences in relation to Central Kenya region .. 193

Chapter summary ........................................................................................................... 200

CHAPTER SIX: RADIO LISTENING IN KIENI WEST AND LANGUAGE OF BROADCASTING ................................................................................................................................. 202

Language and radio listening in Kieni West ................................................................. 202

Language as a determinant in radio listening ............................................................. 205

Diffusing language from the stations to the people ..................................................... 210

Getting the language right .......................................................................................... 214

Critiquing the language of the radio .......................................................................... 216

Chapter summary ........................................................................................................... 221

CHAPTER SEVEN: RADIO IN THE VILLAGE AND BEYOND ........................................ 223
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Newspaper readership in Kieni West .............................................................127
Table 2: Newspaper readership based on level of education........................................128
Table 3: Average time spent listening to the radio across gender .................................182
Table 4: Average time spent listening to the radio by different age groups .................183
Table 5: Average time spent listening to the radio by education level .........................185
Table 6: Selected radio stations reach in 2007 and 2008 ..............................................233
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>The political map of Kenya</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>A map of Kieni West and the three research sites</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>A radio vendor in Mweiga town</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Average weekday radio trends in Central Kenya 12:00am - 12:00pm</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Average weekday radio trends in Central Kenya 12:00pm - 12:00am</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>Average radio trends in Central Kenya Saturday 12:00 pm - 12:00 am</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>Average radio trends in Central Kenya Sunday 12:00 am - 12:00 pm</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE: THE KENYAN MEDIA INDUSTRY

Road to research and the challenges

Between March 2002 and June 2003, I was working with Population Communications International (PCI-Africa) as a Program Assistant. In one of our projects, we ran a popular radio soap-drama called *Ushikwapo Shikamana*, which addressed population issues in Kenya such as reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, human rights, and gender issues. The program was aired on the state-run Kenya Broadcasting Corporation and has enjoyed a very high rating for many years since its inception in 1998. We conducted quarterly field-monitoring research in various parts of the country. I did the groundwork by preceding the monitoring team in mobilizing people in different research sites for focus group discussions. My first four research assignments were very successful regardless of which part of the country we visited.

The genesis of this research goes back to March 2003 when I went ahead of the research team to lay the usual groundwork in the Eastern part of Kenya, an area from which we had consistently received positive feedback in the past. For the first time, my efforts to mobilize listeners had little success and in some areas were quite futile. In what became an awakening moment, I visited a section of Embu town in Embu district and did my usual inquiry and recruitment efforts. However, every mention of the program was followed by sharp criticism of KBC radio, the channel that ran our program. Listeners made it known to me that they no longer listened to the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) stations, which they associated with the dethroned ruling party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU). To these people, the party had not only overseen the impoverishing of their region but also the limiting of the democratic space. In 2002, a
new radio station, Radio Citizen became one of the new entrants in the broadcasting industry. In its programming, Radio Citizen tackled different issues including civic education. As a result, listeners moved away from the KBC Swahili service to the new station. At the same time, they associated any program that aired on KBC Swahili with the government, which had extensively used the stations for propaganda purposes. It did not matter that our program was politically neutral and very informative, not to mention having over five years of goodwill with the listeners.

Looking back at our failed mission, it is very clear that at PCI, we had been slow to notice the changing media scene in the country. More importantly, we failed to make the connection between different factors that affect radio listening in Kenya. Radio listening choices are made based on a myriad of factors such as the politics of the day, listeners’ social and economic positions, ethnic relations, and radio content. It was therefore imperative for us to rethink our choice of the medium if we wanted to continue to communicate with our target audience. Building from this, I have been interested in following the evolution of the radio industry in Kenya. This research has provided me with an opportunity to understand this evolution and contribute to the understanding of the radio industry in Kenya today.

The challenge of choosing the topic in a changing media and political environment

Of all the changes that have occurred in the Kenyan radio industry in the last 15 years, the emergence of vernacular radio stations has been one of the most radical. Vernacular stations have provided an important dimension of radio segmentation, exposing the inequalities that exist between different Kenyan communities and the accompanying dangers of ethnicity. What captured my initial attention was the
emergence of vernacular stations broadcasting in two major languages, the Kikuyu and the Luo languages. Incidentally, these two languages are spoken by communities that have traditionally led Kenya in the political, economic and social fronts. The Kikuyu language, however, has had more stations. After the inception of the first vernacular station, Kameme FM in 1998, two more Kikuyu stations followed suit paving the way for a competitive vernacular market in radio broadcasting. This in turn led to more attention being paid to the rural audience as they constitute the majority of local languages speakers.

My initial interest was to understand the reasons behind the lopsided vernacular broadcasting. I wanted to understand why the Kikuyu community had a well developed vernacular broadcasting system and how the competition both within and outside the language was sustained in a visible small population. As I prepared for my research, the radio industry was quickly changing and my pre-dissertation research established that between 2004 and 2006, seven additional vernacular languages were represented in broadcasting. My research dimension also changed and I set to develop a study that would look at four community case studies of vernacular broadcasting to understand their specific and general dynamics, especially among the rural listeners. As I prepared for this broad research late in 2007, the aftermath of a disputed general election in Kenya led to a spate of violence between different ethnic groups. My community, the Kikuyu, was one of the affected groups. Given my origins, it became both risky and difficult for me to do my fieldwork in other communities. Although Kenya as a nation made strides in an effort to reconcile different communities, it was clear that the situation on the ground will take some time to calm down. I was counseled to stay away from potentially risky
fieldwork. Despite this challenge, I was able to reformulate my research while maintaining the core foci of capturing vernacular radio broadcasting and the rural listeners.

The decision to conduct my fieldwork among the Kikuyu speakers was a blessing in disguise because it gave me an opportunity to extend my research depth. As a researcher, I got the opportunity to take more control of the research. In addition, I have been able to conduct my research in a language that my population understands. As a result, I have benefited immensely from my competency in the Kikuyu language and cultural fluency among the Kikuyu people. These set of skills have been central when interacting with my informants, analyzing local language content and in making interpretation of cultural behavior.

Negotiating the term “vernacular”

From the conception of this research, I have grappled with the use of the term “vernacular” to capture a category of African local languages that are used in radio broadcasting in Kenya. Many people have called attention to the possible “offensive” connotations associated with the term. In the African post-colonial discourse, the term “vernacular” can be viewed as derogatory given the way it has been used in the past, mainly to portray the African indigenous languages as inferior, crude, and underdeveloped. At one level, it embodies the antagonism between proponents of so-called “progressive” Western culture as opposed to “retrogressive and backward” African cultures. In Kenya, this is epitomized in the early revolt by some of the first Christian converts who had undergone missionary sponsored education in Central Kenya against the colonial and missionary education systems’ penchant for demeaning African cultures.
This group led by people like Harry Thuku and Jomo Kenyatta went ahead and established the African independent schools in the early 1930s. The African Independent Churches respected African culture and used the local Kikuyu language as the medium of instruction in their schools. With its roots in the colonial era, the term “vernacular” has in the consequent years acquired a popular usage in Kenya where it is used to refer to all other African indigenous languages distinguishing them from Swahili. Swahili holds a different position, partly because of it roots as a language that arose from the interaction between the East African Bantu communities and the Arabs. Also, Swahili has over the years risen to become Kenya’s lingua franca.

According to the *Barnhart dictionary of etymology*, the term vernacular dates back to 1601 from Latin word *vernāculus* which means “domestic” or “native”. Vernacular can also be derived from *verna* for “home-born slave” or “native”. The Latin adjective occurs in a wide variety of applications but the adjective in English is restricted to the use represented in Latin by *vernācula vocabula*, in reference to “native language”. A look at the etymology of the term does not assuage the disparaging nature of the term. The concept of “native language” as used in the colonial discourse carries the same undertones. As Waweru Mburu, the head of Radio Citizen noted during an interview, “French or German are not referred to as vernacular languages in France and Germany respectively”. Thus he wondered, “Why do we have to refer to African languages as vernacular?”

I therefore concur that the term “vernacular” is to an extent tainted but there is a value free of negative connotation which I employ in this research. In describing the languages that I refer to as “vernacular” in Kenya, the alternative terms that can be used
include local languages, indigenous languages or African languages. I have not used either of these terms for various reasons. First, these terms are loaded with ambiguities when used in broadcasting because this would include Swahili language. However, Swahili language occupies a different position in the country and broadcasting. As one of the national and official languages, Swahili is spoken all over the country while the other languages are only spoken in particular regions. Secondly, in practice, the term vernacular has already been widely used in the Kenyan media industry to specifically refer to other African languages indigenous to Kenya with the exception of Swahili that are used in radio broadcasting. The Steadman Group, the Kenyan media recognized research company that prepares quarterly monitoring reports, for instance uses the term “vernacular” in all their reports. What the widespread usage has done is to cleanse some of the negative connotations associated with the term “vernacular.” However, this does not mask the history of the term, which we should always remember.

In my view, sensitivity to terms such as vernacular is important given the state of the African languages today. In Kenya, forty-five years since the political decolonization, the project to “decolonize the mind” (Wa Thiongo, 1988) is far from over. In doing this research, I came across numerous instances where local languages were characterized as “old school” and boring. On the other hand, English in particular was characterized as modern and interesting especially by the young people. There is an attitude that leads some young people to belittle what is native to them and attempt to pursue that which is foreign and Western. In the same vein, a number of older people interviewed in this research expressed reservations on the cultural competence of the young generation and the need to increase cultural materials in broadcast media. It is therefore with great
restraint that I use the term vernacular in its cleansed form, fully aware of the existing positions.

An overview of radio in Kenya

Radio is the most popular mass medium in Kenya (Odhiambo, 2002) with radio stations broadcasting in assorted languages. Kenya has a three-tier broadcasting system that is comprised of public/state broadcasters, commercial broadcasters, and community radio. The multiple languages used in broadcasting affect the size of audience that broadcasters can possibly reach. Radio stations that broadcast in the two Kenyan official languages, Swahili and English, are called the mainstream broadcasters (Steadman, 2007). In addition to mainstream broadcasters, a number of other radio stations broadcast in local languages such as Kamba, Kikuyu, Kisii, Luo, and Luhya, referred to as vernacular languages. Vernacular languages are spoken by different sections of the Kenyan population who usually belong to the same ethnic group. As a result, vernacular stations are sometimes referred to as regional stations or local language stations.

Although Kenya has a long history of radio broadcasting that dates back to 1928 during the colonial period (Bourgault, 1995), full-fledged vernacular broadcasting is a relatively new phenomenon that only emerged in the last ten years. Despite the recent history, vernacular broadcasting has become an established and important component of the radio industry in Kenya today. The status of the radio industry in Kenya today represents a rapid departure from a state-controlled monopoly that existed until the early 1990s. As a result, there is little research on the current state of Kenya’s radio industry. This study addresses contemporary Kenyan radio broadcasting by examining radio consumption habits of the rural Kenyan audience. Using an audience ethnographic
approach, this study explores rural audiences’ radio listening habits and the role that vernacular radio plays in peoples’ daily lives among Kikuyu language speakers in Kieni West Division, Nyeri District in Central Kenya. The study also provides an update of the current broadcasting industry in Kenya building from the development of liberalized market and the competition that has followed the process.

Radio broadcasting plays an important role in peoples’ lives and is used for several primary purposes in Kenya. It gives people a sense of the world they live in. They use radio to get information and news on what is happening within their locality, region, country, and in the world in general. To some listeners, radio is a companion by providing different forms of entertainment and a discursive space about different issues that affect them both as individuals and as members of a group or community. It offers a forum where different voices can be heard (Scanell, 1996). Radio has the power of emancipation because it is a technically simple medium to master and is less expensive than other media. It allows people who are otherwise excluded from other forms of mainstream media such as print media, a channel to express their voice and a role to play in public discourse. Radio provides an opportunity for people to interpret the world on their own (Hendy, 2000; Hochheimer, 1993).

Broadcasting media in Kenya: A historical perspective

The British East African Company initiated the first radio broadcast services in Kenya back in 1927. This was only the second radio broadcasting service on the African continent after South Africa which had begun in 1920 (Bourgault, 1995). These broadcasts relayed the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) signals for the expatriate colonial community and followed news from their home country and other parts of the
world. During the second World War, the first radio broadcasts targeting Africans were initiated mainly to inform parents and relatives of African soldiers who were fighting on the British side what was happening on the war front, mostly in regions outside Africa such as Asia. In 1953, the first inclusive broadcast service that targeted the local Kenyan population, African Broadcasting Services (ABC) was created by the colonial administration. ABC started to air programs in major African languages that included Swahili, Luo, Kikuyu, Kinandi, Kiluhya, Kikamba and Arabic. In 1954, the Kenya Broadcasting Services (KBS) was established with regional stations in Mombasa (*Sauti ya Mvita*), Nyeri (Mount Kenya Station) and Kisumu (Lake Station). BBC world service started broadcasting in Swahili in 1957 (BBC, 2007).

In 1963, Kenya gained self-rule and the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) was formed by the new Kenyan administration led by the Prime Minister, Jomo Kenyatta, to take over broadcasting services from the state-controlled Kenya Broadcasting Services. KBC became the leading broadcaster in the country. In 1962, television was introduced in Kenya for the first time with a transmitting station set on a farmhouse in Limuru, twenty miles outside the capital, Nairobi. The new television station transmitted a radius of 15 miles (KBC, 2007). In 1964, the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation was nationalized and renamed the Voice of Kenya (VoK) through an Act of Parliament. In 1989, the VoK reverted back to Kenya Broadcasting Corporation through an Act of Parliament. As state-controlled bodies, VoK’s and KBC’s activities were very closely monitored and controlled by the government machinery. The VoK and the KBC were used as mouthpiece and propaganda tools for the government and the ruling party, Kenya African National Union (KANU) (Bourgault, 1995; Odhiambo, 2002). VoK/ KBC also
monopolized both radio and television. Radio broadcasted in two main languages, Swahili- the national language and English- the official language, as well as a host of local vernacular languages through the Central Station. Different languages were allocated hourly slots throughout the day in two-hour or four-hour sessions (Roberts, 1974; KBC, 2008). Television broadcasts on the other hand were exclusively in English and Swahili and remain so to date.

Changes in the broadcasting industry that began in the early 1990s saw Kenya move away from a dominant state-controlled public broadcasting model to a liberalized media market. In 1990, the first independent television station, the Kenya Television Network (KTN) started broadcasting. While radio is the most popular and accessible media form, ownership remained concentrated in government hands. Broadcasting was on AM frequencies until 1995 when FM frequencies were opened. In fact, a KBC subsidiary, Metro FM, was the first to hit the airwaves and was followed by privately owned Capital FM in 1995 and Nation FM in 1996. The Kenya Television Network (KTN) was established paving the way for private ownership in broadcast media. The new FM stations targeted the urban young population with music as the predominant content and broadcasted in English. The emergence of FM stations was revolutionary, in part because it marked the first signs of media freedom in broadcast media (Odhiambo, 2002). FM broadcasting also presented an opportunity for diversification of content in the plural Kenyan society. One area that needed to be addressed was the language used in broadcasting. The new FM stations were all in the English language, surpassing Swahili language broadcasting by far. Based on the Kenyan linguistic setting, radio delivery remained skewed because the predominant use of English provided many options to the
educated population who were comfortable with English. However, the majority of
Kenyans had fewer choices. At the same time, most of the new FM stations were
concentrated in the capital city, Nairobi, and relayed their services to a few major urban
areas. As a result, only a very small segment of audiences accessed them. The urban
centeredness led to an elitist approach by the new FM broadcasters where their content
targeted the youthful middle and upper class urban population.

There are over 60 languages and dialects spoken in Kenya (Githiora, 2002).
Although Swahili is the most widely used language, its use in radio cannot serve all
audiences’ needs adequately. Therefore, there has always been a need for wide media
coverage using local languages that could address diverse local dynamics of the plural
Kenyan population. In 1998, the first vernacular language FM station, Kameme FM,
which broadcast in the Kikuyu language, was established. In the same year, KBC,
sensing increased competition, established a second Kikuyu station, Coro FM. Since
then, different vernacular FM stations have emerged leading to a more diversified radio
industry that serves and appeals to a wide range of audiences. Vernacular stations have
also increased the variety of content available. The radio industry in Kenya is still
expanding. As of December 2008, there were about 110 radio stations in the country.

*Development of media in Kenya from 1927-1990*

The current broadcasting system in Kenya is a culmination of a long broadcasting
tradition that dates back to the colonial period. The development of the broadcasting
industry and the application of the media in Africa have strong colonial roots (Bourgault,
1995; Roberts, 1977; Matheson, 1935). Kenya was one of the first African colonial
countries to send and receive broadcasts (Bourgault, 1995; Matheson, 1935). Following
a 1927 agreement between the colonial government and a private company, the British
East Africa Broadcasting Company established the first regular radio services in 1928
(Roberts, 1935). British East Africa Cable and Wireless Company took over the
broadcasting services in 1931 under a 25-year contract. The company accepted to operate
the broadcasting functions and bear costs in return for a guaranteed monopoly on the
international telegraphic traffic (Codding, 1959). Cable and Wireless Company assumed
responsibility for English and Asian programs, while the colony’s Department of
Information rented transmitter time in order to broadcast afternoon programs in English.

The initial establishment of the broadcasting services was aimed at serving the
colonial interests (Bourgault, 1995; Matheson, 1935). From British to French colonies
and apartheid South Africa, radio was not only seen as an arm of colonial policies but
was used to control an oppressed African population (Bourgault, 1995; Gunner, 2005). In
the British colonies, the presence of a large number of expatriate communities especially
the settlers was important. The first African country to have broadcast services was South
Africa in 1920. Like Kenya, South Africa had a high population of settlers. Hilda
Matheson, writing on broadcasting in Africa in 1935 captures what can well be viewed as
functions of early broadcasting in colonial Africa:

I am not aware of the very great value which broadcasting already is, and
still more was, to white men and women in Tropical Africa. It provides a
new link with events and ideas at home. It counteracts loneliness. It
provides a new bond of interest between isolated settlers or officials. It is
an important Imperial asset (p. 388).
Beyond the communication for colonial workers and settlers, Matheson (1935) argued that broadcasting would serve an important function of providing a means of contact with illiterate or semi-literate people. Broadcasting could be used by colonial government and education agents in primitive [sic] society in equipping the members with “sufficient understanding and practical knowledge to meet change before it overwhelms them” (p. 387). Establishment of broadcasting to fill the communication gap was deemed important. As this quote shows, the colonial mentality that viewed Africans as third-rate citizens was very prevalent in media. The Europeans were positioned first, Asians second and Africans last.

The broadcasting system in the colonies started to change during and after the Second World War due to the increasing demand for soldiers fighting on the British side to get news from home as well as their families to get news about the war (Roberts, 1977). The British Forces Broadcasting Services was set up near Nairobi broadcasting 91 hours every week. Of the total time, 2.25 hours were allotted to Africans. By 1954, the Department of Information was broadcasting in various local languages in Swahili, Kamba, Kikuyu, and Luo for 41 hours a week. At the same time, Cable and Wireless supplied 44 hours in English and 29 hours in Asian languages such as Hindi and Gujarati. The Kenya Broadcasting Service (KBS) which was set up as a government function took over from the Cable and Wireless when their contract expired in 1956.

In anticipation of independence, colonial authorities transformed the KBS into Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) in 1961 to be operated by a private contract. The contract was owned by a consortium of British, Canadian, American and East African commercial interests. Roberts (1977) argues that this move by the colonial government
was aimed at insulating the broadcasting system from future government control. The corporation board was made up of nine members, three each representing the government, the public, and contractors. Funds were expected to come from government subsidies, receiver license fees, and advertising. This interesting arrangement was seen as a unique development in the field of broadcasting as a joint cooperative effort between the public, the private enterprise, and the government with no party having majority voice (Dean, 1962, quoted in Roberts, 1977).

In 1962, television was established in Kenya for the first time. In 1964, the new independent government took over broadcasting. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting took charge of KBC renaming it the Voice of Kenya (VoK), the beginning of many years of state-controlled broadcasting in Kenya that would follow. By 1972, VoK had 19 radio studios that fed transmitters located in different parts of the country. This time, three domestic services were being offered: the National Service in Swahili, the General Service in English and the Vernacular Service in 14 local languages. A regional coastal station in Mombasa originated two and a half hours of Swahili local programming as well as rebroadcasting programs from the National Service (Roberts, 1977). The National Service was on air for 18 hours a day while the general service was on air for an average of 12 hours a day. Vernacular services offered a total of 184 hours every week, a mere average of two hours of broadcast every day for each language. In a sample week, the VoK national and general service had a similar distribution of content predominantly made up of entertainment, news, and current affairs (Roberts, 1977).
The print media

In contrast with the broadcast media, the print media in Kenya has enjoyed a more robust history and development. The print media in the colonial Kenya gained roots very early. The earliest documented regular publication in Kenya was *Taveta Chronicle* first published in 1885 by the Church Missionary Society (Karanja, 2000). There were other publications in different parts of the country. Individuals did not fare well in the news trade, which was dominated by churches. Publications such as *Kikuyu News* published by Church of Scotland Mission circulated from 1908-1957 while *Lenga Juu* by the Anglican Church was launched in 1916. In mainstream publications, the *East African Standard*, which was launched in 1902, to date stands as the oldest running newspaper in Kenya (Wa’Njogu, 2004). By 1906, laws governing publication of materials had been put in place. The Books and Newspapers Ordinance, viewed as a very liberal law required that newspapers should be registered with the government within a month of publication and that annual returns should be sent to the Registrar (Gadsen, 1980).

During the colonial era, the major English newspapers were biased towards the white settlers. To champion the interests of other communities, the Africans and Indians produced their own publications such as *The Indian Voice, Hindi Prakash* (Hindi Light), and *East African News*, a bilingual Gujerati-English weekly. After the First World War, Africans started questioning the colonial government openly. The Kikuyu Central Association (KCA), one of the earliest African political groups launched the *Muigwithania* (the Arbiter), Harry Thuku, a KCA luminary, edited *Tangazo* (Announcement) and *Luo Times* was published in Western Kenya (Wa’Njogu, 2004). In late 1921, the Native Affairs Department began issuing a monthly pro-government
propaganda bulletin, *Habari* (News). This moderate pseudo-African publication was the colonial government’s reaction to native and Indian publications which threatened the entrenchment of the colonial rule (Karanja, 2000). After World War II, there was an increase in local publications. *Baraza* newspaper went into publication in 1939, a sister newspaper to *East African Standard*. According to Wa’Njogu (2004), *Baraza* turned out to be Kenya’s first successful indigenous-language newspaper. Like changes that occurred in the broadcasting media, there was an unparalleled growth in print media especially in the local language controlled press in Kenya (Rosberg & Nottingham, 1966; Scotton, 1975).

Between 1963 and 1991, the initial years of independence and before the introduction of multiparty politics, three newspapers dominated the print media: the *Daily Nation*, the *East African Standard*, and the *Kenya Times*. There were only two Swahili newspapers, *Taifa Leo* and the defunct *Kenya Leo* (Wa’Njogu, 2004). During the single party era regimes of Presidents Jomo Kenyatta (1963-1978) and Daniel Moi (1979-1990), limited freedom of expression curtailed the printing press (Kadhi & Rutten, 2001). After 1991, there has been an increase in newspaper publication. New daily publications include the *People* and the *Nairobi Star*. However, the English publication continues to dominate the market. *Taifa Leo* remains the only national newspaper in a local language today.

While the Kenyan print media has achieved some positive steps, it has not been successful in reaching the majority of the population. The largely rural population can barely afford the cost of the English newspapers. Those who cannot read English have limited choice with only one Swahili publication. Swahili publications have never
achieved a wide circulation and nor have the publishers put much effort to improve the 
Swahili press. In addition to English and Swahili, there is a glaring lack of publications in 
other languages spoken in Kenya. Print media has therefore existed within the narrow 
confines of the main languages. Literacy, narrowly defined as the ability to read and write 
in English, has always been cited as a barrier to the access to printed media. This is 
somewhat misleading because there is a large section of population that cannot read and 
write in English but can in different languages. For example, the Bible in Kenya has been 
translated into different Kenyan languages to cater for the population outside the 
mainstream languages of English and Swahili. Lack of established local language 
newspapers is therefore a part of a bigger language quandary in Kenya rooted in a 
number of factors such as poor language policy as discussed in the following sections. 
Due to these limitations of print media, radio continues to play a central role in 
populations’ information access. Although not all Kenyan local languages are heard on 
the radio, the medium has largely transcended the language barriers.

Why is radio relevant?

Radio in Kenya has been used as a tool to address different population needs. For 
many years, communication-based strategies have been used as means of addressing 
social, political, economic, and cultural issues of different populations through increased 
information access and participation. Consequently, the United Nations has identified the 
right to information as a human right (Koren, 1996). People need information to make 
informed decisions, to increase their knowledge and to get direction to essential services. 
Recognizing the power of information, communication-based strategies have been used 
to stimulate social change since the 1960s. Most of these efforts were and continue to be
implemented in the developing world in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Melkote & Steves, 2002). Due to its ubiquitous nature (Pease & Dennis, 1993), radio has proved to be an effective medium for social change programming and has been used to address issues related to education, health, population, economic empowerment, peace-building, environment, and human rights, among others. Kenyan audiences, especially those living in the rural areas continue to utilize radio for these purposes as the most accessible medium of communication.

Communication technologies are in a constant state of change and the 20th century has witnessed a leap in advancement bringing us to what is now commonly referred to as the information age. In the information age, new technological platforms including satellite radio and television, mobile telephony, and Internet have affected the way people access and consume information. However, the extent of deployment of these technologies in the developing world lags behind the developed nations, creating the digital divide. Within developing countries, there are also wide access disparities between urban and rural populations (Wilson, 2000). While many information technologies are readily available for access and can be attained at fair costs in urban settings, there are limited or no services in rural areas. In situations where they exist, access costs are usually too high for the rural folk to afford. These disparities in information technologies access between rural and urban areas are as a result of poor public policy making, lack of essential infrastructure, populations’ limited economic power, and high costs of deployment for service providers. Consequently, investment in communication technology, especially in new platforms such as the Internet, has been minimal in rural areas. For rural listeners in central Kenya, access to communication technologies is
gaining ground but the extent to which they can utilize them is hindered by costs and limited infrastructure such as power supply.

In many developing countries such as Kenya, the majority of the population lives in rural areas. An estimated 80% of the total Kenyan population lives in rural areas (KDHS, 2004) where literacy levels and vital services such as health, education, and social services are scarce compared to urban settings. In terms of information needs, rural populations have limited access to information. Information sources such as press (mainly daily newspapers) are not readily accessible due to literacy challenges, poor infrastructure such as lack of roads and high costs of newspapers which are beyond the affordability of many low-income rural dwellers. As a result, access to press is through public places like cafes and restaurants but this can only cope with a limited number of people. With these limitations, the rural population in Kenya continues to rely on radio, a medium that reaches an estimated 98% of the total population, for access to information, education, and entertainment (Odhiambo, 2002).

Research on the effectiveness of radio and in particular programs that target rural populations has mainly come from the development communication field. Development communication is concerned with conscious efforts aimed to improve living conditions and the quality of life for people struggling with underdevelopment and marginalization (Melkote & Steeves, 2002). In Kenya, radio-based initiatives have been implemented to deal with wide-ranging issues. Radio has been and continues to be used for educational outreach using programs such as broadcast to primary and secondary schools (J. Onyango-joel, personal communication, August 5, 2008). Additional uses of radio in education include improving teacher-training education and promoting adult education
Radio programs on health and health related issues have centered on family planning, reproductive health, disease prevention, vaccination and communicable diseases and more recently and widely, HIV/AIDS (Singhal & Rogers, 2003; Muturi, 2002). Other programs have addressed economic empowerment, cultural practices, and gender issues such as women’s rights. In Kenya today, radio based efforts to deal with population issues have failed to match the proliferation of the medium. However, populations continue to access vital information from the medium.

Until media liberalization in the beginning of the 1990s, radio in Kenya was minimally developed to meet the information, education and entertainment needs of the population, a fact that hampered the extent to which the medium could be used to make meaningful change for the population. Since the entry of private broadcasters in 1995, the radio industry in Kenya has developed tremendously and this has affected how the medium delivers information and, ultimately, its effects on audiences. The number of radio stations has grown exponentially from two main stations in 1993 to about 107 by December 2008 (Strategic Research, 2008).

Importance of the study

Radio is arguably the most important source of information for the majority of Kenya’s population and for many rural dwellers, the only one available. The development of the radio industry in Kenya has the potential to provide the rural population with the benefits of the medium. Potential benefits of radio include increased access to information and educational materials that are available in different languages from radio stations that target diverse audiences. Today, rural populations have more radio outlets to choose from, something that was not available before media liberalization. Broadcasting
in local languages offers distinct benefits. In Kenya, vernacular radio stations provide added opportunities to the rural population because they are more proficient in their first language (mother tongue) than Swahili and English, the predominant languages used in radio broadcasting. A small exception can be found in some parts of Coastal Kenya where Swahili is used as the first language. The vernacular broadcasting model makes it necessary for the broadcaster to target rural audiences. Due to settlement patterns in Kenya, audiences who use a given vernacular language are likely to be concentrated in particular regions. Thus, while radio can possibly reach relatively large dispersed audiences in any part of the country, the potential of vernacular radio exists in rural areas. Different vernacular languages are also widely spoken in the highly homogenous rural areas with the exception of a few heterogeneous areas. An important determinant of a radio audience in Kenya is the language used because it limits the audience members of radio stations. Thus, most Swahili stations broadcast countrywide. A few regional Swahili stations are found in the Kenyan Coast where Swahili is the first language for most people. Vernacular radio stations are regional or multi-regional (serving a number of regions) but never national.

Commercial audience research in Kenya has devoted little interest to rural audiences. If viewed from the traditional media economic model where audiences are commodities to be sold to the advertiser (Webster, Phalem & Lichty, 2006), rural audiences have for a long time been of marginal concern to commercial media research in Kenya where poverty levels in rural areas are considerably high. It is estimated that 56% of the Kenyan population lives below the poverty line and most of these live in rural areas (KDHS, 2004). As a result, rural audiences have limited purchasing power
compared to their urban counterparts. Media research carried in Kenya by the Steadman Group, the only entity recognized by the industry, draws its largest sample from the urban population (Steadman Group, 2007). According to a sampling frame used by Steadman in 2007, a population of 2,050 was selected from six urban areas while 1,510 were selected from 12 rural areas. In terms of settlement however, the ratio of urban to rural population is 1:4. Even barring the distribution of radio stations which are concentrated in Kenyan urban areas, rural audiences are still underrepresented in Steadman’s research.

The emergence of vernacular broadcasting as a central component of radio broadcasting, an outcome of the liberalized market that has shifted broadcasters’ attention to the rural audiences makes it imperative for media studies to develop a body of knowledge on how this broadcasting situation is affecting the rural audiences. It is important to study the vernacular broadcasting component due to its ability to influence development. As an aggregate, vernacular radio broadcasting intimately addresses the largest section of the population, the rural audiences. Vernacular broadcasting proximity in terms of language used and material broadcasted is important because rural population is critical in developing countries like Kenya for several reasons. Rural populations are always a focal point in Kenya in terms of government policymaking, non-governmental organizations’ activities and any organization that is concerned with improving the living standards and conditions of underprivileged communities. At a national level, Kenya continues to wrestle with different challenges of an economic, political, educational, health, and social-cultural nature. Economic challenges include high levels of unemployment and low production output especially in the agricultural sector, the backbone of the Kenyan economy. Economic production in rural areas such as those
focusing on agriculture can be improved with reliable information. Vernacular radio is well positioned to address this issue. Politically, ethnic tensions, human rights abuses, and corruption in government and its institutions need to be addressed. Low literacy levels and gender disparities require attention. Health presents one of the most daunting problems as illustrated by high prevalence of infant mortality, maternal deaths, soaring incidences of HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases. Today, local cultures are threatened by globalization but the rural population remains as main custodian. As discussed earlier, different strategies and programs that use radio have strived to address some of the issues above. The present radio industry presents even a broader avenue through which a wide audience can be reached.

Vernacular broadcasting in particular can contribute to positive media steps towards information, entertainment, and education provision. Vernacular broadcasters carry more local content that is relevant to their target population and allows for fine targeting which makes it possible to include very specific content. These include targeting messages that are only relevant to a particular group of people or region. For instance, a Luo language radio station can address issues that affect fishing communities on Lake Victoria effectively in greater depth and regularity than a national Swahili station because it is not competing with other worthy news for a wide audience. In the same line, a Kikuyu station can address farming issues for farmers in the Central Kenya region. This possibly improves information access for the rural section of Kenyan population. In addition, use of multiple languages in broadcasting has increased the proportion of local materials carried by radio channels as multiple outlets allow for wide distribution of local content. Vernacular stations carry more local materials as opposed to
foreign content that dominates English stations. These include content such as music, drama, current affairs, and local news. Readily available outlets for local material in turn spur more production due to increased popularity through exposure. The increase in locally produced music consistent with the rise in the number of radio stations supports this assertion. Spitulnik (2004) has argued that transmission of African material such as folklore through new media can contribute to cultural and linguistic preservation and revival as well as functioning as a tool for national integration and education.

With all the promise that the new broadcasting presents, it is important to acknowledge that there can be negative effects that accrue from having a vibrant radio industry. Broadcasting in different languages has a potential to magnify peoples’ differences. This has been the challenge of vernacular broadcasting in Kenya. In a country that has been traditionally divided along ethnic lines, vernacular broadcasting is a potential threat for national unity. The ethnic crisis in Kenya after the controversial general elections in December 2007 points to the danger presented by the broadcast media just as witnessed by the Rwandan Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) role during the 1994 genocide (Gourevitch, 1998; Kellow & Leslie, 1998). Vernacular radio can provide a platform where parochial ethnic-based nationalism can be promoted. The aftermath of the post election ethnic violence in Kenya has seen the broadcast media come under close scrutiny. Debate was alive in the print media since January 2008 with many contributors alleging that radio, in particular vernacular radio, played a negative role before, during and after the dispute elections. The Commission of Inquiry of Post Election Violence (CIPEV) and Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) have implicated a number of vernacular stations for their role in
fuelling ethnic animosity. In a section titled *The Media and the Post Election Violence*, of the CIPEV Report, vernacular radio stations are singled out for their negative role in the post election violence.

Many recalled with horror, fear and disgust the negative and inflammatory role of vernacular radio stations in their testimony and statement and statements to the commission. In particular, they singled out KASS FM as having contributed to the climate of hate, negative ethnicity, and having incited violence in the Rift Valley. However, there were also similar complaints in other parts of the country even though they did not come directly to the attention of the Commission. These included the vernacular music and negative ethnicity coming from Kikuyu FM stations including Kameme, Inooro, Coro, and others in the different parts of the country (CIPEV, 2008, p. 295).

The CIPEV Report partly blames the negative role of the media to lack of new regulatory and legislative framework, thus leading to a free-for-all scenario. Some media entities took advantage of the lacuna and started to “operate freely and sometimes recklessly and irresponsibly” (CIPEV, 2008, p. 296) exacerbated by absence of strict regulations and control on appropriate content by the national regulator, the Communication Commission of Kenya (CCK). This is complicated by the fact that a good number of radio stations are controlled by elites with political interests making the medium of radio prone to abuse. In politically charged situations, vernacular radio becomes a safe haven for tribal leaders to advance their parochial interests.

In addition to addressing the above issues, this research makes an important contribution to African media scholarship by demonstrating the usefulness of alternative
methodology in audience studies. While communication research in Africa has increased in the past years, a central concern noted by African scholars since the 1980s is how to best conduct media research in African settings (Obeng-Quiado, 1986, 1987; Ansah, 1998). These scholars have noted in particular that survey research is not well suited for rural settings (Obeng-Quiado, 1986, 1987; Ansah, 1998). There has not been much discussion on using ethnographic media research in African settings.

Statement of the problem

Studies that focus on rural audiences in Kenya and other similar environments have addressed the use of radio in two main ways. First is the use of specially designed programs dealing with particular issues such as education, family planning, and outdated cultural practices. These programs are usually driven by government, non-governmental or international organizations such as the UN bodies (Bourgault, 1995; Young, 1991) and are executed through the mainstream radio that serves the general population. The radio may be commercially owned or public. The second focus is on the use of community radio as avenues to access rural populations and address local needs. These studies are based on the premise that the local population has specific needs that can be addressed at the local level (Alumuku, 2006; Kasoma, 2002, United Nations Education and Social Organization, 1990). Use of community radio is especially important because it allows for participation of the local population, can address specific interests of local rural audiences and the community has control over the content, operations and management of the radio (Alumuku, 2002). The absence of profit motive in management practices is viewed as a guarantee that the interests of the audience will be served.
Beyond these two models, commercial broadcasting is not necessarily viewed as an important component for broadcasting to the rural population. The proposed research addresses the gap by looking beyond the two approaches of reaching the rural people, (i.e. use of mainstream radio for specially designed and directed information) and the use of community radio. Despite the commercial orientation, radio broadcasting that attends to the rural audience can influence the rural population. In the Kenyan context, vernacular broadcasting, which principally sets rural audiences at the centre of its operations, is a very compelling area of investigation. As the research findings shows, some programs broadcast on vernacular stations provide information and education akin of development communication. This study goes beyond the perception that profit making is the sole motive of commercial broadcasting. According to Thiong’o, the head of commercial vernacular radio Inooro FM, the challenge of the broadcasters in Kenya today is to provide high standard, sensitive and innovative media products that respond to the audience need, some of which has not commercial returns (Z. Thiong’o personal communication, August 14, 2008). The need for the broadcasters to make profits may not necessarily diminish the audience’s satisfaction.

Using audience ethnography method (Moores, 1996; 2000; Murphy, 1998; Press, 1996; Spitulnik, 1996, 2002c), this research explores how rural audiences use radio in everyday life. The research seeks to answer the following questions:

Research questions

This research sought to answer three broad research questions:

1. What is the role of radio in listeners’ everyday life?
2. What is the relationship between audience listening habits and programs format and content?

3. How do audiences’ preferences compare between national stations broadcasting in English and Swahili and those broadcasting in local languages such as Kikuyu?

Classifying radio in Kenya

The increase in the number of radio stations in Kenya in recent years has produced a changed media terrain intensifying competition between the players in the market. As more players join the industry, the audiences are increasingly becoming segmented. As a result, radio stations are defining and re-defining themselves in an attempt to capture a particular audience to consolidate their market share or break into their competition’s market. To understand radio broadcasting in Kenya, it will be helpful to categorize the different radio stations as the industry, which has been unstable since the advent of liberalization, works to realign itself into stability. In examining the radio industry in Kenya today, there are various notable factors that determine which group of listeners a station will appeal to.

Using these factors, I have come up with different categories of radio stations. The factors include broadcast philosophy/ownership, language of broadcast, the station’s reach, and the broadcast content (agenda). The factors above are not necessarily mutually exclusive, there are instances where several factors may overlap and one radio station will fall into two categories. This section examines characteristics of each category based on the identified factors. This categorization is useful as it illustrates how radio broadcasters evaluate their audience and attempt to provide a programming that is
relevant to the target group. It also shows various programming styles can be adopted by stations in the same category.

*Classification based on broadcasting philosophy and funding: Public, commercial, and community radio*

Media in Kenya can be classified based on the station’s broadcasting philosophy and the method of funding its operation. In this classification, there are public service, commercial and community radio. This is the three-tier broadcasting classification that has been implemented in many different countries (Ndlela, 2006). Prior to media liberalization, radio was a public medium where government held the monopoly since independence. However, there were some efforts in the early 1960s, led by United Nations Education and Social Organization (UNESCO) to establish community radio stations mostly in the rural areas but the project did not materialize (Bourgault, 1995). Media liberalization in the 1990s saw the opening up of the FM spectrum and the first commercial stations were established. The post-liberalization period has seen establishment of more community radio stations.

*State-controlled public service radio stations*

Public broadcasting in Kenya is represented by two KBC stations, the General Service that broadcasts in English and Idhaa ya Taifa (National Service) which broadcasts in Swahili. With the change of radio environment in Kenya, KBC opened its commercial wing of radio broadcasting where it runs other main stations such as Metro FM and Inooro FM but its flagship stations have remained the General Service and Idhaa ya Taifa. These stations have continued to uphold the public broadcasting philosophy. As state-controlled public service broadcasters, they are not driven by profit but the goal of
providing information and education to the population of Kenya. Also, although unstated, the stations have continued, in different ways, to represent and amplify the state’s voice on different issues that are more likely to be divergent from the other media outlets. The two stations have a national reach and have a presence even in the sparsely populated areas.

The state-controlled public service broadcasters receive part of their funding from the government to offset some of their running expenses. In the recent past, the stations have increasingly sought to increase revenue generation by improving efficiency in their operations. According to one senior manager in a public service station, all workers are now on performance-based contracts, which require them to deliver at a certain level. The stations are required to air what is considered as content in the public interest. Such content includes the parliament’s proceedings and annual national budget presentations and government functions such national celebrations. The stations also air content such as broadcasts to schools that is part of the continued government effort to increase education access to all. The General Service devotes most of its weekdays during the school year airing the broadcasts to school, working in conjunction with the Ministry of Education and Kenya Institute of Education (KIE).

In the recent past, the level of government involvement and control in the public radio stations has significantly declined from past years and managers make most of the decisions. This is a departure from the single government-controlled media days where stations had to “toe the line”. The stations are also moving further towards independence and objectivity when dealing with political issues. The presenters for instance can criticize the government, something that would never have happened in the government
monopoly era. The stations are still tied to government’s objectives that do not fit well within the stations’ broader ambitions in a competitive market. For instance, during the weekdays, the two KBC stations relay live feeds from Radio China for one hour between 5:00 PM and 6:00 PM. This is a high bilateral agreement between the Kenyan and Chinese governments. Although the managers do not agree with this arrangement because the program interrupts the prime-time broadcasting which is one of the most important time slots of the day, their concerns are overruled by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting which oversees Kenya Broadcasting Corporation due to other issues that are tied to the arrangement.

Public service broadcasters hold the view that the public is in constant need of information, education and entertainment and it is the responsibility of radio to provide the content, irrespective of social, economic or any other factors that define the audience. The public service broadcaster’s audience is not targeted and less defined. Topista Nabsoba, KBC-Swahili assistant station manager described the station’s target audience as follows:

We target different groups in terms of age groups and economics. We target children, the youth as well as senior citizens. We also have specific programs such as farming programs that target farmers who are a rural audience. Our audience is general given the national reach. The defining limits are in terms of programs. We have youth, women, and religious programs for Christians and Muslims. We try to take care of everyone given our mandate as public service broadcaster; we target a national audience which is diverse in itself (T. Nabsoba, personal communication, August 19, 2008).
The same views were expressed by the Head of KBC General service, Jeff Muya.

In terms of our target audience, we generally cut across the population because we are a public service. We are a product of an Act of Parliament. It is our goal, aim, purpose, and mandate to inform, educate and entertain across the board. From the youngest age, as long as they can pick something from radio, that is what KBC is supposed to do, we cut across. Yes I agree that the market has become very competitive such that everybody needs to have a piece of the cake. But should everybody shut down ….one thing we can’t do is shut down KBC ….We cannot tell the 90 years of broadcasting bye. We have a duty to serve all (J. Muya, personal communication, August 26, 2008).

While the public service broadcasters continue to pursue the broad goal of public interest, their future is uncertain because of the challenge they face in a competitive market. KBC already runs two commercial stations which have less audience but are more competitive when it comes to income generation. For a long time, KBC Swahili commanded the highest listenership but has been surpassed by Radio Citizen. There is pressure to perform better and this is hard to attain within the existing organizational framework. Changes are likely to involve movement towards commercialization.

Commercial radio stations

Commercial radio stations in Kenya are owned by a wide range of entities including individuals, holding companies, institutions, and bodies established by Act of Parliament like KBC. The main goal of commercial radio stations is to deliver to the audiences while maximizing profits for the owners or the shareholders. The commercial stations generate most of their revenue from advertising. In Kenya, the centrality of
profit defines a key difference between commercial stations and public service broadcasters as it determines how they view the audience. Commercial stations are likely to be more targeted in their audience definition. Commercial broadcasters view their audiences as commodities which they can in turn sell to the advertisers. However, commercial radio stations in Kenya exhibit different levels of targeting.

The urban based English language radio stations are very particular with their audience. On the other hand, those that use Swahili and vernacular and a few English commercial stations (those that seek a broader national audience) have two definitions of their target audience. As managers put it, there is “paper” definition and the “practical” definition. The paper definition of audience is what is used to seek business from the advertisers. In practice however, the stations reach a wider audience. The paper definition of audience is narrow and therefore stations do not strictly adhere to it when designing programs as they seek a wide range of audiences in order to improve the scope of listenership. Most English urban commercial stations have a specific segment of listeners that they seek to appeal to and their definition is consistent with practice. Stations such as Capital FM, Kiss FM, and Classic FM are good examples. According to Mr. Ochieng, a producer with Capital FM, the station is very specific on the type of people they broadcast to.

We target the upper-class cosmopolitan educated Kenyans. They have to be up-market. They know about internet, Facebook, take time to listen to radio, know about entertainment industry – artists etc. If it’s the young people, probably they
have a car or using parents’ cars rather than using a Matatu\(^1\), gone to good schools; you are knowledgeable and up and about with current affairs; You brush through Times, magazines and keep abreast with what’s happening outside Kenya (C. Ochieng, personal communication, July 25, 2008).

Two sister stations, Kiss FM and Classic FM, which are two leading urban FM stations, are also specific on their target audience as explained by the marketing manager.

Kiss is a youth radio station. Our focus has been 18-24 year old from A B1C2 audience. When we started Classic, in the same vein, we went to the next audience after Kiss, 25-35 to cover a market that was seen as where advertisers are interested because we are commercial stations who depend on advertisements. Our target is determined by what advertisers want (M. Njoroge, personal communication, August 5, 2008).

Commercial urban English FM stations are predominantly entertainment driven with music as the main content. Swahili and vernacular language commercial stations attempt to balance information, education, and entertainment content. There is more emphasis on news in these stations compared to the urban English FM radio stations.

*Community radio stations*

Despite the entry of multiple players in the Kenyan radio industry today, some sections of the populations still feel the desire to have an avenue through which very local and specific needs can be catered to. Community radio stations have provided this

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\(^1\) Matatu is the name used to refer to public transport vehicles. The term can also be used to denote the most popular transport industry that has developed its own culture. For more on Matatu, see Mbugua and Samper (2006).
alternative by addressing a very small population in their area of broadcast. Community radios are small in their operations and are run by the local people for the local people. The content varies from education, information, and entertainment. The information is mainly locally generated content that addresses issues that are relevant to the local population. Community radio stations are low power with a limited reach compared to other radio stations. Some community radio stations broadcast within a radius of ten kilometers. Community radio stations are extensively used as tools for raising public awareness on issues that affect their community.

There are numerous community radio stations in Kenya today in different parts of the country. In Nairobi, community radios are becoming popular in low income informal settlement areas. In Nairobi, community radio is strong in the slum settlement such as Ghetto FM in Majengo, Pamoja FM in Kibera and Koch FM in Korogocho. Pamoja FM for instance serves the Kibera slum, an informal settlement with an estimated 1.2 million people but whose total area is approximately two square kilometers. Radio Pamoja is run by community volunteers and its broadcasts do not go beyond 10 kilometers outside the slum. Radio Pamoja’s content addresses issues that are of interest to the Kibera slum dwellers. They air programs on health and sanitation, leading issues that confront the slum dwellers. Since the beginning of 2008, Pamoja FM has been airing peace education programs after the slums witnessed one of the worst waves of violence after the disputed December 2007 general elections. Another community radio Koch FM broadcasts from Korogocho slums in Nairobi, the second largest informal settlement in Nairobi. Like Pamoja FM, Koch FM is run by a group of unpaid volunteers and provides news and
information about what is happening in Korogocho. The station also airs programs of community interest in areas such as health, education and sanitation.

According to Waweru Mburu, the head of Radio Citizen, community radio stations in different parts of the country have added a new dimension in the industry because they are targeting a small section of the population in small communities and narrow down their programming to what people really need. He cites other community stations such as Radio Mang’elete which is competing with the national radio stations in Mtito and Tsavo areas in South East part of Kenya. Community radio is an important player in the Kenyan radio industry. Other examples of community stations include Kaya FM in the Coast, Sauti ya Mwananchi in Naivasha, and Shinyalu FM in Western Kenya, among others.

*Classification using language: Mainstream and vernacular stations*

Language has become a major factor that influences the audience that a radio station can reach. Due to multiplicity of languages in Kenya, broadcasters have identified language as a way to segment listeners into smaller groups. Using language classification, stations that use Swahili and English language, the two languages that cut across ethnic boundaries in the country, can be termed as mainstream stations. On the other hand, a host of stations employ other local African languages targeting a population that speaks that language. These are referred to as vernacular radio stations.

*Mainstream radio stations*

Mainstream radio stations belong to a broad category of stations that broadcast in a language that can be understood by the majority of the population across the nation. In Kenya, English and Swahili are two languages that cut across populations and regions.
Mainstream radio stations are programmed to address general audiences in terms of social cultural backgrounds but they share common factors such as social economic status and religious beliefs. Mainstream station can be national in reach. Most English FM stations are mainstream and tend to do well in highly cosmopolitan areas. Nairobi region, which is the most cosmopolitan area, has always been dominated by mainstream radio stations. The current top Nairobi stations including Radio Citizen, Kiss FM, Classic FM, and Easy FM are all mainstream (Steadman, 2008). These stations play more music whose large proportion is foreign. Other Swahili mainstream stations that broadcast in Swahili include Q FM, Radio Simba, Milele FM and Jambo FM.

_Vernacular radio stations_

Vernacular radio stations broadcast chiefly using a local language to a target audience that understands the language of broadcast. Vernacular stations tend to broadcast to a community that is also defined by a common culture. The content such as news and different types of programs is mainly in the vernacular language. The degrees to which the stations use the language vary from station to station. For some stations such as Inooro FM, a Kikuyu station, the broadcasts are in the Kikuyu language. The presentation, news and informational programs, and all the music played on Inooro FM are in the Kikuyu language. Other stations however will present some of their content in other language mainly English and Swahili especially in news presentation. A good chunk of music is also in Swahili and English.

Most vernacular stations tend to assume a regional nature because settlement patterns in Kenya are such that people of a given ethnic group are concentrated in one settlement region. Thus, the Luo audience is found in the Nyanza around Lake Region,
the Kalenjin in the Northern and Southern Rift while the majority of Kikuyu audience is found in Central Kenya region. Vernacular stations in Kenya have started gaining the highest listenership in areas where their languages of broadcasts are widely spoken. According to Steadman reports (2008), Inooro FM is the most listened to station in Central Kenya ahead of two other Kikuyu stations, Kameme FM and Coro FM. In Lake Region, Ramogi FM that broadcasts in Luo language has the highest listenership. Kass FM that broadcast in Kalenjin language is the most listened to station in Central Rift Valley area while Muuga FM, a Meru language station dominates the Upper Eastern region (Steadman, 2008).

Vernacular stations also attract more rural audiences because the vernacular languages are widely spoken in these areas. There is also an urban audience, but this audience is more contested because it is the same audience that the mainstream stations seek to satisfy. Most vernacular stations broadcast from the capital Nairobi and use transmitters to relay the services to their regions with their target population. None of the vernacular stations has access to national frequencies. There is a strong rapport between vernacular stations and the listeners. Due to the cultural connections, vernacular stations have become reservoirs of a community’s culture, teaching the listeners different aspects of their culture and traditions. The content is also highly targeted and because of this, some vernacular stations exhibit some of the characteristics of community radio. Kikuyu vernacular stations have increasingly adopted a more sensitive broadcasting where they involve the targeted community in content generation. For instance, there is more local level reporting for most stations in the grassroots levels. The stations content reflect the targeted audiences’ way of life. Thus, Kikuyu vernacular radio stations are heavy on
agricultural oriented programs because their target audiences are farmers. Stations are also increasingly “moving outside the studio” (Z. Thiongo, personal communication, August 14, 2008) where the audience is unseen to a more intimate broadcasting that deals with the daily or actual happenings in the community.

Classification by reach: National and regional stations

Radio stations in Kenya have varied reach. The Communication Commission of Kenya (CCK) grants frequencies to the station to broadcast to specified regions which limits the population they can reach. Some stations are allocated frequencies to broadcast multiple regions in the country while other stations can only reach one region. Defined by the reach, the two main categories are the national stations and the regional stations.

National radio stations

National radio stations have a wide reach that extends to the whole country or most parts of the country. They have transmitters and repeaters distributed across the country. Although their frequencies may not be received in some particular areas, they are generally available in most regions in the country. Currently, there are only three stations with national reach. These are KBC English, KBC Swahili and Radio Citizen. The position of Radio Citizen as a national radio is evident in the Steadman monitoring report. During the second quarter report, Radio Citizen was the station with the highest listenership in eight out of sixteen listenership area and competed with the top station in two more areas. These stations target heterogeneous audiences and use languages that cut across regions and ethnic lines. They also tend to broadcast an all inclusive content as they cater to people from different backgrounds. They try to balance religion, education, social and economic backgrounds as well as age.
National radio stations provide information, education, and entertainment in their program in order to cater to a wide audience’s needs. National radio stations broadcast content of national interest. For instance, they cover important political events such as general elections more widely than other stations. Although they have their political leanings, national radio usually attempts to present issues from a national perspective. For instance, pitching for a certain political position is sold in terms of the benefit that will be realized by the nation as opposed to a particular group. As a result, national broadcasters attract listenership across the country. National radio stations use highly standardized language and are very particular when selecting broadcasters in order to ensure neutrality.

Regional stations

Regional radio stations in Kenya have emerged as an attempt by broadcasters to take care of a wide section of audience who are concentrated in a certain geographical area. Regional stations take advantage of shared culture, religion and language in a population. For example, a number of radio stations broadcasting in the coastal part of Kenya such as Pwani FM, Radio Salaam, and Baraka FM have emerged and gained popularity providing stiff competition to the national stations such as KBC English and Radio Citizen. Whereas people in Coastal Kenya have different cultural backgrounds, the cultures are closely related. They are also predominantly Muslim and use Swahili widely. Coastal people have a distinct music preferring genres such as bango\(^2\) and taarab\(^3\).

Regional radios in Coastal Kenya tend to play popular coastal music genres and use

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\(^2\) *Bango* is a slow tempo music genre that has resulted from the fusion local Bantu music in the Kenya coast with *taarab* and Portuguese music.

\(^3\) *Taarab* is music genre that popular in the East African coast. *Taarab* has its origins in the island of Zanzibar in the late 19\(^{th}\) century and later spread in other places such as Pemba Island and along the Kenya and Tanzania coast line as well the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba. For more on *taarab*, see (Askew, 2002; Graebner, 2004; Fair, 2001; Ntaragwi, 2008)
Swahili for broadcasting. They use a Swahili variety that is particular to the regions. Regional stations provide more news from the region to which they broadcast. It is also worth noting that although vernacular stations do not meet the strict definition of a regional area, mainly because they broadcast to a homogeneous population, they also do assume a regional dimension. Some tend to broadcast to one specific region and also dominate that area in terms of popularity.

Classification based on content: Split, religious, and entertainment/music programmers

Radio stations can be classified based on the content they carry in their programming. Radio stations have varied balances between information, education and entertainment. Some stations have split programming with a wide range of content. Other stations specialize in a particular kind of content. Information oriented stations tend to provide news and current affairs programs while entertainment-inclined stations mainly air music content.

Split programmers

Split programmers are those radio stations that emphasize information, education and entertainment content in their broadcasting. Split programmers are usually stations that have a relatively wider reach. They also broadcast to large group of audiences who have different needs and profiles. For national stations, the audiences belong to different cultural backgrounds, religion and economic class. Vernacular and regional audiences may belong to a common cultural background but from different economic and educational backgrounds. The main idea behind split programming is to meet the needs of the audiences which are diverse. The composition of education, information, and education content vary in different stations. The national stations such as Radio Citizen,
KBC English and KBC Swahili have more education and information and less entertainment. Vernacular stations such as Inooro FM and Coro FM balance the three content types while Kameme FM has more entertainment than information and education. Except for KBC English, which devotes most time of the day during school sessions broadcasting educational content, split programmers have their content intermixed throughout the broadcasting hours.

Religious programmers

Religious stations provide spiritual content to their audiences who are adherents of a certain faith. In Kenya, the religious stations are mainly Christian and Islam based. Due to a large Christian population in Kenya, most religious stations are also Christian. Some of the stations identify themselves with a particular church while others broadcast to the general Christian population. Some of Christian stations are individually owned while others are sponsored by religious organizations such as churches. Some of the popular Christian stations include Family FM which is privately owned and broadcasts to a general Christian audience. Waumini FM broadcasts to Catholic audiences and is sponsored by the Catholic Church in Kenya while Hope FM is sponsored by Nairobi Pentecostal Church. Biblia Husema FM is sponsored by the African Inland Church (AIC). Iqra FM broadcasts to the Muslim faithful.

Entertainment/Music programmers

While most stations in Kenya have entertainment content in varying degrees, there are few stations that are purely devoted to entertainment programs such as Home Boyz Radio and Mtaa FM. Both stations broadcast in Nairobi. These have emerged in Kenya in the last three years. These stations can also be referred to as music programmers
because the bulk of their programming is music content with limited talk. Their programming differs from entertainment-oriented urban FM stations, which have a large proportion of music based on format. For instance, they have very few insertions such as advertisements during the music sessions and therefore tend to play continuously. Entertainment stations have more sessions where music is manipulated. Song arrangements go beyond ordinary fade-ins and fade-outs transition to incorporate techniques such as remixing and beat juggling (pauses, scratches, backspins, and delays). News is limited to entertainment news such as events, music releases, movie-guides, and celebrity gossip.

Classifying radio stations in Kenya is a daunting task due to the numerous overlaps in reach, presentation style and content. There is also lack of clarity in some stations between broadcasting philosophies and business goals. This is to be expected because the liberalized radio industry in Kenya has just taken-off. Most radio stations are young having been in operation for less than ten years. The industry is yet to stabilize. With new radio stations coming up, there is constant reshaping. This is positive, according to Topista Nabsoba, assistant manager of KBC Swahili station.

With increased competitions, there is a change in styles of broadcasting towards those that are more appealing. This allows for creativity in the industry as increased competition has pushed broadcasters to come up with new formats (T. Nabsoba, personal communication, August 19, 2008).

Broadcasters have varying views on the future of the Kenyan radio market. Some like Michael Njoroge, the marketing manager for Kiss FM and Classic FM, view the current system as a transitional one, which will stabilize with time. According to Njoroge,
stations will become more targeted because of the increased competition as well as because of expansion and mergers.

I even foresee a situation where people will be forced to merge their radio stations to form a bigger group which is already happening for example with the Royal Media. When Royal Media walk to Safaricom, they can give a better deal. Nation [Media Group] has also realized and will end up with two. We already have two, we bought East FM and we are launching Jambo FM that will target the same audience Citizen is targeting. We will have five stations (M. Njoroge, personal communication, August 5, 2008).

Other broadcasters also feel that there ought to be a form of regulation in the industry. There are many mushrooming radio stations, a situation that may not necessarily improve listeners’ choice. Jeff Muya, the head of KBC, cautiously sees opportunities in the Kenyan radio.

The future is very bright but we need to know where we are coming from. It is not bad to grow but it is also good to grow healthier. We should look at what is the purpose of what we are doing [having more stations] and if there is not purpose, we shouldn’t do it. The industry is large, it’s good, it’s great, but let us weed that which we don’t need and pick what is relevant for a better world (J. Muya, personal communication, August 26, 2008).

All of these views are relevant. The Kenyan media industry is currently fluid with many stations trying to find their balance. In years to come, there is likely to be more stability. There is also little regulation but events such as post-election violence and the perceived
role of radio is likely to trigger a form of action. However, broadcasting philosophy, language, reach and content are factors that will continue to define radio in Kenya.

Chapters Summary

The first chapter provides a background to this research and the media industry in Kenya. It starts by introducing the experiences that motivated this research. I discuss some of the challenges I encountered in choosing a topic for the research due to the changes that were happening in the media and political environments. In the chapter, I acknowledge one problematic area that arose in early stages regarding the use of the term “vernacular”. Next, the chapter looks at the development of media in Kenya from the colonial era to present. Due to the diverse nature of radio industry in Kenya, I also provide a classification of radio stations that are found in the country today.

Chapter two presents the literature used in this study by situating rural audience research in Kenya in the field of mass communication. I explore various media reception studies that have used the ethnography methodology. In order to understand the place of media among the rural audiences, this chapter looks at conditions that define Kenyan rural population. As a key determinant of media reception and use, the language situation in Kenya and its effect on broadcasting is addressed. The last section deals with the application of information and communication technologies in rural development.

Chapter three discusses the methodology that was used in this research. I discuss the audience ethnography approach to media reception studies. I present Kieni West as the study site of data collection, my relationship with people in Kieni West and experiences in the field. I address my position in field as the researcher and how this affected data collection. The last section in chapter three addresses the specific audience
ethnography methods that were used for data collection in Kieni West. These methods are observation, interviews, focus groups discussion, and document and content analysis.

Chapters four, five and six provide the research findings. Chapter four puts forward the findings on the role of radio in the everyday lives of Kieni West people. This chapter shows how radio is used as a source of information and education by the audience and the reasons that radio is an effective medium for this role. Specific information on agriculture and health is discussed. The next section details how radio is used for companionship inside and outside the domestic setting. This section also takes up the increasing role of radio as a social platform showing the different interactions that are facilitated by the medium. The chapter looks at the role of radio in civic engagement that mainly stems from listeners’ interest in political content and participation. The last part examines ways in which radio is used by the audience in problem solving.

Chapter five examines the relationship between radio programming format, content, and audience’s radio listening habits. The chapter examines the various kinds of formats employed by broadcasters and different content found on the radio stations that are listened to in Kieni West. The next part looks at listening habits among the audience as well as specific content such as news, humor and religious material on the radio. The last part of the chapter examines the radio listening trends reported by Kieni West audiences in relation to selected findings from Steadman Quarterly Monitoring Report for the second quarter of 2008. Chapter six presents the findings on the connection between audience’s radio listening and the languages used in broadcasting. The next part examines the role of radio in popularizing, disseminating, and validating the language used in everyday conversation. The chapter also addresses the perception of vernacular
broadcasting by listeners and the challenges that local languages face in presenting technical content.

Chapter seven provides a synthesis of the state of radio industry in Kenya and how this relates to radio listening habits among Kieni West audiences. The chapter highlights the effects of the transition from a state-controlled to liberalized broadcast industry. This chapter relates radio listening experiences with the role of radio in delivery of information, education and entertainment. It also provides broader discussion on radio consumption and space as well as the role of radio in democratization process.

The last chapter is a summary of the research and the main findings. The chapter also points out some shortcomings of studies and suggestions for future research. I close by providing a short appraisal of the implications of a liberalized radio market in Kenya based on evidence contained in this study.
CHAPTER TWO: UNDERSTANDING RURAL RADIO LISTENERS

This chapter positions rural radio audience research in Kenya within the field of mass communication studies. The first section examines audience ethnography in communication research in Africa and reviews some radio ethnography studies. This section also examines the distinction between African and Western ethnographic approaches and points out how African radio ethnography studies have informed this research. The second section explores the Kenyan society that is characterized by multilingualism and how this has affected broadcasting as well as how the question of language(s) has been dealt with over the years in the country and its influence on the media. The third section looks at conditions that define the Kenyan rural population and how these conditions affect media delivery and consumption. In looking at rural population and media, I use one of the dominant communication paradigms in the developing world, development communication, and its application in the Kenyan context. In addition, I explore one of the latest discourses in communication, the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) and their application to rural development.

Audience ethnography research in African settings

Despite an impressive volume of audience ethnography studies in different parts of the world, studies in Africa appear to be slow in developing. The few ethnography studies that have been conducted in limited settings in the continent. These notable studies include the works of Lila Abu-Lughod, Debra Spitulnik, and Winston Mano. Mano (2004, 2005) consist of radio study in Zimbabwe and Spitulnik’s (1997, 1998a, 1998b, 2000, 2004) work is on radio in Zambia. Abu-Lughod’s (1997, 2005) work
includes extensive studies of television in Egypt. Abu-Lughod’s (1997) study shows television is an extraordinary technology that breaches boundaries. Television intensifies and multiplies encounters “among lifeworlds, sensibilities, and ideas” bringing experiences that originate outside viewers’ community located in remote villages from all parts of the world (pp. 122). Abu-Lughod (1993) illustrates the different functions of serial television drama content reflecting Islam and Egyptian public culture and sites where Egyptian politics are played. Abu-Lughod’s studies are examples of the few ethnographic studies of television in Africa.

Why are there so few audience ethnography studies in Africa? Given that African communication scholars have been engaged in a discussion regarding the best methodologies to study communication in the continent (Ansah, 1998; Obeng-Quiaodo, 1986, 1987), it is important to explore the possible reasons behind the conspicuous lack of ethnographic studies. Obeng-Quiaado (1986) notes that research in mass communication in Africa uses methodologies that are mainly developed in the West. At the same time, most communication researchers are trained in the West using Western models and concepts that are at times not workable, especially in African rural settings. He identifies four core values that should be taken into account by communications researchers working in Africa: belief in a supreme being, collective culture, the concept of time, and work as a necessity for survival. These values influence the choice of research methods. Thus, the group interview has been identified as more suitable in a rural setting instead of an individual survey or interview. At the same time, understanding that rural populations have different values will allow researchers to be more sensitive as opposed to being rigidly bound by logic that only applies to other settings. Following this
argument, Ansah (1998) also calls on researchers to develop theories and methodologies that are relevant to the unique African environment.

If we are to heed this call, audience ethnography presents an approach that is sensitive enough not only to African rural audiences but also to urban settings. Yet despite its potential, audience ethnography in Africa is underutilized. Three factors provide plausible explanations behind the slow development of audience ethnography research in Africa. These factors include the history of traditional ethnography research in Africa, audience ethnography trends in other parts of the world, and lastly, the development of mass media on the continent.

Traditional ethnography research is not a stranger to Africa. It has a long history in fields such as anthropology. However, as Murphy and Kraidy (2002) have noted while addressing some of the criticisms leveled against audience ethnography, traditional ethnography has been accused of embodying elitist and ethnocentric perspectives that are associated with colonial discourses, a charge that focuses on how the field reports experiences simultaneously objectified and subjectified the “Other” (participants). These critiques have questioned the way in which ethnography acted to cement and maintain oppressive power relations through surveillance techniques of distance and control while the ethnographer remained invisible within his/her own text. Therefore, audience ethnography suffers from the baggage of traditional ethnography from which it borrows. This is very sensitive especially for communication scholars from Africa. African scholars would desire to distance themselves from these oppressive notions associated with the traditional ethnographic approach. At the same time, ethnography has been misrepresented as a Western or ‘outsider’ approach that essentially studies unfamiliar
environments. However, audience ethnography studies have been carried out by researchers in their own environments. Continued misrepresentation could potentially limit African communication researchers from benefitting from the method to study their own settings.

Worldwide, a considerable number of early and subsequent studies in audience ethnography in the United Kingdom and the United States (for example, Fiske, 1986, 1987; Lull, 1990; Morley, 1980; Silverstone, 1990; Simpson, 1987) have been on television. Murphy and Kraidy (2003) also note that different regional schools of media reception studies have emerged outside of the US and the UK. These include Latin America, Scandinavian, and Indian communication schools (for example Barrios, 1988; Gonzalez, 1992; Tufte, 2000). Outside the Western world, even fewer works deal with radio. Recently, the rise of the Internet has been accompanied by an increase in ethnography study and its use (see Bealieu, 2004; Riggs 2004; Ruhleder, 2000; Schaap, 2000; Thomsen, Straubhaar & Bolyard, 1998; Wilson, 2006). Furthermore, the pervasiveness of television in the Western world and parts of South America and television’s place in the household makes it sensible for researchers to investigate the medium and hence the high number of studies. The same case applies to the Internet, which has become a part of people’s everyday life in the West and other developed countries. In many African countries, television is still largely inaccessible and has not attracted many studies. Radio on the other hand remains the leading source of media consumption for the population but has attracted scant ethnographic research.

African media ethnography studies have addressed various dimensions that are unique and particular to the African continent. These ethnography studies are also a part
of the post-colonial discourse. Radio in Africa occupies an important position as it allows the interaction between the tradition and the modern life where people engage in emergent and established discourses in contemporary Africa (Gunner, 2006). In her study of radio in Zambia, Spitulnik (1998) has shown how modernity is negotiated in the electronic media. Citing the example of language use, she argues that popularization of radio in colonial Zambia led to an “increased circulation and standardization- and even a canonization- of a basic repertoire of English language expressions for talking about the modernity” (pp. 93). In disseminating and validating certain English language formulations, radio became a powerful agent for talking about modernity.

The concept of modernity in Zambia, according to Spitulnik, denotes “a cultural construct which holds that people can move towards a better life and a more ‘evolved’ society, through the acquisition of certain kinds of knowledge, goods, technologies, and lifestyle habits” (pp. 93). Spitulnik views the history of electronic media in Zambia as a typical story about complex meanings of modernity “on both ends of the colonizer/colonized dyad” and a story about the profound shaping of the consciousness and expression that occurred through colonization. Colonial-derived notions of modernity in Zambia weave in and out of African voices, both past and present, and contain within them all the asymmetries, ambivalences, and contradictions that characterize postcolonial societies.

At the same time, radio in Africa actively promotes different forms of African traditional culture. Mano (2004) illustrates the use of radio as an educative platform for promoting African traditions. Radio in Zimbabwe advances African traditions by providing a discursive space. It also serves to educate those who are not well versed with
African traditions. Mano’s study shows how public radio in Zimbabwe adapts material from the past and uses them as illustrated in a talk program that was modeled after the Shona tradition of *dare*. In the radio program, the *dare* tradition is re-invented on a national scale for the purpose of reviving and upholding the tradition. The program illustrates how electronic media re-arrange social forums, allowing people to get into contact with one another in new ways. In this way, radio overcomes some of the difficulties presented by face-to-face communication (Mano, 2004). The ability accorded to listeners by radio to participate in social settings like *dare* has decreased the significance of physical presence in the experience of people and events (Meyrowitz, 1985; Mano, 2004). Broadcasting traditions in Africa have been found to be important because people look up to the media as a source of explanations, advice, and an arbiter of social morality (Meytnon, 1983; Spitulnik, 2004).

In the same vein, Spitulnik (1996) shows how radio promotes the circulation of media discourse in popular culture. Drawing again from language in Zambia, Spitulnik analyzes how media language is recontextualized, reinterpreted, and played within everyday discourse focusing specifically on the recycling of radio expressions such as program titles, broadcasters' phrases, and broadcasters' turn-taking routines in two major languages of ChiBemba and English. She considers several cases in which phrases and discourse styles are extracted from radio broadcasting and then recycled and reanimated in everyday usage, outside of the contexts of radio listening. Her study shows that mass media, due to their extensive accessibility and scope, can serve as both reservoirs and reference points for the circulation of words, phrases, and discourse styles in popular culture.
African media environment is characterized by pluralism, which is exhibited by broadcasting in multiple languages. Mano (2005) in a study of how daily and weekly schedules of Radio Zimbabwe (RZ) reflect and affect rural and urban listeners found that the format coincided with key moments in the actual Zimbabwean day. The schedule analysis found that national radio broadcasters anticipated rural listeners in two languages of Shona and Ndembele and reveals challenges involved in reconciling two different audiences at a national level. RZ achieved a degree of success in providing programming that was relevant to their listeners. Majority of the listeners interviewed in Mano’s study identified with RZ scheduling because of its language. Music and talk programs fitted in with their lifestyles (Mano, 2005). The station was helping to forge a national public life with a uniform sense of time.

Noting the particularity of contexts such as Africa, Spitulnik (2000) argues that audience ethnographies ought to investigate how features of the media technology enable or inhibit certain kinds of audience engagements. She sees a possibility that social context is just as much a factor in active audience engagements as is any kind of individual interpretive process. Drawing a distinction between Western and non-Western audience ethnography studies, Spitulnik (2000) argues that “… one of the greatest hazards of conventional reception studies which have their origins in literary criticism, printed texts, the single text interpreting reader and assumptions of a Western type of subjectivity- is that they encourage a kind of egocentric (or subject-centric), rather than sociocentric, account of reception practice” (Spitulnik, 2000, pp. 145). We need to understand “media reception” as a constellation of processes which includes: direct responses to media content; decodings of media messages; phenomenological comportment towards media
technologies/appliances; social relations among groups of media users; and the material economic and cultural conditions of media ownership and use. It is possible to produce different kinds of ethnographies of media audiences, depending on which aspect of this reception constellation is stressed. While moving towards documenting the ethnography particulars that may chip away at notions of the generic homogenous audience, questions of cultural patterns, economic determinants and shared forms of social organization should not be discarded.

The radio ethnographic studies discussed above (Mano, 2004, 2006; Spitulnik, 1997, 1998, 2000) are instructive of the African audience environment. They also reveal very important aspects of radio listenership especially through the discussion of the pluralistic environment, rural life, language dimensions, and economic situations in Africa. However, given the media environment in Zimbabwe and Zambia, they do not wholly capture some of the current emerging issues in African broadcasting afforded by a liberalized media market. According to Ndlela (2007), both Zambia and Zimbabwe have failed to enact meaningful broadcast reform. The political crisis in Zimbabwe since 2000 has limited democratic policy reform processes and liberalization of the broadcasting media. In Zambia, the liberalization process has been termed as unsatisfactory because it has failed to open up real space in the broadcasting industry (Ndlela, 2007).

Consequently, these significant African audience ethnography studies have been carried out within a constricted media environment. The African ethnographic researches conducted elsewhere are very instructive and provide a starting point that informs future researches. But it is important to note the situational differences in the environment.
This research was carried out in a liberalized media environment that is characterized by competition that has resulted in audience fragmentation and segmentation. At the same time, the increased use of new information and communication technology is affecting the use of traditional media such as radio. The penetration of mobile phones in the rural areas offers new dimensions in broadcasting. However, the underlying circumstances in the rural areas remain largely unaltered. The distribution of information technologies is still skewed in favor of the urban settings. More importantly, from an ethnographic standpoint, the fundamentals of the society are unchanged. While the media environment in Kenya today is a departure from what it was 15 years ago, the same cannot be said of the people’s way of life as the study of Kieni West shows. Among the listeners in Kieni West, the tradition, culture, beliefs, and interactions that are defined by the Kikuyu community ways of life have not changed. One cannot deny that there are token changes that are going on in the society. There are visible struggles between what can be called ‘tradition’ on one hand and the ‘modern’ on the other. There are differences in the weltanschauungs of the younger population compared to those of the older section of the population. Radio ethnography studies are instrumental in revealing how these play out in the broadcasting as well as listeners’ preferences and interpretation of the content.

Language use and media in Kenya

The development of media in Kenya has been influenced by the population composition and external factors such as colonialism, globalization, and national policies that have been adopted by the state. In mediated communication, language is a central factor in determining the number of people that can be reached by a given medium. In
Kenya, different perceptions toward different languages have developed over time, which has influenced their development and how they are utilized in communication processes. There are an estimated 60 local and foreign languages that are spoken in Kenya (Githiora, 2002). The language situation in Kenya is related to the ethnic composition of the country (Michieka, 2005). The Kenyan population is divided into 42 ethnic groups. The five largest ethnic groups are Kikuyu, Luhya, Luo, Kalenjin and Kamba which represent 72% of the total population while the rest make up 28%. The African languages spoken in Kenya have been categorized into four broad linguistic groups: the Bantu language, the para-Nilotic languages, the Nilotic languages and the Cushitic languages (Githiora, 2002; Whiteley, 1974). The Bantu comprises of the largest language group and are spoken by approximately 65% of the population (Githiora, 2002; Heine & Mölig, 1980; Michieka, 2005). Bantu languages belong to the Niger-Congo family and include languages such as Kikuyu, Luhya, Kamba, Meru, Gusii, the Mijikenda languages and Swahili. The para-Nilotic languages include Maa(sai), Teso, and Kalenjin. The only Nilotic language is Luo. Cushitic languages include Boran, Somali, and Rendile. A number of Indian languages such as Punjabi, Hindi, and Gujarati are spoken mainly in the urban centers (Githiora, 2002).

Swahili is Kenya’s national and official language and the universal lingua franca. Swahili is also spoken in East and Central African countries in Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda, Malawi, and Democratic Republic of Congo. Swahili belongs to East African coastal sub-family along with languages such as Chonyi, Giriama and Digo. Swahili developed to become the common coastal language since the 13th century following the interaction of the Arabs and East African coast Bantu. It however
incorporates a wide range of words from Hindi, Persian, Portuguese, and English (Githiora, 2002). The ability of Swahili to adapt has influenced its position among the languages of East and Central Africa. English is the most widely spoken foreign language and is used as Kenya’s official language. English is also the language of instruction in upper primary classes, secondary schools and tertiary education institutions, the language of government records, reports, and other forms of written correspondence (Musau, 2005). Until 2002 when the Kenyan constitution was reviewed, English was the only recognized official language while Swahili was the national language. The special position accorded to English in Kenya has been a long subject of debate (Musau, 2003; Wa’ Thiongo, 1986) as will be discussed later in this section.

The rise of English language in Kenya dates back to the colonial period. When Kenya was declared a British protectorate in 1895, Swahili had long established itself as a dominant language in the East African coast and trading was going on with the interior. Initially, Swahili and English were used by the colonial administrators (Gorman, 1974). Missionaries also made extensive use of Swahili, which led to translation of the Bible so that the local people could read. With missionaries running the early colonial education system, the English language began to spread steadily among the newly educated Africans (Michieka, 2005). English became an important asset for those who sought jobs in places like the civil service (Myers-Scotton, 1993). To determine the appropriate educational policies, the government set up commissions as early as 1925 such as Phelps-Stokes Commission and the East Africa Commission to inquire into the introduction of English language in the system. A 1927 Advisory committee of the colonial office in one
of its reports felt that one of the main incentives that led African parents to send their children to school was the knowledge acquisition of English.

Knowledge of English is naturally regarded by them [African parents] as the principal means whereby they can obtain economic advance later in life. Any attempt, therefore to delay unduly the introduction of English into African school would be regarded as the attempt to hold back the African from legitimate advance in civilization (quoted in Gorman, 1974, p. 413).

A decisive step in defining the language policy came in 1951 in the form of the Education Department Annual Report which called for the teaching of English from lower classes because it was felt that the use of three languages (English, Swahili and local African languages, referred to as mother tongues) was inadequate pedagogically (Musau, 2005). The policy was implemented in 1958 in what was known as New Primary Approach (NPA). The approach entailed the use of English as the medium of instruction on an experimental basis in Asian schools from the first day of school. The policy was later extended to the African schools (Mbaabu, 1996; Musau, 2005).

After independence, The Kenya Education Commission, also referred to as the Ominde Commission, was tasked with reviewing the education system. The Commission proposed the maintaining of English from class one. Swahili was also recognized and was viewed as a tool for national integration. Swahili was made a compulsory subject in all primary schools, but was not examined (Republic of Kenya, 1964; Musau, 2005). The commission also recommended that vernacular languages be used in daily story telling. In 1981, the ‘Mackay Report’ recommended the restructuring of the Kenyan education system, which was implemented in 1985. Swahili was elevated to a compulsory and
examinable subject in primary and secondary schools. As far as mother tongues are concerned, different education commissions such as the Beecher Report of 1949 and Gachathi Report of 1976 did recommend their use as the languages of instruction in the first three years of primary education. However, their application has been hindered by lack of instructional materials that is complicated by the multiplicity of languages (Mbaabu, 1996). At the same time, such strategy is unworkable in urban areas as well as cosmopolitan areas where the population is heterogeneous. Despite these challenges, there has been no effort to promote local languages leaving English to dominate followed by Swahili. The state of language use imbalances in Kenya, like many other countries in Africa has led to neglect of local languages (Musau, 2005). While their multiplicity has posed a challenge, the costs of using local languages can be minimized through standardization or harmonization of the closely related dialects (Mbaabu, 1996). Mohochi (2003) has argued that the extensive use of English only benefits a small segment of the Kenyan society. He advocates the use of Swahili, a language that allows an effective communication system that link government and the population. Swahili language occupies a special position because it is spoken and understood extensively in Kenya and Eastern Africa.

Robinson (1996) has provided a broad examination of languages in rural development. He decries the neglect of local languages in communication for development-oriented programs in Africa, which he argues, is partly because planners have failed to recognize that language is at the heart of development processes. Language is particular to cultural contexts and it brings distinctiveness, it is a symbol of belonging and a distinguishing feature with respect to different groups. According to Robinson
(1996), language is a vital parameter that reflects the social realities and structures of the rural settings. Rural areas are home to the majority of the population in Kenya and are shaped by specific social and economic conditions that distinguish them from urban settings. These conditions ultimately define roles and applications of broadcast media.

One language issue that continues in the postcolonial studies is the discussion of the acceptability and feasibility of the use of “one’s language of colonization and/or language of slavery to express one’s cultural identities” (Lunga 2004, p. 292). On one side, critics have argued that it is impossible to express freedom in the master’s language. In Africa, proponents for lingua emancipation such as Wa Thiongo (1986) have taken issue with language as it relates to cultural and linguistic genocide and cultural imperialism. Language should help people to understand themselves (Wa Thiong’o, 1986). Wa Thiong’o views English as a ‘cultural bomb’ that contributes to the process of wiping away memories of pre-colonial cultures and history. It is a way of installing new, more subtle forms of colonialism. Others like Chinua Achebe (1975) have advocated for continued use of colonial language for political and economic expediency. According to Lunga (2004), while the language debate allows for the exploration of various positions, “it leads to a false dichotomous vision of English and indigenous languages that is paralyzing, to say the least” (p. 294). Through an analysis of Amakhosi Theater, a popular theatre in Zimbabwe, Lunga (2004) illustrates ways in which colonized people transcend the perceived dichotomy between English and local indigenous languages and as a result, create ambivalent cultural spaces of hybridity. In this new space, the colonial and the indigene contest each other and coexist.
Lunga (2004) argues that the emergence of hybrid cultures in the African settings lead to the coexistence and contestation between the colonial and the indigenous culture. This is mainly a characteristic of African urban and metropolitan settings whose inhabitants have access to external cultural materials. These cultural materials flow from diverse sources including local, regional, and international, mainly through media. This research shows that the emergence of hybrid culture is not limited to urban and metropolitan areas. The youth in Kieni West illustrate that radio platform allows them to interact with the outside world just like the youth from urban settings by exposing them to materials that they can relate to and in a language that they understand. In rural settings where physical contact with the outside world other than the immediate are limited, mediated interactions becomes important. In Kenya, the distribution of hybrid cultures such as slang language and the Kenyan hip-hop music that are products of interactions through multilingualism and multiculturalism is clearly limited to urban and metropolitan areas (Mbugua & Samper, 2006). In rural areas, there is more contestation between what is viewed as “external” versus “the local”. Rural areas are the reservoirs for African cultural forms and play an important role in preserving them. But there also exist contradictions in the value attached to local knowledge compared to external or foreign knowledge. Proficiency in the local knowledge is taken for granted and sometimes not appreciated or acknowledged. Younger people aspire to improve their expertise in external knowledge such as speaking foreign languages, which comes with benefits such as increased possibilities, and competitiveness in the job market. In chapter six, I address the role of language in influencing rural peoples’ listening habits. The discussion points to different trends across age, gender and social status.
Mapping Kenya rural areas economic and social conditions

Rural areas in Kenya have been of main concern in the government’s policy making and planning because of their centrality in development. Rural areas are important to the national development because of various factors. They harbor the majority of the country’s population, amounting to over 80%, and are therefore key locations for economic production. Rural areas in Kenya also face numerous challenges compared to urban areas. At independence, illiteracy, rapid population growth, and rural poverty were identified as three developmental challenges (Republic of Kenya, 1964). In terms of economic production, rural areas depend on agriculture. These areas are the heart of Kenya’s agricultural industry, one of the backbones of the Kenyan economy. The contribution of the agricultural sector to real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth has been higher compared to other sectors of the Kenyan economy (Republic of Kenya, 1997). However, the overall contribution relative to other sectors of the economy has been on the decline. During the period 1964-1974, the sector contributed 36.6% of the GDP; 1974-1979, 33.2%; 1980-1989, 29.8%; 1990-1995, 26.2% and 20% by 2000 (Republic of Kenya, 2001; 2002). Although agricultural contribution to GDP growth has been on the decline, the industry remains one of the most important sectors that drive Kenya’s economic growth. According to the 1989 Population Census, 82% of Kenya’s labor force was rural based (Republic of Kenya, 2001).

The state of the Kenyan rural areas is continuously captured in the government’s policy documents. For example, the *Kenya National Development Plan (1979-1983)* identified major challenges in population growth and lack of constructive social change that accompany modernization (Republic of Kenya, 1979). Throughout the years, rural
areas in Kenya have continued to lag behind in provision of basic needs such as water supply, health, education, development of infrastructure such as roads and low information access (Republic of Kenya, 1979; 1996b; Ministry of Finance and Planning, 2001). In 1997 for instance, the incidence of food poverty was 51%, while the absolute poverty level was 53% (Ministry of Finance and Planning, 2001). Certain occupations have a high incidence of poverty. Examples include subsistence farmers (46%) and pastoralists (60%). Subsistence farming accounts for over 50% of the total poor population in Kenya, all of whom live in rural areas (Ministry of Finance and Planning, 2001).

The prevalence of poverty has been found to force many people to engage in unsustainable farming practices in rural areas (Ministry of Finance and Planning, 2001). People in rural areas are also forced to migrate to urban areas in search of other alternatives such as factory labor. As a result, there are sex imbalances between male and females in urban areas as more men migrate to urban areas in turn leaving more women in rural areas (Republic of Kenya, 1996). There are therefore male deficits in rural areas and excesses in the receiving urban areas. Rural women engaging in subsistence activities have been found to be more vulnerable to poverty than men are. In 1996, an estimated 69% of active female population work as subsistence farmers compared to 43% for men (Republic of Kenya, 1996). Within the household, men control women’s labor through marriage, with implications for women’s labor input. In subsistence or small-scale commercial farming, women contribute higher labor inputs than men or children. Women have been shown to perform over 50% of all agricultural activities and all domestic tasks but men control decision making on household expenditure (Republic of Kenya, 1996).
The National Development Plan (2002-2008) addresses the challenges in agriculture and rural areas through a number of strategies including the implementation of the Kenya Rural Development Strategy (KRDS) that’s aimed at providing a common basis for all actors to steer development in the agriculture sector (Republic of Kenya, 2002).

Another key concern in rural areas is healthcare (Republic of Kenya, 1979; 1996a; 2001). Provision for health services to alleviate and prevent disease, illness, and physical and mental impairment can satisfy one of the basic human needs of good health as well as maintain the productive potential of the people (Republic of Kenya, 1979). As a major provider of health care services, the government has consistently encountered different constraints. The National Development, 1979-1983 identifies five main deficiencies in health provision. These include: (1) inadequate and uneven coverage of the population due to insufficient health delivery points; (2) inadequate level of service due to shortage of medical manpower; (3) unsatisfactory patterns of utilization of manpower, since majority of staff have been deployed in urban areas and in major hospitals; (4) shortages of drugs and other essential supplies due to the financial constraint and an inefficient distribution system; and (5) inadequate flow of information and utilization of that information. These deficiencies persist to date. The health sector in Kenya is under-funded. The health situation has worsened since the late 1980s with the implementation of World Bank fronted Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPS). The SAPS ended free core service provision for human development by the government. Cost sharing was introduced in a number of service sectors. This has affected poor households’ access to basic core services, especially health and education (Soren & Njehu, 2005). The government budgetary cuts in public hospitals were massive due to unavailability of basic
resources. At the same period, the spread of HIV/AIDS in Kenya has presented additional challenges to healthcare provision (KDHS, 2003).

In addition to agriculture and healthcare, education has featured as a vital concern when dealing with the rural population. Education serves an important role in human development. Education empowers people to improve their well-being and participate actively in nation building. The Kenyan government has therefore continued to place education as one of the priority sectors since independence (Republic of Kenya, 1964; 1965; 1979; 2001; 2002). The government policy articulated in the 1965 position paper ‘African Socialism and its Application to Development in Kenya’ clearly states that citizens are expected to contribute to education-sector development through fees, taxes, and labor services. This policy document goes on to acknowledge that, although the Kenyan government was committed to the goal of providing universal primary education, the immediate objective was to expand secondary-level facilities “as rapidly as teacher supply and recurrent cost implications permit” (Government of Kenya 1965: 40). After two decades of independence, school enrolments in pre-primary, primary, and secondary level education were high only for a reversal to happen characterized by a high level of dropouts, low completion rates and low transition rates (Republic of Kenya, 2002).

Research on education has consistently shown disparities in literacy levels between rural and urban population (Mukudi, 2004; Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang, 2004). The term literacy here follows UNESCO’s definition where a literate person is defined as one who can read and write, with understanding, a short statement on her or his everyday life. The 1989 Population Census data indicated that 87% of the urban population was literate compared to 70% in rural areas. There are also disparities between male and adult
populations. In rural areas, only 62% of female were literate compared to 78% for men (Republic of Kenya, 1996).

Education provision in Kenya has been through the formal system from preschool, primary education, secondary education and tertiary education (Muiru & Mukuria, 2005). The Kenyan educational system has been viewed as elitist and therefore failed to satisfactorily initiate the desired scientific culture or instill learners with the desirable social skills and values due to lack of human resources, physical learning facilities and instructional materials (Muiru & Mukuria, 2005; Republic of Kenya, 2002a). Lack of resources is more pronounced in rural areas. Over the years, the presence of user fees in the school funding structure has affected school attendance rates and dropout rates among students as well as limiting access to education (Mukudi, 2004). In an effort to reduce the high levels of illiteracy among the adult population, the government, religious organizations, and non-governmental organization have implemented adult literacy programs. These efforts have been marginally successful, as implementers have continued to face numerous challenges. Poverty has been identified as the underlying cause of low literacy rates at the individual level (Carron, Mwiria & Riga, 1989; Muiru & Mukuria, 2005). Given the high incidences of poverty in rural areas, the resident population bears the brunt and hence low literacy levels compared with the urban settings. In addition, the migration patterns are likely to rob rural areas of most of the educated personnel as they seek competitive opportunities which are concentrated in urban areas.

The conditions of rural areas described above have always been in need of improvement. Within the communication field, the development communication thinking
that emerged in 1950s as a response to modernization aspirations has been an important part of the development agenda in many parts of the world. In Africa, development communication became the most influential system in broadcasting in the post-colonial states starting in the early 1960s (Hyden, Leslie & Ogundimu, 2002; Ndlela, 2007; Nyamnjoh, 2005). The following section examines the application of mass media in development processes in the developing world and identifies specific examples from Kenya. I also explore a renewed shift in thinking where information and communication technologies (ICTs) that encompass new media such as internet and mobile telephony have become a key component in the development communication field.

Application of mass media in the developing world

Mass media and communication in general has been applied to promote development in different parts of the world. The most dominant application has been in development communication. Although much of the discussion relating to the role of mass media in development has come from development communication related research starting in the 1950s, it is evident that similar views existed earlier on as illustrated in arguments for the establishment of broadcast systems in the colonial world. Hilda Matheson’s article titled *Broadcasting in Africa* in 1935, also discussed earlier, is an early example of connections made between concepts of modernization and communication (Katz & Wedell, 1977). Beyond the basic role of providing a means of contact with illiterate and semi-literate people, Matheson (1935) viewed broadcasting as a tool that can be used by a government or education agent for equipping what she called “primitive community” with adequate practical knowledge to meet change. Later, the emergent views on the causal relationship between communication and development
were more clearly articulated (Lerner, 1958; Pye, 1963; Schramm, 1964). Lerner’s definition of being modern included the exposure to broadcast media. According to Lerner, media is important in the development of ‘empathy’, the ability to identify with social, political, and technical need of new-nationhood beyond the confines of experience in extended family and village. Lerner’s thesis has been supported by other scholars such as Inkeles & Smith (1974) whose study found a correlation between broadcast media and development.

Lerner’s model was adopted and widely applied by the UNESCO, which was instrumental in the establishment of broadcast media in newly independent African states. UNESCO applied the modernization model to promote media penetration while advocating following of minimum target saturation standards: for every 100 persons in the population, there should be ten daily newspapers, five radio receivers, two cinema seats, and two television sets (Bourgault, 1995; UNESCO, 1961). UNESCO launched educational radio projects in the 1960s that promoted rural education in Ghana and in Niger. School broadcasting projects were implemented in Nigeria, in Togo, in Burkina Faso, and in the Congo, among others while teacher education programs were initiated in Sierra Leone, Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda.

The immediate years after independence saw African states take charge of broadcasting processes mainly by nationalizing the national broadcasting bodies. The increased role of the state led to the limited role of international organizations such as UNESCO. In what became the development communication model of broadcasting, the goals and role of the national broadcasters in countries like Kenya were aligned with the nation building objectives articulated by the government. To fulfill this, the national
government policies were actively pursued in the media. Radio is a potential instrument of social engineering capable of shaping listeners’ knowledge, opinion, and behaviors. This has made radio in Kenya a tool for both government and non-governmental organizations to use the medium in shaping listener’s lives (Ligaga, 2005). In Kenya, the main goals starting in the 1960s and throughout the 1970s were to improve literacy levels, stimulate economic growth through development of modern agriculture and improve population’s health. In education, the government of Kenya through the Voice of Kenya (VoK) undertook radio based educational programs. In Kenya, radio lessons were produced nationwide between 1974 and 1990 through the Ministry of Education Schools Broadcasting Unit (Adhiambo, 1990; Roberts, 1974). These nationwide broadcasts were scheduled during the day. Radio lessons were aimed at students and teachers in primary and secondary schools as well training college instructors. In the 1980s, more efforts were directed towards family planning and reproductive health. In the late 1980s, the increasing burden of disease exemplified by diseases such as malaria, infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, and the rising spread of HIV/AIDS made health one of the foremost addressed issues on the media. In the recent years, HIV/AIDS has continued to be a topical health issue in the Kenyan radio.

While communication is a potential tool for development, access to information is not always balanced because some sections of the population are not reached. In examining communication and information policy considerations from the standpoint of Kenyan women, particularly those living in rural areas, Steeves (1996) argues that women’s needs are neglected in policy discussions. Most Kenyan women are poor and live in rural areas and “bear the primary responsibility of at least four of their country’s
development priorities: agricultural production, environmental protection, population control and child welfare” (Steeves, 1996, pp. 157). Part of the problem stems from the fact that Kenya has not developed an explicit and coherent national policy on mass communication and hence relies on implicit policies embedded in myriad laws and in executive powers (Steeves, 1996). Kenyan official policy focuses on control as opposed to other issues such as access (Okoth-Owiro, 1990). Steeves argues that in order to ensure access to all segments of populations, including the underprivileged rural inhabitants, democratic national information and communication policies are important. Policies that stress universal access to information while recognizing the importance of national unity and security, valuing local culture and indigenous media forms and democratize structures of control are important (Hamelink, 1988).

Although this discussion centers primarily on radio communication, there is a strong relationship between different media forms which influences the overall performance of one medium. For example, radio broadcasters constantly need to have a dialogue with listeners on different issues. Broadcasters solicit feedback on their programming. Many programs also depend on on-air contributions from listeners. Telephone calls, short messages (SMS) and email messages allow for such dialogue. Today, there is an increase in access to telephone thanks to the mobile phone technologies, which has in turn increased participation in radio platforms among the rural listeners (Z. Thiong’o, personal communication, August 14, 2007). The following section explores the information and communication technologies access in the rural areas.
Information communication technologies access in the rural settings

Developments in the information technology field have extended the discourse on access to media and their applications beyond the traditional mass media forms. Current discourses on communication have dealt with the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in development. ICT is an umbrella term that includes any communication device or application and encompasses radio, television, cellular phones, computer and network hardware and software, satellite systems and so on, as well as various services and applications associated with them, such as videoconferencing and distance learning. ICTs have great potential and a key role to play in development of Africa including the rural and marginalized communities that have been left behind in essential services provision (Ahlering, 2000; Polikanov & Abramova, 2003; Roman & Colle, 2003). ICTs have faced numerous challenges in implementation but they also offer a powerful tool for empowerment and income generation (Kenny, 2002; Opoku-Mensah, 2000). The most common outlets for rural Internet consumption in Africa and Asia are telecenters, places usually found in rural settings where people can access ICTs such as phone and internet (Harris, Kumar & Balaji, 2001). Telecenters serve the basic function of information provision in different aspects of the target population. Internet outlets have been used to provide varied information depending on the target population's needs. For example, Internet projects have been used to disseminate agricultural related information, health information, and education (Dagron, 2001; Harris, 1999). Other projects have helped to organize poor communities around issues that affect them, help to connect the community at the global level, using Internet to enlist the
interest and support of the international community of activists, researchers, and other groups (Beck, Madon & Sahay, 2004).

The Internet has been used in different strategies. As a new technology, Internet has been combined with conventional mediums in the developing world. The radio Kothmale project in Sri-Lanka is one example where broadcasters have used a radio program to interpret information from selective Internet sites (Dagron, 2002). The radio station here is used as the service provider, a free access point to important points of service such as libraries. However, the sustainability of Internet in development is a matter of concern (Harris, Kumar & Balaji, 2002; Ballantyne, 2002). Rural communities are faced with numerous challenges that may militate against efficient implementation of Internet-based projects. Other questions include whether these communities are actually ready for modern communication technologies; or would it make more sense to concentrate efforts on improving the traditional communication tools (Kenny, 2002)? The nature of extreme poverty in developing countries points to an unsustainably high cost and relatively low benefit of direct Internet service provision through telecentres to the very poor. Very low incomes, subsistence agriculture, and unskilled wage labor as the dominant income source, food as the dominant consumption good, low education and high illiteracy, minority language status and rural location are characteristics of poor populations (Kenny, 2002). Harris, Kumar & Balaji (2002) points out that an Internet-based project can be sustainable depending on varied conditions that are situation specific.

While ICTs provide an opportunity for information access, many rural areas in countries like Kenya still rely on the traditional communication modes especially the
La Pastina (2005) in a study of Macambira area, located in interior of the Rio Grande de Notre state in northeastern Brazil illustrates that ownership of communication devices such as a television is for more than entertainment purposes. For many television viewers, television is the main, if not the only, source of information. In addition, the separation and isolation of rural areas are not only physical and cultural but also symbolic and emotional from the urban and modern representation of a nation. Spitulnik (1998) gives a similar description of a radio set in the Zambian village. A radio set or television set as a device or source of information may be taken for granted. For many rural folks however, years of savings to acquire the device represent economic wealth while the information availed ensures the only practical connection with the outside world (La Pastina, 2005; Spitulnik, 1998).

Chapter Summary

This chapter has addressed ethnographic approaches to media studies drawing upon the distinction between the traditional anthropological ethnography and media ethnography. Media ethnography distinguishes itself from the quantitative research tradition by moving away from a passive and aggregative view of the audience to that of an active human community. The section shows that television and new media such as the Internet have and continue to receive considerable media ethnography attention. On the other hand, ethnographic studies on radio are uncommon, particularly in Africa despite the fact that radio is the most dominant medium in the continent. This research contributes to ethnographic research through the examination of radio consumption in rural Kenya. Media ethnography studies are sensitive to the social settings of the audiences and communication devices, such as the radio, occupy different positions in
varying environments. In this research, radio is contextualized in an African setting as a source of information and a connection to the outside world. The radio device is examined beyond the domestic sphere, recognizing that it can circulate outside the home and enter into a variety of social relations outside the family household.

This research recognizes the importance of radio to the Kenyan rural population. The development of media in the country starting in the colonial period shows that print media was more developed than electronic media, a situation that the independent government inherited but did not improve. However, print media has never been an adequate substitute for electronic media because it is limited in its reach. Low literacy levels and limited economic power have inhibited the print media. Another key limiting factor has been the language barrier, because English has dominated the print media. Language is central in the plural Kenyan society and this section has explored various language policies and made a connection with the development of print and electronic media. Language policies have reflected the development of electronic media for many years that saw English and Swahili dominate the government-controlled radio broadcasting industry. This limitation left out most of the rural listeners who face challenges of economic production, health, education, among others. The literature available does not adequately address the liberalization period and the resultant developments in the language of broadcast. This research therefore sets out to capture the developments in the liberalized media industry in Kenya using the case of Kieni West to examine how the new broadcasting regime is reflected in the audience’s listening habits.

The rural population is yet to experience a substantive leap in new technologies whose application and maintenance is an expensive undertaking. However, mobile
telephony has diffused quickly including among the rural population. The technological limitations maintain the reliance on radio. This study goes further in examining what opportunities the changes in the broadcasting regime in Kenya ushered by the advent of liberalization have presented to the rural folks as commercial broadcasters have moved to capture different segments of the population. Also, I examine the connection between the rise in the use and application of mobile phones and radio broadcasting. The data presented in this research shows that cellular technology has penetrated the rural areas. With increased usage, listeners and broadcasters take advantage of the cell phones to initiate and maintain interactions. As the next chapter will show, rural listeners contribute to broadcasting content through participation in interactive programs, sending requests or greetings. Listeners are also able to give broadcasters feedback on various aspects of programming.
CHAPTER THREE: DOING AUDIENCE ETHNOGRAPHY IN KIENI WEST

This study examines rural listeners’ in Kieni West everyday interactions with radio. Media consumption occurs within a particular environment and listening habits are shaped by a myriad of factors, both internal and external to the group. In order to understand radio listening habits of the listeners within their social group, audience ethnography method provides tools that allow the researcher to examine multi-layered aspects of radio listening in audiences’ everyday life through the use of observation, interviews, discussion groups, document and content analysis. These different methods reinforce each other in different ways and provide a wide range of data necessary to construct a deep understanding of an audience’s media consumption.

This chapter details the methods used for data collection and is divided into five sections. The first section addresses the ethnographic approaches to studying media reception by looking at the methodological assumptions of the communication research. The second section discusses the research site, Kieni West Division in Central Kenya, and its population. The third section attends to the researcher’s position in the field revealing how different positions and relationships were negotiated during the fieldwork. The fourth part deals with specific data collection methods of audience ethnography that were used in this research and the kind of information they were used to uncover. The last part summarizes the content of the chapter.

Audience ethnography method

Moores (1993) has noted that while the ethnographic approach to investigating the social world of actual audiences is a relatively new tradition, ethnography has a long history in other disciplines such as anthropology. Ethnography is a description and
interpretation of a cultural or social group or system where the researcher examines the group’s observable and learned behavior, customs, and ways of life (Miller & Salkind, 2002, p.162). The objective of ethnography is to understand a culture from the native’s point of view, trying to grasp people’s subjective concerns of the social environment (Moores 1993, p. 3). Ethnography involves recording the interests and interpretations of others. In communication research,

Audience ethnography is an integral means for understanding the everyday world of social groups, their patterns or interpersonal communication, and their uses of the mass media. The purpose of ethnographic studies of mass communication is to allow the researcher to grasp as completely as possible, with minimal disturbance, the ‘native’s perspective’ or relevant communicative and sociocultural matters indigenous to him. (Lull, 1980, p. 199, quoted in Schroeder et al., 2003).

In addition to conceptual assumptions, the usage of the term *ethnography* in audience research differs from the general meaning in other fields. The term ethnography used in media and communication research also refers to a variety of methods that include in-depth interviews and short-term observation as well as longer-term participant observation. Audience ethnography approach is closely intertwined with the method.

Ethnography has been widely proposed as the most promising qualitative method for audience studies (Fiske, 1988; Grossberg, 1988; Morley, 1986; Radway, 1988). A consistent and fundamental thesis of ethnographic reception studies is the rejection of the notion of ‘audience’ as a unified aggregate that receives fixed messages from the media (Spitulnik, 2000). Press (1996) views this departure along the qualitative-quantitative
dichotomy. She argues that communication researchers have become increasingly discontented with a demographic approach to audience studies. Instead, “they are more interested in investigating the ways in which subjectivity is constructed at the site at which the audience constitutes itself- a realm somewhat resistant to quantitative methodology” (Press, 1996, p. 113). As a result, the term audience has been challenged due to its emphasis on the passivity of this group that does not allow opportunities for studying the subjectivity of the audience (Ang, 1996; Fiske 1987; Grossberg, 1988; Radway, 1988; Lindlof & Meyer, 1987). This has led to a much broader interpretation of audience leading communication scholars to borrow from the human sciences such as anthropology.

According to Press (1996), a broader definition of audience in communication research which views them as a human community has become important. Focusing on the constitution of this community as a mass, audience per se yields only one facet of the whole. A subject “[of] greater interest though is the integration of this audience-aspect into the whole lives of individuals and communities, the interplay between dimension ‘as audience’ and meanings, rituals, practices, struggles and structural roles and realities that make up the rest of their lives” (Press, 1996, p 13). This approach typifies what Ang (1996) calls culturalist audience studies, which are empirical and interpretive works that start out from the acknowledgment that media consumption is an ongoing set of popular cultural practices. The “significances and effectivities,” according to Ang, only take shape in the “complex and contradictory terrain, the multidimensional context, in which people live out their everyday lives” (Grossberg, 1988, p. 25 quoted in Ang, 1996). For Ang, to turn audiences from ‘an abstract hunch’ into more concrete knowledge and more
tangible understanding, we need to contextualize the media not as a series of separable independent variables that have more or less clear-cut correlations with another set of dependent audience variables (1996).

Audiences, as social subjects, produce meaning when they interact with media materials. In order to address meanings produced by social subjects and the daily activities they perform, qualitative researchers have frequently sought to explicate those significances and practices by locating them in relation to broader frameworks of interpretations and to structures of power and inequality (Moores, 1993, p. 4). This is one mark of critical ethnography (Harvey, 1990), an approach that recognizes the significance of media interpretations that are constructed by consumers in their everyday routines. At the same time, critical ethnography is not afraid to interrogate and situate media consumers’ spoken accounts (Moores, 1996).

Audience ethnography researchers are interested in the realm of day-to-day life and household cultures of media use (Lull, 1980). Ang (1992) refers to this as the social world of actual audiences. This realm cannot be measured because it exists as a dispersed domain of lived experiences and cultural meanings as opposed to calculable meanings. In order for us to get ‘behind the ratings’ (Morley, 1990) and to explore these experiences and meanings, researchers adopt methods that have very different purposes. In television reception studies, for example, Morley (1990) notes:

The kind of research that needs doing would involve identifying and investigating the catch all phrase ‘watching television’. We all watch television but with how much attention and with what degree of commitment, in relation to which types of
programs and occasions? ... Research needs to investigate the complex ways in which television is embedded in a … range of everyday practices (p. 8).

Spitulnik (2000) has however shown that audience activities can extend beyond the household realm. In her research on the use of radio in rural Zambia, Spitulnik observes that “radio in Zambia is not strictly, or even primarily, domestic technology but a machine that circulates far beyond home and enters into a variety of social relations and social situations beyond the same-residence family” (2002, p. 160). These findings are in contrast to claims from Western societies where radio as a technological device is restricted to the domestic settings (Morley & Silverstone, 1990).

**Data Collection**

The audience ethnography method was used to collect data in Kieni West Division of Nyeri district in the Central Kenya region. Audience ethnography as data collection method allowed the researcher to closely interact with audiences within their natural settings by being a part of their daily lives. During an eight-week research period in Kieni West I was able to integrate and interact with the people in the area. I visited local shopping centers, homes, and social places. I listened to the radio with some families and engaged in discussions of radio content when they arose. Because I speak Kikuyu as my first language, I easily participated in different aspects of these interactions. In addition, knowledge of Swahili helped where Kikuyu could not be used. As a researcher, I facilitated interactions in order to generate data relevant to my study as explained in the following sections. Ethnographic methods gave me the opportunity to explore radio content by listening to the programs as well as interviewing local broadcasters to get a deeper understanding of participants’ media behavior.
The specific ethnographic methods that were used include short questionnaires, interviewing, observation, and focus group discussions. These methods are well suited to answer the questions raised by the research. In addition to understanding listener’s choices based on the available radio stations, this research went beyond the surface by investigating the factors behind the choices made to provide what Spitulnik (2000) has called a “sociocentric” account rather than “egocentric” or “subject-centric” accounts of the audience (pp. 145). This research was interested in qualitative and not just quantitative accounts (Fontana & Frey, 1994) through the emphasis on description as opposed to numbers only. To understand radio listening habits among rural listeners in Kieni West Division in Central Kenya, the research followed other studies that have used audience ethnography in African settings to capture a multi-layered understanding of radio in listeners’ everyday life (Mano, 2004; Spitulnik, 2002a, 2002b). Questionnaires were used to give the researcher a general view of radio listening choices. Through the use of interviews and group discussions it was possible to explore the role of the radio as perceived by the listeners. Observational methods provided everything from issues that are directly observable to subtle ideas among the audiences. Observations were more revealing because they allowed the researcher to discover even deep rooted functions during the course of interactions (see Spitulnik, 2000, 2002a).

I found interviews as a useful method as I sought to identify themes of the lived daily world from subjects’ own perspectives (Kvale, 1996). Interviews and focus groups discussion methods were used in seeking to understand how listeners interpret different radio messages from radio stations and whether this plays a part in shaping their identity. Interviews were useful methods of eliciting information that arose during various
discussions allowing the researcher to probe further. In-depth interviews with the broadcasters provided different perspectives of the broadcasting formats which could not be captured from the listeners’ standpoints alone. Document analysis such as looking at the latest media monitoring research was used to bridge the gap between my own findings, the audience, and the broadcasters. In addition, content analysis through listening to the programs enabled me to follow up what I had found from the research. To be able to understand the listeners’ perspectives on certain programs for instance, it became necessary for me to listen to these programs.

The Research Site: Kieni West Division

Kieni West is one of the four divisions that make up the Nyeri South District. Until mid 2008, Kieni West was one of the seven Divisions that made up the Nyeri District. The population is mainly comprised of low-income families sparsely dispersed throughout the area. Kieni West land is partly flat with fertile ridges that are on the slopes of Aberdares Mountains. Like many places in the Central Kenya region, the main spoken language in Kieni West is Kikuyu. Kieni West residents speak Nyeri dialect Kikuyu. A very small population that speaks other languages can be found in pockets of the region. Samburu and Turkana speakers are found in some of the big farms and ranches. Many Samburu and Turkana languages speakers are also fluent in Kikuyu language. The closest urban setting is the Nyeri town, which is 20 miles away. There are limited direct interactions with Nyeri town, which, despite its classification as an urban area is surrounded by rural agricultural settings.

Mweiga town is the administrative center for the Kieni West Division. Mweiga rural town is a small town with buildings on either side of the Nyeri-Nyahururu road, a
tarmac road that connects two towns in central Kenya, Nyeri and Nyahururu. The transport infrastructure in most of Kieni West division is underdeveloped. The populated areas are mainly connected by dirt roads. Only a small population lives near the Nyeri-Nyahururu road which cuts across Kieni West. Relative to its population, Kieni West has a fair number of public primary schools, slightly more than many rural areas in Kenya but this is a common characteristic in the Central Kenya region. However, there are very few high schools when compared with other parts of the greater Nyeri District which has one of the highest concentrations of high schools in the country. The post-secondary institutions include a few youth polytechnics that mainly offer short term craft courses.

Mweiga Division is divided into five administrative locations of Endarasha, Mwiyogo, Mweiga, Gatarakwa, and Mugunda. Data in this research was collected in Endarasha, Mweiga and Mwiyogo.

Kieni West was selected as the research site because of its rural setting characterized by sparse population, limited infrastructure development and dependence on agriculture. These characteristics are very similar to what one can find in other rural areas. In terms of the Kenya Central province that is inhabited by Kikuyu language speakers, Kieni West has special attributes such as mode of production where residents’ agricultural practices involve crop cultivation and rearing livestock on freehold farms. These practices are widespread in other Kenyan provinces such as the Rift Valley, Eastern, and North Eastern. Doing a study in Kieni West therefore provides a good basis for future research in other similar populations. Kieni West as a research site presented an area with limited urban influences, allowing the researcher to concentrate on rural audiences’ distinct situation. Kieni West population lives in similar conditions as many
other rural populations in different parts of Kenya. Radio is a popular medium to residents; most of whom have limited access to other media forms such as newspapers and television.

As the researcher’s first language, Kikuyu made it easier to carry out the research. Understanding the language allowed the researcher to be in control and minimized the need to work through intermediaries. Kieni West provided a good site to explore the development of radio. The area receives a high number of radio stations signals compared to other rural areas due to its proximity to Nyeri town where more stations broadcast. With
Kikuyu vernacular broadcasting having been in existence for at least 10 years, Kieni West provided a solid case to investigate the radio industry because the audiences have been exposed to different choices over an adequate period. Doing research in the area allowed the researcher to capture various dimensions of radio listening as will be discussed later.

![Map of Kieni West Division and the three research locations](image)

*Source: The Electoral Commission of Kenya, 2002. (The location markings have been inserted by the author).*

*Figure 2: A map of Kieni West Division and the three research locations.*

**The people of Kieni West**

The main economic activity in Kieni West is agricultural production. Depending on the area, residents of Kieni West Division either practice commercial or subsistence farming. In the high altitude Endarasha area, residents practice commercial farming while in Mweiga and Mwiyogo area, the farm production is subsistence. In Mwiyogo, the
majority of the families cultivate crops such as maize, beans, wheat, and potatoes whose harvest is consumed at home. When there is a good harvest, the surplus produce is sold. Some residents also engage in small scale commercial tree growing. In addition, animals (mainly cows) are kept and sold. There are also few sheep and goats. Because the farms are not large enough to accommodate the animals, they are taken out to graze freely in unoccupied farms and government reserve land. The cows produce milk mainly for domestic consumption. The extra milk is sold through the local Dairy Cooperative organization. In 2007 and 2008, the area experienced a shortage of rainfall, which caused the production of crops to fail and little pasture for the animals. During this period, residents of Mwiyogo were forced to drive their animals more than 10 miles away to grazing fields that are owned by the government. In the evening, they would drive their animals back mostly to water them because there are no water sources in the grazing fields. The situation is, however, different in the Endarasha area. Despite the proximity to other parts of Kieni West, high altitude nature of the area has endowed the residents with highly productive farming land. Crop cultivation is practiced all year round. Residents specialize in farming short term produce such as cabbages, tomatoes, peppers, carrots and onions. They also grow cash crops such as coffee and tea and keep dairy cows for milk production.

In addition to the small freehold farms, there are a number of large farms spread all over Kieni West Division that are mainly owned by wealthy local individuals or private farming companies. They grow cash crops such as vegetables and horticulture for export, and crop trees such as blue gum. There are also a number of livestock ranches. According to my research assistant, Mr. Wanjohi, these farms are rarely beneficial to the
local people. The owners do not employ the local people but instead prefer “outsiders” who are likely to be paid less without complaint since they come from faraway places while local people may have alternatives, such as working in their farms.

There are few wage employment opportunities in Kieni West area. The most common forms of formal employment are with the government and a few private facilities such as health centers. There are a number of teachers who are employed in government and private schools in the area. Other civil servants work with various government departments such as the police, the wildlife service, agriculture, provincial administration, and the Ministry of Health. These are however found in the small towns where the government services are located. A large section of residents make their living through trade mostly done in the local shopping centers. The largest shopping center in Kieni West is Mweiga town which has a population of about 2,000 people. However, more people are likely to visit during the day as they conduct their business. Businesses include the transportation, foodstuff retail business, and service industry that include bars and food outlets, hairdressing and barber shops. There are also maize and wheat mills, building materials, agricultural and veterinary supplies. On Mondays and Thursdays there is an open air market where people from the larger Kieni region bring products such agricultural products, domestic wares and clothes to sell. The market is also open during the other days of the week but the activities are very limited.

Most residents in the area are aged below fifty years. There is a very small elderly population because the area was only inhabited in the 1980s by people from the larger Nyeri District whose population has exploded since the 1960s. The youthful population in their late teens and early twenties who are to be found in the area are mostly
unemployed or waiting to enroll in college. Those who are unemployed work as casual workers but such jobs are usually temporary and rare. In the agriculturally productive areas such as Endarasha, most young people are involved in farming from an early age. The majority of the unemployed youth are those who could not proceed with education past the primary or secondary school mostly due to lack of school fees. A sizeable number of the young people with whom I interacted have an eighth grade education and did not attend high school. Some dropped out of high school mostly in the first two years because they could not afford to pay school fees. Failure to achieve adequate level of education is largely as a result of financial constraints. Many students who finish high school did not enter into any form of college due to the high costs. I met a number of men who went to college and were employed before in different industries but have lost their jobs through retrenchment. Ordinarily, young men and women migrate to major urban centers such as the capital Nairobi and Nakuru, Kenya’s fourth largest city located West of Nyeri, in search of opportunities. Many of the young people whom I met had at one point migrated to the cities.

During the fieldwork, I observed particular gender differences between men and women. With respect to women, those who were interviewed had less education than men. Women tend to get married early. During the focus group discussions, a married women’s group age would range from as low as 20 years while the same group for men would comprise of people in their 30s. Women have a different view of life compared to men. At the time of my fieldwork, most people were facing hard economic times. Men and older women tended to raise the economic issue more often during the discussions. However, young women, especially those who are married, seemed to view the issue in a
different way. In talking to people, some argued that because being a housewife, which involved taking care of the family members and property at home, women faced less pressure to generate income compared to men who have to go looking for work every day. This does not mean that women are lesser contributors in the domestic arena. They are responsible for taking care of the farms and therefore produce food that is consumed in the family. In the family, husbands tended to be slightly older than their wives and are mostly likely to have a few more years of education. There are few instances where the woman was more educated.

Education experiences between men and women were not similar in all research areas. In Mweiga and Mwiyogo, young men interviewed had more education than women. The education inequalities are partly attributed to parents’ preference to educate male children compared to the female children. If a parent has two equally able children, male and female, the boy takes preference (J. Muchangi, personal communication, July 25, 2008). Residents blamed this on the limited economic power where most parents are unable to afford education costs for two or more children at the same time. They would therefore be forced to make tough decisions. In making such a decision, Muchangi feels that parents will reason that the girls will grow up and get married one day. In this case, the girls will leave the home but the boys will marry and stay. If a girl is lucky to be married to an able man, she has a chance to take care of her family. Therefore, educating a man, from the parents’ point of view, is a more prudent investment. Such logic appears as part of the patriarchal society point of view that does not treat men and women
equally⁴. Only in a few instances will the girl take preference such as when they are more academically gifted.

In Endarasha area, I encountered a different scenario. During my interaction with the young people, I realized that young women were more likely to have at least high school education while young men either completed only the primary education or dropped out of high school at some point. According to Mr. John Githinji, a 39 year old farmer from Endarasha, people are engaged in farming from a young age due to the high agricultural potential in the area. He says that it is common for teens to have their own small pieces of farms where they will grow vegetables. A good harvest often leads to good sales. When most young men “taste” the money, they become disoriented and fail to take their education seriously. They are also likely to pick what he calls “negative” habits such as smoking, drinking and eventually engaging in drugs. This has led to many of them quitting school at a young age (J. Githinji, personal communication, July 23, 2008). Very few are able to continue with farming after that. Young men at Endarasha shopping center were working as mechanics, welders and barbers although opportunities are rare even with high school education. For young women, getting married is one of the options. Girls are married as early as 18 years old. Men are mostly likely to get married from 25 onwards.

A family in Kieni West is composed of a husband, wife and children. Most families are also extended. In households where parents have married children living in

⁴ The patriarchal nature of the Kikuyu community is a huge determinant of the treatment of girls and women in general. The “home” or family in the traditional Kikuyu way of thinking focuses on the paternal side of the family. When a girl and a boy are born into a family, the man is viewed as the continuity of the family tree when they marry. Those whom they marry will become part of the family. On the other hand, a girl who is married joins a new family. These ways of thinking can be attributed to the reasoning about choice of whom to educate. When it comes to inheriting property women who are married were usually not included as heiresses. Today, this is changing in some families but the traditional view is still common.
the same compound with their families, all people who live there are considered one family. There are few single households run by women although they are likely to be viewed as a deviation from the norm. One woman complained of being viewed negatively for being a single mother. Commenting on a family program she likes to listen to, she explained how listening to a topic on single motherhood and women-headed families made a difference in her life. “In a very rare instance, I felt like I am an ordinary human being. Being a single mother in this community, most people view people like us negatively, just because we are not married”. In the traditional family, there are general perceptions of gender roles that are shared by many residents. It is widely agreed that men are the heads of the families.

To get a better understanding of this relationship, I asked my research assistant, Mr. Wanjohi, a 33 year old married man with two kids, to describe his position at home. He said that he is the "Director" of his home. This means that he makes most decisions at home. Many married men confess that women are rarely involved in decision making. It is not uncommon for men to make unilateral decisions without consulting their spouse. On the other hand, women cannot make decisions in the home without consulting their husbands. To get an idea of women involvement in decision making at home, I framed a question that relates to cattle, a source of wealth, milk for domestic use and occasional income to many families. When asked the question about how a decision, say, to sell a cow would be made, most men said they would sell without consulting the wife while a few said they would inform their wife although their opinion would not affect the decision. Both men and women agreed that a woman cannot make a unilateral decision on the same issue. Part of the argument is that men usually own the animal because they
buy them. When asked what would happen if the woman bought the animal, most men said that they would consider consulting but at the same time, any property that was brought to the home automatically falls under the authority of man. While some men, especially those who are educated, acknowledged female participation in wealth generation, others are reluctant but would do so on more probing. I address these issues as part of my observation because there are parallel examples, albeit in different forms, that affect and determine radio listening habits in the family setting.

Beyond farming, there are limited sources of gainful employment. In Mweiga and Mwiyogo areas, there is a huge population of unemployed young people who depend on occasional manual type of work. These include working in the farms during the busy seasons or seasonal work such as in construction sites. A day of work pays Kshs. 200.00 (roughly three US dollars) which is barely enough to buy a day’s meal for a family of four people. Other young men seek work in the public transport sectors working as drivers and conductors. Older men take care of animals; taking them to the grazing fields for most part of the day and bringing them home in the evening. Other older people work in their farms. A few who are retired from jobs such as teaching depend on their pensions.

**Researcher’s position in the field**

Ethnographic research studies require the researcher to address his or her relationship with the informants in the field. Prior to conducting the fieldwork, I spent a considerable amount of time thinking about my identity during the research. From the beginning, I considered myself both an insider and an outsider in the field. My position as an insider derives from my membership in the Kikuyu community. I went to the field
well versed with the culture of my community and its language. This kind of belonging proved to be important from the time I went into the community and throughout the research period. During my fieldwork in Kieni West, my interactions were in Kikuyu. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in Kikuyu. With the exception of five or so out of more than three hundred people I spoke to, listeners were comfortable conversing in Kikuyu despite the fact that most understood Swahili and English, including groups such as teachers. Understanding the culture and the language facilitated smooth integration with the community around me. My daily interactions were easier than what a person from a different culture would encounter. Cultural competency came in handy especially in interpreting cultural phenomena as well as picking subtle clues. For instance, during discussions with women, I knew which issues were hard for them to discuss even though they would not tell me so.

At the same time, I was aware that I am also different, because of my positioning as an outsider. While I am a Kikuyu who grew up in a Kikuyu family, it was in a heterogeneous population setting in an area whose original inhabitants were the Maasai people. As a result, one part of me distinguishes from what I call the “practical belonging” as a Kikuyu from the “technical” belonging as a Kenyan. It was also my first time to live in a predominant Kikuyu setting. I have spent my time in cosmopolitan or foreign settings. These differences become clear when I got to Kieni West as I experienced during my first visit. After arriving in Kieni, I visited a village called Mahiga and I was introduced to my research assistant. My research permit was still in process and therefore I could not start the fieldwork immediately and I had to go back to Nairobi. In the company of my research assistant and a friend, we happened to walk past two older
women in a home near the road. Instinctively, I greeted the women using a common Kikuyu greeting form, mũrĩ ega which translates to how are you? The women hesitated for few seconds before they answered. Immediately, I realized I had made a big mistake. In my Kiambu Kikuyu dialect, it is acceptable to use this form of greetings to anybody in the society. However, in the Nyeri Kikuyu dialect, people who are older are greeted differently from people who are young. Men and women are also greeted differently. Therefore, I should have greeted the older women using the acceptable form (m)wakĩa maitũ, which means how you are my mother(s), a form of greetings that appreciates the fact that I am young enough to be their son. Thus, my greetings could be interpreted as disrespectful to the Nyeri Kikuyu speakers. I immediately discussed the issue with my assistant and I got a lesson on greetings, something that I must say was almost impossible to learn or get used to because over the whole fieldwork period, I struggled to adapt to the new greetings format. When you have greeted people in one way all your life, it is hard to change, especially when you are using the same language. The issue is complicated by the fact that the greetings mean that in every encounter with people, you need to make a quick and accurate judgment of their age so that you can correctly greet them. They too should also have a good idea of your age. I faced a number of challenges. One was that I was slow to discern some peoples’ age especially when dealing with the older people, partly because I was born of older parents and therefore my idea of a parent is someone who is relatively older. Secondly, men were not keen on the appropriate greetings protocols as women were. I could note that local people did not follow the “greetings rules” most of the times. At the same time, I had a problem with middle aged people because they kept underestimating my age, some shaving ten years off my age. In one
incidence, a woman who was only three years older than me confronted me and insisted that I should use a different kind of greetings because she was old enough to be my mother. To escape the greetings quagmire, I resulted in waiting to be greeted rather than initiating the greetings which minimized my chances of making mistakes.

In the eyes of my hosts, I was subject to different labels depending upon the people I was dealing with. To many humble rural dwellers, I was viewed as a privileged person removed from the modest rural life. As someone who has had access to higher education, I am a privileged person in a place like Kieni West where a first degree is considered as a great achievement not to mention that I have gone through education in the West. I tried to limit discussion on my full identity beyond where I come from and what I am doing. I did not disclose where I go to school during normal interactions unless people asked. As much as I tried to play along as one of Kieni West people, word would somehow leak and some people would be aware of this identity, which meant I was very different. A number of times, I encountered young men who are out of high school and are trying to make decisions on what to do with the rest of their lives. Some just did not know how to make future education choices even when their parents could afford to send them to college. What should they study? Is that course marketable? Others had passed the examination well but could not manage the financial demands of further education. They sought advice from me on how they could get to the next step. We would talk and all that some needed was reassurance that what they are thinking about is reasonable.

Although this is a somehow unique position for me, these encounters are neither new nor removed from me. They replayed similar experiences that I have gone through in my life. Lovell (2007) aptly addresses this kind of relationship when giving an account of
possible reasons that may have led an interlocutor in Marseilles to open up during her fieldwork. Lovell contends that despite lack of any similarity with the researcher, an interlocutor named José opened up without any tacit understanding. In analyzing possible reasons that may have led to this, she extrapolates by suggesting that lack of awe and curiosity for the exotic that stems from her own biography may have affected José’s attitude towards the ethnographer. What I find relevant to my own experiences is how Lovell describes herself.

By the time I was born, my parents had achieved middle-class status. And although I was raised in relative comfort, on four continents and in three languages, I am only one generation removed from a large, dirt poor, Southern Baptist family of sharecroppers (on one side) and marginal laborers (on the other). This legacy separates the remnants of my extended family between the “haves” and “have nots”… While I grew up economically secure… I have incorporated from my parents’ culture traces of the habitus of poverty, that habitus which is transmitted through socialization to the next generation –in this case, me (2008, p. 71).

My experiences are very different from Lovell’s but in dealing with humble rural audiences, I can parallel my own life with her own. I grew up in a polygamous family, the last son and second last born of a trader, an old traditional Kikuyu man and a farming mother. My parents never went to school. However, I share a very different life experiences with my 14 siblings, the oldest of whom is 34 years older than I. Most of these differences accrue from experiences in the family and outside the family. Some of my older siblings grew up during the colonial era, others in the boom years of post-
independence Kenya. Some of my siblings know very traditional parents while I know both traditional and dynamic parents. People whom I have encountered during my adulthood have viewed me very differently from what I perceive myself to be. My middle class peers have always assumed that I led a childhood life similar to their own or came from a relatively well to do background but in reality my life is very different from many of my friends. Their parents are younger and are relatively well educated. They have also led a different type of life such as attending private or city schools while my father believed that any school could lead you to the highest level. Outside the immediate family life, my habitus has been shaped by the environment. Growing up in a small farming community with limited basic amenities including educational opportunities has shaped who I am. I am one of the very lucky few to get a decent education. When doing my field work in Kieni West, I was able to identify first hand with some of the young men whose education opportunities have hit the dead end. They remind me of many people I know, my childhood friends and primary school classmates who after we graduated together were not lucky enough to even get a high school education. My interlocutors’ experiences are not the exact ones that I grew up with but provide “feelings that I have experienced either directly, or by proxy” (Lovell, 2007: 71) at some point in my life.

Beyond sharing close experiences with the population, it was hard for me to shed the “privileged” position. This position is not necessarily based on how people viewed me but also had to do with the realities on the ground. At the time I was doing my fieldwork, people in Kieni West were going through very tough economic period. In the country as a whole, the prices of all commodities had gone up and many people had lost
their jobs after the post-election violence at the beginning of 2008. I met some of these people. Worse still, the harvest had failed due to extended dry season. Milk production had gone down. When we went into different one-roomed houses talking to people in Kiawara Village, a poor settlement section in Mweiga town, I came face-to-face with the deep poverty that the residents experienced. A week after my visit, there was an article on the Daily Nation newspaper about people in the village who were starving. With these realities, where many residents are short of options, I can barely claim to identify with their situation because I had very different conditions. I had options and did not have to worry about my next meal or anything else. Despite being able to understand their plight, I could not share their inner felt experiences. I was also there for a short time as my research assistant would remind me from time to time.

The prevailing conditions affected the research. When we organized focus discussion groups for instance, people would ask for some form of compensation. Some argued that they would have to leave their work while some would have to walk a distance to come to the meeting place. Initially, I had grappled with ethical questions of compensation and decided that it is not a good idea to compensate people because it was likely to set a pattern where anyone coming after me would have to do the same. This can be detrimental especially for students who study in the local universities and do not have access to research funds. On the other hand, I needed to give a form of consideration to some participants who were foregoing some of their daily activities and routines to accommodate my needs. The first two focus discussion groups were not compensated. These were held at a shopping center in a restaurant from where we bought drinks and snacks. It also comprised of people who worked within a few meters. Some would step
out once in a while to check their work which was a different case with the people in the village.

I could afford some little compensation as a sign of appreciation. My first thought was to use a method that would not involve actual exchange of cash such as buying household commodities like sugar, maize or wheat flour. We would either personally buy the goods and have them at the venue of the focus discussion groups or arrange with a shopkeeper in the nearby shop and give coupons to participants which they would in turn redeem at the shop. This was based on the idea that in the Central Kenya, people use such gestures to show appreciation. However, this became practically difficult because the groups were organized at different locations including homes based on convenience. We therefore decided to give a little cash to the participants. There was a question of how much I should give and the implications on the consequent groups. I did not want word to spread that we actually compensate groups; there is always the danger of information distortion. My research assistant suggested that the amount should be minimal but people will still appreciate. He also took the role of the facilitator so that I did not deal with the group directly when matters of compensation came up. The participants were very appreciative of the compensation although we were careful to distinguish between “payment” and “appreciation”. Ours was a token of appreciation. Our rapport also increased. In his village, my research assistant would be thanked by some participants as a person who “minded their welfare”. After one of the discussions, we had a long session of prayer. They prayed that all my work would succeed. It reminded me of my own mother.
When addressing some issues such as Kikuyu identity, I was able to strike a sense of belonging and get people to talk about issues that they might otherwise be uncomfortable speaking to a person of different ethnicity. At times, I would use the term “we” to present myself as one of them to raise issues of Kikuyu identity. In other discussions, people personalized the issue around me. When talking to older people for instance, they would make statements such as “you young men” when talking about the younger people, a reference mostly derived from the fact we used Kikuyu language throughout the discussions. I was therefore not different from the young men they encounter every day as shown by the following statement from Samuel Kariuki, 68 year-old from Mwiyogo where "you" is constantly used as a direct reference to me (I was the only younger person during the focus group discussion with older men) and also to mean the younger generation.

During our times, we would sit down with the old men and they would teach us our traditions and norms. These days are different. There are no platforms where the young and old can interact. If I want to find you, you are in the drinking dens, which is where you learn what you learn these days. Your home is the drinking den. Do you expect an old man like me to go and drink together with you? What respect can we get in such places? No wonder we are losing our traditions because your generation will never learn (S. Kariuki, personal communication, July 17, 2008).

Cultural competency helped me to negotiate through different interactions. During the focus groups discussion with older people, the Kikuyu customs expected me to show respect to the elders. Among the Kikuyu, younger people cannot refer to elder people by
their names. They can only refer to them as their mother, father, grandfather or grandmother. They can also refer to them as mother or father to one of their children. The concept of *gūtengura* that closely translates to “laying one bare” is for instance used to refer to a situation where a younger person refers to a parent or an elder by their name, an act that is considered insulting and disrespectful. Understanding such issues in the Kikuyu culture, I was able to excuse myself before I started the discussions to refer to the older participants by their names so that I could accurately note who was speaking. However, I still could not use their names alone. If a man is called Kamau for instance, I would refer to them using the title *Mūthee* Kamau which signifies they are older male people and use the title *Cūcū* for an older woman.

The researcher can intentionally play an insider or outsider position to obtain information that they would otherwise not obtain. In different situations of the focus group discussions, I had to assume an insider or outsider position depending on the kind of information I was trying to obtain. For instance, when I asked the question regarding the Kikuyu vernacular radio and the construction of national and ethnic identity, I would assume either of the positions. When the discussants had strong ethnic sentiments and unwilling to open up some of their positions, I would ask a question as one of them, a Kikuyu. This would somehow make them feel that they are speaking to one of their own and would lead them to open up. In other instances, I would probe such positions by playing an outsider, usually by positioning myself as a Kenyan rather than a Kikuyu. My gender was also an issue. Younger women were more reluctant in discussing issues of a family nature with me. Being an insider for me meant that I have to follow the Kikuyu cultural norms where subjects such as sex are taboo. When I openly raised such topics, I
was acting as an outsider which allowed the discussants to discuss such issues more freely to someone who is not necessarily one of their own. By playing an insider or outsider position, I was also able to get both men and women to open up on gender issues. For men, I was always assumed to be an insider and it was possible to get the strong opinions such as men domination. Most men believed that they are entitled to be the dominant figures in the family set. However, I found that most of the time, I had to come out and raise a different opinion because men discussants that had a differing opinion chose not to amplify such issues. When addressing the question of male domination in the women groups, playing an outsider allowed me to raise issues that are unconventional for a man from the same village to discuss. By delving on questions such as male domination, women opened up and challenged such positions as well as revealing the strategies they use to balance between keeping peace at home while resisting at the same time. These issues will be addressed in later chapters.

My experiences in the field are part of what Karin Narayan (1993) calls multiplex identity. She argues that “a person may have many strands of identification available, strands that may be tugged open or stuffed out of sight” (Narayan, 1993, pp. 673). Ethnographic field experiences have shown that data are mediated by the researcher’s relations with the research participants (Choi, 2006). Data are not only mediated by social categories such as age, gender, class, and education background but also by ‘invisible positioning” such as the researcher’s hunches, preconceptions, prejudices, cultural beliefs, theoretical predispositions and common sense (Choi, 2006, pp. 446). It is hard to divorce research from the researchers’ position. While preparing to go to the field, I was
aware that these issues would arise but I could not tell how they would exactly play out and to what extent.

**The research assistants as co-researchers**

When you are new in a place, it takes time to integrate, regardless of your social and interpersonal skills. Coming into Kieni West as an outsider, I needed someone who would help me to integrate with the community as soon as possible given the little time I had to do the fieldwork. I was lucky that I had a friend from the area who in turn introduced me to my research assistant, Mr. Wanjohi. My research assistant proved to be very helpful throughout the study. Not only did he understand the area but he was also an outgoing person and therefore had a good relationship with the residents. During the fieldwork, he played an important role during the actual contact with the people. When we started doing the preliminary interviews and administering questionnaires, the most important part was doing the introduction. Introducing myself to the people, telling them who I was, what I was doing, and why I was doing it did not appear to be a big task for me before the actual process began, but I learned otherwise afterwards. In the very first interactions, I sought to explain my mission, using language such as “research” and the need to write a final “thesis” or “dissertation” before I can “graduate” from my program. I also had to tell my respondents that I was not representing any radio station, something that seemed hard for them to understand. They wondered what help it would be for someone to just go and collect data on radio without directly dealing with the radio stations. This was more complicated when I used the Kikuyu language to explain. There are hardly any clear terms which communicate educational concepts such as research, researcher and dissertation.
My research assistant quickly sensed the challenges I was facing and took over the introduction part. The most important thing was the way he twisted the language to define me. He defined me as a “student” instead of a “researcher”. My mission was not just “to do research” but “doing it as a part of attachment”. I had been sent by my school to do an attachment in the area for me to be eligible to graduate. “Attachment” is the term used in Kenya to mean internship. This is the language that people in the field understood. He did not wait for people to ask the question why should we participate? He would start the conversation by saying that I was his friend and he was helping me to take the next step in my education and that I could not do it without the respondents help. He was able to strike a certain chord in all instances and everybody responded favorably. Even when we got another assistant to help us gain entry in a low economic settlement, the same language was used and we had no single declined interview or questionnaire response. Part of it is how the research assistant understood what I was doing, which was the same way the people we were dealing with understood. After the experience, I realized that I was not equipped with the same set of research skills as my research assistants when it came to dealing with certain issues in Kieni West. I started to learn these important skills from my research assistants but there were things that I could not do. I could not assume the same position that my research assistants had because I was not a local person. My assistants were able to appeal to the respondents’ collective responsibility sub-conscious making them feel that it is their duty to help their neighbor. Because I was not necessarily their neighbor, the informants responded to my proxy. They were also able to break things down to the language and concepts that people in the rural area understand. For instance, they knew that students or trainees are sent on field
attachments because they have seen teachers, agricultural extension officers, and nurses, among others doing their attachment in the area and interacted with them.

This experience however presents an ethical dilemma of a kind regarding the researcher’s mission disclosure. It also brings out the possible incongruence between the ethical principles as we view them before going to the field and the actual practical experiences that one is likely to encounter. As much as I wanted to disclose what I was doing to the people in the greatest details, it was not possible to do so without using the language of the academy. But this could only be done in lay language whose concepts and meanings are not exactly the same. In most cases, people were not very interested with the details at all. Although we always tried to obtain verbal informed consent before administering the questionnaires, doing formal interviews or conducting focus group discussions, the respondents were unconcerned. They would brush it aside with statements like “you just go ahead; I have known Mr. Wanjohi (the research assistant) for many years”. Others were just excited that they would be tape recorded. At the end of the day, the presence of the research assistants changed the dynamics of the research. They definitely made the work easier for the researcher and facilitated interactions. However, research assistants did not participate in all the processes in order to minimize their influence on data. During the focus group discussions, the research assistant did not sit in the group. In some places, he was needed for introductions but left when the actual discussion started.
Specific Data Collection Methods

This study used an ethnographic approach where different methods were used to collect data on radio consumption in Kieni West area. According to Drotner (1994), media ethnography draws on variety of classical anthropological and ethnological methods of investigation: participant observation, informal talks and in-depth or life course interviews, diaries kept by the informants as well as self-reports kept by the researcher. In addition, he or she may apply textual analysis of, for example, selected television programs, musical scores or magazines genres (Quoted in La Pastina, 2005, para. 16).

Specific methods used included questionnaires, interviews, observation, discussion groups, (Murphy, 1999) document analysis and content analysis. These methods are discussed in detail in the following section.

Questionnaires

There is limited information on the details of radio listening among the rural audiences in Kenya. The closest information that is available on radio listening is the quarterly media monitoring data that is provided by the Steadman Company. The Steadman data is however too generalized and deals with a very small sample. Steadman’s reports provide highlights that include the popular stations in areas such as Central Kenya and which programs are listened to. To get a better understanding of individual radio listening choices, questionnaires were administered to 108 randomly selected listeners through house-to-house visits in three locations in Kieni West: Endarasha, Mweiga and Mwiyogo. The decision to use questionnaires was taken once the
researcher arrived in the field. The initial idea was to use preliminary interviews to get the overview of radio listening and use of other media. Due to time limitations, it was difficult to carry out comprehensive preliminary interviews as originally planned. To administer the questionnaires, several different homes were visited to find respondents. I also sought individuals at different locations such as shopping centers. Both the researcher and a research assistant filled in the questionnaires.

The questionnaires were used to gauge important audience traits. Important population information included the language proficiency among the listeners, the level of education, occupation and household size. The questionnaire also focused on different areas of radio listening and media use. They sought data such as household and individual ownership and use of televisions, mobile phones and fixed telephones. Establishing the ownership of different media devices was important in order to compare their use and influence on radio listening. Also, mobile phones were found to complement some aspect of radio listening, such as participation by giving the audience a means to interact with the broadcasters. The listeners were also asked about newspaper access, how often they bought them, and where they obtained them to read if they did not buy them. The energy used to power the radio was captured in the questionnaire which revealed the sources of energy that are available to listeners in Kieni West. Availability of energy is important in determining the time spent listening to the radio. These issues were probed further during interviews and focus group discussions.

Specific information regarding individual radio listening was sought using the questionnaires. The number of hours that people spent listening to the radio during the weekdays and weekends, the specific stations listened to in the past seven days, favorite
stations, the reasons for preferences and specific programs were all captured. In ethnographic research, these kinds of questions do not tell much about audiences’ everyday radio consumption. However, such information gives the researchers different pointers on the issues to delve into. The questionnaire information was immediately tabulated with a preliminary analysis to inform the next steps of the research.

*Interviews*

The interactional nature of interviews allowed the researcher to have a dialogue at the research sites. This involved one-to-one dialogue with an individual or a number of individuals. Among the rural audience in Kieni West, I took advantage of the informal style of interviews because they have an appearance of face-to-face conversation or discussion as opposed to formal question and answer format. People in rural Kenya are generally sociable, laid-back, and tend to be uncomfortable in formal situations. Formality can restrict the level of interaction and people’s willingness to participate thereby limiting the amount of data that can be obtained. Interviews allow the researcher to do follow-ups on issues that arise as well as probe when there is a need to get into depth on an issue. In interviewing different individuals, I was able to focus on different specific details relevant to each individual. Interviews allowed me to build relationships with people which were important for collection of data. Interviews provided a good starting point in an area that I was not very familiar with. I used three interviewing methods: preliminary interviews, conversation interviews and in-depth interviews to generate different kinds of information.
Semi-structured preliminary interviews

Semi-structured preliminary interviews were used to elicit panoramic understanding of radio listening by the audience (Murphy, 1999). Initially, I had planned to employ structured interviews using a pre-designed interview protocol to conduct interviews lasting approximately 20 minutes in the three research locations, preferably in a household setting. After arriving in the research site, I realized that being new, it was important to make sure that I provided a more relaxed environment when trying to elicit information from the people. Having an interview protocol with me was likely to arouse suspicion on what I was doing. Also, structured interviews would limit the opportunities provided by spontaneous encounters. I did, however, maintain the goals of the preliminary interviews to have a better understanding of the status of radio ownership among individuals and families. To establish what channels are received in the area, individual radio listening patterns such as what channels are generally preferred and by whom, and what content is on the channels that are listened, the interviews proved to be very informative. In addition, the panoramic information included exploration of the prevalence of other media devices such as televisions and mobile phones among the listeners because they are likely to affect the use of the radio.

The preliminary interviews were designed to capture a diverse segment of listeners in terms of age, gender, and education background. These interviews were conducted at different locations such as homes, shopping centers, markets, in public vehicles, and other social places such as restaurants. During my first visit to Kieni West, my friend from the area accompanied me so that he could introduce me to people. We arrived late and took a taxi home where we spent the night. During the taxi ride, I started
a conversation with the taxi driver, a married man in his late thirties, about what radio stations the area receives and what he like to listen to. After such conversations, I would take notes. Due to the unstructured nature, the length of these interviews differed from person to person. They were however important because they provided highlights of audiences’ radio listening practices. They could be conducted anywhere which allowed me to interview different kinds of people. Preliminary interviews formed the foundation for other data collection methods. They presented pointers to radio listening behaviors and routines.

*Semi-structured conversational interviews*

Semi-structured *conversational interviews* with different listeners derived ideas and information from preliminary interviews, the questionnaires, observations and at times, the focus group discussions. These interviews assumed different forms. Sometimes, they were loose, less scheduled in approach and informal (Murphy, 1999). At other times, they were scheduled and conducted in a formal style. Conversational interviews were 20-45 minutes long and were conducted in the three research locations (at least five in each location). Initially, I had thought that the conversational interviews would follow a linear order; that they would occur immediately after the preliminary interviews. However, I ended up using them at different points of the fieldwork as they proved to be a useful avenue to conduct an in-depth look at various issues based on the primary research questions. Conversational interviews were helpful in getting deeper explanations of different issues that come out at different times and using different methods. For instance, while filling the questionnaires, some listeners would stress one particular issue in their listening habits. When such points became common, I would take
an opportunity and have a conversation that revolved around it. For example, religion became a common issue that I had not anticipated throughout my proposal writing. It emerged that the vernacular radio has huge chunks of religious content and some listeners specifically sought out this content. Conversational interviews were used to follow-up such emerging issues. For instance, after administering a questionnaire to one middle-aged woman, I had a conversational interview with her that focused on the question of religious content on the radio as well as her religious beliefs and how this blended with her radio listening habits.

During some focus group discussions, I would notice some participants who demonstrated a deeper understanding on some issues. Some would not only mention a phenomenon but would give a deeper explanation of what they viewed as causes of the same. After the focus group, I would use a conversational interview with the individual to help me deconstruct some of the issues that were raised or discussed. In one discussion with the young people in Endarasha, many discussants argued that the vernacular stations are boring. One of them however followed a different route and tried to explain why his colleagues had what he called a “twisted view”. After the discussion, I invited him for a drink and we had a deeper discussion of the same topic and other issues that are particular to the Endarasha area. Conversational interviews helped me to concentrate on the emerging issues and identify informative sources. They also allowed me to react to those issues immediately and utilize the information sources that were available. They are also representative and diverse and were conducted in a relaxed manner which made respondents comfortable.
Structured in-depth interviews were conducted with a few individual listeners and with radio broadcasters. An in-depth interview allows person-to-person discussion. The interviews with the broadcasters went beyond the main emphasis of this research on the listener’s perspectives. It was important to have an understanding from the broadcasters’ perspective as they make key decisions that affect what audiences receive. Broadcasters decide what content is broadcasted based on different criteria that include economic concerns, laws and regulations, and audience choices, among others. They are also constantly in touch with listeners. Using in-depth interviews to gather information from the radio broadcasters shed light on all these issues. The interviews with the broadcasters were semi-structured where I used some predetermined questions but also dealt with other issues that are specific to the radio station I was discussing. Informants were encouraged to talk at length about their radio station.

The in-depth interviews with the broadcasters were conducted after the fieldwork with the listeners. This strategy was adopted so that listeners’ preliminary information would be used to identify the radio stations and programs that are popular. Out of the field research, a total of twelve radio stations were identified as the “most listened to stations” in Kieni West area. These stations were diverse and ranged from urban inclined English FM stations, Kikuyu vernacular stations and national mainstream stations. All these stations are based in Nairobi. I travelled to Nairobi and initiated contacts with some of the stations. For some, I had already initiated some contact the previous year during the preliminary research. The broadcasters’ interviews in general were more difficult to schedule but this differed from station to station. Out of the twelve stations, three are
under the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, two apiece are owned by Royal Media and Media Holdings respectively. The remaining five are private individual entities.

Out of the twelve stations identified, I was able to interview ten broadcaster’s representatives. I interviewed three station heads, one assistant station head, one marketing manager who represented two radio stations, one operational manager and two producers. The interviews lasted between 25 minutes and one hour thirty minutes. As a result, the information obtained was varied. Some representatives had a better understanding of the station than others. Some had worked with the station since the inception and therefore knew the station inside out. Others were new in the station and not versed with the historical aspects. Generally, the more aggressive and competitive the station is, the more responsive the representatives are. Conservative stations such as those run by KBC had shorter interviews while their counterparts were very aggressive and also tried to market their stations during the interviews. Some representatives were more willing to provide extra information voluntarily. Generally, the representatives were helpful and would share materials that I requested such as program line-ups. Some even went as far as recording some of the programs I requested. The in-depth interviews with the representatives were important in bridging the details gap between the content broadcasted and what the listeners receive. They helped to explain the reasoning behind some decisions such as inclusion or absence of different kinds of programs in the radio broadcasting. These interviews with the broadcasters’ representatives allowed me to compare how they perceive the audiences versus the audiences’ actual experience.
Observational methods

A large part of data collection involved the use of observational methods, either as a participant-observer or just an observer. Mason (2004) notes that observation method is not limited to the process and technique of observance, it is also a social interaction process. One is “variously involved in observing, participating, interrogating, listening, communicating as well as a range of other forms of being, doing and thinking (pp. 87)” in the fieldwork setting. The role of the researcher is less clear-cut than in other methods such as interviewing and involves processes of negotiation and renegotiation (Mason, 2004). Participant observation allowed the researcher to examine radio listening in different social settings. In the domestic setting, it allowed me to see how people listen to the radio at home and how the construction of a family affects or relates to radio listening. In Kieni West, like many other places in Kenya, radio is ubiquitous in small businesses such as local cafes, hair salons, and shops. Through participant observation, these types of social settings were accessed.

In the observational process, the sites were not viewed in isolation. While observational settings were very significant for this study, some interactions of interest that are related to radio occur “outside” the settings. Different orientations, motivations, cultural rules, norms or discourses may emanate from elsewhere. In this regard, radio consumption habits are also influenced by the broadcasters’ decisions on formats and content. The outcomes of such decisions have to be interlinked through observing the listeners as well as understanding the broadcasters’ viewpoints. Also, the processes that are happening in the country at large affect people at the local levels. Observations were therefore not limited to what was happening in Kieni West area but what was also
happening around the country. At the same time, I went to the field aware of what I was going to observe. For observational sites to be productive grounds, the research was selective on what to note from the observation. Not every observation experience yielded data for the study and time in the field had to be used in a focused way. What was being observed was linked with the research questions and other sub-questions in the research. For instance, by observing the number of people in the shopping center, there were always more men than women. By the evening, shopping centers were almost exclusively populated by men. In asking questions regarding the use of media such as television, I found higher access to television among men was mostly explained by the fact that they watched television in public places like the bars and restaurants in the evening. Such observation is important in answering the questions on differences in overall media consumption which narrows down to varying radio listening habits between men and women and provides a possible explanation of such differences.

In turning the observations into data, field notes were extensively used. Field notes were made as contemporaneously as possible to recount experiences, events, and interactions. The field notes that forms data of this research include detailed descriptions of what was happening, discussion of my own feelings and impressions, and my own analytical ideas. Where possible, field notes were written on site. In most cases, field notes were written at the end of the day. In addition to field notes, I had initially intended to take photographs but I realized that carrying a digital camera would disrupt the research process. It would represent me as a “tourist” and cement people’s view of me as an outsider.
Focused group discussions

Focus group discussions were conducted with informants from three locations in Kieni West division. These groups brought together different people who were selected based on their age and gender. One focus group discussion was however conducted with a group of teachers. Initially, I expected to organize the groups into male and female young adults and male and female adults. The young adults were viewed as those who are aged 18 - 30 years while those who are aged over 30 years would belong to the adult groups. However, my initial experiences led me to alter the groups because the classification appeared too general. During the preliminary interviews and filling the questionnaires, there were identifiable differences that were not based on age but other factors such as marital status. Thus, a married twenty year old man might have a very different radio listening schedule from his single counterpart because he has to incorporate his wife in the process. At the same time, young married couples were likely to have different listening habits from older married couples. Older couples, for instance, would have to incorporate their grown-up children while young couples with young children did not have to include them in their radio listening. In addition to the four segment groups that took into account the age and the gender of participants, the marital status variable was added leading to six segments. At some locations however, it was difficult to organize the six groups and when this happened, the groups were collapsed into four segments.

The first grouping comprised of the young people starting from 18 years, divided into male and female segments. In the men young adult groups, participants were as young as 18 years and as old as 30 years. These groups in Mweiga and Mwiyogo were
made up of young men who were single. Most of them lived alone or with their families. In Mweiga town, most of them were working as businessmen and assistants in the small businesses in the town. In Mwiyogo, most participants were out of school waiting to go to college while others were working as teachers or casual laborers but they stayed with their parents or relatives\(^5\). In Endarasha, some were working as mechanics and farmers, while others were unemployed. The young women segment was made up of girls aged from 18 years to 25. In the three locations, many of the girls worked as hairdressers, a very common occupation with young women. In these groups, some of the girls were single mothers but all were staying with their parents. The second grouping was comprised of men and women who were married but did not have grown up children. A discussion group of married men was conducted in Mwiyogo with participants aged 27 – 37 years of age. Most participants had children aged below ten years. The women group in Mwiyogo had participants aged between 22 and 32 years old while Endarasha participants were aged 30 to 42 years old. The last groupings took into account middle aged and older adults. In Mweiga town, it was not possible to organize older population since they are rarely found in town unless they are busy attending to some task and will usually go back home. This group was therefore easy to find elsewhere such as the farm areas. However, both women and men groups were organized in Mwiyogo and Endarasha. Participants were aged between 45 and 85 years. In addition to these groups, one discussion was held with teachers of a primary school in Mwiyogo location. In the

\(^5\) Mwiyogo area is populated by people who are mainly farmers. They use their farms whose average size is five hectares for farming. The population density is low and most farms are idle. There no rental houses in the area. People who many not own land either rent one or live with their family or friends.
group, there were ten women and one man which is the whole staff excluding the school head who sat out of the group.

Gender, age and marital status stratification was important. It allowed me to obtain key information that relates to specific group dynamics. In all the groups, I acted as the moderator, using the interview guide. All the interviews were conducted in the Kikuyu language. Participants were more comfortable doing the discussion in Kikuyu even though most of them were also proficient in English and Swahili. Due to the need to have people at the same location, the discussants were recruited mainly from one area. Also, every group had their own modalities in the recruitment and interviewing places. The timing and place of the interview were important and determined whether we would succeed in organizing the groups or not. In the village setting such as Mwiyogo, my research assistant used word of mouth to gather residents in one home. For instance, groups of the married women and married men were held at his house. In organizing the groups, male groups in Mwiyogo were held in the evenings. The young men were interviewed in a small shop where they like to gather every evening. They had to be interviewed after work, around 7:00 pm. The married men were interviewed starting 8:00 pm because most of them work far away. The older men were interviewed at a neutral open space near a local shop after most of them had come from the grazing field. Older men would not agree to go to somebody’s home for the interviews.

It was easy to recruit some informants when it came to a town like Mweiga. However, not all segments of the population were found here. Young men and women were easily found in town while older population was hard to find. It was easy to organize an acceptable venue for men. They could sit in a bar, a restaurant or any open
space. Women on the other hand were picky and avoided public places. They had to be interviewed privately in a home. The informants were given some incentives for participation. For the group that was held in Mweiga town, the participants were not keen on incentives; buying soft drinks was enough. In the village such as Mwiyogo and Endarasha, participants were keener on monetary incentives. However, this is understandable because most participants in the town are employed while those in the farms are not likely to have constant source of income. They are therefore likely to be interested in money. Having a research assistant who knew the people facilitated easier organization of the groups. In places where he did not know the people, we used local people to identify and convince people to participate, a strategy that also worked.

Document analysis

There are various documents that are produced in the media industry. These documents provide relevant elements of the radio industry in Kenya. Broadcaster’s decisions are widely shaped by outcomes of media monitoring surveys, which are conducted by the Steadman Group. I have relied on the Steadman’s quarterly monitoring report to keep up with the fast changing media industry in Kenya. The reports are one of the most up-to-date sources of information on the number of radio stations in the country. The media diaries also provide information on which radio stations are popular in different areas of the country. In a place where the media has become highly segmented, the media diaries are helpful because they capture all the radio stations in all regions and therefore provide a quick map on what is happening nationally. Media monitoring reports also provide the broadcasters with an overview of the radio industry performances for every radio station, demographic data of the audiences and provides information to
individual broadcasters about their competitors. From my conversations with radio executives, the monitoring findings are the broadcasters’ report card. Absence of other alternative sources of information in Kenya has left the Steadman’s reports as the most credible source of information on broadcast media in Kenya.

I am aware of the epistemological and methodological divergence between audience ethnographic research on one hand and the traditional market research on the other. Steadman Groups data are an example of market research. The definition of audience is also different. My use of market information does not go beyond pointers such as where different radio stations are popularly listened to. The reports are also central to understanding the broadcasters’ perspectives and the basis of some of their decisions and getting a current appraisal on the Kenyan radio history. Examining the previous reports has enabled me to follow the progression of the radio industry in Kenya over the years.

Internal documents that were available from the broadcasters such as present and future business plans, programming schedules, and advertising costs, among others revealed business decisions and responses to different audience needs. These documents could not be obtained from all radio stations. Also, there are differences in the details available from what was obtained. My aim was to get as much information as possible and therefore worked with whatever I could get. I have also made extensive use of newspaper articles that discuss past and present issues in and on the media as well as different opinions. For instance, the debate on the role of vernacular radio stations in the post election violence in January 2008 has been widely documented in the print media. Newspaper articles from different media houses have been used to follow this debate.
Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed ethnographic methodology and approach used in data collection among listeners in Kieni West Division in Central Kenya. I have discussed the research site, Kieni West Division area in Nyeri District in the Central region of Kenya and the population that inhabits the area. Kieni West was selected as the research site due to its rural setting that is characterized by factors such as sparse population, limited infrastructural development and dependence on agriculture. The area receives a sizeable number of radio signals from different stations broadcasting from Kenyan capital Nairobi. Data was collected in three locations in Kieni West that provided different population dimensions. The chapter has also addressed the researcher’s position in the field and negotiation of these positions during the fieldwork. I have also discussed the role of my research assistants as co-researchers.

The last part of the chapter has discussed in detail the research methods used. These methods include questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, observation, document analysis and content analysis. The methods have produced a wide range of data. Questionnaires and interviews yielded data on different dimensions of individual media and radio use. As the following chapters will show, people in Kieni West depend on radio for most of their informational needs. Other media forms such as newspapers and television are only accessed by a small section of the population in Kieni West. Listeners in Kieni West have a wide range of stations and content preferences that vary depending on factors such as age and education level. Interviews with broadcasters provide data that help us to relate the content that is sent to audiences and how they receive, use and interpret it. Focus group discussions were used to elicit a different type
of information, some of which was hard to get individually. Information on taboo and muted subjects for instance needed a form of group assurance for people to open up. Observational methods yielded some of the most important data as they provide information that helps in understanding the peoples’ ways of life in Kieni West. By observing and participating in everyday interactions, various relational aspects could be noted. For instance, the gender relations and division of labor in a domestic context were observed when I spent time with families. These are important in analyzing how radio consumption habits relate to the culture of the listeners. Different methods complement and reinforce one another, allowing for a multifaceted consideration of the issues that emerge.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE ROLE OF RADIO IN LISTENERS’ EVERYDAY LIFE

This chapter and the following two chapters present the research findings from the radio listeners in Kieni West area. In the following sections I explore the place of radio in listeners’ everyday lives. Radio is a communication device that is present in every home I visited during the research. Also, nearly all individuals encountered in the study reported to have listened to the radio in the past two days prior to my interview session. I remember encountering only one individual, a woman teacher, who said she usually does not listen to the radio although she has a set at home. This section aims to unpack listeners’ interactions with the medium. In these interactions, the researcher found that listeners seek information, education, and entertainment from the radio. Listeners depend on radio to stay in touch with what is happening in their locality and beyond. They also seek pertinent information on their health and well-being from the radio as well as gathering information on agriculture, their economic mainstay, from various programs that address the subject on the radio. Radio acts as a companion to listeners especially when they are alone and cannot find another human company. The Kikuyu vernacular radio is changing the social milieu of the listeners, allowing some to move beyond the interpersonal relations to build new mediated networks. Radio has extended the social sphere of listeners in Kieni West, sometimes reinforcing interpersonal relationships by identifying people within a locality who share common interests and bringing them together.

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, data from interviews and Kieni West was collected in Kikuyu language. In the finding chapters, I have extensively used quotations from radio listeners. These quotations have been translated from Kikuyu to English. I have elected to provide as succinct translations as possible to convey the intended meaning.
Radio is also transforming the socio-cultural aspects of life by challenging some of the existing norms and compelling the society to deal with issues that they have found difficult to address before. Radio is breaking the barriers by succeeding in addressing taboo and muted discussions, slowly dissolving a wall that has existed before to allow people to discuss these issues frequently beginning at the family level. Finally, radio has become a place where people who are in need can get things done by responding to urgent calls and giving people a place where they can go for assistance. Through the on-air personalities, radio is mediating on behalf of those who do not have voices as well as addressing personal predicaments of individuals in need.

Radio as a source of information and education

Radio is the most common information and telecommunications device in developing countries. Since the cost to develop a radio broadcast is relatively inexpensive, this medium becomes widely available to people who have low income. Among the people of Kieni West radio is a relatively affordable device to buy and there are different choices available from the market. Radios are sold in electronic shops and open-markets found in small towns and shopping centers. According to Samuel Nderitu, a mobile open-air market radio vendor in Kieni West, the prices of radios he sells range from Kenyan Shillings 100.00 (US$ 1.50) for a pocket radio to Kenya shillings 2,500.00 (US$ 35.00). Findings from the questionnaires administered at the beginning of the research indicate that all respondents had access to a radio set and had listened to the radio the previous day. Among the same respondents, only 46% had access to a television. Out of those who had access to the television, only 59% had watched TV the previous night. TV ownership in Kieni West does not necessarily mean that the audiences
are able to watch. This is mainly due to energy limitations. Most of those who reported to own a TV yet did not watch attributed the minimal viewing time to limited energy availability such as low battery to power the sets. People who are close to towns and shopping centers watch television at public places such as bars and restaurants.

The other source of information is newspapers. Newspapers are however a limited source of information for people of Kieni West, only 32% of those who answered the questionnaires had read newspapers in the past one week period prior to the research. Out of those who had read, only a meager 10% had actually bought the newspaper themselves. Most read the copies that their relatives had bought, from public places like restaurants, borrowed from friends or read from the newspaper vendor. Reading of the newspaper is also mainly restricted to scanning the headlines. Many people said they

Figure 3: A radio vendor in Mweiga Town.
would love to read newspaper more, but they cannot afford to buy a copy whose average cost is Kenyan shillings 40.00 (US$ .50), a price that is beyond the reach of common people in an area where an eight-hour day of work pays an average Kenyan shillings 150.00 (US$ 2.00). The availability of newspapers is also a factor since they can be found in a few towns. There are many areas where copies do not reach so even those who may want to buy cannot access them.

As a result, people who live in or close to towns are likely to access newspapers compared to those who live in the farm areas. Forty-one percent of questionnaire respondents from Mweiga town reported to have read a newspaper in the past week, compared to 30% in Endarasha and 27% in Mwiyogo. As expected, Mweiga, which is a moderate sized rural town, has more readers, followed by Endarasha, which has a small town and farms and Mwiyogo, a farm area, has the least as shown in table 1 below:

Table 1

*Newspaper Readership in the Three Locations of Kieni West*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Read Newspaper</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mweiga</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mwiyogo</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endarasha</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To access the newspaper, those who live in the farms must travel to the town or come into contact with someone who was in town. For those who are engaged in the farms for
the whole day, it is not possible to access the newspaper as Michael Gitau, a 46 year old casual worker from Mwiyogo told the researcher. “I have not been to town for weeks now, so I have no way of getting a newspaper” (M. Gitau, personal communication, June 23, 2008). Beyond access, a large section of the population cannot read and write well while most commonly available newspapers are the English language newspapers. As expected, people with more education are likely to read newspapers compared to those with low education. Only 16.3% of the people with 8th grade education and less (primary school level) read newspapers compared to 43% for those with 9th-12th grade education (secondary school level) and 53% with at least college education. Thus, those who have more education are likely to read newspapers compared to those with low education as summarized in the table below.

Table 2

Newspaper Readership Based on Level of Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Read Newspaper</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The limitations of alternative sources of information leave radio as the most reliable source for the rural people in Kieni West. Radio can be accessed without the need to
leave home. This medium provides information through assorted languages and listeners have the freedom to choose the language that suits them most. Because of proficiency in different languages, many listeners consume information in various languages. According to the listeners, news and feature programs provide the most information and education. News programs provide current information on what is happening locally, nationally and internationally. Feature programs on agriculture and health are also popular with the listeners in Kieni West. Male listeners reported seeking current news more often than women. Listeners identified news coverage as one reason behind their choice of radio station as their favorite. Ndugi, a 24 year old from Mweiga preferred a station that carried news frequently.

For me, because of frequent news on Metro FM, which comes after every 15 minutes, what I like about their news is that that they are not only national but international. I am anxious to know what is happening all over the world. I am very happy with their news.

For Michael, 20, the comprehensiveness of news is important. “There is no other station with comprehensive news like Inooro FM as far as I am concerned. The news is both local and international”.

Listeners with college education showed more interest in political news. Anne Njogu, a 43 years old primary school teacher described her liking for political news in a very personal way. “First I like politics. Injūkaga wega mūno. Also, in Inooro FM, there is a program between 10 pm-12 midnight with Professor Ngugi. I also like Koigi wa Wamwere who I like politically”. The phrase injūkaga wega mūno is hard to translate to English, but the closest meaning is “it works magic on me”. Her colleague, Mr. Wamae
is also a fan of politics which he follows on the radio. “I love politics a lot on Inooro. At times they bring a politician and interview them. I feel empowered because I am able to understand politics. When I listen to Inooro, I look for those programs”.

One of the most popular programs among listeners in Kieni West is *Coro Matūrainî* (Coro at the grassroots); a one-hour news magazine program which utilizes reporters on the ground from major areas where the station broadcasts. The program which goes on air at 6:00-7:00 p.m. on weekdays was always cited by listeners as one of the most comprehensive news program on the radio. Listeners were particularly impressed with the program because of its ability to penetrate the lowest level including the rural areas which are usually less likely to be covered. There is also limited filtering of news because the information comes straight from the reporters on the ground.

Listeners reported that *Coro Matūrainî* has provided more coverage of their locality than any other program as Margaret, a 40 year old woman from Mwiyogo cited a recent case she heard on the radio.

*Coro Matūrainî* covers every part of the country. The other day I heard a story about the grazing issue in the government land, right here behind us where a group of women from the area disarmed and arrested a police officer who had been exploiting them when they went to collect firewood. It was interesting to hear the news first from the radio as opposed to a word of mouth.

Programs such as *Coro Matūrainî* are changing the listeners’ view of what news is. Before such information was available, news mainly reported items that involved the outside world. As Ms. Alice Muthoni, a teacher at Mweiga Secondary School noted, “….
news on the radio is about everywhere from the villages, cities and even other parts of the world”.

Farming Information

Agriculture is the main economic activity in Kieni West where people cultivate crops and keep livestock. Listeners reported that they listen to the agricultural programs on the Kikuyu vernacular stations especially Coro FM and Inooro FM stations because they provide practical information that they need in their daily farming activities. Accessing information on agriculture helps farmers to improve production and to stay updated on the industry as a whole. Listeners quoted agricultural programs such as Mũgambo wa Mũrĩmĩ (Farmer’s Voice) that is broadcast on Inooro FM on weekdays between 9:00 and 10:00 am as one of their favorite programs. Agricultural programs are popular because they provide important and sensitive information that is practical to farmers. Farmers seek information on the best ways to use agrochemicals such as fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides. Agricultural programs on the radio advise farmers on how to use fertilizers and manure to improve soil fertility in a way that ensures continued productivity and preserve the soil. Agnes Mugure, a 38 year old teacher argued that the radio programs are filling an information void that existed before.

The agricultural programs are very important because most people do not have any other ways to learn. It is very hard to find an agricultural extension officer who can advise you on how to improve your farming. Before, schools also used to teach agriculture subject seriously and many people relied on this knowledge. Right now, we are not teaching agriculture and radio is probably the remaining source for people in the villages.
Information on different diseases that affect crops was identified as important as well as the use of pesticides. In these programs, farmers are taught how to identify, prevent and treat different crop diseases. The farming programs discuss ways in which farmers can prevent the spread of such diseases during the outbreak and for potential future outbreaks. Agrochemical companies send their experts to the programs to clarify to farmers how to use such products as John Githinji, a 40 year old farmer from Endarasha explained:

The programs are important because sometimes you find one chemical which is in liquid, granules or powder and you cannot tell the difference. Most of those who sell these products are not experts; they can even give you wrong information. But listening to experts on the radio program, I have for instance learned that liquid form of a chemical will work well during the dry season and not the rainy season.

Farmers also reported following closely information on the prices of the produce. Having information on the prices of the produce in different markets around the country helps them to determine the best place to take their produce. It also influences their decision on when to harvest or sell their crop. According to Githinji, a few days can make a big difference on how much one will earn from their produce.

Agricultural programs address issues of animal husbandry. Farmers learn how to improve their livestock rearing and raise production of milk and other products. In Kieni West, farmers keep livestock mainly for milk and meat. Farmers in the rural areas are usually handicapped by lack of information. Livestock keepers tend to continue to follow animal rearing practices which fail to maximize livestock potential and the overall production. One of the areas that the livestock farming information has challenged is
breeding. Farmers traditionally use their own animals to breed but this has been found to produce subsequent inferior breed. With the new farming methods, farmers are encouraged to use artificial insemination where they can get different breeds that are specifically suited for an area with its climatic condition. Teresia Waiganjo is a 48 year old livestock keeper who explained how she is learning to change.

We are learning a lot and this is very important. Now we hear from the radio every day what experts suggest. Different farmers also talk of their experiences when they call the programs or when they are interviewed…. Before, we would just cross-breed the animals between what we have. We used to view artificial insemination as expensive and did not think of potential benefits. Now, I know better. I use the little money I have and in exchange, I get a better quality breed. Radio programs also address what can be viewed as basic knowledge such as feeding the animals but in reality constitutes one of the most important aspects of livestock rearing. For many livestock keepers, feeding the animals involves releasing them to the grazing fields and watering them. However, farmers are being challenged because grazing on grass only does not provide the animals with all the nutrients they need. In the dry season, the grass is dry and less nutritious. By being able to constantly access information through radio, farmers are becoming more enlightened in their production. In Mahiga where cows are taken to graze miles away during the dry season, farmers are now providing factory manufactured feed to the animals in the evening to supplement other nutritional needs. My research assistant, Mr. Wanjoji, who also keeps livestock, explained the following to me:
When we had prolonged dry season like this, we would lose many animals because they did not have enough. But if you look now even though we have not had rains for over two years, it is not common to see people losing their animals. People are buying food from the animal stores which really help the animals. They give them multivitamins too which is keeping them alive.

Part of the change is attributable to increased information coming from the radio. Whereas radio has been used for this purpose before, it was not able to address very specific populations. Kikuyu vernacular stations address very specific population. “We listen for ourselves and learn for ourselves”, Mary Kanyogo, a 76 year old whom I had just watched feed one of her cows that could not stand after it was given an excess dosage of multi-vitamins. We had spent almost two hours of a Tuesday morning trying to help the animal to stand before we gave up. As the animal lay down, Mrs. Kanyogo relentlessly fed it factory food from a basin. The following day I learned that the cow had died.

Livestock information on the radio has allowed farmers to share information. Many farmers in Central Kenya keep animals and some have been very successful. Program such as Mũgambo wa Mūrūmũ identify the successful farmers and interview them on their practices. This allows the listeners to get first hand experiences. Some of the farmers explain the changes they have adopted and how this has influenced their animal productivity. Other issues on livestock production that are addressed on radio included livestock diseases. Livestock diseases are one of the biggest challenges that farmers face. An outbreak of a disease can wipe out the entire animal population in an area. Farmers receive information on how to deal with the problems if they should arise
and how to prevent an outbreak. For instance, farmers are advised to spray their animals to minimize vectors such as ticks which transmit most of the livestock infections.

Catherine Wanjiru, a 43 year old farmer from Mwiyogo put farming into perspective.

A lot has changed here in terms of livestock. In the past, we took our animal to a common community cattle dip\textsuperscript{7} for tick control. We paid a minimum amount to have our animals get the spray so we did not have to buy the chemicals. These animal dips are no more so we have to spray our animals individually. We had to learn how to mix and how to spray. The radio programs are very useful because they remind you what to do. They will also tell you that you need to change the chemical you use after sometime for it to be effective. We do learn a lot from these programs.

To many farmers in Kieni West, the importance of information accessed from the radio how it impacts the economic outcomes of their activities. Wanjiru quoted above summarized very well.

If you put your energy on an activity, then it should be able to give you reasonable returns. The problem has been that most of the time we have always toiled hard and gotten nothing due to lack of knowledge. With the knowledge we are getting, we are having better production and more returns for very little addition to what we used to do.

\textsuperscript{7} In the past, the government built community sheds where animals would be taken for spraying on specific days to protect the animals from vectors such as ticks. The cattle dips were shared by the whole community. Farmers paid a little amount depending on the number of animals. The amount collected was used to maintain the cattle dips. The management of the cattle dips was left to the local people. But an agricultural expert was responsible for mixing the chemicals. The cattle dips have slowly disappeared in many areas leaving farmers to take care of their animals on their own.
As agriculture continue to play central role in the economic production of the population in Central Kenya, the programs that address the topic will remain important. Radio is an effective avenue to address agricultural issues.

*Health Information*

Radio provides health information to the listeners. Health information was mainly identified by women as one of the content topics they like listening to. In particular, the listeners reported that they listen to information on traditional health practices such as use of herbal remedies that is available on the vernacular stations. Listening to information on traditional health practices on the radio allows them to learn about remedies which are readily available in their localities which they can easily turn to when they are in need.

To some listeners broadcasting of traditional health information is a way of preserving the indigenous knowledge which is increasingly being lost. Radio programs are bringing the information back as well as diffusing it. Listeners of health programs reported interest in nutrition. Women said that they learn more about nutrition especially how they can utilize locally available food to maximize diet in their families. These programs use the experts such as nutritionists to explain the topics which provide authoritative information that the listeners want. Anne, a primary school teacher, quoted the authority of the doctors who appeared in these programs. “I like programs on health especially the doctors who come to inform us on how to eat well and live a healthy life”.

There was less discussion of health content by male listeners. There was also less mentioning of health problems such as specific diseases in the radio. Given the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Kenya, I was keen on finding out whether the increase in radio stations may have affected the coverage of the epidemic and whether this would be
mentioned by the listeners. However, there were very few references to the disease that were made. After directly interacting with more than 350 listeners, there were only three instances that the issue of HIV/AIDS was raised. In these instances HIV/AIDS was mentioned by young women when asked about the kind of content they would like to hear on the stations. Although Coro FM has a five minutes program on HIV/AIDS from Monday to Friday at 2:30 pm and 10:30 pm, listeners did not mention this program. When asked about the amount of content on HIV/AIDS on the radio, Mr. Waweru Mburu of Radio Citizen said that although there is still content on the radio, there has been a decrease on such content and felt that very little is being done by broadcasters, government and organizations working in the health sector to increase such information. His station does not have as much programs as it used to in the previous years. He believes that more needs to be done especially given the fact that the infection rates have been reported to be rising again after decline in the past years.

Apart from the above: current affairs, agricultural and health information, other listeners like Wahome, a 23 year old from Mwiyogo are attracted to business news. “For me the radio station I love most is Capital FM. They have comprehensive business news such as micro-enterprises that young people are interested in. They also do analysis and offer advice”. With such views, my first guess was that Wahome is a businessman. However, he works in a farm but his future plans are to open his own business. Parents of young children reported that they encouraged their children to listen to child programming that usually airs on Saturdays on vernacular stations because it provides an opportunity for them to learn. For Charles Kinyua, a 32 year old father, radio on Saturday morning hours belongs to the children because that is when the children program airs.
Radio and companionship

Radio occupies an important place in audiences’ daily lives. Listeners in Kieni West have a kind of personal relationship with the radio device to an extent where it is interpreted as a cherished companion. Many conversations about the radio device were punctuated with description in Kikuyu such as “karedio gakwa” (my sweet small radio). This statement conveys more than possessing the radio. By adding the prefix ka- before the noun radio, listeners illustrated their love for the device. Ka- in Kikuyu signifies diminutive marker or something good, but generally “small” is implied to be good. Thus, “karedio gakwa” statement that was repeated over and over demonstrated listeners’ affinity to the radio. Listeners made the distinction between a radio set that is personal versus one that belongs to the family. The intimate set is identified with a member of the family and whose location appears to be defined. For Samuel Kariuki, a 68 year old man who spends most of his day grazing his animals, his radio does not leave him. “Karedio gakwa gatiumaga mũhuko mũthenya wothe (My little small radio never leaves the pocket for the whole day).

At the domestic level, radio companionship is defined in terms of spaces that are curved from the larger domestic spheres. For many women head of households, that space is the kitchen. For young men, that space is in their “cubicles”. Some men head of the households are “mobile” where their radio tends to follow them wherever they would be within the home. For instance, in the evening, most men will be sitting outside the

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8 In the Kikuyu culture, young men (usually from 12 years old onwards) are likely to have their own small house, commonly referred as cubicles that are built within the family compound. Traditionally, from age 12 boys are circumcised as a part of rite of passage to adulthood. After circumcision, they live in their secluded house because it is considered awkward for a grown up man to live in his parents’ house. They however continue to eat from the parents’ house and can spend their time there but ordinarily will not sleep there.
house just before the dark. After dark they will move to the living room with their radio and take it with them to the bedroom when they retire. Hellen, a 42 year old teacher and a mother of a grown up girl and two boys describes her home where there are multiple radios for different members of her family. Her description reveals different spaces that are specific to different members of the family.

In my home no one has to decide for the other on what to listen to. We have been forced to have many radios so you stay where you are with the radio. I have mine in the kitchen and my husband has his in the living room. If it is the young men, they have their own in their small house. We have at least four radios: mine, my husband’s, the boys’, and the girl’s.

These spaces are gendered. For women, radio provides companionship when they are in the kitchen preparing meals for their family, mainly the breakfast and dinner as well as daytime when they are at home alone. In the rural Kieni West, the setting of a home is different from other places. For those households that have television, the set will be put in the living room. For households without television, but have a number of radios in the house, one radio will always be in the living room. In Kieni West, in addition to a kitchen room in the main house, there is usually a separate one outside the main house. *Rião ri naï nja* (the outside-kitchen) as is commonly referred, is a small house built a few meters from the main house because most families use firewood for cooking and would want to keep smoke away from the main house. Since women do the cooking, being in this small house separates them from the rest of the family where they find the company of the radio as the rest of the family engages in different activities. I observed this in different interactions with various families.
On many evenings, I would spend time with my research assistant at his home. His main house is a three roomed house with a living room and two bedrooms. Outside the main house is a one room kitchen where the family cooks. On this particular evening, Mr. Wanjohi had two other visitors, two young men who spent most of their day in the grazing fields. They had come to bring his family part of the meat from an impala they had caught during the day. Four of us sat in the living room conversing and watching the small rechargeable battery powered black and white television set. Mrs. Wanjohi, on the other hand, was preparing the dinner in the kitchen. The couple’s two girls aged four and six moved back and forth between the kitchen and the living room. After about an hour, the dinner was ready and Mrs. Wanjohi brought the food for the four us to the living room. After serving us the food, she left. She did not join us in the living room as we ate but instead ate her portion from the kitchen and only came to collect the utensils. Throughout the meal preparation she had a small radio on in the kitchen keeping her company except for a few interruptions by the children.

In Mwiyogo area, I was introduced to 19 year old Robert by my research assistant, Mr. Wanjohi. A few homes in the area had just been connected with electricity but one of the transformers was immediately vandalized by criminals. I was carrying my laptop and there was no electricity in the home where I was staying. I also needed to charge my cell phone. Robert’s parents’ home was one of the few places where they had electricity. Robert lived in a one room earthen floor “cubicle” to which he had amateurishly connected electricity from his parents four roomed stone house. I met his parents and sometimes they would also invite us for dinner. As we would wait for the dinner, Robert’s mother was always in the kitchen with her radio on while we would sit
in the living room watching the television. Like Mrs. Wanjohi, Robert’s mother rarely joined us during the dinner.

Radio keeps many women company for most of the daytime. A large section of women in Kieni West are housewives and the daytime consists of a long period of time when they are at home alone. Those who have young children take care of the children during the day. Ordinarily, housewives spend their time either at home or taking care of their farms. In most parts of the year, there is little work to do in the farms and this leaves more time to spend at home. Furthermore, the past few years have seen failed rains which diminish the amount of work to do at home. Husbands and children leave home early, usually before 8:00 am. A woman wakes up before six in the morning to prepare the family breakfast and the children for school. After the rest of the family has left, the woman spends the rest of the day alone. Wairimu, a house wife and a mother of two from Endarasha explains the role of radio during her lonely daytime hours.

During the weekdays, I find myself alone at home with little to do. My husband leaves the house at seven o’clock in the morning and my two children are gone to school shortly after. Shortly after they leave, I will be done with the domestic chores. My youngest child comes from school around 2:00 pm while the elder one will be home after 4:30 pm. For all the time that I am on my own, the only thing that keeps me busy is my radio. I just don’t know how it would be without my radio.

Similar views are echoed by Peris, a 40 year old housewife from Mweiga. For Peris, radio provides a presence at home when everyone but she has deserted the place.
I just don’t know what I would do without a radio. When the radio doesn’t have batteries, I feel like I can go crazy. You see, during the day the village is so quiet and again I am here all alone. The only noise that I can hear is probably an animal somewhere, apart from that it’s all a hollow. With the radio, I have company because I will be listening to what is going on, different programs or music. I don’t even have to concentrate to listen; the sound of the radio makes the place habitable.

Most men in Kieni West used radio as a companion in their places of work. Men who take animals to fields carried the radio with them. It helped to keep them company in the far away fields where there is limited human interaction as Samuel reported.

For me radio is like a friend. For years I have been grazing the animals and what keeps me company is this small radio. If you have ever grazed, you know that the day can be very long. You are almost doing nothing but following the animals around. For eight hours that can be extremely long. But with the radio, everything appears organized. You listen to music for this hour, at 1:00 pm I will be waiting to listen to the news and so on. Just like that the day will be gone. But even when I go home, I don’t leave my radio. It has become part of me.

Others will carry the radio to the farms. Of those interviewed, I found that men were more likely to carry the radio when going to the farm than women. John Ngare, a farmer from Endarasha always carries his small radio to the farm. “I have a small radio that is portable and I carry it whenever I am working in the farms. It keeps me company, tells me the time and entertains me”. I observed a number of people in the farm who took the radio to the farm. Usually, the set was covered with a cloth to protect it from dust and
positioned within a certain distance of the working person. As the worker moves to different parts, the set was moved too.

In some occupations, radio is synonymous with a tool for the job. Daniel, a father of three who works as a security guard, has taken a radio with him to work for the last ten years. He says that radios are very popular with security guards in every part of the country. The security guards prefer the pocket radio because they are easy to carry. Usually, the pocket radios do not have headphones or ear phones so they are always glued to the ear as Daniel reiterates below:

I have been working as a security guard at the Seminary for more than ten years now and carry my small radio every day to work. As you know, radio is synonymous with us guards. Every guard that I know has one. It helps us to stay awake through the night although we have to listen to it close to the ear.

Several young men interviewed reported that the radio plays the role of a companion in their everyday life. Youthful men who are not married are more likely to spend their free time in the evening, the period between getting home and going to sleep, listening to the radio. After spending most of the day at work or with friends, they are usually alone in the evening. Ngunjiri, a 22 year old mechanic from Endarasha explained his interaction with the radio in the evenings.

I spend most of my day in town working. At around 5:00 pm, I will be done working and this is the time that I hang around with friends, talking, and socializing. Sometimes I will go home around 8:00 pm. Sometimes I eat, other times I just go straight to my house. I just relax with my radio until I fall asleep. Most of the times I fall asleep while the radio is still on.
For Nick, a 23 year old shop attendant in Mweiga town, radio fills the void left by not having his family near him.

I come from Nyahururu and came here when I was young to work. None of my family is here so I am used to being alone at home. There is only the radio. …My radio is never turned off when I am home. When I am not working, I am usually with friends or at home. When I go home, I start listening to my favorite station, Metro FM.

The examples above show radio filling the social gap that is left when the young men are alone. During most part of the day, they are able to interact with other people in their work place or at the social places mostly in the shopping centers. When they go home, they find themselves alone and radio fills the void, becoming the only form of interaction.

Radio as a social platform

Radio has assumed a social role among the listeners in Kieni West. Radio was reported as a platform where listeners get in touch with other people outside their immediate environment, made acquaintances, discussed issues of common interest and exchanged ideas. Radio also captures a changing social environment among rural populations. People in the rural areas have been known to be the custodians of the traditional way of life. While migration and westernization has disrupted the traditional ways of life, rural communities have generally maintained many aspects of the traditional culture and interactions. In Kieni West, there is an agreement that society in general has been undergoing tremendous changes. People agree that the nature of social interactions is changing. Today, things are different from what communities have traditionally known. The family structure for instance is changing with nuclear family taking center
stage and extended family moving apart. The relationship between parents and children is different. The role of the wider community in a child’s upbringing has diminished with the roles going to the nuclear family level or taken over by teachers. These changes are interpreted in different ways. For the older generation, there is a sense of panic. They are worried that a new generation is emerging that does not understand the traditional Kikuyu culture. To them, the young people do not have a grip of their community’s underlying social systems and their experiences are increasingly becoming disconnected from their parents’ and grandparents’. With these changes, people agree that communication mediums such as radio have now become a part of the new social sphere where interactions that were conducted through interpersonal relationships in the past find their place today.

For the young people, these changes are not only inevitable but are necessary in order to cope with the rest of world as Ndugi, a 24 year old from Mahiga, illustrates in his views.

We are not just a part of the village we live in; we are a part of a larger society. It is beyond the ethnic group we belong to and it is beyond the region we come from. It is even beyond nationality as Kenyans. At every point, we seek to associate with a community that is larger than our immediate environment.

As Ndugi argues, radio has given listeners platforms where they are able to interact with people who are not necessary within their immediate environment. Aided with the rapid growth of the mobile telephony, people have found a forum where they are able to share life experiences, find common interests, discuss issues and learn from one another. As a social platform, radio is bringing together people from different locations.
and with diverse experiences to a common space where they can interact. The position of radio as a social platform has been enhanced by the rapid development of the mobile telephone industry. The rural population has increasingly become connected using cell phones. More than 81% of the people who filled the questionnaire reported that they owned a cell phone. This has in turn contributed to participation in the radio programming through which their voices are heard. Some of the popular social discourses on radio include listeners groups, various discussion forums, and greetings.

Listeners groups consist of a group of people from an area who are fans of a given radio program. The members are spurred into a group by a common interest in the program. Many listeners do not have prior contact with each other before participating in the programs. For example, Metro FM which before August 2008 was an all reggae station had a big listenership among the younger people, aged between 18 and 30 years. In Mweiga town, I found a group of youths who were ardent listeners of the station. According to Nick, a 23 year old shop attendant, many of them started participating in the program through sending requests for their favorite songs. This was done through text messages (SMS) or phone calls. Nick said that he participated in live call-ins and sent text messages every day. When one calls the station, they identify themselves with the place they come from. With time, people who come from a similar location start identifying with each other and start dedicating songs to each other. According to Nick, a number of people from Mweiga town became regular contributors to the program and they ended up connecting with each other, meeting at one of the local bars. Although the group had become inactive by the time I was conducting the fieldwork after some of its
members had moved from the town, Nick felt that the group provided a forum for social networking for people like him.

In the group, we all had something in common first because we love reggae. At the same time, we are all young, in a way we understand each other and what is happening in our lives. I feel bad that we don’t meet anymore but I still contribute in the programs. I send big-ups (greetings) to other people who I have not met but it feels like I know them through the radio.

The trend of having listeners groups has gained popularity especially among the vernacular radio stations. According to Mr. Danson Nguru, the marketing manager of Kameme FM, the stations groups are organized into what is called *Shabiqs*\(^9\) clubs in areas where the station has higher listenership. The station has a program called Shabiq’s hour weekdays 9:00-10:00 pm.

We have Shabiq’s fan clubs complete with members. They meet to assist one another, enjoy the programs and give us feedback. We visit them; we give them airtime and socialize together. Next week we are going to have a focus group of about 20 key listeners, senior managers, ordinary managers, farmers and ordinary folks, just to sit down and hear from them. We want to hear what they think about their station. We will use that feedback to tweak the programming.

Another Kikuyu vernacular station, Coro FM has a strong listeners group. According the Jane Mumbi, the Head of Coro FM, the fan clubs are distributed all over the country.

We are very close to our listeners. We have fan clubs all over where we get to know what our listener need through them. Each club has a chair who reports to

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\(^9\) The term Shabiq is modified borrowed form of the Swahili term *shabiki* which means “a fan” or “a spectator”.

one representative who is a producer of a program in Coro. The clubs are very
effective and twice every year, I meet the clubs in a party organized by them.
Once in a while we meet with the chairpersons who present the fans grievances.
We have about 40 fan clubs in different areas where we have reach and they have
one national chairman.

Listeners groups are not a new phenomenon in the Kenyan broadcasting. They also
existed during the KBC broadcasting reign. However, most clubs were virtual groups that
did not involve actual contacts of the members. Members only sent greetings to KBC
using special cards which were bought from the broadcasters. A few however managed to
meet. Also, some groups were organized based on particular programs. The main
difference between the new fans club and the older clubs is the level of listeners and
broadcasters involvement. Broadcasters utilize the groups for feedbacks. Coro FM and
Kameme have very active fans clubs.

Listeners also use radio to keep in touch with friends and the loved ones. With the
increased listeners’ participation, radio stations provide more calling times on air. For
instance, early morning radio shows in three Kikuyu stations (Coro FM, Inooro FM and
Kameme FM), between 5:00-6:00 am are interactive with call-ins and short messaging.
Listeners in Kieni West reported that they use these programs to send messages to their
friends and relatives who are away. Nyambura, a 28 year old designer in Endarasha is a
regular contributor on Kameme FM early morning show.

I call Kameme FM in the morning once in a while to send messages to my sister
Anne who works in Nairobi. She is also a fan of Kameme FM and she will once
in a while do the same. It feels good to hear my name mentioned. Although we
talk on the phone often, having a dialogue on the radio has a different form of satisfaction. Again, it is odd for someone to call you before six in the morning. But on the radio, I can give her some words of encouragement and blessings for the day.

Kimani, a barber at Mweiga town is also a regular fan of the morning programs where he sends morning wishes to his friends and family.

I am an early riser and sometimes I will be listening to the radio even before 5:00 am. My business is not something I can open at 7:00 in the morning because I don’t have early customers here. So, I just relax listening to the radio for some hours before I can go to work. After listening to people sending morning wishes on Inooro FM for sometimes, I also started contributing. Now I am a regular. I like to wish my friends and family a good day in the morning. If I cannot call, I will send SMS. It is not easy to get through on the phone at least once every week. I send SMS at least twice every week. I like it now; it’s almost a daily ritual.

Men were found to be more likely to participate on the radio than women. Also, the younger listeners reported to calling the stations more often which means they are more interested in the radio social activities than older listeners. At the same time, many contributors to the radio are those who had a regular source of employment found in the small towns and shopping centers. This group contributes more often to the radio social activities such as greetings, requests and dedications compared to those who live in the farms.
Another social aspect of radio was reported mainly by the youth which involves what they termed as “discussion of issues of common interest”. These are wide ranging issues that include education and career choice, dealing with parents, drugs and alcohol abuse, health, HIV/AIDS, relationships, among others. Beste, a 22 year old man from Mweiga town is a fan of Metro FM. Apart from listening to music, he likes the different discussions that come on the radio which he feels targets the young people.

I can say that I like Metro because of reggae music. But it is not just music all the time, there are very many discussions on the radio on issues that are relevant to young people like me. The presenters usually raise these issues or get them from listeners. It is encouraging to hear people calling and contributing different points of views. I also find it interesting because, no matter where that person is, you just hear as if they are talking about you. …..Sometimes they will be talking about dealing with your parents and friends, next time about relationship. These affect us all.

Marion, a 19 year old from Endarasha, likes to listen to Coro FM because she feels that the station provides her with a place where she can follow different discussions that are related to the youth.

I like to listen to Coro FM because as a young person, I get to listen to discussions from different people on issues that I identify with. For example, ways to protect myself from dangerous liaisons with men and their associated risks. I have listened to girls of my age recount not so good experience and others who have managed to evade the same. These are issues that I might not hear from my friends who I interact with everyday because they have not had similar
experience. And even though people here in Endarasha may have experienced the same, I don’t know them or they don’t talk about it.

Michael, a 20 year old from Mwiyogo is a fan of the discussions on the radio. His main interest is in education. He finished high school in 2007 and works as an untrained teacher in a local primary school as he waits to proceed to college. For Michael, his current dilemma is choosing the best course to study. Being in the rural area does not give him the exposure he would like in order to make the best career decision. He discusses this in relation to some of the content that appeals to him on the radio.

Let us be real. When you are living in the village in a rural area like this, you are away from the radar and sometimes you cannot know what is happening elsewhere. But youth have the same dilemma. You just finished high school and want to go to college but you do not know how to make the right choice. I have heard good discussions about different careers on radio. Someone will call with the dilemma and they get other people, some who were in the same position or some who are involved in training giving them the possibilities. I like that because when I am in the village, I do not have access to much information.

One of the important attributes of the radio here for the young people is the ability to aggregate the shared experience and address a broader audience. Youth in the rural areas get a chance to interact with their fellow youth across the country and get more than what their daily social interactions will provide within their own locality. While these kinds of interactions continue in the youths daily settings, they are incomplete because they are not as rich and diverse. They are also limited in terms of space. In Mwiyogo area which is dominated by farms and is more of a village setting. Young men come to hang
out at a small shop every evening at 6:00 pm after everyone is done with the day’s work
where they play darts and converse for a few hours. Other points of social interactions are
bars but they do not provide a space for much serious interactions. For a whole week, I
observed the same group of friends. By nature of an undersized group with limited
information, they are therefore not likely to have something new or different to talk about
within the small circle. Most of the young men who hang together in Mahiga had known
each other for many years having attended primary and secondary school together.
Typically, an external experience is when one goes to Mweiga town. But even here, the
time for interactions is limited. Young women are more restricted in terms of
interactions. Unlike the young men, they are usually expected to be home before dark.
They are also not likely to hang out in a public place like outside the shop because this is
considered unacceptable. Girls therefore tend to socialize with friends at home or semi-
public places like hair salons.

Weekend late-night shows are one of the most popular programs with the listeners
of Kikuyu vernacular radio. The three leading Kikuyu radio stations have a family
program during the weekend night which has gained strong roots among listeners.
According to the latest the 200 second quarter Steadman Report, the night late programs
attract the highest numbers of listeners. (Steadman Group, 2008). These programs consist
of what is a new form of social sphere that allows people to discuss issues that are rarely
discussed in the daily interactions. Zulu Thiong’o, the head of Inooro FM explained:

Most Kikuyu people do not like to talk about issues that are related to sex. They
shy a lot from that. We were the pioneers in [vernacular] radio to talk openly
about sex. We thought that since people do these things and others do them
without the necessary knowledge, how will they get the necessary knowledge?

We took it upon ourselves to bring these issues to the limelight. Other people say that Kikuyu people are not romantic, so we wanted to know what romance from our listeners is. Other people say that Kikuyu women are over-reserved and do not show emotions when it comes to sex appeal. So we wanted to know why they suppress the feelings, we wanted to give them a forum to express themselves.

What is sex, how do they relate with the opposite sex. People liked it because people came out in the open which was very surprising.

Radio in Kenya has since become an effective social platform where listeners now discuss sexual issues that are of concern to their life experiences. During the course of an ordinary day, issues that relate to sexuality are rarely discussed openly especially across age groups, genders and within family, for instance parents and children. Sexual subject matter is difficult to negotiate because many African societies are conservative on the issue. Even my conversation with Mr. Thiong’o includes a carefully chosen language which for instance includes substitution of sexual references such as “sexual intercourse” with general terms such as “these things”. “To hear women saying that I do not like to be handled this way, I like it this way, such that even men can know where they usually fail.”, Mr. Thiong’o continued. The quote above illustrates another set of carefully chosen words, where phrases such as “this way”, “where” are substitutes to descriptive sexual text from the listeners that the broadcaster is not ready to repeat.

During the interviews and focus discussion groups, two late-night programs, Ithaa rīa kwībangā (Time to be smart) and Hutia Mūndū (Touch someone) were identified as listeners’ favorite programs for a number of young listeners, majority of married young
people and middle aged respondents but usually without direct reference. When the question *What is your favorite program?* was posed, many respondents would give a winded response because they are uncomfortable talking about the exact nature of the program, partly because it is of sexual nature as illustrated by the following dialogues. The first dialogue is within a focus group discussion with young men at Endarasha where I pose a question to John Ngunjiri, a 24 year old mechanic at Endarasha shopping center.

**Interviewer:** What radio program do you like to listen to?

**Ngunjiri:** News, people like Mũnyūrūũ, a comedy type of a program. And there is this program that comes at night (*kapindi gaka gokaga ũtukũ*).

**Interviewer:** Which one?

*(The respondent giggles, like he is trying to hide something or is shy to reveal some deep secrets.)*

**Ngunjiri:** *(Laughing).* It is about family.

*(Or it is the one called *Hutia Mũndũ, another participant interjects).*

**Ngunjiri:** No, it is a different one that comes very late at night and people are interviewed, like what women like, such things.

**Interviewer:** Are you married?

**Ngunjiri:** No

Another section of the people interviewed identified the program with the main presenter. For instance, *Ithaa riũ Kwibanga* was identified with Pastor JJ as the presenter is popularly known. In most instances, I had to probe before I could get the listeners to
name the program. The following excerpt is from a focus group discussion with young
women from Mahiga in Mwiyogo.

Interviewer: How many people in this group listen to Pastor JJ’s program?

(Discussants raise their hands)

I see five. What is Pastor JJ’s program about?

(Few seconds of silence)

Priscilla: It is about man and wife, how they should live.

Interviewer: When is it on air?

Priscilla: It is on air on Saturday, from 9:30 PM.

Interviewer: What is the name of this program?

Priscilla: It is called Hutia Mũndũ.

(The group busts into a long laughter).

Interviewer: Tell us the issues that are discussed or things that you have heard

on the program

Priscilla: Hmmm… they are very difficult

(The group busts into an extended laughter lasting over one minute. There

is another long silence)

Interviewer: Are you feeling shy? We are all adults here, so you can talk freely.

Priscilla: The program gives different experiences. For instance, when a

wife refuses to have sex with her husband or when a husband

refuses to have sex with his wife. It gives such examples.

Interviewer: What else, from another person? Anne?

(Silence, then laughter)
Interviewer: Beatrice

Beatrice: The program helps people.

Interviewer: How?

Beatrice: It advises a man and a wife how they can live together

(Another long silence)

Interviewer: How, in which ways. Priscilla -tell us.

This interview excerpt, like the preceding one, reiterates the difficulty that people find in discussing sexual topics. In the focus groups of eight people, there was only likely to be one person who was bold and it took this person for the others to talk. In the case of this group, it was Priscilla who was showing some level of boldness which helped to open up the discussion. Hence my probing focused on her although she also struggled. Listeners agreed that the sexual subject is hard to talk about in the real life. However, such content can be discussed on the radio without people feeling the same pressure.

Many people in Kieni West would like to hear and be free to discuss topics that are viewed as taboo and what I call muted subjects. Taboo topics are those that would be considered offensive or disrespectful to ask or talk about, such as sex and sexuality. Muted subjects comprises of topics that are not necessarily offensive and can be discussed within a controlled setting such as when one is with his age mates, close acquaintances or members of a group. These include issues of rites of passage such as circumcision, relationships, diseases, sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS.

John Muchangi, a 32 year old businessman who seemed well versed with the community, decried the lack of open discussion of taboo topics and mute discourses. He identified some taboo and muted subjects he has observed such as extra-marital affairs, fertility
problems, and single motherhood. “We do not or rather we cannot openly talk about issues of sexuality, reproductive health even HIV/AIDS, among others, yet these are some of the most important issues that affect us in our day to day life”. In daily life, taboo topics are spoken either in codes or whispers. The late-night family programming is a new kind of content on the vernacular radio and includes explicit content, too sensitive for children and underage to listen to. When taboo topics are listened to on the radio, the environment is altered to make sure that that they do not disrupt the certain norms such as who can hear what and with who in the vicinity. In an article appearing on *The East African Standard* titled “Love and lunacy on late-night radio”, the writer quotes some listeners of *Hutia Mündū* on the explicit nature of the content.

Because of the explicit nature of the program’s content, however, she cautions that it is wise to keep children away while it is being aired. Ahead of the presentation, the first thing that the presenters of *Hutia Mündū* do is to sound a warning to parents to ensure that their children are a safe distance away.

At home, listeners in Kieni West treated listening to this program like a ritual. Wairimu, a 34 year old mother of three children aged 11, 8, and 5 years described her Saturday evening before her favorite program, *Hutia Mündū*.

Every Saturday I have to prepare to listen to the late night program, *Hutia Mündū*, I make sure that I feed the children early and prepare them to go to bed in good time. At 10:00 pm, my husband and I start to listen to the program together.

The urban FM stations have had similar type of content but their programming has been different. The urban FM stations late-night program address taboo topics but directed towards younger people, presented by regular presenters and are usually spontaneous
arising from contributing listeners. According to David Nguru of Kameme FM, vernacular radio stations’ approach is different. The programs are organized, carefully selected and researched and are targeted more towards the family or those who are thinking about having a family in future.

In order to address the taboo nature of the subjects, two popular late-night family programs that appear on Inooro FM and Coro FM are co-hosted by Christian preachers who are also trained psychologist. Pastor Kuria presents *Hutia Műndũ* program, which appears on Inooro FM, while *Ithaa rĩa kwĩbanga* in Coro FM is presented by Pastor JJ. Bringing religion into program on the sexual discourse has made it more acceptable to many listeners who are also Christians. According to the Zulu Thiong’o, the head of Inooro FM, the station made a conscious decision to have a religious figure on the program for various reasons. “We use the Pastor to present the program because he is trusted, he is chosen. What he addresses are issues that based on the Bible and not his personal views”. The late-night programs were the only programs that married couples reported listening to together. Married women mostly reported to have introduced their husband to the programs. “There is one program that I introduced my husband to, the one by Pastor JJ. It comes on air every Saturday once a week” says Cate, a 29 year old mother. Through the radio, listeners get a chance to participate actively and passively in the taboo subjects that they would ordinarily in the everyday discourses. Those who listen are able to follow-up the subjects of discussion. Others actively participate through call-ins or text messages where they ask questions or air their views and opinions.

Muted subjects are addressed in a variety of programs and are more easily than taboo topics. Sexually transmitted infections and related issues are addressed in health
programs in different radio stations. Inooro FM for instance has different slots where
doctors tackle various issues. HIV/AIDS has been widely addressed on the radio but rarely in the day to day social interactions. People in the rural areas, for instance, are always reluctant to discuss the issue in public (Muturi, 2002). African cultural issues such as rites of passage are constantly addressed on cultural programs in the vernacular radio but the discussants will not delve into the details. For instance, presenters and contributors will talk about circumcision as a rite of passage but will not address what it really involves. In this case, the details of the practice are taboo. Listeners constantly identified Coro FM as a station that addresses the Kikuyu cultural issues.

Radio assumes the role of an extended social sphere to address taboo and muted subjects that are not easily dealt with in the daily interactions. Through this, the medium is breaking the barriers which have in turn spurred dialogue in the community. At the family level, spouses reported increased communication on issues that they had not been able to discuss in the past. John Gathua, 28 and his wife Mary, 24 revealed how they started listening to the program.

Mary: When these programs were new, I would once in a while listen but did not pay attention. Then people started talking about them. When we went to women group, people would talk about how they address family issues. Then there was talk of people listening with their husbands or encouraging them to listen. I was also becoming a regular and after some time, I had the courage to ask my husband to join me.

John: My wife introduced me to the program. I was a little hesitant at first because we usually don’t listen to anything serious together. Sometimes I
did not go home early. Most weekends I would stay out with my fellow men. With time though, we started feeling comfortable. These days, we even discuss the issues that were addressed in the program something that we did not do before because we felt uncomfortable.

Older people interviewed during the study identified a shift in their society where the traditional avenues of interactions are disappearing. Mr. Samuel Kariuki, 68, pointed to this ensuing gulf.

There are many changes today and we older people can notice them but younger people probably feel that everything is alright. When we were growing up, old men would sit down with young people and have a dialogue and pass knowledge to them. Today, if you want to find a young a man you have to go to the bar.

With the shifting social spaces and limited interactions, radio is an alternative site where culture is passed on, learned and negotiated.

Radio for civic engagement

A significant outcome of the liberalized broadcast industry can be noted in the opening up of broadcast media as a public sphere, "a discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment" (Hause, 1998, p. 86). The public sphere can be seen as a stage in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk (Fraser, 1990) and a realm of social life in which public opinion can be formed (Asen, 1999). While the first urban FM stations were entertainment oriented, new stations such as Radio Citizen, a national Swahili station was started in 1996 do not shy away from engaging in political discourse. According to the station’s head, Waweru
Mburu, the station’s inception was motivated by the need to provide an alternative political voice to the people. In the consequent years, new vernacular radio stations have also included programs that address politics and other issues of public interest.

Listeners in Kieni West demonstrate a lot of interest in politics as well as engagement in public deliberations. People are interested in what is happening in their immediate environment and beyond. They also constantly questioned their politicians and their government. They felt that the performance of the government and local leadership directly influences their lives. A government that is working is aware of people’s needs while effective leaders provide a link between the citizens and the government. As discussed elsewhere, Kieni West area finds itself in a complicated position being part of the larger Nyeri District, an area that is considered relatively developed compared to other areas of the country.

However, the population views their association with the larger Nyeri District as detrimental because it masks special needs in most parts of the area. Due to these and similar challenge, the population is very vocal. They also view the political system as a driving force that can change the prevailing conditions. To illustrate the level of political awareness, people constantly criticized the current president, a Kikuyu from Nyeri who also owns a ranch in the area. Given the nature of Kenyan politics, people of particular ethnic groups are usually likely to support a president unanimously. However, people of Kieni West are critical in their views that are based on government’s response to the needs of its citizen. In a telling moment, I encountered Mr. Muriuki, a 65 year old man from Endarasha who felt that people in the area were better off during former President Moi’s regime.
We might have the president from the region but this has not changed anything in our life. In fact, I feel that things were better during Moi’s rule. When we had droughts and food crisis, the government would respond and send relief food. However, there have not been such efforts with Kibaki’s government. People are going hungry but there is not help that has been forthcoming.

While Mr. Muriuki’s views may not necessarily be shared by everyone, they provide a critical view of the government by a citizen. It is a differing opinion for a resident from Central Kenya to give credit to Moi’s government, a regime that is blamed for deliberately destroying the Central Kenya’s economy. Such opinions are not likely to be common in Central Kenya and are therefore worthy of notice. Radio stations provide a forum where listeners can engage in public discourses such as those of Muriuki. The significance in these public interest subjects has led the stations to come up with programs that give the people a chance to contribute and deliberate on them. Radio Citizen was constantly mentioned as the most preferred station for political content. These findings are consistent with the content of the radio and the extent to which the station gets people involved in discussing different issues as the head of the station, Waweru Mburu described. “Radio Citizen is the common man’s radio. That is why we make sure that we give them the airtime to air their views than any other station. We have given the ordinary person a forum to participate”. One such program is *Bunge la Wananchi* (The People’s Parliament) where listeners call in to contribute to different issues that are affecting the country. Mr. John Wamae, a teacher at Mahiga primary school is fan of this forum.

Interviewer: Tell us more about politics.
Wamae: I love politics and that is why I listen to Citizen a lot. They have different programs where we participate, talking about different things on politics.

Interviewer: Do you have a particular program in mind.

Wamae: Yeah. My favorite is Bunge la Wananchi. I have called to contribute a number of times. There are always vibrant debates going on and we have different views from people in different parts of the country. During the election period, the debate was so hot but we all get a chance to air different positions.

Radio through different programs gives people the opportunity to comment on the functioning of the government, criticize it, demand accountability from the leaders and scrutinize leaders’ performance. For a number of years, Radio Citizen has had a number of critical programs that are directed to the leaders in various walks of life. One such program was Wembe wa Citizen (Citizen’s Blade). According to Waweru, “Wembe wa Citizen gave the people a forum to deal with their problems. It dealt with the Assistant Chief, the Chief, and the MP. It was one of the most dreaded programs. If you appeared in the program, you were done and done forever”. While the program is no longer on air, some listeners in Kieni West still remember the program. Listeners would send their complaints through letters or telephone calls about an issue, usually a failure of a public figure, and this would be read on the program naming the person, and the accusation. The program was a sort of public dressing, that took on public servants such as government officers, head teachers, among others as well as church leaders. This type of radio
programs have enabled the common folks to say what they would like to say to the ruling class, a group that they ordinarily cannot reach.

On Bahasha FM, the morning show addresses issues of public interest. Boniface Maina, a 50 year old farmer from Mahiga in Mwiyogo likes this role of the radio.

I like Bahasha FM because they tell the news as it is. There is also a program by Muthoni wa Mucomba that is called the Boss. The program highlights people who have erred depending on the complaints they receive. When she (Muthoni) receives complaints, she takes the issue and directs it to the mentioned person, be it a policeman, the chief or even the president. She is able to put forward to the relevant authority issues that the affected people cannot.

Radio, usually through popular presenters, acts on behalf of the listeners by raising different issues with those who are concerned. Broadcasters have the ability to pursue matters with those who are in power in a way that a common person cannot. Failure of the affected party to respond to an issue would result to them being called out publicly on radio which will lead to negative publicity. Hence, broadcasters are able to obtain responses on behalf of the listeners.

Radio and problem solving

Since vernacular radio derives most of its listenership from the rural audience, the stations have assumed a community-centered approach that allows them to stay close to the people. Included in this approach is the necessity to respond to different needs of the people as they arise. Limited access to services and resources has seen the listeners increasingly turn to the broadcasters whom they see as close helpers. According to Zulu Thiong’o, the head of Inooro FM, the role of radio in Kenya now goes beyond the
informing and educating. “Radio has a social responsibility, working for the public good.

There are burdens we carry as if they are our own”. Jane Wambui is a mother of four from Kiawara village in Mweiga who usually does not call, send SMS or write letters to radio stations. But when her baby fell sick, she called a radio station.

I had a sick baby who needed medical attention and I did not have enough money to take her to the hospital. So I called Inooro because they have been helping people. I also wrote a letter to them. Although I have not heard from them, they remain my only hope.

Wambui must be aware of what is happening in many vernacular radios as they come to help those who are in need. She must have been aware of experiences similar to what Mr. Thiong’o narrated to me.

There is a child who was born with complications which are supposed to be addressed when the kid is below two years but by the time they came to us, the child was four years old. When the mother came to us we decided to help. We announced on air, sought a doctor who can volunteer and perform an operation on the child. We bought a phone and gave people M-Pesa\textsuperscript{10} account to channel money for surgery and the upkeep of the child. As we are speaking now, that child was operated on and released from the hospital. She lives a normal life. I actually spoke to the mother this morning. One of our presenters was personally responsible for that child’s treatment. She would go to hospital and see the child, following the case closely.

\textsuperscript{10} M-Pesa is a service that is operated by the mobile phone provider Safaricom. It is an electronic money account that is operated through a cell phone. When one acquires a service line and activates an account, you can receive or send money.
This new form of social responsibility goes beyond a one-off action. Every day, there is someone in the community who is in need. When asked what his favorite station was, Mr. Ndungo from Mahiga in Mwiyogo cited the responsiveness of Inooro FM.

I like Inooro because of their programming and their method of broadcasting is such that you will be able to get the information and understand it. The other thing is that Inooro helps people; the station helps the weak and the strong. You will hear if something has happened somewhere, they will call or go there and that person will be able to get some help. Those things have made Inooro strong.

The same sentiments were echoed by Michael, a 20 year old from Mahiga also. In discussing the radio station that feels close with most, he points to Inooro FM.

Inooro is our radio because of the issues that they discuss … The other thing is that if you have an issue, say your child is lost, even if the program is going on, you just need to call and they are able to interrupt the program and make the announcement.

The broadcasters realize that people especially in the rural are more handicapped when it comes to response of emergency. With the availability of the mobile phones, calling the stations allows the broadcasters to mediate for a more rapid response. “We always encourage them to inform us on what is happening in their locality”, said Mr. Thiong’o.

A few days ago there was a kid who fell into a pit latrine in Kiambaa area and she needed help. If one has to go to the police and fire brigade, it’s a long process. But if you call Inooro FM, we have the phone numbers of the police, the Fire Brigade, everyone. We were able to respond very fast and that kid was rescued.
There are other challenges that the general population face. If you lose your job unfairly and your union seems to be toothless, your hope is someone at the radio station who will follow the case for you. Waweru Mburu of Radio Citizen has become accustomed to playing the role of a problem solver as he described the roles of his station.

We also have people who come to our premises to see us with problems. We may not be able to satisfy their needs or solve all their problems but we do what we can. Right now I am following a problem of three people who were sacked by the House of Manji and I am following up the matter. We don’t have to broadcast some of these things. We can sort them out differently.

Radio is taking the role of addressing the issues that would be addressed by leaders and other prominent people in the society. Listeners appear to be finding radio closer and responsive than they would find their leaders.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the place and uses of radio in the everyday life of the people of Kieni West. Radio is a ubiquitous device in people’s homes and is used as a source of information and education. Other uses of radio include companionship, a social platform where different issues are discussed, and a public sphere for civic dialogue. For other people, radio provides a means through which they can seek help when they have challenging problems in their daily life.

Through the radio, people in Kieni West learn what is happening in their locality, in the country as a whole as well as the rest of the world by listening to news programs. Listeners who are interested in local and international politics use the radio to follow political news. Listeners in Kieni West use radio to obtain information on farming, their
main economic activity. The Kikuyu vernacular stations have programs on farming that target farmers in areas like Kieni West. Farmers find these kinds of programs useful because they discuss their daily farming practices on crop cultivation and animal rearing. Farmers use radio to follow current agricultural information such as commodity prices in different parts of their country which help them in making marketing decisions. Other listeners find radio useful in providing information on health issues especially on nutrition and traditional health practices.

We have also seen that radio is used as a companion and many people have a very close relationship with the device, which is a part of their lives. In the domestic sphere, women in Kieni West use the radio for company in their kitchens and during long periods of the day when they are home alone. The sound of the radio creates an added presence in homes during the quiet days. We have also seen that radio is a close companion for men whose days are spent in the grazing fields and those who work as security guards.

We have seen that radio has captured the changing social environment among rural people. Radio is redefining social interactions and opening up social spaces through which people engage with each other and different issues. Radio is helping to keep listeners in touch with the wider social environment as members a society that goes beyond their local environment. Through the radio, listeners interact with their peers who are in different places bringing together people who are separated by distance. Radio has extended the possibilities of sharing different social experiences despite distance barriers. People are brought together by common interests and use radio as a launch pad to form social groups such as fan clubs. We have also seen how Kikuyu vernacular radio has taken dialogue on taboo and muted topics such as sex to a different level. Through
programs that openly address sex and family issues, radio has allowed people to open up
and discuss these issues more often than they have done before. However, this does not
mean that people are ready to break away for the cultural norms that govern such
discussions. As shown during the interviews with the researcher, restraints on these topics
still remain. At the family level, the dialogue between couples was reported to have
increased.

We have also discussed the role of radio as a public sphere. The present radio
industry in Kenya has given listeners a platform where they can discuss matters or
common interest. People are using the radio to send messages to their leaders and
government, make their complaints and dissatisfaction heard, and questions each other as
citizens. Radio stations through various programs act as people’s voice by directing
questions to different public readers as requested by listeners. Finally we have seen that
radio has become a place where listeners can run to when they have problems in their
lives. Most rural people are poor and lack access to various resources. Radio has become
a facilitator, sending pleas on behalf of the people in need. Radio presenters have also
used their positions to follow up on specific issues raised by listeners. These illustrate
that radio plays an important role in lives of the people in Kieni West.
CHAPTER FIVE: RADIO PROGRAMMING FORMAT AND CONTENT AND AUDIENCE LISTENING HABITS

In the previous chapter, I have examined the role of radio in the everyday life of listeners in Kieni West. The multiple uses of radio are facilitated by the ability of the broadcasters to communicate using the content they transmit to the listeners. There are a variety of radio stations at listeners’ disposal at any given time to choose from. Some are more popular than others. In this chapter I take a closer a look at Kenyan radio stations’ programming format and content and how this renders itself in audiences’ listening habits. The first part identifies the programming formats, program content and presentation styles of the most listened to radio stations in Kieni West. Three categories of formats (the traditional, the vernacular and the urban format) are identified. The next section examines the radio listening habits reported by audiences in Kieni West. From the findings, patterns of radio listening emerge in different times of the day. This chapter also examines the time spent listening to the radio during the weekdays and during the weekend and compares audiences across age, gender and education levels. Finally, the chapter examines the content and program choices that were reported by listeners. Using the Steadman Group’s monitoring data, we compare the Central Kenya region audiences’ listening trends with those reported in Kieni West.

Broadcasting format and content

Radio stations in Kenya have different programming formats and content based on their target audience. The program format and content of the 12 most listened to radio stations in Kieni West that were identified in this research can be grouped into three categories that largely depend on the type of station. I use the terms traditional format,
vernacular format, and urban format to categorize the programming. The formats are characterized by the type of content that is found on these stations and their timings every day. The stations’ programming content includes information, education, and entertainment and varies in emphasis and proportion. The traditional format emphasizes education and information content while the urban format stresses entertainment. Vernacular stations balance the three different types of content. The content presentations and delivery also differ. The vernacular format uses local languages and includes large proportions of locally generated content as opposed to urban format that uses English language for presentation and has a high amount of foreign content. Urban and vernacular formats use strong personalities strategically placed during the prime time periods. There are minor differences between radio stations that use the same programming format mainly based on the content specificity. For example, in urban format the dominant entertainment content is music but the type of music played on different stations varies widely based on genre and place of origin.

The traditional broadcasting format

The traditional broadcasting format is found on the national stations. These stations have a wide reach and appeal to a general population. There are three stations that fit into this category: KBC English, KBC Swahili and Radio Citizen. In the traditional format, there is more information and education content and less entertainment. Because of their wide appeal, there are higher instances of content mixing as these stations try to cater for various tastes and preferences. A typical hour of broadcasting may comprise 15-minutes of announcements, 15-minutes of music, and 15-minutes of an educational program and another 15 minutes of music. Radio stations that
follow the traditional broadcasting format seem to derive their popularity from the relevance of the content they broadcast, which usually cut across the population. They also rely less on the station’s personality popularity with the listeners. This is particularly true with the KBC stations which have a high presenter turnover due to lack of financial muscle compared to the private radio stations. KBC also appears comfortable with their role as the training ground for Kenyan broadcasters in addition to its broadcasting mandate and therefore has shown less effort in trying to retain their personnel.

KBC English service is an education and information station. The station devotes most of its weekday daytime hours airing broadcasting to school programs which takes up to 60% of the airtime during the week. The rest of the time is divided between information programs and a small portion for entertainment. For KBC Swahili programs, 60% of content is information and education while 30% is entertainment. However, KBC Swahili format is somewhat unpredictable due to its responsibility in broadcasting government related content. The station runs live broadcasts of state functions and parliamentary proceedings during its daytime programming. However, the parliament only sits for three days a week when it is in session. This leaves the slots open when it is recessed and also makes it difficult for the station to arrange for a long-term programming schedule. There are also various government functions which do not follow a specific program and at times the station does not get adequate notice of upcoming events.

The two state public broadcasters, KBC English and KBC Swahili, have a closely similar program format in their daily broadcasting. The first session is the morning show that runs between 5:00am and 9:00am. This session consists of music with tips on health,
education, and fashion and a review of the daily newspapers. There are news briefs and full bulletins at 7:00am and 9:00am, sports news and weather forecasts for the day. The two stations also have game shows where listeners participate through call-ins and short messaging (SMS). When schools are in session, KBC English Service transmits broadcasts to school from 8:45am until 12:30pm. Next, a one-and-a-half hour interlude is filled by music and a 15 minute news bulletin at 1:00pm, followed by announcements and music. The broadcasts to school resume at 2:00pm to 4:00pm and then from 5:00pm to 5:30pm. When schools are on recess, the mid-morning sessions run between 9:00am and 12:00pm and content includes African top music from the 1980s to present, chat on continental news, views and events as well as debates on African culture. Between 2:00pm and 4:00pm is a music segment when the schools are not in session. The afternoon session between 4:00pm and 7:00pm is a musical presentation starting with a two hour fast-paced music followed by an hour of slow music. The evening session between 7:00pm and 10:00pm has a 15-minute news bulletin at 7:00pm and 9:00pm, announcements and feature programs interspersed with music. The China Feed programs runs from 7:30 to 8:30. The late night program runs between 10:00pm and 12:00am and features slow tempo romantic music with limited dedications, love messages and inspiration. Listeners make calls and send short messages that are read by the presenters. The weekend programming is dominated by music and feature programs.

KBC Swahili content in the midmorning between 9:00am and 12:00pm is dominated by music. There is a 15-minute news bulletin at 9:00am and news headlines at every top of the hour. The early afternoon session runs between 12:00pm and 2:00pm and consists of music from East Africa, celebrity gossip and the East African top ten
countdown. There are also discussions that center on business, education, touring opportunities, people, culture, trends and lifestyles in the East African region. There is a *salaams* session where listeners send greetings which are read on air. The late afternoon session between 2:00pm and 7:00pm continues with music with emphasis on genres such as *taarab* and reggae. The session also includes a presenter-driven talk show that focuses on social issues interspersed with traffic updates, news highlights and business tips ending with one hour of uninterrupted easy listening music. The evening session between 7:00pm and 10:00pm consists of information and feature programs on topical issues in health, education, environment, economic empowerment, and gender issues. There is a complete news bulletin at 9:00pm followed by station productions, current affairs news, parliamentary report, business and sports, interspersed with music and promos. The late night program between 10:00pm and midnight is interactive, addressing relationship issues, promos, and station indents capped by an hour of slow music until close at midnight.

Radio Citizen is the only commercial station that has a traditional broadcasting format and that reaches most parts of the country. The station has over 80% information and educational content and 20% entertainment with news broadcasts at every top of the hour around the clock and numerous informational programs, usually paid for by the advertisers. It is the only station in Kenya that has presenters around the clock. Unlike KBC broadcasters, Radio Citizen is not bound by state obligations but has taken it upon itself to broadcast events of national interest whenever they can access them. Radio Citizen also broadcasts programs with huge demand such as international soccer matches.
The vernacular broadcasting format

The vernacular broadcasting format identified in this research is found in the Kikuyu radio stations. These stations carry content that can be termed as all-inclusive and balanced between information, education, and entertainment. This kind of programming is common on Kikuyu vernacular stations that include Bahasha FM, Coro FM, Inooro FM and Kameme FM. The stations have longer sessions than those found in the national stations owing to the inclusion of wide range of content. The programs in these stations are arranged to compete with other vernacular stations hence they are highly similar. The vernacular stations open at 5:00am, playing Christian inspirational music until 6:00am when the news headlines are read. During this hour, listeners also call in to send early morning greetings and dedications. The morning show falls between 6:00am and 9:00am and is one of the most important segments. Morning shows on the Kikuyu vernacular stations consist of information in the form of news briefs at the top of the hour and a full news bulletin at 7:00am. With the exception of Bahasha FM, the Kikuyu vernacular stations feature a comedian in the morning who co-presents with the main presenter. The morning content includes music, talk, review of the major newspapers top stories, and constant traffic updates. Because the morning shows attract higher sponsorship from advertisers, there are various sponsored games where listeners call in to win money and other prizes.

The midmorning show falls between 9:00am and 12:00pm. This is a slow session with music, discussions on social issues, and informational programs on education, health and agriculture. There is a complete news bulletin at 9:00am and news briefs at the top of
every hour. The period between 12:00pm and 2:00pm is slow paced and dominated by music with a full news bulletin at 1:00pm.

The midmorning and the early afternoon sessions on Kikuyu vernacular stations are generally slow tempo and are presented by less prominent presenters. The afternoon session starts at 2:00pm and runs until 7:00pm and generally features prominent broadcasters. The afternoon segment starts with slow tempo programming playing music fused with presenter guided talk and starts to pick up after the 4:00pm complete news bulletin. The session after 4:00pm has more talk and game shows where listeners call in to win prizes, as well as constant traffic updates because of proximity to Nairobi where they have a sizeable audience. The evening session runs between 7:00pm and 10:00pm. This segment is dominated by informational and educational programs. It also includes news, announcements, and feature programs on health, agriculture, economic, gender issues, and environment. Vernacular stations have death and funeral announcements that run in two sessions, usually between 7:00pm and 8:00pm and between 9:00pm and 10:00pm. The late night shows run between 10:00pm and 1:00am and include slow music, romantic dedications and discussion topics mainly on relationships with contributions through telephone calls from listeners. Late night shows are the last programs that are presented live. Because the stations operate for 24 hours, the stations queue in non-stop music between 1:00am and 5:00am when the stations open.

*The urban broadcasting format*

The urban broadcasting format is found in the English urban FM stations which are entertainment oriented. Urban stations’ dominant content is music played around the clock. As discussed elsewhere, the urban English FM stations have a very carefully
designed program content and format that is aimed at maintaining their competitiveness in the radio industry. In the recent past, the market share of the urban stations has been shrinking as more players join the market. The urban English FM stations include Capital FM, Classic FM, Easy FM, Kiss FM, and Metro FM. Music programming forms the main content of these stations interspersed with talk shows, short news on politics, sports, and business. They also feature health and beauty tips. Like in the vernacular format, the sessions on the urban radio tend to be divided into longer blocks of at least four hours. On-air presenter programming starts at 5:00am with an hour session of uninterrupted music until 6:00am. An important aspect of urban stations’ programming is the level of emphasis they put on the morning show which runs between 6:00am and 10:00am and the afternoon show from 2:00pm and 7:00pm. The urban radio competition is intense in these two segments and capturing the early morning and afternoon audience is very important for entrenchment in the market. The morning shows are presented by the most popular presenters and a comedian. They include a review of daily newspapers, weather forecasts, politics, sports and business news and traffic updates in Nairobi. Lately, urban FM stations are providing eye-witness traffic reports with reporters stationed in different parts of the city, mainly the busy spots, to keep listeners updated on what is happening on the roads. The morning session is a staple for advertisers and therefore heavily features sponsored games and give-away competitions. Using the main presenter and the comedian, the morning shows bring out discussions on topical issues, today mainly on relationships. Listeners call in live to contribute their experiences, views, and opinions. The midmorning/early afternoon session runs from 10:00am to 2:00pm. While the morning session is fast paced, highly interactive and has a lot of information, the
midmorning/early afternoon session is slow paced, low key and music oriented. In most stations, this session also features a number of thirty-minute uninterrupted music sessions. The session has a single presenter on air. It is also common for stations to feature a particular genre of music. The afternoon segment which starts at 2:00pm and runs until 7:00pm is another important session on the urban English FM stations. The segment starts at a slow pace, picking up around 4:00pm. This session usually features two presenters and also incorporates fun in the programming. Second presenters may not be outright comedians but are usually funny in their own right. Easy FM features three presenters on the afternoon drive session. The afternoon drive has more advertisements boosted by alcoholic beverage makers who are not allowed to advertise on radio before 3:00 pm. There are political, business and sports news mainly recapping what has been happening during the day. There are also numerous game shows and competitions. Other stations feature discussions with listeners’ contributions through phone calls for songs request and dedications through short messaging. There are traffic updates due to the evening rush hour after 5:00pm with eye-witness reports from various city locations.

The evening session starts at 7:00pm and runs until 10:00pm. This session has more music content and less talk. Today, all urban English FM stations have a top songs countdown during this session going by names such as Top Seven at Seven, Top Eight at Eight, and Top Nine at Nine at the top of the said hour. These count downs are usually sponsored by leading companies mainly beer makers and fast moving consumer goods manufacturers. The evening session also includes limited political, sports and business news. The late night program between 10:00pm and 1:00am is a music and talk session. Unlike the sessions early in the day, the late night programs do not feature any
informational content such as news. They consist of slow romantic music with discussions on family and relationship topics. The discussion topics may involve listeners’ participation through telephone calls, email and text messages. It is common for listeners to phone in a problem and the presenter will open up the topic for discussion through phone calls and email contributions. Other sessions feature expert counselors who answer questions from the listeners. On some days, radio stations provide a forum for single people to meet in segments such as *Speedy Connection.*

The weekend broadcasting on urban FM is relaxed and different from the weekdays. The main presenters are off the air and stations tend to feature different music programming, playing genres that are not commonly found on the stations during the weekdays. Thus, genres such as jazz, soul, gospel, and African classics are common during the weekend broadcasts. These sessions are usually presented by guest presenters who are not on air during the week. Some stations air syndicated foreign music programs. Capital FM airs American countdown shows such as *Rick Dees Weekly Top 40 on* Saturday mid-mornings and *Walt “Baby” Love on* Sunday mornings. There are fewer discussions, news and information programs on urban radio during the weekend. Normal programming resumes on Mondays at 5:00am.

**Audience listening habits**

An examination of the Kieni West audience’s radio listening habits suggests that they are related to the stations’ programming formats. Kieni West audience’s listening habits also conform to the listening trends of the wider Central Kenya audience. These habits are influenced by factors such as availability of the audience to listen when the program is on air, the relevance of the program content, and the popularity of the
program based on the content and presenter(s). The radio audience in Kieni West chooses programs from multiple stations. While some stations are more dominant than others, there are instances when lesser listened to stations will command higher audiences at specific times when the program and content attract more listeners.

Radio listening habits in Kieni West vary from one individual to the other. Listeners tune in to a wide range of radio stations. The vernacular stations have the highest listenership but listeners also listen to the national stations as well as the urban English stations. People listen to the radio more during certain times of the day when they are available and are likely to make sure that they tune into their preferred program when it is on air. Most radio listening occurs in the early morning hours before people start their daily activities and in the evenings after work. No major differences were found between the amount of time people spend listening to the radio during the weekdays (Monday to Friday) and during the weekend (Saturday and Sunday). On average, respondents to the questionnaire spend an average of 6.8 hours on weekdays compared to 6.4 hours on weekend day. Many listeners are free from their work during the weekends and one would expect that they would listen more during this time. However, this is not case and various explanations were given. Some women reported that they are likely to be busy during the weekends because they have to take care of the children who are not in school. During the weekdays, mothers spend the day alone at home but this changes during the weekend when children are at home. For people who have formal employment such as teachers and administrators, the “free time” during the weekend does not actually amount to being free. This time is used to perform other duties that they are not able to fulfill during the weekdays. During the weekends, it is common to find
men doing various activities at home such as doing domestic repairs, taking care of animals, or working on the farm, among others. For others like Gerald Karimi, a 38 year old casual worker and a father of three, the weekend is spent with the family and working on the farm as he reported.

The weekend is the only time I am ever at home. The rest of the week, I leave home very early before 6:00 am when it is still dark and will not come dark until 8:00 pm when it is dark again. I do not even get to see what is happening around my compound. Also, most of the times I will come home and the children are sleeping, same when I leave in the morning. The weekends are therefore sort of busy for me and it is hard to find time to pay much attention to the radio. I spend the weekend with my children, talk to them, play, and sometimes take them to visit relatives and such things. I also use the weekend to work around the farm. You will find me mending fences and putting up or repairing animal structures.

Saturday in Kieni West is a busy day with numerous activities. Saturday is a market day in Mweiga town and many people reported that it is the day they go to the market. The market days are significant, especially for those who live in the farm areas as they are the only days that one can find public transport to Mweiga town and other towns. When people want to transport goods, they do it during the market day (Tuesday and Saturday in Mweiga and Monday in Endarasha). Saturday is also the best day to purchase different products because there are more vendors and prices are competitive. On a market day, Mweiga town is busy and vibrant while on other days, except Sundays, it is just another sleepy rural town. Saturday is also the day for social activities which tend to occupy members of the community. These include church activities, wedding
ceremonies, family gatherings, school meetings, among others. These take people away from home.

In comparing the average number of hours spent listening on the radio across gender, this research found that male listeners spend an average of 7.2 hours on weekdays while women listeners spend 6.2 hours. During the weekend, female and male listeners spend almost an equal average time with 6.5 hours and 6.4 hours respectively as summarized in the table below:

Table 3
Average Time Spent Listening to the Radio across Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Weekdays Hours</th>
<th>Weekends Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Mean</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Female listeners reported that they mainly listen to the radio when they are at home. Male listeners on the other hand listen to the radio at multiple locations. Those in business are likely to listen to the radio at their business premises. However, men are more likely to be found manning the business in towns and shopping centers in Kieni West than women. As discussed elsewhere, male listeners who work in the grazing fields and as security guards listen for extended hours while at work. Since women such as housewives spend a lot of time at home and reported tuning in to the radio, it would be
expected that the average time spent by female listeners would be higher than males who reported being away from home most of the time. Individually this appears to be the case. At the household level, females reported listening more than their male counterparts. However, male listeners such as those who listened in the business reported listening for extended hours while some young male listeners reported that they never turn off their radio. At the same time, there are more male listeners in town and shopping centers where there is electricity supply which makes it possible to have the radio on for extended hours. Many housewives are found in the farm areas where there is no electricity supply. Such occurrences possibly account for the higher average time spent listening among the male listeners.

The average time spent listening to the radio by listeners of different age groups and education levels in Kieni West were compared as summarized in the table below:

Table 4:

*Average Time Spent Listening to the Radio by different Age Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Weekdays Hours</th>
<th>Weekends Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-30</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-45</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46+</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Mean</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Younger listeners aged between 18 and 30 years spend an average of 6.1 hours during the weekdays and 6.2 hours during the weekend. Those aged between 31 and 45 spend an
average of 7.3 hours during the weekday and 6.8 during the weekend while older adults aged 46 years and above spend 5.9 hours during the weekday and 6.6 during the weekend.

These results do not indicate marked differences in the time spent listening to the radio between the three age groups in Kieni West during the weekend. However, listeners aged 18-30 years and those aged 30-45 spend more time than the older people. Older people’s shortened listening time may be accounted for by such factors such as less interest in prevalent content. Older listeners only reported interest in news, announcements and cultural discussions while expressing little interest in content such as music. However, younger male listeners aged between 18 and 30 years are less likely to be at home compared to those aged between 30 and 45. When they are not working, they prefer to hang out with friends in public places while their older counterparts are mostly married and tend to spend a little more time at home when they are not working.

There are differences in the amount of time spent listening to the radio across listeners with different education levels. People with primary school education reported the highest number of listening hours during the weekdays and the weekend with an average of 8.0 hours and 7.8 hours respectively. Listeners with high school education spend an average of 7.5 and during the weekdays and 7.4 hours during the weekend. People with college education have the least listening hours with 4.2 in the weekdays and 4.7 during the weekend.
Table 5:

*Average Time Spent Listening to the Radio based on Education Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Weekdays Hours</th>
<th>Weekends Hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Education</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Mean</strong></td>
<td><strong>6.8</strong></td>
<td><strong>6.5</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The difference between the amount of time spent listening to the radio by listeners with primary school education and those with high school education is small. However, college educated people spend over three hours less than the primary and high school counterparts. One possible source of the difference is the fact that many college educated people are in formal employment such as teaching, health or administration which leaves them with fewer hours to listen to the radio. College educated people also reported having more access to other type of media, especially print. People with more education also reported feeling more comfortable watching television. People who are not well educated are often less interested in television because it predominantly broadcasts foreign content. Unlike the radio, Kenyan television stations use English language in their programming with limited use of Swahili in a few programs and none of the rest of the local languages such as Kikuyu.

_CoInent and program choices among listeners_

Listeners in Kieni West have varied preferences of radio stations that they listen to. Listeners have a favorite station but they will usually listen to a number of radio stations.
Listeners reported to have listened to an average of four radio stations a week while some listen to as many as seven radio stations. Listeners’ popular preferences point to particular kinds of content that is popular across all segments regardless of what radio stations they appear on. To better understand people’s radio listening habits, I will examine particular programs and trends. Although listeners reported some level of loyalty to certain stations which is also confirmed by listenership numbers from the Steadman Reports, such generalities do not reveal the whole picture. To illustrate this, I am going to use three content types that were prominently mentioned by listeners in Kieni West. These are news, humor, and religious content. Programs and sessions that feature this kind of content are very popular.

*News*

News is ubiquitous on radio stations and one of the most sought after content types. Radio stations provide news in varying length and depth. On most radio stations, there is some news that is read at every top of the hour. Comprehensive news on some radio stations is spread out from the morning to late evening hours. KBC English and Swahili services broadcast 15-minute news six times a day at 7:00 am and pm, 9:00 am and pm, 1:00 pm, and 4:00 pm, a format they have maintained for more than 20 years. The new radio stations have also taken the same format with Coro FM, Inooro FM, Kameme FM, and Metro FM reading their main news on the same times slots. Because radio is the main source of information for many rural people, listeners in Kieni West reported daily activities that are organized around the news schedule. John Githinji, a 40 year old farmer from Endarasha explained his daily radio listening and emphasized the timing of news.
I listen to the radio from 6:00-7:30 in the morning. After the news, I get ready to go to the farm and take care of the animals. If I have time, I listen to the 1:00 PM news and from there I go back to work. Then from 7:30 after coming back from the shopping center where I socialize with the people, I am back home to listen until 9:30 or 10:00 at night.

Agnes Murugi, a 43 year old businesswoman from Mweiga also reported a schedule that is organized around the news programs.

I wake up around 6:30 and start the morning chores. At 7:00, I listen to the Inooro morning news on my home radio. By 8:00 I leave the house to go to open the shop. I listen to the radio in the morning switching between stations but at 1:00 I listen to Inooro news again. In the evening, I will listen to Coro Matūrainĩ. I have to listen to the news in the morning, during the day and in the evening.

For other people, different stations offer varied news perspectives. Different language stations put emphasis on different content. Kikuyu stations concentrate on local news while the English and Swahili stations are more nationally and internationally oriented.

John Nderitu, a 27 year old from Endarasha listens to Swahili, Kikuyu and English news.

I tune my radio on before 6:00am but at that time I am not listening to something specific. Between 6:15-6:30 I listen to Leo Magazetini (Today in the newspapers) on KBC Swahili. Then at 7:00, I will listen to news on Coro FM and then leave the house around 7:30. At 1:00, I like to listen to KBC English news and in the evening, I also listen to Radio Citizen news at 7:00 in the evenings.

Asked why he switches between the different stations, Nderitu explains:
There is a lot of information on what is going on in different places and they cannot be put in one broadcast. Listening to different stations’ news, they are all different. The Kikuyu stations for example always give more information about Central Kenya while KBC Swahili will tell you about the government and the country as a whole. Radio Citizen’s news are almost like KBC except that they do not talk about the government all the time and can even say negative things about the politicians. Listening to all of them gives me more information than I would get from listening to one only.

Most of the extended news timings are in times when listeners can be free to listen. In the morning, most people will not have left home. At 1:00pm people are on lunch break while in the evening, people are done with their daily chores. News content preference cuts across gender, age and education in the population.

**Humor**

Humor is another popular content type on the radio. Prior to the emergence of FM broadcasting, radio stations did not consider presenter-driven humor as an important part of their content. Because KBC was the only broadcaster, much of the time was devoted to information and education with little entertainment. Entertainment was mainly in the form of music with a few radio drama programs. However, the recent years of broadcasting have seen stations adopt a more laid back presentation that has also expanded the definition of entertainment. Radio stations strive to combine both serious and humorous content sometimes on the same programs. Humorous content is present on all stations during the breakfast segment. Stations have adopted a format where the breakfast session is presented by a main host and comedian. The breakfast show
incorporates information and entertainment. The main presenter-comedian combination allows radio stations to address serious issues in a relaxed manner including commentary on the current news in other media such as television, newspapers, internet as well as the previous day’s events.

Breakfast sessions have been used as a platform for political critique, one way in which radio calls into question politicians’ actions. Unlike other programs, breakfast shows are less likely to attract controversy. The comedian, a buffoon like character, usually throws the punches while the presenter will take an objective position. This way, two sides of the argument are discussed. In some cases, the comedian is also used to raise taboo topics such as sexual issues. Jokingly, he calls on the listeners to respond, sometimes on air. This is very popular with Classic FM, a station that has been broadcasting for the last five years but has taken over as the most popular urban station in the breakfast hours. Michael Njoroge, the marketing manager for two leading urban stations, Classic FM and Kiss FM, explained the logic behind this breakfast show format.

This is a proven formula that has worked worldwide.... Breakfast needs a lot of interaction where audience needs news and information. When you have people who are compelling, it helps a lot. Most people want fun and entertainment. So for you to be number one station in the breakfast, you need fun and entertainment which is what research has shown with our audience. The top thing people want is fun and entertainment. Someone has just woken up and need their spirit lifted up. How do you do this? You need to cater for what people want. Most people want information, so you need someone who is like an anchor, the serious person who will deliver the information and give it some credibility, someone with
You also need someone who can provide fun and entertainment. That is where the comedian fits in. You need that person who makes people laugh in the morning. Not necessarily a funny guy, not a clown. A very sharp and smart person… people, who brings out things, makes you remember something that had happened in the past and you had forgotten.

People reported that they listened to the comedians in the morning spread across the radio stations. But when they were asked why they liked the comedians, they echoed Mr. Njoroge views above that these comedians lift up their spirits in the morning. Many breakfast shows were also identified with the comedians. Rarely were the main presenters mentioned.

*Religion*

Although none of the popular radio stations identified in Kieni West is a specifically religious station, there is a lot of religious content, especially on the vernacular stations. Preference for religious content was reported among the listeners in Kieni West. The station heads of Coro FM, Inooro FM, and Kameme FM described the Kikuyu listeners as “highly religious” and these stations have responded to this by including religious content in their broadcasting. Because most of their target audiences are Christian, the religious content is Christian. This was reiterated by audiences when they were asked what kind of content they would prefer to hear on the radio. Listeners reported that religion should be an important part of the content and that religion is a foundation of other aspects of living. For Purity, a 45 year old teacher at Mahiga, religion amounts to fear of God which in turn would make society better. Given a chance to make a decision on what content to include on the radio, Purity said, “I would like first for the
station to teach people on religion because if people fear God, we would have lesser
problems. This would start from home and people would know how to guide their
family”. Similar views were expressed by Hellen, a 52 year old teacher from Mahiga who
described radio content from a religious perspective.

I would like the station to teach…. family issues, people should respect each other
and fulfill the will of God and not look for happiness and end up getting
themselves in dangerous diseases which is costly and painful. I would also like to
teach people on different self-help issues such as business which is concluded by
fear and belief in God.

The most popular religious content is music. Vernacular radio stations have found
it easy to incorporate gospel songs in their programming because they do not necessarily
have to be presented in a standalone segment but are fused with the secular music. This is
mainly the case during the listener’s request programs. A song that is requested is always
played regardless of the genre. This differs from urban FM stations which have some
slots set aside for certain music genres. If a request is made say for a slow paced rhythm
and blues song in a session that features fast paced alternative rock, presenters will kindly
decline but promise to play it during a relevant session. All vernacular stations start the
day’s broadcasting with some gospel content, which is played during the first hour of the
stations’ broadcast between 5:00am and 6:00am.

Religious content is very popular on Sunday. Listeners in Kieni West listen to
different religious programs on Sunday as a part of their religious rites. Many listeners
who are Catholics like Margaret Njeri, a 45-year old woman, listen to the Mitha (Mass)
program. This is a radio mass that appears on the Kameme FM on Sunday morning and that Margaret listens to without fail before she goes to the church.

Mary: I am an ardent Catholic and one program that I listen to every Sunday is *Mitha* on Kameme FM which is on air at 8:00 am.

Interviewer: Do you go to church or does radio worship suffice for you?

Mary: I don’t miss the service. I go to Mahiga Church every Sunday where I sing in the choir.

Interviewer: The Catholic mass is standard everywhere in the world every Sunday and I would presume what you hear on the radio, such as the readings, is the same thing that will be repeated in your local church. Why do both?

Mary: Yes, the teachings are the same and the readings I hear on the radio are exactly the same in my church. But I feel more enriched when I worship both on the radio and at the church. Radio sort of prepares me well for the mass at the church.

For other listeners like Joseph Ndirangu, listening to the mass on radio means that they do not miss their Sunday worship. “Before, when you could not make it to the church, then you miss the worship altogether. These days one is able to follow the mass from home which I find very important”. Apart from the Catholic mass, there are other sessions with preachers from different denominations leading sessions on the vernacular stations which have established themselves as *de facto* Christian stations.
Listening trends among Kieni West audiences in relation to Central Kenya region

This section examines radio listening trends reported by listeners in Kieni West by juxtaposing them with selected Steadman Report (2008) findings on aggregate data for the Central Kenya media region. Most listeners in Central Kenya are exposed to similar stations as listeners in Kieni West and share characteristics such as language and culture. However, Steadman Reports on listeners from Central Kenya are general and therefore may not capture special characteristics and differences that exist among audiences from a smaller population. At the same time, the listening trends allow us to explore differences, similarities and explanations of the listening trends reported in Kieni West and compare them with the general trends in Central Kenya. Using sections of the Steadman reports, this part provides some graphical representation of Kieni West audiences listening trends.

In comparing the Kieni West listeners’ reported trends and those of Central Kenya in the Steadman Report (2008), there are a number of consistent findings. First, the radio stations that were identified as the most popular in Kieni West are similar to the Steadman data on Central Kenya region. The Steadman Report goes further to provide a breakdown of hour to hour listening, information that was beyond the scope of this research but one that I find useful in comparing the popularity of some programs that were reported. Secondly, using the graphical hourly sketches, I am able to track different radio stations audience levels and their nuances during the weekdays and the weekends. The rise and fall in audience levels can have different interpretations such as when people have turned off their radio sets, when they are busy and therefore not able to listen to the radio, and where they might be at a particular time. By comparing individual radio
stations, I am able to match the listenership levels and compare them with the reported popular programs on various radio stations.

Figure 4 below shows the average weekday radio listening trends between 12:00am and 12:00pm. From the figure, the major Kikuyu vernacular stations occupy three of the four top spots. Radio Citizen breaks into the vernacular domination of Inooro FM, Kameme FM, and Coro FM in the central region. The figure indicates that listeners tune in to their radios at 5:00am and listening picks up from 6:30am, reaching a peak at around 7:30am. By 11:00am, fewer people are listening to the radio.

Source: Steadman Group 2008 Second Quarter Media Monitoring Report
Figure 4: Average weekday radio trends in Central Kenya, 12:00am-12:00pm
This matches with what was reported in Kieni West where most people wake up before 6:00am which is the time they turn on their radios. By 7:00am, most people are awake and listening to the radio and by 7:30am, those who are going to work are ready to leave the house. This is also the time when the declines from the peak starts. This may not be exactly consistent with most of Kieni West listeners because many people do not have formal employment and therefore tend to start their days a little late. Even when people have to work on farms, they do not have to travel long distances and therefore can leave home later. In areas such as Mwiyo, the periods when people are not busy in the farm such as the dry season leave them with more free time. As we have seen in the preceding section, the early morning hours on all stations features information and humor which are popular with listeners.

Figure 5 shows the average listening trends between 12:00pm and 12:00am. After a slump in listening during the mid-morning, numbers start to rise at the 1:00pm lunch hour then decline slightly after 2:00pm. Compared to the morning hours’ trends we have seen above, the vernacular stations continue to dominate. Radio Citizen is the only non-vernacular station that commands high numbers but the station’s number fluctuates especially between 2:00 pm and 7:00pm. Inooro FM remains strongly at the top all day but Coro FM picks up in the afternoon between 2:00pm and 7:00pm while Radio Citizen’s numbers rise again between 7:00pm and 9:00pm. The rise of audiences during the lunch hour can be attributed to the free lunch hour which starts between 12:00pm and 2:00pm. Listeners in Kieni West, including those who work in the farms, reported that they break for lunch at 1:00pm. At the top of the 1:00pm, there is a complete news bulletin on the leading stations. Also, younger children who spend half of the day in
school go home at the lunch hour. Many parents of the young children make sure that they are home at this time.

The periods during which the Steadman trends indicate rise in listenership for different stations are instructive because they coincide with specific programs that were identified as the most popular in different stations. For example, the sharp increase in listenership for Coro FM from 2:00pm coincides with a program that was widely reported by listeners in Kieni West, *Ithaa rīa Kuumīria* (Time to wrap-up) This program was simply referred to as *Kipindi gīa Simo na Kata* (the program by Simo and Kata), identified with the two program presenters. It is one of the most popular programs on
Coro FM. On the same station the listenership rises higher at around 6:00pm which also coincides with the start time of the news magazine program, *Coro Matūraini* (Coro at the grassroots). Generally, an increase in listenership in prime time starting 6:00pm during the weekdays is expected. But compared with other times of the day, Coro FM for instance has the third highest listenership compared to 6:00pm, up from fifth at 5:00pm.

Another confirmation of a program popularity among Kieni West listeners that conforms to the Central Kenya region listeners can be seen in the exponential rise in listenership of Radio Citizen between 8:00pm and 9:00pm. This is accounted for by the popularity of a social and political commentary program *Yaliyotendeka* presented by Waweru Mburu which goes on air at the same period. *Yaliyotendeka* was also identified as the most popular program on Radio Citizen among the Kieni West listeners.
Figure 6 shows Central Kenya audiences’ radio listening trends during the afternoon hours on Saturday from 12:00pm to midnight.

These trends are similar to those found during the week with Inooro FM having higher audiences than any other radio station. The listenership levels of Inooro FM during daytime and early evening are average but the numbers rise rapidly beginning at 10:00pm and stay relatively high until midnight. This again confirms the popularity of the late night program Hutia Mündü which was reported in Kieni West. People stay up late to listen to the program, another example of program loyalty. With the exception of Inooro FM, no remarkable changes in listening trends on other radio stations are noticed.
The figure in the next page is another illustration of how audiences’ habits are related to particular content. The Sunday radio programming on the Kikuyu vernacular station is highly religious. On Sunday morning, Kameme FM turns the tables and commands the highest listenership, the only instance when it dominates Inooro FM. The Sunday morning program, *Itaha rìa Muoyo* (Spiritual Food) that runs between 6:00am and 9:00am is a program that combines gospel music and scriptures readings. From 9:00am to 11:00am is the presentation of the Catholic mass, *Mitha*. After these two programs, Kameme FM’s numbers go back to normal. In Kieni West, *Mitha* program is very popular especially because of the large Catholic population.

Source: Steadman Group 2008 Second Quarter Media Monitoring Report

*Figure 7: Average radio trends in Central Kenya Sunday 12:00 am-12:00 pm,*
From these trends, it is plausible to argue that while listeners in Kieni West have their preferred radio stations, there is a strong loyalty to particular sessions or programs. This loyalty is also commonly associated with presenters and program content. The gains and losses of audiences at certain times for some stations imply that listeners switch between them. Even with the generalization of the Central Kenya media region, the times when different stations’ numbers rise also corresponds with specific content identified by listeners in Kieni West. Therefore, listeners’ habits in Kieni West, to a large extent, are similar to those of the listeners in the Central Kenya region in general. The popularity of content as illustrated by different programs reported in Kieni West is spread across the region(s) of broadcast.

Chapter summary

Radio listeners in Kieni West enjoy a variety of radio programming formats, content and presentation styles that are now afforded by availability of diverse stations. The programming format, content and style that a radio station adopts are likely to affect its ability to reach the targeted audiences. Kieni West audiences suggest that there is a close interplay between what radio stations broadcast and their audiences. Radio listeners are likely to respond to radio content and programming format if they take into account listeners’ unique tastes and preferences. The wide range of stations that Kieni West audiences listen to also illustrate different levels of competition between the stations. Different stations satisfy various listeners’ needs. Kikuyu vernacular stations for instance are able to satisfy local and regional needs for the Kikuyu listeners. National radio stations on the other hand help to bring listeners to the national stage as a part of a larger Kenyan community. Kieni West listeners cannot be isolated from the wider Kikuyu
audience. As illustrated the Steadman Reports, Kieni West listeners’ radio consumption habits are in many ways similar to the larger Central Kenya audience because they share common social, cultural, economic and political ideas and practices.
CHAPTER SIX: RADIO LISTENING IN KIENI WEST AND LANGUAGE OF BROADCASTING

In the last two chapters we have seen how listeners in Kieni West make choices among the various radio stations that are available and how factors such as content and broadcasting format influence these choices. In this chapter, I discuss radio listening in Kieni West in relation to languages of broadcasting. Radio content choices are strongly influenced by listeners’ language proficiency. As concluded in the previous chapters, Kikuyu vernacular radio stations have come out as the most popular. The preference for Kikuyu as the language for broadcast cuts across all age groups and levels of education. There is however a sizeable group of younger people who prefer to listen to English language radio stations. These young people for some reasons may feel alienated and at times are resistant to the local language, Kikuyu.

This chapter also examines the role that radio plays in popularizing, disseminating, and validating certain language constructs. I will discuss some vocabulary that appears in everyday language discourse of the Kieni West population that has been popularized by radio. When it comes to language, radio listeners have shown active engagement including questioning a number of issues that are related to Kikuyu language. Many listeners appreciate the role of Kikuyu vernacular radio in presenting content in a language that they understand. They also express some discontent with the radio language standards as illustrated by critique on vernacular language broadcasting.

Language and radio listening in Kieni West

Like most people in Kenya (Githiora, 2002), the Kieni West population is largely multilingual. Since the population is predominantly Kikuyu, the first language for most of
the people in the area is Kikuyu. This language is spoken at home and outside the home during daily interactions. The second most spoken language is Swahili; it is used mainly for interaction with people from different ethnic communities. English comes in as the third most spoken language that is ordinarily acquired when one joins school. English is the language of instruction in schools and also the official language in Kenya. All 108 listeners who responded to the questionnaire had the knowledge of Kikuyu language while 95% spoke Swahili, and 80% had some knowledge of English. Thirteen percent of the respondents reported that they spoke at least four languages. For people who are born in Kieni, exposure to the Kikuyu language is from a young age. For the young population who are in the primary school (usually aged between six and fifteen years), Kikuyu is the preferred language but Swahili and English are highly encouraged in school. At times these two languages are forced on students through implementation of tough rules by teachers. These rules are aimed at improving language skills, which are perhaps necessary for better academic performances\textsuperscript{11} since Swahili and English are examinable subjects. Apart from Swahili, all examined subjects in primary school are in English language. When I visited St. Jude’s primary school in Mahiga, Mwiyogo area, students spoke in Swahili and English. This was also observed at Mahiga Primary school. According to the teachers, students are banned from using their mother tongue (Kikuyu)

\textsuperscript{11} In the Kenyan education system, standardized national examinations after the eighth grade determine the kind of high school a student gets admitted to. The high schools have a tier system of national, provincial, district and local schools. The national schools only admit high performers across the nation. National schools have more resources and have a good record for the standardized high school examination which determines entry to the university. Thus there is pressure to perform exceptionally well and teachers use all means possible to ensure the students are competitive. In rural areas, one of the ways to improve performance has been to stress students’ language proficiency in English and Swahili. Rural students are less exposed to English and Swahili compared to their urban counterparts. This has in turn meant discouraging the local mother tongues by all means including punishment, a measure that is unpopular with students but not with teachers and parents. Another consequence, albeit unintended for most part, has been disempowering the the local languages and empowering of English and Swahili.
while in school to give them adequate time to practice English and Swahili because school is the only place that they get to speak the languages.

With the exception of a few individuals whose origins are outside the Kikuyu speaking area, the people of Kieni West are highly proficient in Kikuyu. A few people from the neighboring Turkana and Samburu communities who work in the area speak Turkana and Samburu as their first languages respectively. People from outside the Kieni West area, especially those who have lived there for a long time have learned Kikuyu language. Some residents also speak other Bantu languages such as Kamba, Meru and Embu. These languages are closely intelligible with Kikuyu. Proficiency in different languages is largely dependent on the level of education and age. The older population is likely to be less proficient in Swahili and English. These are mainly people who have not interacted with other people outside the Kikuyu speaking population or those who have not gone through formal schooling. Since independence, in 1963, standard of education in Central Kenya has been high compared to other areas. People in a homogeneous rural setting like Kieni West are relatively more exposed to different languages in addition to Kikuyu than one would find in other places. Due to this, many people who I interacted with were proficient in Kikuyu, Swahili, and English.

The degree of proficiency in different languages varies and may be hard to establish especially in English. People exhibit disparities between spoken, read, and written English. For instance many people can read from sources such as the local English newspapers which are more easily available than Swahili newspapers. They can also listen to the news on radio and television although they constantly encounter “difficult words”. The main challenge with English is speaking. In describing his
language proficiency, Beste, a 24-year old man from Mweiga said, “I understand English (spoken) very well but when it comes to speaking, it is a bit hard…. As for fluency, Kikuyu comes first, then Swahili and English comes last”. Many older people aged over 60 years do not understand English at all. The majority of the population is proficient in spoken Kikuyu but not as proficient in reading and writing the language. The older segment of the population is mostly proficient in spoken Kikuyu. Some young people on the other hand reported not being good in Kikuyu beyond the language of ordinary general conversation. Proficiency in Swahili among Kieni West people lies between the Kikuyu and the English language extremes. Over 90% of the people I interacted with understood the language well. They can read and write easily and most can speak. These language dynamics come into play during radio listening. In the following section, I discuss the listeners’ language preferences and the reasons behind them and how this influences their radio listening habits.

Language as a determinant in radio listening

Other than the availability of signals, one factor that determines the choice of the radio station that audiences listen to is the language of broadcasting. Among the questionnaire respondents, 71% picked a Kikuyu vernacular station as their favorite station. Those who preferred vernacular stations cited the ability to comprehend content as one of the major reasons behind their choice. To the older population, the emergence of vernacular radio broadcasting has provided an avenue where for the first time they could listen to the radio on their own without relying on an intermediary. The old broadcasting system in which radio broadcast mainly in English and Swahili left out a huge section of the older population. They had to rely on those who could understand the
languages to tell them what was going on. The following comments reflect some of the views of the older people. For Beatrice, an 85-year old grandmother from Mahiga, the new broadcasting has changed the radio.

The good thing about the new Kikuyu stations is that even as old people, we can now listen to the radio without asking anyone to explain what was said. I will just sit there with my radio and get everything that is said. Before, things were very different, the radio was a device that just made noises, now it speaks to me.

Stephen Ndungo, a 62-year old from Mahiga explained this too, contrasting the old times when there was little to choose from and the current times where there are many choices of radio stations.

The local language stations are good because before we had KBC that broadcast in English and Swahili and not everyone is educated or can speak Swahili or English. So there will always be a time when people listen to the radio but miss something. But since the day we got local language broadcasting, there is no way you will hear someone asking what was said because even little children now can say I heard this and that on the radio. So the local languages make life and radio listening easy.

Struggling with English is not restricted to those who said they did not understand the language at all. Some listeners said that despite understanding English, they have not attained the proficiency level where they are able to understand everything that is said on the radio. From those who reported a modest understanding to teachers and young people who have a higher proficiency, these sentiments were shared across the board. Michael,
a 20 year old teacher at a local primary school who is also waiting to join university said that language is critical in influencing his choice of stations.

Some stations, based on my level of understanding of the language (English), sometimes I may not understand the news. Even when I want to listen to the news, sometimes the use of English is a little too complicated. If I listen to news from Easy FM for example, I cannot comprehend the language without straining. So I end up tuning to a Kikuyu station because I can easily understand.

Agatha, a 55-year old teacher at Mahiga primary school captures the language situation through what she calls “deep meanings” she gets and the “taste” of her language, Kikuyu, compared to English and Swahili. She also talks of “feeling the language getting” in her that signifies cognitive proximity to the speech as it is delivered and the ease with which listeners understand their language.

Kikuyu for instance, I listen mostly not because I cannot understand English or Swahili but I feel that I can get the deepest meaning in Kikuyu. For instance, in Swahili there are vocabularies that you might not understand. Also, in English someone will put in an accent. But with Kikuyu, even a small kid will know what has been said. And there is also a different taste in Kikuyu because it is our language. For instance, I listen to Kameme FM because I feel the language getting in me and I will never ask what was said.

For some listeners, the choice of language is determined by those who are around you and the language norms. Young listeners like 23-year old Bernard Mutugi from Mweiga pointed to what they view as the sensitivity of Kikuyu language, which they believe mutes discussion of topics that are freely addressed in other languages.
Culturally, there are shared language norms that have to be adhered to. When a language that is deemed as inappropriate in the Kikuyu culture is heard on the radio, young people feel uncomfortable if they are in the company of older people. However, there is no such discomfort if one is in the presence of her or his peers. However, it all depends on which language is being used on the radio as Mutugi explained.

Based on what is being discussed on the radio, like in Kiss 100, there are things that can be freely said in English. But if the language of broadcasting was Swahili or Kikuyu, it would feel shameful to listen. So I can laugh without hiding and without losing respect. When some issues in English are delivered in Kikuyu language, they are very sensitive and I will feel uncomfortable. Also, because of the people around me, there are things that when said in Kikuyu, with my mother present, will sound offensive. But the same things can be said in English and I can still listen with her.

Young people on the other hand argue that Kikuyu language, like the culture, is more conservative while English language is liberal in the discussion of taboo topics and muted discussions identified in the preceding section. They feel more uncomfortable using the vernacular language to discuss sexual issues than older people. Even concepts that are not necessarily considered unacceptable in the day-to-day speech are hard for many young people to use while the elder people do not have the same problem. Mr. Kariuki, a 68 year old from Mweiga argues that Kikuyu language is not necessarily blunt; instead it is the young people who do not understand their culture.

Our language is not blunt. I think some parents have taught their children that our language is blunt. Our children have lost our culture and that is making things so
difficult. One day I told a young man something and he was so mad because he thought I had insulted him by telling him he depends on his mother. When I went to visit his home, he was asked to prepare me a cup of tea but refused and said I insulted him. When he repeated what I had said, his mother reprimanded him asking him who else he depended upon. Our children just don’t understand.

It is also interesting to note how some of the young listeners view Kikuyu broadcasting. Some are resistant to their language on the radio. For them, the language is too mundane; they hear it every day in their lives and would rather listen to something different. Some do not even want to be associated with listening to Kikuyu stations because among their peers it is not considered a “cool” thing to do. In contrast, listening to English language FM stations has a sense of prestige. According to Joseph Mathenge, a 22 year old male from Endarasha, listening to Kikuyu stations for a young man feels awkward. “Even girls are not impressed when they find you listening to Kikuyu stuff”. Ndugi, a 24 year old from Mwiyogo thinks there is too much Kikuyu on the radio. For Ndugi, such presence results in people all over the country learning the language which erodes any uniqueness of the Kikuyu community.

I don’t know how I feel about Kikuyu stations because I do not listen to Kikuyu stations. And after all, these Kikuyu talk has gone overboard making me feel like I can turn off the Kikuyu stations. As the Kikuyu people, we need a way we can communicate among ourselves, be different and symbolize ourselves as Kikuyu. But now the language is being spoken so much by four stations such that even Kisii or other communities understand Kikuyu and from the way things are going, they will all be speaking Kikuyu. If you go to a different place these days and
meet a Kisii, Kamba, or Kalenjin, they are all speaking Kikuyu. In a few years to come, everyone will be speaking Kikuyu language fluently. These comments illustrate a feeling of protectionism. Ndugi feels that the Kikuyu people ought to keep their language to themselves. However, there is also an aspect of resistance that does not necessarily come out openly. It is a kind of discomfort that some people, especially the young feel with their vernacular language. There is a desire to feel different from the rest. In many cases, disassociating with the “local” makes these young people feel different and one way of doing that is using a different language for communication, such as English, which is considered “prestigious”. When asked, many young people expressed the desire to move away from the village, probably to join their friends in the urban areas where life is considered more flashy and interesting. Also there are assumptions that more employment opportunities exist in the urban areas. As Githinji, a 40-year old farmer from Endarasha explained, since many young people do not manage to go away from the village physically, the consumption of urban content serves as a psychologically compensatory act that partly fulfils their wish.

Diffusing language from the stations to the people

Full-fledged Kikuyu vernacular broadcasting has been on since 1998. The first years of vernacular broadcasting were largely experimental as broadcasters tried out forms of content and modes of presentation that would work best for the audience. One of the challenges in these early years was determining how much vernacular language to include in the presentation. As a result, the very first vernacular radio broadcasted in mixed languages. When Kameme FM started broadcasting in 1998, they used Kikuyu, English, and Swahili for presentation and wide range of content in these languages. The
subsequent radio stations found themselves in the same position. Initially, there was a feeling that vernacular languages would suffice in broadcasting without borrowing from other more established language (Z. Thiong’o, personal communication, August 14, 2008). This situation can be attributed more to the lack of prior experience with vernacular broadcasting as opposed to a gap in language or content availability. A lack of precedence in an environment that was dominated by English and Swahili also tempted the broadcasters to work with what listeners were used to.

Over the years, Kikuyu radio stations have slowly made progress and managed to cultivate their own broadcasting identity. Kikuyu vernacular stations have become more comfortable with the language to an extent where some stations such as Inooro FM now broadcast 100% Kikuyu content round the clock. These stations have also attracted a base audience. Listeners have connected with the radio stations and are now accustomed to hearing broadcasting in their own language. With these developments, Kikuyu vernacular radio has become a site where popular language is being constantly defined. Through the radio platform, radio personalities such as presenters, comedians and musicians invent or popularize the language that ends up in the popular discourse.

During the early days of my research, I started to notice a prevalence of Kikuyu terms and phrases that were being used in the daily conversation in a way that I did not understand. My first thought was that it was as a result of dialect variation, but on closer scrutiny it was not. These terms were being used by people from Nairobi as much as they were used by the Kieni West population. On further listening to Kikuyu radio stations, I noticed a language that is similar to what people were using out there. Radio was in fact the source of this language. In Kieni West, these new popular radio inspired terms are
mostly employed by the younger population under 40 years. A lot of phrases come from the names of programs and shows. There are also different expressions. This language is not literally new but involves changing the context of the usage. The new context is then popularized on radio and moves into the ordinary conversation. Below are a few examples of the phrases and concepts I came across in Kieni West and how they are being employed.

During individual interviews and focus group discussions, one of the questions that I asked the listeners was what program they listened to and liked the most. Then I would follow the question by asking the listeners to explain why they liked the program. From many people, a common simple answer was given as “nĩ kĩnjakaga” (it builds/constructs me). This was little confusing at first because “building” normally relates to structures. The term gwaka is also used in Kikuyu to mean “to dominate” or “reign over” someone. In my research, the term was used in different contexts. In one way, it was used to explain a positive outcome of listening to radio content such as music, religious programs, informational programs or educational programs. When deconstructed, these benefits include enlightenment, empowerment, spiritual uplifting and motivation. In everyday language discourse, the term gwaka mucii is used in the domestic sphere to mean “keeping the family stable”. The radio usage is what has been popularized to relate to the individual level. Listeners thus described a program as nĩ kĩnjakaga (it builds/develops me), to mean that they derive something positive from listening. Of the favorite presenter it was said, nĩ anjakaga, (she or he builds me) meaning she or he motivates me. Religious songs it was said nĩ cĩnjakaga (they build me), meaning they entertain and spiritually uplift me and so on. The use of the term
gwaka for these concepts appears to derive from the need to convey a particular meaning(s) within the radio sphere. There is hardly a precise Kikuyu term that communicates the concepts of enlightenment, empowerment, spiritual uplifting or motivation that can be derived from processes such as listening to the radio\textsuperscript{12}. The closest terms include ġiteithia (to help or to assist), kũhotithia (to enable) which are ambiguous.

Another popular term I encountered in daily interactions is kuumĩria, a term that is used in the farms during harvesting where the produce is moved from deep in the farms to a central collection point. The phrase is commonly used in tea and coffee growing areas. Kuumĩria (to move something from a deeper place) is a transitive verb, but is also used in the farm context as an intransitive verb. The phrase found its way into vernacular broadcasting and popularized in its use to refer to the late afternoon session, the drive time. From the radio, the phrase has been picked in the ordinary language discourses to mean movement. So, instead of one saying nĩndathiĩ (I am leaving or going), people will say nĩndaumĩria. In the compound phrase nĩndaumĩria (I-have-moved [something]), the active verb umĩria is a transitive verb and thus would require a direct object. However, the phrase nindaumĩria in the new meaning is used as a reflexive since nĩ- refers to the subject and there is no object. The new literal meaning would be I am moving myself. Some presenters have taken it to a different level. To make it even more palatable, presenters of a popular afternoon program Kuumĩria on Coro FM refer to kuumĩria nyau

\textsuperscript{12} I have consulted a number of people who speak Kikuyu to find if there is a precise meaning of these concepts. From six people I know, the terms that corresponds with “to help” and “to enable” came up. I also posted the following question on a discussion thread on a popular Kikuyu online forum, www.kikuyu.com. Assuming that you are listening to the radio and the program that you listen to is beneficial to you. Among other things, you feel that this program “enlightens, empowers, spiritually uplifts or motivates” you. How would you describe such outcomes in one Kikuyu word? The results were the same that there is no corresponding exact concept. One of the answers from the forum read “Kikuyu is a growing language. In the modern lingo, one would say kipindi kũ nikĩnjakaga mũno”, an exact answer I have heard from radio listeners in Kieni West. Importantly, the respondent acknowledges the term is a modern term.
nyau (The fast drive). But nyau in Kikuyu is the name given to cats; literally this phrase would not make any sense especially when it is repeated. However, the broadcasters have followed the slang phrase from Sheng\textsuperscript{13}, nayo nayo and rhymed it with the closest Kikuyu word to come up with the phrase nyau nyau. The phrase nayo nayo itself was borrowed from Kikuyu to mean nayũ which means immediately while a repeated phrase nayũ nayũ conveys a sense of urgency. The phrase *kuumĩría nyau nyau* represents a complex process where Sheng borrows from Kikuyu. The same term is borrowed back by Kikuyu in a changed and assimilated using the closest equivalent in pronunciation but with a different meaning.

Other popular terms include *kwĩbanga* (to be organized or take time to be prepared) but in this case the term is used as a metaphor that means “to be smart”. Used in the late night program *Ithaarĩa kwĩbanga* (time to be smart) that appears on Coro FM, the phrase *kwĩbanga* is now very popular and is used to address taboo topics in an acceptable manner. People are using the language in some muted conversations. For instance, in talking about protecting oneself from contracting HIV/AIDS the term *wisange* (get smart) is commonly being used. This means positive behavior such as abstinence, condom use and being faithful.

Getting the language right

Another issue that is related to broadcasting language has been to find concepts in Kikuyu language that communicate to the population as clearly as English and Swahili do. With the advent of colonialism and rise of English and Swahili hegemony in

\textsuperscript{13} Sheng is a popular slang language used by the youth especially in the major urban centers. It uses the Swahili grammatical structure and borrows its vocabulary heavily from Swahili and English through modification. Sheng also borrows from other languages in the country including Kikuyu.
independent Kenya, many aspects of the vernacular language have been lost as speakers of vernacular languages like Kikuyu adopted and borrowed popular concepts from other languages. To embrace a Kikuyu identity, the vernacular stations have had to bring back in the vocabulary concepts that had been lost by the current generation and popularize them again. For example, the concepts of times of the day and seasons in Kikuyu are not well known to many young people. Vernacular stations, however, have been using them. Unfortunately, they sound alien to many listeners. Irene Njambi, a 34 year old mother is a fan of Kikuyu radio and loves Kikuyu languages but has found some challenges in the process.

Sometimes they use very deep Kikuyu to describe say the months or even the times of the day. But we are so much used to saying January, February and others in Kikuyu or the first month, the second and such. When they use Kikuyu, those months are based on seasons or some animal behavior but a lot has changed, so they don’t make sense. The same thing with the time of the day, they have to do with animals or other traditional way of life. It is very hard for a young person to relate to these concepts because we do not experience them. That way, the language begins to feel a little alien even though it is our own.

But Irene also thinks that this is a good thing because it is the only way people can get to learn the language. “Slowly we are getting used to the language. Just like we were not used to listening to Kikuyu on radio, with time we will be”, she adds. Similar views were echoed by Peter Wanjohi, a 28-year old barber in Mweiga town.

We definitely don’t speak the same language that our parents speak. They were born with Kikuyu and almost speak that language only. But even on radio, it is the
older presenters like Wakaria (an old general presenter who appears on Coro FM) who use the deep language. Younger people like us still use simple language or have to learn. I am sure those young people working there did not know the deep stuff.

The younger people especially those in their early 20s, are more vocal about not understanding their language. Their reaction has been to move away from the stations because they are not interested in the vernacular content. In Endarasha, young men complained that the language used on radio is too deep for them to understand. “I know the language as far as speaking is concerned, but I don’t understand the deep cultural concepts that they talk about on radio”, said Patrick Kanae, a 22 year old mechanic. These comments were echoed by three of Patrick’s friends, who prefer to listen to an English reggae station, Metro FM. Despite their limitations in the language, they expressed no desire to learn what they do not know. “I do not know much Kikuyu and I don’t want to know more. As long as I can speak, I am just fine”, said 22-year old Francis Seko, also from Endarasha.

Critiquing the language of the radio

Whereas some younger listeners felt that the Kikuyu language on the radio was too complicated, the older population was more critical of some of the presenters who do not use “pure” language. To some older people, the young presenters do not use the proper language, probably because they are not as highly proficient. Samuel Kariuki, a 68-year old from Mweiga described such language when commenting on what he would like to hear from the radio.
My station would be in Kikuyu language and teach people the Kikuyu culture the way I know it as I was taught by my parents and grandparents. That is the same way I would also teach my children because there are some on the radio who speak Kikuyu and they speak the opposite. You get a feeling that their Kikuyu language is not straight; it is being forced upon them. I feel it is because they are young people who are still learning the language or it happens that they did not get what they were taught in the correct way. I would like people who speak the proper and original Kikuyu.

There are other language challenges that vernacular broadcasters face especially in presenting informational content. In many informational programs, the broadcasters invite experts to the programs to talk to listeners on various subjects. Although some of these experts are Kikuyu speakers, many of them struggle to address technical issues in the vernacular language. Such programs usually end up being highly punctuated with English making it hard for the listeners to follow. Some argue that this mixing is a result of failure to develop local languages so that they can also address technical issues. In other instances, there is a lack of experts who are proficient in the language and who can address technical issues. Teresah Wangechi, a 60-year old retired teacher expressed some of the frustrations listeners have when language becomes a hindrance to effective presentation of programs. She cites a medical program on Inooro FM.

Because the presenters are educated in different ways, they mix the Kikuyu language with the other languages. They want to mix everything. Some also want to appear as if they are experts but they know very well their language is coming from picking bits and pieces from different places. Like last night there was
someone who was talking about medicine. He is a doctor. And all the time the he
spoke, he was speaking as he was being corrected by the presenter all the time. If
he wanted to say something is concentrated, he would go “What do I say?”, and
he would be told. If he wants to say someone is in great pain, he cannot say it.
You get the feeling that they want to present themselves as if they know foreign
languages better than Kikuyu and therefore will not speak three Kikuyu words
without bringing in a foreign language. So, it is not Kikuyu, it is not English or
Swahili, it is just some mashed-up language.

I remember listening to the said program as well and noticed the doctor’s struggles. The
whole program is distorted because the messages are lost and the presenters do more
correcting than moderating the program. But this doctor’s first language was not Kikuyu.
He had a Maasai name and his accent was Maasai which I could discern having grown up in the Maasailand. It is therefore bound to be difficult for the expert given his
background. Listeners however argue that the whole essence of such programs is to
educate people in their own language, most of whom have lower levels of education. The
extent to which people can understand the content is therefore hampered by the language barrier.

However, some listeners understand the challenges that vernacular broadcasters
face and experts in discussing technical fields like health and medicine. Gladys, a 45-year old teacher gives an example of naming diseases, some of which she thinks did not exist among the Kikuyu people and therefore have no names.

I also think most of the diseases are new, they have come after the colonial period. In the past those diseases were not there. There are also diseases I used to
hear my grandmother talk about but never got to know them. Like she would
mention a disease called *heeho* and even today, I cannot tell what kind of disease
it is even in English. But even in hospital, it is hard for the doctor to explain the
whole illness to a patient in the local language.

Teresa’s view is that some of the challenges encountered in dealing with complex
language can be solved if those who are involved in broadcasting took time to prepare
their content, including the technical parts.

Our doctors should study the names of the diseases, so that older women and men
can learn because the little English they insert will lose them. For her to
understand then they should name the medicine in Kikuyu, parts of the body and
the feelings so that they can help both the educated and the non-educated
listeners. The doctors should take time to learn the language if they are going to
communicate with the people.

There are some exemplary presenters that listeners identify as using good
vernacular language on radio. Listeners believe that other presenters can borrow a
leaf from these exemplars. Josephine Waithera, a 48-year old mother gives an
example.

[W]hen I listen to Gathoni wa Mucomba, her language is right on point. Her
station has very good content. When you listen to her, you just want to be there. If
it is Coro FM, you will hear that their language is also straight and not mixed. If it
is Kikuyu, let’s speak the real language and that is the only way we can help the
people.
While the Kikuyu language that people in Kieni West hear from the radio may not be perfect, it is good enough to communicate to the listeners. For Stephen Ndungo, a 62 year old from Mahiga in Mwiyogo, the presenters are doing a good job because most people are able to understand what is being said on the radio. He however laments that the language is still losing some aspects.

I hear the language spoken but it is good because we can understand. But if you look closely, you will find that the language is losing some aspects and it is deteriorating because young people do not know the traditions. A young man will tell you he wants to get married but he does not understand the process, they have to get someone to explain it to them on how to go about it. Years back, Kikuyu was exciting because it was being taught in school and there were text books on language and books on Kikuyu people. Today, there are books on other languages. So if we do not guard Kikuyu, the language is going to disappear.

Mr. Ndungo’s position is spot on and consistent with the views such as those expressed by young men from Endarasha discussed in the previous section. Language is connected to the culture and the traditions of the people. It is also influenced by other systems such as education. People who belong to the current generation have interacted with culture differently. They have also undergone a different kind of education which stresses different issues that may not be consistent with the traditional culture that is being promoted on the radio. The education system is dominated by formal schooling whose demands take them away from their native language and veers students towards Swahili and English. Kikuyu vernacular radio stations find themselves at a crossroads. They have to fit within the general scheme that recognizes different languages but at the same time,
vernacular languages are not accorded enough opportunities to thrive. The same parents who want to hear the best Kikuyu language on the radio want to see their children acquire the highest proficiency in the languages that matter, English and Swahili. Yet it is the same system that feeds the stations with the broadcasters. It is a difficult act to balance for the broadcaster also given the diversity of the listeners. The majority of the listeners has accepted the stations’ status quo and understands the challenges that broadcasters face. With time, the stations are likely to improve just as they have since their inception.

Chapter summary

The rise of vernacular language broadcasting has been received well by listeners who have found comfort in their native language. The presence of other languages ensures that listeners have enough choices to make and access a variety of radio programming materials. Listeners are interested in the language of broadcast and their proficiency allows them to critically evaluate how it is used and point to what they view as positives of vernacular broadcasting. This critique is important in revealing some of the challenges that Kikuyu vernacular radio stations face in the process of communicating with the listeners. Some of these challenges are as a result of the inadequacy of the language themselves rather than the broadcasters. Their resolution goes beyond the broadcasters. But as they continue to broadcast, they are slowly improving as illustrated by ability of some stations to use Kikuyu language in all their broadcasting. In this chapter, we have also seen interplay between the language used in radio broadcasting and the language used in everyday life. Vernacular radio is becoming a powerful space within a larger language discourse where language is negotiated. The larger space which is the society informs radio broadcasting. Radio presenters select and sometimes modify certain
radio terms. Because of the radio platform’s ability to reach a wider population, some language terms are easily picked up and adopted by the general population. In this way, broadcasting shows its ability to influence the language discourse.

This chapter underlines the active nature of radio audience in Kieni West. The ability to interact with different aspects of broadcasting is illustrated across the board irrespective of listeners’ age, gender, and education level. The examination of language in relation to the vernacular broadcasting is important because it represents an important point of departure from the state-controlled to liberalized media. The multiplicity of language has directly resulted from increased competition, diversity of voices and content and presence of local materials in the media as the next chapter shows.
CHAPTER SEVEN: RADIO IN THE VILLAGE AND BEYOND

The state of mass communication in Kenya shows a continued domination by radio as the most effective medium among rural audiences. In Kieni West, 99% of the household encountered in this research owned a radio set. While many parts of the world today boast the proliferation of new information and communication technologies such as the internet, satellite television and mobile telephony (Pitts, 2002), most African countries have faced slow development due to challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and high cost of deployment. In Kenya, the urban-rural technological gap is evident as indicated by the limited communication technologies choices available for populations living in rural areas such as Kieni West. Since around the year 2000, there is a notable technological change in Kenya which has resulted in an explosion of mobile telephony. Ownership of mobile telephones in Kenya has risen from 1.2 million subscribers in 2002 to an 11.3 million in 2007 (ITU, 2007). Internet deployment has been slow but slightly improved with 186,800 subscribers, and 3 million users in 2007 compared to 40,000 subscribers and 100,000 users in 2000 (ITU, 2007). Internet access is on the rise as mobile phone companies are providing web services while the long awaited Seacom fiber optic cable went live in July 2009 (Mwakio, 2009) is expected to support more faster and affordable access.

The broadcast industry has also seen the entry of satellite television in major urban centers but the minimum cost in Kenya shillings of about 3,000.00 (approximately US$ 50.00) per month remains too expensive for many people. The result is the continued reliance on radio. In rural areas like Kieni West, many households have more than one radio set which allows family members to have different choices of stations.
Individual family members can listen to what they want without being tied collectively. Data on radio listening habits among Kieni West listeners indicate that increased radio access has improved the overall flow and exchange of information. In this chapter, I discuss the state of radio broadcasting and its implication for the Kenyan listening population. The first section is a discussion of the transition from a state-controlled broadcasting service to a free market media and its outcome. I use the broadcasting standard of public interest and the principles of diversity, competition, and localism to examine some of the changes that have affected radio's performance in the delivery of information, education and entertainment. The next section discusses delivery of information through radio and also contrasts it with studies in other parts of Africa. The section examines the relationship between increased access to radio in Kenya, as well as broadcasting of development and social change oriented communication.

In acknowledging that radio consumption habits vary from one environment to another, I also situate radio consumption in Kieni West by discussing the radio listening process and space. Here, I follow Debra Spitulnik (2000) in looking at radio consumption in the domestic sphere and beyond and exploring issues of mobility of the device and sharing among listeners. This section also discusses how radio functions as a platform for interaction that allows listeners to connect uninhibited by space. In addition, I discuss how radio in Kenya is functioning as a platform for civic engagement and thereby promoting democratic culture. Using Dahlgren's (2002) conceptualization, I frame this discussion around the role of radio as a public sphere. Finally, this chapter addresses the relationship between media, language and culture. I discuss how the multiplicity of
languages in liberalized media intersects with culture as revealed by Kieni West radio audiences.

From public to free market broadcasting model

For some decades now the public service broadcasting (PSB) model has come under a threat with the increased commercialization of the media around the world (McCauley et al, 2003). These include the BBC in the UK and National Public Radio (NPR) in the US. Part of the threat stems from the change in technology leading to an explosion of channels as digital broadcasting has provided more spectrum-efficient forms of communication. At the same time, commercialization has resulted in a growing economic muscle of private media companies both in Western and non-Western nations. However, the situation in countries like Kenya is more problematic. The Kenyan PSB body, KBC, was modeled on the BBC and is today governed by the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (Nationalization) Act of 1989 and the Kenya Information and Communication Act of 1998 (KICA). KBC Act of 1989 is a repealed statute of Voice of Kenya Act (1964). VoK had replaced the Kenya Broadcasting Company that the country inherited after independence. The provisions of the 1989 Act were mostly carried over from the VoK Act of 1964. The KICA Act provides for the establishment of the Communication Commission of Kenya (CCK) as an independent regulator. Among the roles of CCK is to “facilitate the development of the information and communication sector (which includes broadcasting, telecommunications and postal services) and electronic commerce” (CCK, 2009). In Part IV A of the KICA Act titled “Broadcasting Services”, three categories of broadcasting services are identified as public, private and community. KBC is designated by the KICA Act as the public broadcaster. However,
KICA cedes all matters of public service broadcasting regulation to the KBC Act. Beyond this, there is no nexus between the two Acts, a situation which poses a regulatory inconsistency. Public broadcasting which should be ordinarily subsumed under CCK is ceded to a separate body. KBC therefore retains autonomy outside the KICA Act and CCK.

The term “public interest” appears four times in the KICA Act under broadcasting services. In section 46A, the functions of the CCK in relation to broadcasting services include to “(a) promote and facilitate the development, in keeping with the public interest, of a diverse range of broadcasting services in Kenya, and (c) promote the observance at all times of public interest obligations in all broadcasting categories.” Section 46D also states that “In considering applications for the grant of a broadcasting license, the Commission shall have regard to (a) observance at all times of public interest obligations in all broadcasting categories....” Finally Section 46I requires that all licensed broadcasters shall, among others, “(e) when controversial or contentious issues of public interest are discussed, make reasonable efforts to present alternative points of view, either in the same program or in other programs within the period of current interest;....” It is difficult to infer the intended meaning of public interest within the local Kenyan context given that there is no history of the standard in the country. The only plausible conclusion is that the standard is adopted due to its centrality worldwide and in particular informed by the British broadcasting system.

In the KBC Act, there is no mention of public interest. Analyzed closely, KBC Act is a weak broadcasting statute because it devotes the majority of its parts to the creation of a bureaucratic body and does little to spell out broadcasting related functions.
of the corporation. Also absent are clear guiding principles that steer the conduct of the broadcasting body. As a result, the most important aspects of the corporation are found in section 8 of the Act titled, “Powers and Functions of the Corporation”. In this section, two subsections in Part 1 stand out. Subsection (a) describes one of the functions of the corporation being to “provide independent and impartial broadcasting services of information, education and entertainment, in English and Swahili and in such other languages as the Corporation may decide” while subsection (f) states that KBC shall “conduct the broadcasting services with impartial attention to the interests and susceptibilities of the different communities in Kenya.” There is no statement of broadcasting standards that the corporation will follow beyond these two subsections. The closest the statute comes to spelling out broadcasting standards is in subsection (g) which asserts that the corporation shall “ensure the observation of standards of broadcasting and commercial advertising.” Here, what constitutes standard(s) is unclear.

Despite absence of clear statements, KBC can be examined based on general features of PSBs worldwide. These include (1) the general geographical availability; (2) the concern for national identity and culture; (3) the independence from both the state and commercial interests; (4) impartiality of programs; (5) range and variety of programs; and (6) substantial financing by a general charge on users (Barendt, 1995; Mendel, 2000). Kenya is among many African countries that have struggled to implement the model (Banda, 2006) making PSB “a distant ideal rather than a working reality” (Raboy, 1996:78). Before media liberalization, KBC dominated the market through the monopoly it enjoyed protected by a powerful state. The corporation also got through the first years of liberalization until the change in government in 2002 without altering its core
broadcasting approach. The year 2003 can be referred as an important turning point in Kenya politics as the end of 39 years of KANU reign signaled some major change in the political arena. While the advent of multiparty politics resulted in some changes, the successive KANU governments made practical changes in the government structure hard to implement. In broadcasting, the new NARC government for instance tried to implement reforms and even hired a KBC head from the private media. While KBC has not succeeded in shaking off government interference in its operations and management, the current regime is starkly different from the pre-2003 era.

As a PSB, KBC has always had a national reach making radio available to majority of the Kenyan population. To a larger extent, the station promoted a unified national identity and culture especially during the fragile first years of Kenyan independence. However, the station has also been dominated by the drive to meet the interest of the ruling party and political elite whom it served resulting in bias in political coverage. KBC’s funding today is a combination of stations’ advertising revenues and state financing through subsidies. In advertising KBC faces stiff competition from other commercial media outlets leading to the weakening of the PSB format in Kenya. Without substantial reform, KBC position as a player in the Kenyan media is at a threat.

Related to the public interest standard, broadcasting principles of competition, localism and diversity have in practice gained root as a result of media liberalization. Like public interest, the KICA Act mentions diversity under the broadcasting regulation and competition which refers to prohibition of anti-competitive behavior in the information and communication industry. Again, the Act does not go beyond mentioning them to define what constitute diversity or anti-competitive behavior. The Act does not
mention localism (or local content). Despite the lack of clear articulation in the Kenyan broadcasting policy, it is important to put these standards in the Kenyan context in order to examine and understand the performance of radio in a liberalized market.

Public interest

Public interest is a guiding principle in communication policy making and central to public service broadcasting. Napoli (2003) discusses three levels of public interest standard, the conceptual, the operational and the application level. The conceptual level relates to ways that an institution that is charged with serving the public interest makes its public interest determination. There are three main conceptualization of public interest. The majoritarian view, also called the “preponderance” approach defines public interest as the sum total of individual interests such that majority rule determines the policy options (MaCquail, 1992; Napoli, 2003). The procedural conceptualization defines public interest in terms of the process used to reach decisions. Public interest is fulfilled if the decisions reached reflect the input of various interests. Finally the unitary conceptualization defines public interest as a unitary and coherent scheme of values. The operational level addresses the particular values and principles that should be related with serving the public interest.

Due to the limited articulation of the public interest standard in Kenyan broadcasting, the analysis of the concept is a challenging task. First, the conceptualization of the concept at the three levels is based on the democratic theory and presupposes the existence of a policy making body. Until 1998 when the CCK was established through the KICA Act, there did not exist a communication regulatory and policy body charged
with the determination of public interest. This role was taken by the government and was
devoid of any real participation by interests outside political and ruling elites. The
implied public interest can only be seen from the state perspective. What the state felt
were citizens needs, whether agreed upon or imposed, was what constituted public
interest. KICA Act does not address public service broadcasting and instead leaves it as
defined as the KBC Act of 1989 which does not include public interest. The operational
level of public interest is missing. The KICA Act only mentions principles such as
universal service, diversity and competition but does not relate the standard and
principles to specific industry functions in the information and communication industry.
In radio broadcasting, these principles can only be construed from the industry’s practice.

In the following section, I examine these concepts borrowing from a policy making
perspective in the US and South Africa and how they are being realized in the current
radio market in Kenya.

Competition

The end of the KBC monopoly in Kenyan broadcast media paved the way for a
competitive market. An attempt to capture this in the regulations can be found in KICA
Act where Part VI(c) on “Fair competition and equal treatment”. The Act prohibits any
form of anticompetitive behavior in the information and communication sector.
Subsection 84Q states that

A licensee under this Act shall not engage in activities, which have or are
intended to or likely to have the effect of unfairly preventing, restricting or
distorting competition where such act or omission is done in the course of,
as a result of or in connection with any business activity relating to licensed services.

This is the only articulation of policies and regulatory guidelines that define competition in the Kenyan broadcast industry in the Act. Despite an evident hole, free market practice results in competition which can be discussed from electronic media perspective. In the electronic media context, the benefits of competition can be viewed in economic terms which include improving efficiency, enhancing the quality of production and increasing consumer satisfaction (Napoli, 2003). Studies in electronic media have indicated that there is a direct relationship between increased competition and increased financial and personnel commitments to program production (Lacy & Riffe, 1994; Napoli, 2003).

“Competition has also been seen as promoting more politically or culturally oriented objectives, such as diversity of sources and content, and localism” (Napoli, 2003: 154).

Using the US example, Napoli points that competition as a principle of electronic media has unique conceptual and application challenges. It is difficult to determine what exactly constitutes a sufficiently competitive electronic media market. Electronic media can be divided into geographic markets and product markets. These two definitions are relevant and therefore can be used in the analysis of competition in Kenyan radio. There are various levels of geographic markets. In Kenya, radio stations compete at national, regional and local levels. Competition is influenced by technology, regulations and economic factors. Radio frequencies are only capable of reaching a geographic audience within a specified range. National reach in Kenya requires use of transmitters and repeaters in multiple regions. Reach is also a function of regulation. The range of frequencies that a station has access to is determined by the licensing limitations.
Economic factors also influence radio operations. There has to be a demand for radio broadcast content from the audience. Radio advertisers may need audiences within a specified proximity. The nature of population and their geographic setting has become an important factor in radio competition as will be discussed in the following sections.

Radio competition in Kenya can be viewed from different dimensions. First, there is competition at the three-tier broadcasting, between the public broadcasters, private broadcasters and community stations. At this level, KBC as public broadcasters has lost most of its market to the commercial stations as they have developed their own audience. In 2002, KBC Swahili commanded an audience share of over 70% and KBC English service came second with 57%. With the new FM stations restricted to the urban areas, the commercial station with the highest listenership was Metro FM which had 10% of the listening audience (Steadman Group, 2002). KBC was able to hold this sizable portion because only its two stations could transmit to most parts of the country while the commercial stations had frequencies in restricted areas. In the subsequent years, commercial stations have extended their reach countrywide. The rise of national commercial stations such as Radio Citizen has completely altered the radio landscape. By June 2008, Radio Citizen had the highest reach in the nation with a listenership share of 65% with KBC Swahili second with 40% reach. In the period between December 2007 and June 2008, most radio stations appear to have lost audience share and a few gained.

The table in the following page, reconstructed using Steadman's (2008) report, shows the fluctuations in listenership for selected stations at the national level in the preceding one year. The table shows that with the exception of Radio Citizen and Kass FM, leading radio stations have lost their audience share. These losses are a result of
entry into the market by more radio stations. There are a host of stations including community radio stations that have taken away segments of audiences that leading radio stations attracted. A telling decline can be noted with KBC English whose listenership has decreased considerably since 2002.

Table 6:

*Selected radio stations’ reach in 2007 and 2008*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Station</th>
<th>June 2008 % Reach</th>
<th>Dec 2007 % Reach</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radio Citizen</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KBC Swahili</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiss FM</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy FM</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro FM</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inooro FM</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classic FM</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coro FM</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KBC English</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kass FM</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Adopted from Steadman second quarter monitoring report 2008*

A number of vernacular stations now have more listeners than KBC English. Competition is not only limited to stations with different philosophical orientations. There is high competition among vernacular stations as exemplified by the four Kikuyu language stations. They have to reckon with each other in addition to national and urban radio stations. In other language broadcasting such as Luo, the leading radio station, Ramogi FM, has also seen a decrease in listenership. Broadcasting from Nairobi and relaying its
signals to Nyanza region, Ramogi FM is now facing competition from stations that broadcast from the region.

While swings in the number of people listening to one station suggest one aspect of competition, there are other important facets such as the different viewpoints represented by radio stations. Different radio stations offer the listeners varied points of view in their broadcasting. A contrast can be made between the KBC stations and private stations in political issues coverage. Due to the connection with the state, KBC coverage is usually pro-government and not likely to be critical. Private stations on the other hand are able to take a more critical position because they do not enjoy such close ties. This does not mean that all private stations are objective in covering the government but the probability of bias is low because a variety of points of view are likely to emerge.

Competition in the Kenyan radio industry has at the same time led the broadcasters to move away from the traditional economic model of targeting listeners who are viewed to have superior economic power. The media market has extended from a small urban population with stable employment to include the rural low income population. The vernacular stations are adept at this by bundling listeners from different social economic statuses. These stations have changed their view of poor rural audiences as listeners from a forgotten locale into one of the most sought after segments due to their sheer numbers and consumption of vital products such mobile telephones services. If the current data is anything to go by, none of the radio stations are assured of their position in the coming years. This can only be a positive outcome for listeners.
Diversity

Diversity is a fundamental principle underlying evaluations of the performance of mass media systems and objectives of policy making. It is an important measure of the quality of the offering that is available to the audience (Levin, 1971; Napoli, 2003). Diversity is closely related to the doctrines of economic liberalism and political pluralism. Its appeal can be made on neglected minorities and of consumer choice, or against monopoly and other restrictions (McQuail, 1992:142). Hoffman-Rien (1987, quoted in McQuail, 1992), identifies four dimensions of diversity. These dimensions can be used in examining the Kenyan radio today. The format and issues dimension refers to the difference between media functions such as provision of entertainment, information and education. The content dimension relates to opinion and topics of information and news. The persons and groups dimension relates to both access and representation while the geographic dimension has to do with coverage and relevance. The current Kenyan media system provides different media formats as identified in chapter five. The three formats identified – traditional, vernacular and urban format – that emphasize different proportions of information, education and entertainment avail a variety of choices to the radio listeners in Kieni West and extend to a majority of listeners in the country. Kenyan radio stations have also broadened the range of content. There are different opinions and perspectives that vary with radio stations, different topics of information as well as news. In Kieni West, different groups are catered for by different radio stations. The difference in listening habits between the younger population and the older population exemplifies this.
Pluralistic mass media can contribute to diversity through reflection of differences in the society, giving access to different points of views and offering a wide range of choice (McQuail, 1992). This has also been termed “representative diversity” (Jacklin, 1978) which corresponds to the structure of diversity in society. Diversity of access involves the ability of a media system to make available channels through which separate groups and interests can express and keep alive their cultural identity. There is plurality in Kenyan radio today with a variety of languages from which listeners can choose which enhances the different aspects of diversity. The Kenya broadcasting regulations have few guidelines that are geared towards promoting language diversity. South Africa on the other hand has taken steps towards promoting diversity in the media. Its media regulations recognize eleven media languages in television and radio. In addition to English, Afrikaans, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda, and Xitsonga are spelled out as languages of broadcasting. The public broadcaster radio, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), has a mandate to provide broadcasting services in these languages (Broadcasting Act 4, 1999). Despite the lack of policy, Kenyan vernacular radio stations provide a degree of diversity of language but not all communities are represented. The establishment of the vernacular stations is also driven by the political economies of the targeted communities leading to some imbalances.

Vernacular stations are promoting cultural identity of listeners through the use of local languages, local materials and cultural education. However, other aspects of diversity on the Kenyan radio such as religious representation can be lost when vernacular stations for example act as de facto Christian stations, leaving the voices of
other religious beliefs out. To a large extent, this is compensated for by other stations such as regional radio stations whose broadcast is also skewed towards their majority audience’s inclinations. Diversity of choice and channels has grown tremendously in the past few years as can be seen from the growth in the number of radio stations from 46 in 2006 to 107 at the end of 2008 (Strategic Research, 2008).

Localism

Localism is one of the central guiding principles in communications policymaking. In the US, the principle of localism has been described as a touchstone value of the Federal Communication Commission (Napoli, 2004). Various arguments institute the raison d'être for localism principle. However, localism is not envisaged as an end in and of itself but rather as a means of achieving broader social objectives (Napoli, 2004). Localism as a principle harbors political and cultural relevance and has factored prominently in the design and operation of social institutions. The role of language in promoting localism on the Kenyan radio relates to the content based definitions of the principle. Importantly, local orientation to the design and functioning of social institutions can serve a cultural function. Localism in radio is crucial in the preservation of distinctive cultural values and traditions within particular communities (Napoli, 2004; Stavisky, 1994). Like with other principles, the Kenyan media regulations do not specify local content requirements for broadcasters. An example of local content regulations can be found in the South African broadcasting requirements that are enforced by Independent Communication Commission of South Africa (ICASA). ICASA has set different levels of local content on radio. Public and community radio stations are required to include 40% local content and 25% for commercial stations (ICASA, 2006b).
The Independent Broadcasting Act of 1993 (IBA) defines local music as a musical work that fulfils at least two of four requirements. These requirements are that lyrics (if any) are written by a South African Citizen, the music is written by a South African citizen, the music and lyrics are principally performed by musicians who are South African citizens, and if it is a live performance, the music must be recorded in South Africa or be broadcast live in South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 1993).

Media have powerful influence on culture and values in an environment which supports the rationale for local content. This is important in African settings such as Kenya where local culture has been threatened by infiltration of foreign cultures especially from the West propagated through imported materials such as music, television programs and film. To a large extent, vernacular radio stations which use local language are helping to tip the balance between local and foreign content on radio. Through the use of local languages such as Kikuyu, there is content originating from different parts of the country that end up in the day-to-day programming. In the first years of media liberalization, content in the Kenyan broadcast media was predominantly foreign fuelled by the English FM stations (Steadman, 2002). Today, the increase in the number of radio outlets has rendered irrelevant the argument that was constantly raised in the past that the local content is not easily available and what is available is of poor quality and hence cannot support the broadcasting business. During the period of urban radio stations’ domination, broadcasters questioned the ability of locally produced materials such as music to maintain audience interest in their programming. With calls from local artists, producers and other activists for the control of foreign materials, proponents, mainly the broadcasters, argued that such measures would lead to loss of audience (Kimani, 2001).
Today, the Kenyan radio industry appears to have found a way to balance itself to the extent that control measures may not be necessary. However, the television industry is still dominated by foreign content.

Another operationalization of the localism principle has to do with the nature of the content product provided by local programmers. Under this operationalization, the localism principle can only be said to be satisfied if the programming addresses the distinctive needs and interests of a local community (Napoli, 2003). There is evidence that the Kenyan radio stations are responding to the needs and interests of the audiences in various ways. Through the use of local languages, vernacular radio stations respond to informational needs of all segments of the population. As the older section of the population in Kieni West reported, the current radio system allows them to access information that they could not access during the state broadcasting era. Radio stations are also responding to the local needs as exemplified by various issues that are discussed on the radio. In Kieni West, radio addresses civic issues that are relevant to the people of the area. The presence of programs such as those that deal with agriculture, an activity that is directly relevant to audiences, also illustrates the sensitivity to the audience.

Another important dimension of localism can be seen in commercial radio stations’ response to listeners’ problem. The responsiveness exhibited goes beyond the traditional content found on the radio. Only stations that understand their audience are able to perform such a function. This is one of the factors that have blurred the line between vernacular and community broadcasters. Traditionally, it is community radio that constantly responds to listeners’ immediate needs.
The principle of localism can be looked from the political perspective as an important value in the distribution of control in a nation. This is tied to the need to disseminate political power and promote political participation and education among citizenry (Napoli, 2003). Media being a significant political institution, the function of localism as a communication policy can be linked to ideals such as preservation of national interests, forging national unity and achieving the democratic objectives such as enhanced participation (Napoli, 2003). This is partly realized through the role of radio in promoting civic discourse.

The opening up of the airwaves in Kenya happened in the same period as it did in other African countries under very similar conditions, part of the push for democratization process. The liberalization of airwaves in Africa has tended to solve some of the language barriers in communication that were not addressed by the government media. As a result the evolution of radio from state controlled broadcasting in Kenya is similar to what happened in Zambia. With the licensing of private media there, the government media was left to compete in the new industry. One of the results is the shrinking of the audience share of the national broadcaster. The Zambian National Broadcasting Service (ZNBC) radio continues to maintain different services that take into account the language needs of the population (Pitts, 2002). The government radio in Zambia consists of three services, Radio One, a vernacular service broadcasting in the seven dominant local languages; Radio Two, primarily airing English language programming; and Radio Four, FM service primarily for residents along the line of rail towns of Livingstone, Lusaka, N’dola and Kitwe (Pitt, 2002). Different entities that have taken advantage of the liberalized media in other African countries are very similar.
These include private owners, religious organization and communities (through non-
governmental and community based organizations).

Commercial radio and the delivery of information and education content in Kieni West

Listeners in Kieni West use radio for their information and education content.
They listen to news and current affairs programs to stay abreast with what is happening
around them. Radio is an important source of information in Africa, both in the rural and
urban settings. Pitt (2002) in his research in Zambia found that people got most of their
news from the radio. In addition, they thought that radio is the fairest source of news,
with television coming second and newspaper third. The study of Kieni West confirms
that in the rural areas no other media form can be accessed as easily as radio and
therefore it is the single most important source of information. In Kenya, the privatization
of radio in Kenya has transformed news delivery. There are more news programs
available for listeners on different radio stations that also offer diverse points of view
compared to the government controlled broadcasting era. The situation in Kenya is
different from Pitts’ (2002) conclusion on Zambia that “the presence of private radio does
not guarantee a multiplicity of news voices” (pp. 157) where private stations tended to
depend on government news sources. The private radio stations in Kenya do not rely on
government news sources but have instead built their own networks of reporting.
Although the Kenyan government had built its own network through the Kenya News
Agency, the history of lack of objectivity and proclivity towards political issues has over
time made the agency an unreliable source. The new radio news gathering networks at
times penetrate deep into the population and hard to reach areas. News reporters can be

241
found in the rural areas as illustrated by vernacular stations such as Coro FM that have reporters in Kieni West. This has resulted in more inclusive news with a local angle.

The level of competition between stations has led to higher standards in news reporting. Radio stations in Kenya show a promise of progressive and objective political reporting. Private stations operate independent of the government and are therefore able to stay clear of state’s interference. However, vernacular stations are still handicapped by ethnic loyalty where they have to appear closer to their main target audience. To some extent there are aspects of bias by presenting the favorable side. Stations may also be indifferent by choosing to ignore controversial issues that may be received negatively by their target audiences for fear of backlash. Politically, the private Kikuyu vernacular stations are more inclined to broadcast content favorable to the community’s political leanings.

The content listened to by Kieni West audience shows how broadcasting in a liberalized media environment has changed the role of radio in development. One of the goals of the state controlled broadcasting was to foster education and development of the nation through the use of mass media. To date, the state controlled KBC stations continue to pursue this goal through information and education programming. Many of the KBC programs continue to use the development communication approach, the practice of systematically applying the processes, strategies and principles of communication to bring about positive social change (Melkote & Steeves, 2001). Theoretically, liberalization of the airwaves and the associated increase in the number of radio stations would be expected to have a number of implications including improved role of media for social change. First, the increase of the number of media outlets through multiple
stations broadcasting in a variety of languages offers more platforms through which to provide the necessary information and education content. This content can be easily targeted to suit the needs of a specific population. Secondly, the entry of private and community stations in Kenya takes away some of the limitations such as limited availability of air time experienced before with only two main radio stations. In the restricted market, the cost of airing programs was high and so was the cost of creating them due to limited infrastructure. I had first-hand experience in this when I was working with Population Communication International where we produced an entertainment-education soap drama *Ushikwapo Shikamana*. The cost of the airtime and the cost of production were the two largest items of the budget. With liberalization and the attendant competition, the cost of buying air time from the stations and producing programs would be expected to be lower. Thirdly, with over 100 radio stations available, one would expect more information on critical topics such as health, education, economic development, among others. Findings from Kieni West point to different aspects of the relationship between increased number of radio stations and social change related programming.

Media liberalization has led to proliferation of radio stations as evidenced by a total of 107 radio station at the close of 2008 (Strategic Media Monitoring, 2008). Kieni West audiences as we have seen have at least twelve stations to choose from at any given moment. The stations have varied types of content including information and education. The most common information and educational content sought from the Kikuyu stations is on health and agriculture which is readily available on the radio stations. The health and agricultural information that is available to the listeners today differs from what
listeners accessed 15 years ago. In the past, health and agricultural programs that were carefully and consciously designed and transmitted through the national broadcasters. They were usually targeted towards a wide population in the whole country. Listeners in Kieni West today listen to agricultural program that are narrowly targeted. At most, these programs are targeted to the Central Kenya population. The agricultural content is directly relevant to the listeners. With more radio outlets, there is more content available. The education and information content on private stations that is available is however being produced differently as we will see later in this section.

The entry of multiple players into radio broadcasting has addressed the limitations that existed with fewer stations. There are more outlets through which those willing to put information out there can use. However, there is little evidence to show that organizations such as NGOs that use media platforms to transmit informational programs have reaped the benefits of competition. On the contrary, the competition has increased the pressure for media companies to generate revenue. Private media stations are therefore not easily accessible because of the cost of the air time. For programs that are targeted to a wider population, a segmented market presents an added challenge. For instance, during the single broadcaster era, a program on KBC Swahili station for a certain amount of money was likely to be heard in every corner of the country. The station gave a wider reach in terms of geographic location as well as actual listeners. With multiple stations broadcasting in the country today, putting a program on a national platform such as KBC or Radio Citizen only means that the station can potentially reach audiences across the nation, but practically very few people are going to listen. Most people in Central Kenya will probably be listening to Kikuyu vernacular stations while
people from Coastal Kenya will be listening to one of their regional stations. To be able to reach a wider audience, one has to make the program available on multiple stations. Ultimately, this has not cut the cost of transmitting the programs but instead requires more investment to put a single program on air today compared to fifteen years ago. It has therefore become more challenging to organizations working in fields such as health communication to have programs on HIV/AIDS, for example. As a result, fewer programs of this type are broadcast which may explain why very few listeners in Kieni West mentioned HIV/AIDS as part of health education content available on the radio. Instead, issues such as nutrition dominated what they view as health education content.

This brings us to the third point that more stations would lead to more information on important areas such as health, agriculture, and education. From general observation it appears that radio stations are providing some form of information in these areas. However, liberalization has led to a major shift in delivery of message that is tied to social change. The information that is available today is the type that can “sell” to the audience as consumers of goods and services. This is the kind of information that attracts program sponsors and advertisers through its direct ties with products that are on the market. A viable program is one that can generate revenue for the radio station and advertisers. On Kikuyu vernacular stations listened to in Kieni West, nutritional informational programs are prominent. These programs are usually sponsored by companies that are making food products. As the companies encourage people to adapt what they call “healthy behavior”, they are also persuading listeners to buy the products they are making which are available in the local retail outlets. Information on HIV/AIDS has found few sponsors. A possible explanation is that there are few commodities that
can be tied to this which would appeal to rural people. One would however expect to find sponsors such as condom manufacturers who advertise heavily on television and billboards in the major Kenyan cities, but this has not been the case. In agricultural programming, most information sponsorship is likely to sell and attract a variety of business opportunities for agricultural equipment makers, as well as manufacturers of crop chemicals, animal products and fertilizers.

Health and agricultural programs found on the most radio stations are different from agricultural programs that appeared on KBC stations in the past in other ways. On the commercial radio stations, there is less involvement of government and developmental organizations such as the NGOs and international organizations. Previously, these were the bodies that funded the programs. This however does not mean an overall reduction on the number of the programs such bodies sponsor given that they are dealing with over 100 stations as opposed to two in the past. In the current media system, it is easy for a good program to lose prominence regardless of the station they appear on. There also appears to be more programs that are produced in-house by the radio stations mostly in collaboration with the sponsors. Short term sponsorships are more prevalent. For example, as of January 2009, four main health programs on Coro FM were produced in-house. Only one program, which is on health and nutrition, was sponsored by food manufacturers; the rest were run by the station. There are also four main agricultural programs on the same station, three which are produced in-house while one is produced in an outside studio and sponsored by a seed manufacturer. Two of the agricultural programs were not sponsored while one had sponsorship on and off (J. Mumbi, personal communication, January 26, 2009). Secondly, the lack of sponsorship
of educational programs on the commercial stations may lead to less rigorous program preparation. There is less input in terms of research in the design of the programs. A number of health and agricultural programs found on Coro FM for example involve guest experts, an approach that is cost effective. The subjects and themes of these programs are also more likely to be broad than specific. In contrast, many past programs on KBC stations were based on the development communication models such as entertainment education, carefully designed programs with specific goals, pretested, and constantly monitored and evaluated. Education programming by KBC English today follows the same rigors, but programs are produced by experts from the Kenya Institute of Education.

There is a shift in the motivation behind producing social change programs. Most programs today including some on KBC are designed by the radio stations as a response to the target audience’s needs as well as to the stations strategic business considerations. If Kikuyu vernacular stations want to reach their target audiences who are predominantly farmers, they have to include programs which touch listeners’ everyday economic activities. By transmitting such programs, the Kikuyu vernacular stations are improving their position in the radio industry and increasing their chance to maximize profits. At the same time they are responding to the listeners’ immediate needs by providing relevant information on an important subject. This explains why Kikuyu vernacular radio stations have more agricultural oriented programs while Luo vernacular stations have programs on fishing as well as agriculture. There are two factors which have made social change programming viable on the Kenyan private radio. First is the need for radio stations to reach a wide audience. Secondly, private companies are seeking consumers for their goods which lead them to sponsor social change programs as a form of advertising. The
availability of sponsorship solves funding challenges associated with airing these programs which have posed problems for broadcasters and development communication practitioners in the past.

High listenership of agricultural programs in Kieni West supports the view that radio plays a central role facilitating communication in rural Africa. Okwu. Kuku and Aba (2007) in a study that investigated the use of radio as a medium for agricultural information delivery to farmers in Benue State in Nigeria found a high level of listenership in the programs. The study found that 66% of the respondents listened to the agricultural programs aired on Radio Benue and 42% of the listeners indicated that they found the programs relevant to their agricultural informational needs. Majority of their respondents admitted that they gained some new knowledge through listening to the programs. Agricultural information in Africa is important for the rural population because these areas are economically struggling. Agriculture has the potential to increase productivity which would in turn help to improve the living conditions of the rural people. Absence of a functional agricultural information delivery started has been identified as a major constraint to agricultural development in many African countries (Aina, 1989). Aina (1989) points to non-provision of necessary agricultural information as a major factor that hinders agricultural development in Nigeria. Yourdeowei (1995) argues that lack of access to relevant agricultural information by farmers in developing countries is a problem that is found in different sub-sectors of agriculture and different stages of the agricultural production process.

Agriculture is an evolving industry that requires the practitioners to stay up-to-date with various developments. There are multiple channels that have been employed in
the past such as use of extension officers, farmer-to-farmer contact, print media (newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, leaflets, posters), and electronic media (radio, film, television, film strips) to disseminate information (Olowu & Oyedokun, 2000). Oku, Kuku and Aba (2002) however argue that the required amount of information and learning is “so vast that only effective use of the information multiplier, the mass media, can provide information at the rates driven by pressure of time, population, geographical constraints and shortage of trained extension personnel in developing countries” (pp. 14). Their study found agricultural knowledge gains on crop planting, correct application of fertilizers, diseases and pest control and improvement of crop and livestock varieties. These results are similar in areas of disease and pest control and improvement of crop and animal varieties found in Kieni West.

Confronting the “Boss”: Radio and promotion of civic engagement

The role of radio in civic engagement can be viewed within the broader discussion of the effects of broadcasting changes on political development. With economic liberalization in Africa, media scholars have presented differing assessments of the possible outcomes of such process (Andriantsoa et al., 2005). A pessimistic assessment holds that privatized media lack the impetus to advance and address the interests of the general population. Media control by foreign interests concentrate on content that is of less political relevance such as music. Control by local elites also causes another risk where rich and powerful media owners are driven by the desire to advance their own interests rather than those of majority population who are poor and who were formerly served by the public broadcasters under the public mandate (Andriantsoa et al., 2005; Barnett, 1998; McFadden, 1998).
In Kenya, there is an increased role of radio in promoting civic engagement and the overall democratization process, a product of newfound freedom in the broadcast media. As Rozumilowicz (2002) argues, the development of free and independent media is associated with freedom of expression. In democratic theory and practice, freedom of expression is an inherent and universal human right. Rozumilowicz identifies two important functions of an independent media. It is necessary in order to provide a public forum where people can express and deliberate different opinions, beliefs and viewpoints. It is also essential in order to inform, educate and entertain by which people’s lives can be enriched (2002: 13). Thompson (1995) identifies “publicness” or “visibility” in society as one of consequences of increased media access. This entails “the enhancement of transparency in regard to politics, the power structure and ‘society’” (Quoted in Dahlgren, 2005: 318). Through the media, the public is rendered more visible. We are offered ongoing symbolic constructions that portray who we are and how we think.

The notion of mediated public brings into play the analytic tradition of the public sphere which is closely tied to the concerns of democracy (Dahlgren, 2005). Viewed through this lens, radio is a communicative space that permits the circulation of information and ideas. Civic and political processes are among the information and ideas that radio audiences in Kieni West engage in. Radio in Kenya advances this process in two ways. Radio stations produce and air programs in the form of news, commentaries and critiques on different political issues and leadership. Radio stations also grant the public platform to air opinions and participate in political debates. In these ways radio act as information sources and facilitate the communicative link between the citizens and power holders in the Kenyan society. Listeners in Kieni West not only get to know what
is happening and debate associated issues, radio stations also invite various political leaders and public figures to studio to discuss or explain different issues. In addition to listening to such figures, the radio audience gets the opportunity to participate by asking questions and making comments.

In analyzing the role of Kenyan media in the civic and political process, Dahlgren’s (2002) conceptualization of the public sphere as consisting of three constitutive dimensions is useful. These dimensions are structural, representational, and the interactional (pp. 319). Using these dimensions, this section analyzes the extent to which radio in Kenya has played the role of a public sphere during two broad periods of radio broadcasting. These periods are the state-controlled broadcasting era (1963-1990) and the post 1990s liberalized era. The structural dimension relates to formal institutional features of the public sphere which include media organizations, policies and issues of their financing and the legal frameworks defining the freedoms and constraints of communication. The legal frameworks also relate to issues of ownership, control, procedures of licensing, and rules governing access.

Beyond the organization of the media themselves, however, the structural dimensions also analytically encompass the society’s political institutions, which serve as a sort of “political ecology” for the media and set boundaries for the nature of information and forms of expression that may circulate. At this level, the public sphere entwinement with society’s overall political situation comes into view. A society in which democratic tendencies are weak is not going to give rise to a healthy institutional structure in the public sphere. (Dahlgren, 2000:319)
In analyzing the structural dimension, the state-controlled broadcasting era in Kenya constituted a restricted public sphere where the flow of information was controlled by the government machinery through strict regulations of ownership and limited access. This era was characterized by absence of democratic practice. Although the government held elections every five years, the outcomes of such elections were always a foregone conclusion (Ahluwalia, 1997; Atieno-Odhiambo, 2002; Steeves, 1997). With the advent of liberalization and democratic reforms, the legal framework procedures of licensing and ownership were altered making it possible for private entities to own media outlets. Broadcasting licenses are no longer the preserve of the government and a few well-connected individuals as was the case before 1990 and the following few years of multiparty politics. As a result, the radio industry in Kenya today has diverse ownership that includes the state, organizations such as private and faith-based, individuals and community groups.

The representation dimension refers to the output of the media in form and content. The representation dimension includes issues of media output such as fairness, accuracy and pluralism of views. Dahlgren (2002) argues that modern societies find themselves in a historical situation where social relations are dependent on various forms of media. The use of and interaction with media constitutes a great part of most people’s everyday life. Social life and institutional activity accommodate themselves to the general requirements of media. Thus, media has become the language of the public culture and “the grammar of this language affects the way we experience and think about the world and about ourselves” (p. 320). The evolution of radio in Kenya from “a tool for repression” (Odhiambo, 2002) to “common man’s radio” (W. Mburu, personal
communication, August 8, 2008) characterizes a changing public sphere. Radio output from the Kenyan radio exists in various forms expressed in different languages of broadcasting and diverse formats of programs. There are various examples of political programs that are found on Kenyan radio that appeal to listeners in Kieni West. There are open forums such as *Bunge la Mwananchi* (The People’s Parliament), an exchange between citizens and *Yaliyotokea*, a political and social critique, both aired by Radio Citizen. During the morning segment every weekday, a Kikuyu vernacular station Bahasha FM airs a public accountability program, *Boss*. The confidence in these programs expressed by the audience in Kieni West is derived from perceived fairness, accuracy and diversity of views.

While the current representation in Kenyan radio is far from perfect as characterized by power inequalities between the rich and poor and those who have access to telephones and those who do not have (hence cannot participate in radio discussions for example), it is still a major step from what the country had before. Also, the presence of multiple radio outlets and voices makes it difficult for politicians or news producers to manipulate information because they will be contradicted by other outlets. Plurality of outlets has for instance rendered the KBC stations irrelevant in political competition as exemplified by the debate on constitution referendum debate in 2005 and the 2007 general elections. In 2005, contentions over some provisions of the proposed new Kenyan constitution were taken to a national referendum. Two groupings emerged within the then National Rainbow Coalition (NARC). One faction supported the new constitution (what became known as Banana Team) aligned to President Mwai Kibaki and the second factions argued against the new constitution (Orange Team) led by Raila Odinga. The
KBC stations as well as the leading national station, Radio Citizen, supported the Yes campaign. Despite this, the Yes campaign which also employed other ideological status apparatus was handily beaten. Also, during the 2007 elections, the same alignments on the media were visible with the government winning controversially. This experience shows the diminishing role of KBC whose role during the first two multiparty elections (1992 and 2002) was enormous. This period corresponded with absence of a competitive broadcasting media that could allow for expression of opposing views.

With the emergence of alternatives to KBC, private radio stations have proved that they can play a critical role in the democratic processes such as general elections. Private radio stations in Kenya have been used to communicate timely and accurate electoral results. A similar example can found in Madagascar during the electoral process in 2001. In addition to opposition candidates having access to media through private outlets, the conclusion of the process was contested when the Ministry of Interior issued misleading elections results which showed no outright winner between the incumbent president Didier Ratsiraka and Marc Rovalomanana, the former mayor of Antanananivo. However, the results by an independent church-led consortium showed Rovalomanana had won convincingly. Without the stranglehold of the media that the government enjoyed before, an uprising over the contested results could not be silenced (Andriantsoa et al., 2005).

The interaction dimension consists of two facets. The first one involves citizens’ encounters with the media. This is the communicative processes of making sense of and interpreting the output. The second facet is the interaction among the citizens themselves. Dahlgren follows Dewey (1954) and Habermas (1989) in the
conceptualization of “a public” where it is more than media audience. The public here exists as a discursive interactional processes; atomized individuals consuming media in their homes do not comprise a public in as far as they do not engage with each other. Only an informed citizenry can actively engage with political output on the media. The state-controlled broadcasting provided very few encounters with the media because they offered a single dimension and a biased view friendly to the ruling party and government of the day. For the larger part, there is also little suggestion of critical engagement with political output (Odhiambo, 2002, Wanyande, 1995; 1996). Instead, there was a large section of citizens who sang the ruling party slogans even when the government left a lot to be desired in its leadership. The rural audience in Kieni West shows a high level of engagement with political content and close scrutiny of public figures, elected leaders and the government as a whole. Through radio forums such as Bunge la Mwananchi listeners engage in deliberation and discussion with each other. Such forums allow for political participation through vibrant debate during times such as competitive general elections, a practice that is crucial for democratic leadership (Schumpeter, 1987).

The concept of civic culture does not presume shared interests among its citizens. Rather, it assumes that there are many ways in which citizenship and democracy can be practiced. The concept however suggests the need to have minimal shared commitments to the vision and procedures of democracy, which in turn entails a capacity to see beyond the immediate interests of one’s own group and its concerns. Successful use of radio for civic engagement is good for Kenya’s democratic growth. This also allows audiences to develop as citizens. The development of democracy depends on a fruitful interplay between the civic culture of everyday life and the formal political system. The two
processes are linked by the public sphere (Dahlgren, 2002: 324). With a functioning public sphere, the physical space is not the condition for communal engagement. Citizens can show support for a movement or express discontent with their government from their homes (Winocur, 2005). From the domestic sphere, the individual is able to bridge the distance with the world. For a communicative space to function well, citizens need a way to connect with each other. Lack of an avenue to connect can be a barrier to civic participation. This is the case in many parts of Africa and the developing world in general, more so in the rural areas (Wanyande, 1996). In Kenya, the increased availability of cell phones is slowly enabling rural citizens to participate. Through telephone calls or sending text messages their voice is heard as illustrated by radio listeners from Kieni West.

There is no doubt that radio has provided audiences with an important avenue for political participation. But while we acknowledge these positive steps, it is also true that the medium has more ground to cover in promoting the democratization process in Kenya. There has to be a media structure that is free from interested parties’ interference. These include government, business, or dominant social groups in order to maintain and support competitive and participative elements that define the concept of democracy and the related process of democratization. Media democratization is not yet fully realized. Although the government has loosened its grip, it still controls the state-broadcaster KBC. There is also visible political alignment in the private stations. As Dahlgren (2005) argues, free and independent media are not ends in themselves. They are good to the extent to which they support other and more intrinsic goals of the society. These goals include democracy, a particular economic structure, wider cultural understanding, and
human development of a nation. Free and independent media should reinforce these greater societal objectives and areas. Processes of civic engagements are in their nascent stages in places like Kieni West and Kenya in general. This situation shows us the relationship between media, public sphere and democracy that is starting to develop.

Radio consumption process and space

Radio listening in Kieni West is not experienced as a single daily activity but is connected to other daily activities. Domenget (2003) describes this as a part of “bundle” of activities. According to Domenget, “bundling” refers to the fact that the activities (such as listening to the radio and carrying out some other domestic activity) are so interlinked that it would be wrong to attempt to separate them (p. 50). This is a real integration, merging of two practices leading to the creating of a “new, specific practice which cannot be reduced to constituent parts” (2003: 50). Domenget’s study of radio listening habits of retired people identifies bundling at the domestic space. Listeners in Kieni West exhibit bundling both in the domestic space and outside the domestic space. Women bundle when they are at home doing domestic chores. Bundling in work situations happens when people are working on farms, when tending the livestock, guarding at night, and at their business premises. The grazing fields and the farm are mobile spaces where the radio does not stick at one point. In the farm, a radio is usually carried from home and stays close to the listener. It is kept at a distance at which the listener who is working can hear it. In the grazing fields, radio occupies both “fixed” and mobile positions. The listener carries the radio with him in his pocket or shoulder strap. However, the listener moves as his herd moves. This fixed location is illustrated by Mr.
Kariuki, reported in chapter four saying that his radio never leaves his pocket. In the grazing field context, it is hard to separate Mr. Kariuki as a herdsman from his radio.

Mobile radio consumption in Kieni West is a predominantly male habit. It represents one aspect of gendered radio listening. The gendered listening observed here is related to the division of labor between the male and the female members of the society. Usually, it is men who take animals to the grazing fields and work as a guards, two occupations where radio is popular. However both men and women work on the farms, but women are not likely to carry a radio to the farms. Listening habits in Kieni West do not indicate significant differences in the desire to listen. The time spent listening favored men due to access. This reflects the gender power relations between among the Kieni West population. Since men are the head of the household and usually claim ownership of family property such as the radio sets, they have the freedom, for instance, to take the device away from the house. In a case where women take a device away from home, she will have some explaining to do if a man cannot access it. However, the power relations in many households is negated by the presence of multiple as well as preference of small pocket radios for mobile listening while bigger sets are kept at home. The pocket radio is also cheaper and affordable. In this case prevalence of mobile listening in Kieni West among the male is based on the population’s socialization that it is a male behavior.

The mobile nature of radio in settings such as Kieni West is one way in which consumption habits in rural settings differ from those in urban settings. Radio listening in the rural areas is not only restricted to the domestic space, while in urban areas, radio listening is mainly in the domestic space. The mobility of radio in Kieni West is similar to that observed by Spitulnik (2000) in Zambia where radio circulated beyond the
domestic space. However, the circulation that Spitulnik observed in Zambia involved a
circulation that is fuelled by the act of sharing among members of the community. In her
study, the radio could be borrowed from the owner usually by relatives. In a day, one
radio could be seen in different locations with different people. Radio in Kieni West is
personal. There are very limited instances of sharing even in the domestic sphere where
most members of the family have one of their own. This difference is also explained by
the difference in accessibility to the set. Without scarcity that was found in rural Zambia,
the need for sharing is diminished.

The mobility of radio in Kieni West does not negate the importance of radio in the
domestic space. Listeners in Kieni West demonstrate the entrenchment of radio listening
in domestic space. It is this domestic space that housewives in Kieni West such as Peris
find “insane” and therefore would go “crazy” if the radio is absent. For listeners like
Peris, the interaction with radio is not necessarily about listening and hearing what is
coming from the announcer or what song is being played. Rather, it is the kind of
presence described by de Carteau.

[The] radio is frequently on as a landscape inside the home, a burning light, a
flame in the hearth, a voice offering a melodic companion to daily work, where
the meaning of the “sung” words do not have to be listened to or understood,
involving sounds from which one raises the tone of voice to suffocate the
neighbor’s noises, to erase untimely message and reestablish, on the contrary, the

In an article “Radio texture: Between the self and others, Tacchi (2002) discusses the
everyday use of sounds and how it acts to create an environment for domestic living.
According to Tacchi, radio sound can be seen to fill “empty” space and time with a familiar routine. In this way, radio sound is a presence in domestic time and space (2002:241). Radio listeners can relate to these sounds in a distracted way as evidenced in the attitude of “listening without listening” or keeping the radio as “background music” and constitutes a cyclic mechanism of withdrawal-connection that characterizes practices in the domestic sphere (Winocur, 2005). Tacchi (2002) argues that radio can add sociability in the lives of listeners in their home. Tacchi uses the concept of silence, the “absence” viewed as “lack of interaction and not necessarily a lack of all noise” (2002:244). Listeners in Tacchi’s study for instance reported that playing music at a very high volume helps to clear whatever might be bothering the listeners mind. Radio listening here becomes therapeutic. Like with Kieni West listeners, some informants in Tacchi’s study left their radio on through the night while sleeping. Other used the radio to distract their feelings of loneliness and from other unhappy thoughts or worries without consciously listening.

*From face-to-face to mediated interactions*

Radio in Kenya has become a forum for interaction between people who share a culture, common interests, and those who need to stay in touch with each other. It’s a place where various social issues are addressed. For these reasons, radio becomes an extension of the everyday’s social exchange. The role of radio as a social platform for the Kieni West audience points to the entrenchment of media in their lives. The first role that came out was radio as a cultural mediator between disconnected generations, a disconnection that is exacerbated by a rapidly changing society. The interplay between the traditional forces on one hand and modernity forces on the other is realized in the
differences between rural and urban way of life. The rural population in Kenya is usually likely to follow emerging cultural trends that are defined by the educated and urban folk. This does not mean that rural people are always willing adherents of the modern ways of life. They also exhibit resistance to the new cultural trends that are usually inconsistent with their way of life. This resistance is however not sustained and represents a dissonance between generations evidenced in Kieni West by divergent points of view of listeners of different age groups. Culture is at the center of this including how it is being transmitted. There are two views of culture in Kieni West, one held by the older generation and another by the younger people. The older people view culture as a rigidly bounded set of values and linguistic or folkloric practices which is the organizing principle and end property of a particular group (Dolby, 1999). On the other hand, the young people’s view of culture is related to the cultural studies formulations of culture not as a unity, entity, or deposit, but as a set of processes involved in the production of images and as a site where identities are elaborated in a the new globalizing context that has overtaken the nation state (Hall, 1991; 1992; Morley & Robins, 1995).

Kieni West audiences recognize the diminishing role of interpersonal communication as a source of cultural education as illustrated by constant mention of fewer interactions between members of the older and younger generations. This lack of interpersonal communication does not mean that there is an absence of social capital because there are as many older people who have the requisite knowledge to pass to the younger generation as there probably was 100 years ago. In the same vein, it would be misleading to assume that the current generation is made of up of disinterested young people who are indifferent to their culture. Rather, society’s dynamics have changed. The
constituents of the social organization such as the family and the community today are different. For example, the concept of home today is different from the traditional serene place where family members retreat after hard day of work, a place where they can have time for each other. Rather, even a rural home is a hybrid place that constitutes different translocated spaces such as school and workplace. The time at home in a Kikuyu family’s home in Kieni West today is spent doing school work (parents more likely to assist their children with homework), a parent doing some of his daily work at home or catching up with domestic work they have not had time to do. Seldom will the family be seated at the fireplace exchanging fairly-tale stories. The need of a home to serve these different functions dominates the traditional role of cultural exchange. The evening time is scarce, split between doing homework and going to bed early because by 6:00am the children will be leaving for school. It is within the new redefined home that radio fits, fulfilling some of the functions of interpersonal communication.

One can also argue that interpersonal communication alone may not be adequate for today’s society members. In Kieni West, what we see are people who are increasingly defining themselves as a part of a larger community. This is what is expressed by the younger people for whom radio listening and participation conveys an extended view of identity. The view of identity itself is problematic as illustrated by a 24-year old Ndugi from Mahiga, who in discussing two separate issues expresses two incongruous positions on identity. In discussing what he views as a changing view of individual’s belonging to a community, Ndugi argues that young people are not just part of the village but rather a part of a larger society that goes beyond an ethnic group, region or even nationality. The current crop of rural youth associates themselves with a community that is larger than
their immediate environment, a process that is partly made possible through a communication medium such as radio. Using this extended relationship Ndugi is denying what can be termed as a narrow view of identity where one is defined by their ethnic affiliation, region, or nationality. He instead embraces a larger community, a position he believes is shared by fellow young people. Yet when commenting on the use of Kikuyu language on radio, Ndugi’s identity is convoluted. He admits that he rarely listen to Kikuyu vernacular stations because they are boring. He decries what he views as “over-presence” of Kikuyu language on the radio. Yet his problem with this over-presence does not have to do with the domination of the Kikuyu language. Rather, he worries that through the overpresence of the Kikuyu language, Kikuyu people are losing their uniqueness. Extended exposure, he argues, has in part led to people from different ethnic backgrounds to become proficient in Kikuyu language thereby diluting the Kikuyu identity. Eventually, members of the Kikuyu community will not have any way that they can discuss their own “internal” issues without intrusion. Ndugi therefore feels the need to have a way that “we can communicate among ourselves, be different and symbolize ourselves”. This contradicts his earlier views of a broader identity that goes beyond the ethnic belonging.

Beyond these two contradicting positions there is a presentation of a dual identity. The first identity is based on age where Ndugi views himself as a youth. His views appear to be constructed from his exposure and also what he perceives as his peers predisposition. Ndugi attended high school in the neighboring country of Uganda for two years. In comparison with his friends from Mahiga he can be considered fairly travelled. However, there are many young people whom I encountered that share similar views
although they may not have traveled outside the area. This position is supported by many instances of interactions I had with youth from Kieni West. The youth’s identification with culture and cultural materials including fashion and music that is beyond local and national points to a global orientation. The second form of identity is ethnic based. After Ndugi initially denied the tribal identity, he comes back to it in the discussion of language. Although he appears to be protective of his ethnic roots from people who have other roots, he does not seem to view the ethnic identity as very important despite the obvious manifestation in his subconscious.

The increase in rural listeners’ participation on different radio platforms indicates the changing nature of interactions in the Kenyan society. Interpersonal communication in rural areas between members of the community has traditionally been defined by face-to-face communication. It is one of the social pillars of the rural communities illustrated by close ties between people beyond the family. Radio consumption and participation suggest such ties may be loosening. Also, increased migration of family members and people who share common identity such as ethnicity makes radio an important way to stay connected. Thus, listeners in Kieni West use radio to reach people who are within their environment and beyond. This is one attribute that face-to-face communication lacks. Media studies have posited that the nature of interactions on mediated platforms such as talk radio provides an interpersonal character.

Talk radio is one of the few public media which allows for spontaneous interaction between two or more people. Any time two people interact, they must perceive and respond to one another in some consistent and appropriate manner. One person’s communication becomes data for another person’s verbal response
which defines a symbol system for the interactants (Avery, Ellis, & Glover, 1978: 5).

Interactive programs amount to defining a social reality which is significant for the communicators. Interactions through phone calls and message exchanges in greeting programs constitute important events for those who communicate (Avery et al, 1978). Some studies have suggested that use of interactive radio can be rooted highly in the personal need for communication (Bierig & Dimmick, 1979; Turrow, 1973). Radio may function as a substitute for face-to-face communication. In the US, the rise of talk radio in the 1960s and 70s was attributed to widespread loneliness in the society and the consequent need of some people for substitute friends such as radio presenters (Bierig & Dimmick, 1979). Talk radio is important as a remedy for loneliness in the lives of groups such as the elderly, the handicapped or housewives confined to their homes by children and housework. Within a megalopolis, Turrow (1973) found that residents call to acquire interpersonal contact which is missing in their daily lives. Tacchi (2002) argues that radio can also be seen to provide a frame, not only for social interactions but also for avoiding, or making up for lack of social interactions. The study of Kieni West differs in some aspects with the studies above given the different contexts. The US studies were conducted in an industrialized urban setting where the level of interpersonal relationships is different compared to a rural Kenyan setting. However, there are parallels in these studies regarding the social role of radio in interpersonal communication. As in the studies above, some listeners in Kieni reported that they used radio for social interactions because they felt lonely. Listeners such as 22-year old Nick were likely to call the radio stations due to loneliness when they were alone at home. The interactions with relatives
through the greeting programs mentioned in chapter four are another way through which face-to-face communication can be substituted.

There however appears to be another motivating factor for personalized interactions through radio. This factor would explain why listeners like Nyambura, quoted in chapter four would leave messages for her sister early in the morning given the fact that she has the choice of communicating with her sister through the phone. She may as well call her sister directly instead of going through a mediator (the radio presenter) or send her sister a text message. But she does not do so because radio interaction, in addition to substituting face-to-face communication, is a social sphere in itself with completely different aura. The radio social environment, unlike one created by telephone interaction, is an inhabited space. The presenters and other listeners populate this space as opposed to a phone conversation which involves only two people.

Audience participation on radio among Kieni West audience also indicates that presenters play some role in influencing the interaction. Previous studies have shown that the extent to which the listeners interact with each other is influenced by the radio presenters. Listeners in Avery et al. (1978) study reported calling hosts that are not likely to cut them off or treat them with disrespect. Their study concluded that talk radio is not just an outlet where people air their opinions. It is a medium for interpersonal communication. Thus, radio callers are likely to be attracted to a presenter who is perceived to be agreeable, positive reinforcing and less dogmatic because they produce a communication which is conducive to relationship development (Avery et al., 1978). Kieni West listeners support Avery et al. findings through closeness expressed with presenters who were perceived as friendly. On the other hand, they complained about
presenters who were snobbish and therefore would not call these stations. Kieni West listeners are more likely to call the vernacular radio stations than the English FM stations. However, the higher instances of participation reported for station like Metro FM is consistent with the stations commitment to reaching ordinary people. On the other hand, English medium stations such as Kiss FM are popular with the younger people, but very few presenters are viewed as approachable. Listeners for instance said they would never call during one woman presenter’s program because they thought she was rude and demeaning to listeners.

There are also inherent disparities between presenters of different radio stations that the Kieni West audience listens to. These disparities may affect listeners’ interaction with the station. The Kikuyu vernacular radio presenters are people that rural listeners can easily identify with. Based on their presentation styles, they are just like individuals whom listeners interact with physically in everyday life. This is also how Zulu Thiong’o, the head of Inooro FM, defined his presenters. They are common people who seem as unsophisticated as their audiences. Urban presenters on the other hand appear sophisticated to the rural folk. Most of these presenters have either grown up in rural areas or have acclimatized there. Even when they have not, they understand the rural life. The presenters on the urban FM are mainly urban in upbringing or have a predilection for urban way of life. An article that appeared in Kenya's *Daily Nation* newspaper on the expensive vehicles that a certain class of Nairobians drives gives a glimpse of how some urban presenters view themselves.

Radio presenter Maina Kageni is a familiar figure on Uhuru Highway in his royal black Hummer H3 which he will top by buying a Range Rover Sport. “I feel like
my behind is scraping the tarmac whenever I do normal cars,” he once said on radio. *(You are what you drive*, Daily Nation, January 29, 2009).

Maina is a presenter on Classic FM radio station which, despite its urban orientation, attracts a sizable listenership outside urban settings. Unlike their colleagues in public, vernacular and regional stations, some urban stations' presenters are very well paid and therefore can afford an expensive lifestyle. Even though comments about “scraping the tarmac whenever I do normal cars” were definitely made with an intention of humor, listeners in rural settings are likely to find them arrogant. Expensive lifestyles are commonplace topics on the urban station but rare on vernacular stations. Rural listeners in particular can hardly relate to issues of motoring, let alone luxury cars. For the majority of listeners in Kieni West, any car is a luxury.

Kieni West listeners’ participation on Kenyan radio is also influenced by language used on the station. Listeners’ ability to express themselves during their participation and to understand each other makes them feel a part of the community. The use of Kikuyu language on the vernacular stations makes communication easier for listeners in Kieni West. On the other hand, the English stations, in many cases, require the listeners to speak in a language that they are not very comfortable using. The effect of language is also clear in the inconsistency between the young people’s radio language preferences and participation. Many young people interviewed in Kieni West expressed disinterest in listening to radio in Kikuyu and instead preferred English language broadcasts. However, they do not participate in the English radio programs that they widely listen to through call-ins because they are not proficient enough in the language used. They participate in content such as radio discussions as passive observers. John
Githinji’s observation of this behavior mentioned earlier, the young people’s compensatory consumption that somehow connects them with the urban lifestyle they yearn for, shows the quandary presented by multiple radio choices to a rural youth.

“Going back to the roots”: Media, language, and culture

The radio industry in Kenya today evidences changes that have occurred in the country altering the traditional positions of different languages. The use of local languages on radio has increased thus challenging the hegemonic position of the English and Swahili languages in the process. While the majority of radio stations broadcast in Swahili or English, these languages are no longer in the same dominant position they occupied in the media. Changes relating to language are not unique to the Kenyan broadcasting system alone but have been experienced in many African countries that are inhabited by heterogeneous populations. The presence of vernacular languages on the radio stations gives people a chance to interact on the radio with a language of their own. Acquisition of the national language is no longer a precondition for interaction with radio.

Broadcasting language changes in Kenya are a result of market forces rather than a policy outcome. South Africa is a good example of an African country that addressed the language of the media in its broadcast policy as discussed in Barnett (2000). Kenya shares linguistic similarities with South Africa. Both societies are characterized by a high degree of linguistic complexity with multiplicity of languages spoken and with the geographical differentiation of these languages. Multilingualism is a common feature with a large proportion of the population capable of communication in at least three languages. This necessitates the need for a lingua franca and both countries have
attempted to use English for this purpose. In South Africa, Zulu, Xhosa, and Afrikaans are the most widely spoken languages in numerical terms as well as regional dispersion. As in Kenya since independence, the English language was identified as the one that can serve as a lingua franca in the post-apartheid South Africa. The potential of English for this role is however hampered by relatively low levels of understanding of the language among the South African population. Forty five years later since Kenya’s achieving independence and institutionalization of English as a lingua franca, the experiment has not been successful. While the language has been promoted at the policy front, its practical application has not met the needs of most people as the rural population in Kenya illustrates. In recognition of centrality of language in South Africa, the provision of the constitution identifies eleven official languages, nine of which are local African languages. The South African constitution defines the use of a language of choice as a fundamental right that cannot be abrogated by the state. At the same time, the South African constitution defines various steps to be taken by the state to protect the language and to establish conditions for the exercise of individual language rights. These are the kind of steps that Kenya has lacked all along, steps that could possibly promote language parity in the country.

To better understand the varying positions of different languages, we can borrow the discussion of what has been described as “symbolic” and “pragmatic” powers of language. Symbolic power of a language has to do with the status and the esteem associated with it, while the pragmatic power is determined by who speaks what language, to whom and for which purposes (Barnnet, 2000; De Kadt, 1991; 1996). Webb (1996) in examining language in South Africa argues that the social power associated
with English in both senses is likely to grow in the future which would potentially undermine the political commitments to linguistics diversity of the public sphere. Webb’s assertions are true today but the rise of English language power, one can argue, has been as a result of the weakening of the Afrikaans language. English is also well suited and has been applied as the lingua franca in South Africa, but the local languages such as Zulu and Xhosa remains very important. According to Siphokazi Magadla, English in South Africa has become important in public discourse between people from different linguistic backgrounds. But local languages are also important. Siphokazi argues that for any young person who is interested in a political office in South Africa today, for instance, a good grasp of their local language is a must, otherwise no one will take them seriously (S. Magadla, personal conversation, January, 18, 2009). In Kenya though, English has retained the symbolic power while Swahili has the pragmatic power because it is the language that is understood by almost every section of the population.

Laitin (1992) provides a different explanation of the position of English which is based on the interrelationship between micro-forces influencing everyday language use in the national and international sphere. This interrelationship plays a role in encouraging the rationalization of language use in African states promoting a pattern where individuals have repertoires of multiple languages, including a language of wide communication for official and international purposes, practically a European language, a standardized indigenous language lingua franca and a regional vernacular. This is the case with the language situation in Kenya. According to Barnett (2000), the formal language policies are not necessarily the most influential factors in determining changing language practices. The influence of non state agencies, such as private corporations and
mass media are critical in shaping the development of language use in multilingual societies. In Kenya, the single most recent important factor in changing language practices has been not as a result of formal language policies but of the private media institutions. However, this does not discount the role of official policies because they act as either an enabler or barrier to language promotion. The role of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) in translating the broad constitutional principles on language into practical measures (Barnett, 2000) shows how government policies can be incorporated in broadcasting. The SABC language policy released in 2004, which was in line with its own research on language preference, had an equitable allocation of broadcasting time based on the proportion of home-language users of the entire population, irrespective of actual access to radio and television.

The high level of language multiplicity in Kenya raises the question of practicality of having all the languages addressed in a broadcasting system. A monopolistic PSB system was ill equipped to address even a section of the more than 42 languages spoken in Kenya. Free market broadcasting on the other hand has adopted various strategies including focusing on shared languages where a high degree of intelligibility exists. For the sake of broadcasting, multiple languages are collapsed into a single cognate entity through the use of standard dialects as illustrated by Luhya and Kalenjin vernacular broadcasting. This approach is capable of generating large audiences and therefore is efficient.

Radio consumption in Kieni West through the African local language, Kikuyu, illustrates different dimensions of the interplay between mediated communication, language, and culture. Kikuyu is not only the language of broadcasting but also the
language of one’s identity and culture that comes with constraints and opportunities due to the embeddedness in the community’s norms and traditions. The presence of more cultural based content is as a result of proximity of vernacular radio to a specific ethnically defined population. But radio as a mediated interaction is not as strictly bound by the same cultural norms and taboos found in face-to-face communications. However, the content on vernacular radio is more scrutinized leading to sensitivity constraints in listening that Swahili and English stations do not face. To negotiate sensitive content such as taboo and muted topics, the vernacular radio can be seen to function as a counter-public sphere. It challenges long held cultural and language norms, subverting them by bringing them to the public from the private realm where they are traditionally negotiated. It is however important to note that discourses on taboo and muted topics are not necessarily proscribed; rather their use is strictly defined. The language norms define who can use certain words in which place and in presence of certain people. In Kikuyu culture for instance, vulgar language could be freely used during the circumcision ceremonies and employed in songs related to certain dances such as mūthū, sung by athuuri (the elders] and mūmbūro, sung by ihī (the uncircumcised boys). Outside such settings, such language is not socially sanctioned (Kabira, 1995; Kenyatta, 1962; Muriuki, 1974).

Cultural factors are responsible for the difference in the reception of taboo and muted topics compared to the rest of the content found on the vernacular radio. Taboo content and muted topics are not publicly negotiated. The case of late night family talk programs is a good example. Despite their popularity, these programs remain highly contested among the listeners as illustrated by the debate on the appropriateness of such
topics such as sex, marriage, and divorce and parent-child relationship on the radio. The taboo topics were initiated by the stations inviting the listeners to participate in the dialogue using a “cautious” approach as seen through the use of Christian religious figures to present the program. By invoking religion in the programs, the stations succeed in making such topics palatable to most listeners by removing them from Kikuyu social realm and positioning them in the religious realm. In many listeners’ definition, the late night shows are therefore religious programs and therefore appropriate. In an article titled “Love and lunacy in the late-night radio,” that appeared in a leading Kenyan newspaper, The Standard, some listeners who were interviewed said that they would not listen to similar programs if they were presented by secular presenters. Other listeners argued that the religious/secular distinction is not important. Relationship issues that are raised by the listeners can be interpreted in different ways.

In addressing issues that go beyond the social sanctions, content such as late night programs also challenge the status quo. Underlying the debates on the appropriateness of the program as revealed by The Standard article is the real and potent challenge to the nature of the social organizations, issues such as the place of patriarchy in modern day Kenyan society. A question reported by the article from a male listener is illustrative of this challenge. “Sometimes back, my wife and I had nothing to complain about… But that is now in the past and, lately, she is complaining that I am ‘no good’, and even thinks that lack of interest is a sign of infidelity.” In essence, the caller blames the late programs for leading his wife to believe that he lacks potency. In a patriarchal setting, late night programs might constitute a subversive public sphere that threatens men's dominion by empowering women. Also, we should not underestimate the potential of forums such as
late night programs as sources of women's empowerment in the family. If anything, it is women who reported listening to the program first and encouraging their husbands to listen together and participate in discussions that are pertinent to the family.

Connecting with content

The language preference patterns among Kieni West listeners underscore the importance of diverse languages in the media that provide adequate choices to the population. Language is however not just about what people speak and how they communicate with each other; it is also a form of cultural communication. Cultural interactions differentiate communication from mere exchange of information. This is complicated by the fact that communication is coded and patterned differently in different cultures. The varied coding and patterning applies to both the verbal and non-verbal aspects of interaction. Kirch (1973) argues that some of the differences are obvious while others occur beneath the level of awareness. In verbal communication, the unconscious differences may interfere with the communication process because they are difficult to analyze, perceive, teach and learn. Verbal differences come into play in communicative processes such as radio listening. The phonological aspects, for instance, are easily sensed by a native speaker of one language. Radio listeners whose native language is Kikuyu associate the English spoken on the English FM radio with something foreign. To them, the kind of accent found on some of these stations cannot be associated with what is perceived as “local” but with foreign culture such as American or British culture. The dichotomy between “local” and “foreign” may also assume the rural and urban dimension. In this case, the urban is equated to foreign because rural people view their urban colleagues as people who do not maintain aspects of African culture.
The importance of vernacular radio broadcasting is that it is able to capture the cultural value of the local languages. As an entity with an existence of its own, language finds a home in vernacular radio stations when they act as a space where it is stored and shared. In an era when the local African language had been relegated to a second-class status, the rise of vernacular radio has given local languages a new lease on life. From the subjective point of view, vernacular radio uses the local languages such as Kikuyu as an instrument through which information, education and entertainment can be provided to a particular population. Vernacular radio provides a platform through which listeners can learn their local language or encourage others to learn as David Kareithi, a 49-year old teacher from Mahiga argued.

When the white man came, we joined schools and before we knew it, we were learning foreign languages i.e. English and so there are some of our cultural issues that we still don’t know so well. I would say that right now the radio is doing a good job educating the young and old about their culture in our own language. Listening to the radio in the local language is not just about hearing a language that one understands well. Listeners make a connection between the messages received and the extent to which these are consistent with their beliefs. For example, Samuel Kariuki, a 68 year old father felt that he is able to make a connection between his role as a parent and the radio messages. For him, a radio message that is presented in a language that is consistent with his own makes a big difference in parenting.

I am happy with our language because the way our stations broadcast is the same way I teach my children. If I am telling my child that she or he is on the wrong, they understand because the same thing is being said on the
radio using their language. So the child is able to understand that if dad says we should not do this, it is true for it is being reiterated. That is why I like our local language on the radio broadcasting.

Kieni West audiences’ interaction with cultural content illustrates how vernacular radio in Kenya has become an active platform for the promotion of African culture. The vernacular radio in Kenya actively promotes African culture in the same way Mano (2004) found with radio in Zimbabwe. With the easiness that is provided by the local languages, vernacular radio in Kenya provide a discursive space where cultural issues are brought. Among the Kikuyu people, the discursive space existed in the domestic sphere and social sphere. The parents and grandparents would pass some knowledge to the young ones through stories, fairly tales and direct advice (Kabira, 1995; Muriuki, 1974). The young people would pass cultural knowledge to each other during the rite of passage such as the period immediately after circumcision. However, these spaces have slowly disappeared as people in Kieni West revealed. Presently, there appears to be a knowledge gap between different generations. The older people are a product of the traditional informal education as well as formal education. The current generation is a product of pure formal education. What radio has done is to fill the discursive gap left by providing people with constant information about culture. Radio is able to merge both formal and informal systems of education by employing a rich cultural capital that is available. Radio compensates for the absence of face-to-face communication among members of the community (Mano, 2004). As a result, the primacy of a social setting where cultural information is circulated has been diluted because physical presence is not a requisite for the exchange (Meyrowitz, 2000).
Chapter Summary

Media liberalization in Kenya has stimulated a myriad of activities in the radio industry. Beyond the obvious change of the broadcasting system, policy making process and regulation weaknesses in the system have been exposed as clearly illustrated by the relationship between two legislations on broadcasting, the KICA Act and KBC Act. This chapter has discussed how a Kenyan broadcasting system that is dominated by commercial radio continues to fulfill some of the traditional functions of radio in a developing world. The functions of radio that include provision of information and education are however implemented using a different approach from what was experienced with public service broadcasting. The new approach is necessitated by the need to balance between revenue generation and taking care of audiences’ needs and tastes. While the difference in approach has skewed the type of information available to the audience, there are significant parallels with the traditional role of radio in the delivery of agricultural information as literature from other parts of Africa shows.

This chapter has juxtaposed the radio consumption process among Kieni West listeners with some audience studies conducted in other parts of Africa. Kieni West audiences interact with radio in the domestic sphere and beyond, similar to what other ethnographic studies have found in Zambia and Zimbabwe. Despite their unique habits, listeners in Kieni West share characteristics with listeners that have been studied in other parts of the world in their use of radio in the domestic sphere. Here, radio can be personal and used as a landscape to create an environment for domestic living. The study of radio consumption habits in this research goes on to capture the role of technology in a changing social environment. Radio use captures the intersection of interpersonal and
mediated communication. As a mediated platform, radio takes listeners beyond their immediate environment. In Kieni West, radio listening is also closely related to the identity of the listeners. The use of radio for social interactions in Kieni West today bears some similarities to what was happening in the United States when talk radio was popular, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s. In addition to social interaction, this chapter has examined the use of radio for civic purposes where radio functions as a public sphere. Functioning as a public sphere that promotes civic engagement, radio in Kenya is serving an important role in promoting democracy. Radio in a pluralistic setting like Kenya has comes with its own concerns such as the danger of creating divisions between different ethnic groups.

The determination of language of broadcasting can be a function of political processes that are concerned with policymaking as the case of South Africa illustrates. In multilingual environments such as Kenya's and South Africa's, competing languages are accorded different positions based on the language policy or lack thereof. A choice of language for broadcasting is essential in order for radio to reach audiences and serve as an effective communicative tool. That choice extends to the relationship between language and culture. The relevance of vernacular broadcasts is based on the proximity to listener’s culture. Culture determines audience perception of different radio content just like in everyday life interactions. We have also discussed how the use of radio can act as an alternative platform for cultural exchange where face-face interactions are not possible.
CHAPTER EIGHT: BEYOND THE THIRD WAVE OF RADIO IN KENYA

Summary, limitations, and delimitations of the study

This research set out to examine how rural audiences in Kieni West Division, Nyeri District in Central Kenya utilize radio in their everyday life. The study was framed within a changing media environment that has experienced an increase in the number of radio stations, a situation that has created a wide range of choices for the audience. This study has demonstrated that radio remains the most dominant information and communication medium for the people of Kieni West. Factors such as cost, accessibility, and ease of use make radio popular and effective in this region. In addition to these factors, the ability of radio stations to provide relevant and responsive content in the language of listeners has enhanced the popularity of the medium. This study has also captured a number of new functions of radio for Kieni West listeners that go beyond the traditional roles of providing information, education, and entertainment. Rural listeners in Kieni West use radio for companionship, social interactions, and civic engagement.

To answer the three main research questions on (1) the role of radio in listeners’ everyday life; (2) the relationship between audience listening habits, programs format, and content and (3) how audience’s preferences compare between national and local language stations, I conducted an audience ethnography fieldwork in Kieni West. This ethnographic study also included responses from radio broadcasters. Specific methods that included observation, interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis were used. The use of audience ethnography allowed for an examination of radio audience in both domestic and public social contexts. Using observation methods, I participated in varied interactions with both the people and radio content (Mason, 2004). Despite the benefits
that are accorded by audience ethnography, data collection for this study was constrained by limited time and insufficient research funds to carry an extended fieldwork. I was only able to spend eight weeks in Kieni West. My interactions with the subjects were limited. I would have liked to spend more time because it takes some time to build relationships in a new research location such as Kieni West, a place that I visited for the first time during the fieldwork. However, some of the challenges that I encountered in doing audience ethnography have been noted in the audience ethnography research. Murphy and Kraidy (2003) while commenting on the evolution of the field of international communication have noted that “For much of the history of media reception studies, qualitative media audience researchers composed ethnographies that were often theoretically sophisticated, but empirically sparse” (p. 305). Murphy and Kraidy (2003) go on to answer the questions why there has been a drift towards what they call “quasi-ethnographic” research and why many studies that clearly lack ethnographic credentials are forged under ethnographic rubric. They identify the “political economy” of ethnographic scholarship as one reason. Long term fieldwork is costly and requires considerable institutional and time resources from the researcher. The demanding nature of fieldwork on media reception is also a fundamental source of the gap between the application of ethnographic techniques and the field experience. It is difficult to “participate” in the fairly “closed” contexts of media consumption such as bedrooms, living rooms or headphones (p. 305). Such challenges may not be solved by extended time in the field. This shows that aspects of media ethnography such as participant observation are different from the traditional ethnography.
There are other limitations in this research related to the population under study. The ethnic diversity of the Kenyan population is illustrated in radio broadcasting by multiple languages employed. However, this study was only able to capture radio consumption among an audience section that predominantly speaks the Kikuyu language. Therefore, the results of this research do not extend to radio consumption in other segments of the population which may have different political economy and social organization. Among Kikuyu speakers, this research addressed a small section of the population. Although the findings point to aspects of rural Kikuyu radio audience, they cannot be generalized for all rural Kikuyu speakers. The rural audience in Kieni West is fairly homogenous but there are other populations that are not which may lead to varying media consumption habits. Owing to the fact that frequencies are allocated to radio stations in different regions, the population’s ethnic composition influences the number of stations that are available. This may lead to differences between the two sets of audiences. For example, Kikuyu listeners living in multi-ethnically populated areas such as Nakuru District receive different stations from Kieni West.

This study also centers on the use of radio by rural audiences and shows that vernacular radio stations are the most popular stations. There are specific dimensions that fit within the Kieni West content such as preference of agricultural programs. However, we cannot tell the extent of popularity of vernacular stations among the general population through this study. There are indications from the Steadman reports that vernacular stations have a fair following in urban areas such as Nairobi. A study that looks at the dimension of local language such as Kikuyu in a cosmopolitan language
competitive environment would be instructive. It would also be useful to identify what kind of functions radio serves in such environments.

These limitations notwithstanding, rural areas in Kenya have some common underlying characteristics regardless of the ethnic inhabitants and composition. For example, in most rural settings in Kenya, there is an extensive use of one local language, underdeveloped infrastructure, reliance on agriculture and other extractive industries. While not generalizable, the findings presented here provide valuable analysis of the patterns of rural audiences’ radio consumption habits that form building blocks for future studies. By making the connection between the audience reception and broadcasting through analysis of the broadcasters’ perspectives, this research has gone beyond a narrow scope of addressing a small population of rural audience and allows us to understand the bigger picture of broadcasting in Kenya. The use of ethnographic approaches has provided tools for a deeper investigation that yielded different kinds of data while focusing on one population.

Beyond the “third wave” of radio in Kenya

This study was initially motivated by what appeared to me as an anomalous place of Kikuyu vernacular radio until 2005. For some years, only Kikuyu and Luo languages were represented in vernacular broadcasting. Part of what fascinated me was the presence of three Kikuyu stations despite competition both among the vernacular stations and from other languages stations in the country. Also, despite the early emergence of a Luo station, it took about six years before a second competitor came in. However, the period between 2006 and 2008 was characterized by high activity in the radio industry with more vernacular stations coming up. These are the activities that typify the liberalized
market which I call “the third wave of radio” that starkly differ from two other waves in the Kenyan broadcasting history.

The first wave of radio encompass the colonial era where radio was used as a tool to dominate the local population. When broadcasts were aimed at the local population, they were targeted towards promoting the colonial government’s ideas. The second wave that started at the nation’s independence in 1963 consists of thirty years of experimentation with government-controlled public radio. In the early years of independence, radio broadcasting was chiefly intended for social and economic development. With the consolidation of one-party rule, radio was eventually turned into one of the strongest political machines. While the medium continued to provide development-oriented content, political content took center stage. A notable characteristic of the first two waves from a scholarly perspective is that we can conveniently follow radio as a medium. There are only two main stations broadcasting in two national languages, the broadcasting hours are few, and everything is centralized through KBC. However, the third wave of radio in Kenya presents a complex media environment with more interactions between the medium and the population. In the current radio system, there are various dimensions of the relationship between broadcasting and politics, culture, language, regionalism and religion. A decade ago, rural people such as those of Kieni West considered their lives simple and uneventful, unlikely to attract the attention of the media. Listening to radio news meant interacting with events happening far away, mainly in the cities. Today, rural people attract as much attention as any other segments of the population in radio broadcasting. Rural areas are likely to make news on many radio stations than before. The rural people are also the point of focus for radio
programmers as they come up with content with this segment of audience in mind and consider the tastes and preference of this segment.

Thus, a few conclusions can be made from this study regarding the functioning of radio in Kenya. In doing so, I will examine the position of broadcasting media today since the advent of liberalization. In July 1995, UNESCO hosted the International Roundtable on Cultural and Educational Functions of Public Service Broadcasting. During the roundtable, a paper titled *Broadcasting liberalization: Implications for educational and cultural functions in Sub-Saharan Africa* was presented by African Council for Communication Education (ACCE). This paper consists of a number of questions that lingered at that time, mainly whether the new media dispensation fronted by commercialism will be able to serve the education and cultural functions (ACCE, 1995). To a large extent, the findings of this research provide data that can be used to draw a report card on the implications of media liberalization in Kenya in the two areas addressed by ACCE paper. Education and cultural issues are central to the rural population. Given the information access inequalities between urban and rural people, this research which centers on rural areas is very instructive.

Under education, the ACCE background paper addresses the questions of informal education, international affairs and political education. As this research has shown, the role of radio in providing informal education to rural audiences has improved with media liberalization. Commercial vernacular radio stations are proving to be adequately suited in this role as they have the advantage of proximity to the communities they serve. This quashes some of the doubts raised regarding the extent to which commercial radio might do this as reflected by the statement below.
The public stations in sub-Saharan Africa have been a reliable medium for public affairs and civic education, although they often reflect mostly the government or official view of current affairs. This traditional of informal education on public affairs may not be continued by new private stations (ACCE, 1995:9).

Commercial stations in Kenya demonstrate that they can perform education roles in addressing social, health and economic production issues. However, commercial radio can still make improvements in these areas. There is a need for more information on critical issues such as HIV/AIDS, inter-ethnic harmony and civic responsibility. Radio broadcasting is a medium that penetrates the society to the lowest level of the communities as vernacular radio stations do in Kieni West. Rural population in Kieni West has shown that the demand for news runs from local, regional and national levels extending to international affairs through multiple stations. Access to international news is possible beyond BBC World Service and Voice of America which were the only places where people could go for such news in the past years. This was evident in Kieni West as listeners easily made references to current news on what is happening in countries all over the world. In addition to the availability of content, there are also different perspectives from multiple outlets.

According to the ACCE paper, “Radio and television are cultural tools, and the recent arrival of private stations has many significant implications, among which are cultural imperialism, cultural pride and political stability” (ACCE, 1995:12). Findings on Kieni West suggest that one of the outcomes of diverse stations is a new balance between local content and foreign content, an important step in containing cultural imperialism. Multiplicity of content enables local material to compete with foreign material. There is
high level of content differentiation. Vernacular radio stations mainly provide local content while urban English stations are internationally oriented. Beyond cultural imperialism, it is also important for listeners to interact with a wide array of materials from all over the world. Local material is not inherently good, neither is foreign material inherently bad. It is important for the audiences to have access to a wide range of content addressing multiple issues given the interconnected nature of the world today. At the same time, the increase in local material cannot be addressed without reference to technological exchange. The improved technological capabilities in Kenya have allowed the local producers to come up with quality material that can compete in the market. Part of the absence of local content and resultant poor quality was exacerbated by lack of production facilities, higher costs of production and limited manpower. However, the improved technological infrastructure evidenced by many production facilities not only make the content available but also ensures that the product meet high standards. Beyond purely local cultural materials, Kenyan local industry is abuzz with hybrid culture such as local hip-hop music, which creatively fuses local and foreign material, creating a product that can satisfy local and global tastes.

ACCE has also called for more traditional elements of African culture to be incorporated into contemporary broadcasting. This research has shown that the rural people in Kieni have a good connection with traditional aspects of life. This partly explains the positive reception of radio cultural content because listeners can readily identify with the material. The increased role of radio in promoting African culture reflects a form of cultural renaissance that has taken off in the country. An example is the Cultural Nights phenomenon which has gained popularity in major urban centers.
Cultural Nights are events held in popular entertainment spots mainly in urban centers featuring a particular community theme. They go under banners such as Kalenjin Night, Kikuyu Night, Luo Night, and others. People dress in traditional attire and are served with traditional food and drinks. The events feature music and dance exclusively from the community. Such events are part of what has been dubbed “going back to the roots”. Vernacular radio stations have been in the forefront in sponsoring the Cultural Nights because they fit within their cultural centered programming. Despite the fact that external trends continue to encroach into the foundations of African culture, the traditional ways are being reinforced and radio is playing an active part.

Closely related to the preservation of culture, Musau (2005) has argued that the dominance by English and Swahili in the media has led to negative attitudes towards African indigenous language. Kieni West listeners’ inclination towards vernacular broadcasting and perception of their local language shows positive signs. Giving the local languages equal exposure on the radio helps in empowering them and makes them visible. This way, the population is able to interact with the language at various levels. However, it is still evident that English is still viewed as a prestigious language. Some young people in Kieni West still harbor negative attitudes towards their mother tongue. Also, without entrenching the local language in the broadcasting law, there is no guarantee that the commercial broadcasting will continue to operate in a way that is friendly to their advancement. It is therefore important to institute concrete policies that will encourage information access in local language in the same vein as national languages. The development of local languages cannot be left to the media alone. As listeners in Kieni West revealed, the education system is one of the most important
language socialization institution. Changes in the education system will have far reaching implications on the languages, outcomes that will eventually trickle down to the media.

With the diminishing role of public broadcaster, the question raised by the UNESCO working paper on the ability of commercial radio stations to meet the challenge of providing political information that is crucial for the promotion and sustenance of democracy is very relevant. So far, there are encouraging signs on the role of radio in democratization process. Commercial radio is a powerful tool for political education. In addition to political education, involvement in civic discussions by the listeners in Kieni West and other parts of the country may also suggest that there has always been a need for participation. What was lacking is the means and platform. A combination of radio and cellular phone technology provides a good system for civic engagement bridging distance and space. The level of civic engagement on commercial radio station disproves the assertion that public radio has been “a reliable medium for public affairs and civic education”. In Kenya, the role of KBC points to the contrary. The content covered on public radio rarely constituted significant public issues and involved following and reporting mundane activities of senior government figures such as the president (Bourgault, 1995). At the same time, the civic education provided by public radio has usually constituted what is “friendly” to the ruling interests. The relationship between public broadcasters and the state has therefore negated their role for political education. Such role can only be realized if the public broadcaster becomes independent of the state. This remains a distant dream in Kenya.

From a researcher standpoint, this research has exposed me to a number of issues that I hope to address in future. I am convinced that the Kenyan media need increased
attention from scholars. The rapid developments in the radio industry need to be matched with equivalent intellectual engagements in order to build a better understanding of the media and their relation with the society. The Kenyan radio industry has remained undefined in areas which are critical both from theoretical and praxis perspectives. One of these areas is in the classification of radio stations. Because different types of radio stations are closely related in the ways that they operate, the existing classifications have failed to capture some of the distinct characteristics of particular stations. In chapter one, I provided a typology that captures the various aspects that underlie different radio stations operations. One problematic area has been the tendency of vernacular radio stations to represent themselves as community radio stations. While this is partly for marketing expediency, this study has shown that there are various functions that vernacular radio fulfills that are traditionally carried out by community radio. However, this does not qualify vernacular radio stations as community radio mainly because such functions are overridden by the profit motive. In this case, it is important to separate what can be viewed as primary and secondary goals of radio stations. Commercial radio stations’ primary objectives are to maximize profits. Serving the community is a secondary objective because they can only be served within a profitable environment. Whereas these two goals have become intertwined, there is no question regarding raison d’être of these stations.

Having a clear classification of radio in Kenya is also important from the policy making and regulation standpoint. The Kenya Information and Communication Act contains one basis of classification of broadcast media. Three-tier broadcasting classification identifies the public, commercial, and community broadcasters. As such,
the provisions of the Act are applied to the extent that different radio stations conveniently fit within this limited classification. This has far-reaching implications as the Act misses out on numerous issues that not only define radio practice in Kenya today but the population as a whole. By failing to acknowledge the difference between vernacular radio and mainstream radio for instance, the Act cannot come up with specific regulations that are relevant to those stations. If broadcasting regulations are to be effective, they must capture the complex nature of the radio industry in Kenya. This will include drawing up clear distinction of broadcasters in Kenya. The gap in policy related to definition is evident in recent literature and reports on the 2007 post-election violence. Radio and vernacular stations in particular have been identified as platforms that were used to fan ethnic tensions through uncontrolled discussions, biased coverage and rumor-mongering (Abdi & Dean, 2008; CIPEV, 2008). It will however be difficult to reign in over vernacular stations within the current regulatory framework because the KICA is absolutely silent on the issue of language of broadcast.

Also emerging from this research, there is a need to explore the future of public broadcasting in Kenya. With the rapidly changing radio terrain characterized by cut-throat competition, the public broadcaster KBC, need to institute some form of changes if it is to remain relevant in the market. While liberalization has led to major broadcasting reforms in the radio industry, lack of the same on the part of KBC raises serious questions on the future of the broadcasters. The KBC Act of 1989 remains the guiding document for the public broadcasters. The most common form of repeals is deletion of some sections that have been rendered extraneous by changes in media environment. In my view, the KBC Act needs a complete overhaul. Internally, KBC need to chart its
future in order to operate effectively and compete adequately. There are a number of public broadcasters in Africa that have instituted changes that KBC can learn from. The Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) responded to media deregulation by expanding its services establishing regional stations (Heath, 2001). The South African Broadcasting Corporation, on the other hand, expanded its public wing while strengthening the private wing to cement its position as the most dominant broadcaster in the country. My future research will be geared towards answering these kinds of questions.

This research shows that the coverage and reception of development related topics such as health, nutrition, and agriculture by rural listeners has shifted in development communication. Radio listeners in Kieni West receive information on development topics through vernacular radio stations that use an approach that is different from the traditional development communication. The traditional approach to development communication centers on the systematic practice of applying the processes, strategies, and principles of communication to bring about positive social change. However, the processes and strategies that are being employed by commercial radio stations do not fall within the strict definition of development communication, but they do have similar outcomes. The agricultural information delivered to farmers in Kieni West has the potential to affect social change in the population. Studies that look at this changing approach to development communication in free market environments are necessary.
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APPENDIX A: LISTENERS’ PANORAMIC QUESTIONS GUIDE

Listeners’ Panoramic Questions Guide

In a household setting

1. How many people live in the household
2. How many house units do you have?
3. Do you have a radio set?
4. How many radio sets do you have in the household?
5. Do you have a television(s)?

Individual or household communication devices

   For radio owners

1. Does the radio have a cassette player?
2. Do you play cassettes on the radio?
3. Does your radio have a CD player?
4. Do you play CD on the radio?

Television and telephone ownership

1. Do you have a TV?
2. Do you watch TV as a together as a family?
3. Do you watch TV with your neighbor(s) in your house?
4. Do you have a mobile phone?
5. Do you have a landline phone?
6. Do you have Telkom wireless phone?
7. Do you share with your neighbors?
Energy Source

1. What is your energy source in the house

2. What energy does your radio set run on?

Radio listening

1. In a typical 5 days of a week period, how many hours do you spend listening to the radio?

2. In a typical weekend, how many hours do you spend listening to the radio?

3. Name the radio stations that you have listened to in the last one week

4. What is your most favorite radio station?

5. Why do you prefer this station?

6. Name your most favorite programs and the stations they appear on

Radio content and stations listened

Where do you usually listen to this type of radio content?

1. News and current affairs

2. Music

3. Informational programs

4. Announcements

5. Death & funeral announcements

6. Local politics

7. International politics

8. Agricultural information

9. Sports

10. Health
11. Religious programs

12. Greetings

13. Drama and comedy

Use of print media

1. How many times did you read a newspaper?

2. How many times did you buy a newspaper?

3. If you read the newspaper but did not buy, where did you obtain the newspaper?

4. What language(s) is the newspaper you read?

5. What kind of information do you look for in a newspaper?

Television viewing

1. How many hours did you watch TV yesterday?

2. Where did you watch the TV?

3. What program type of programs did you watch?

4. What program type do you usually watch on TV?

5. Why do you watch the program(s)?

Audience participation in radio

1. Have you ever written a letter to a radio station(s) If yes, which stations and how many times?

2. Have you ever called a radio station? If yes, which stations and how many times?

3. Have you ever sent an SMS to a radio station(s)? If yes, which stations and how many times?
4. Have you ever participated in radio competitions? *If yes,* name the station(s)

5. Have you ever won a prize in radio competition? *If yes,* name the station(s)

6. Do you know someone who has won a prize in radio competition?
APPENDIX B LISTENERS’ PANORAMIC QUESTIONS GUIDE

Panoramic Questions Kikuyu Translation

Ciũria cia ũthikirĩria wa kameme

Mũciĩ
1. Nĩ andũ aigana maikaraga gũkũ mũciĩ ũyũ?
2. Mũciĩ ũyũ ũrí nyũmba cigana?
3. Nũ mũrí radio?
4. Mũrí radio ciigana mũciĩ ũyũ??

Indo cia ũkinyanũria cia mũciĩ

Ene radio
1. Radio yaku nĩ ũrĩ kaseti?
2. Nũũthakaga mĩkwa ya kaseti radioinĩ?
3. Radio yaku nĩ ũrĩ CD?
4. Nũũthakaga CD radioinĩ?

TV na thimũ
1. Nũ mũrí TV??
2. Hĩndĩ ũria ũkwirorera TV, wiũroragĩra wi wiki kana mwĩ ta bamũri?
3. Nũ mwũroragĩra TV na andũ angĩ a itũra gwaku?
4. Nũurũ thĩmũ ya gũoko?
5. Nũurũ thĩmũ ya nyũmba?
6. Nũurũ thĩmũ ya Telkom wireless?
7. Nũ mũhoyanaga thĩmũ andũ a itũra?
Kĩrĩa tũtũmũra gwakia na guota

1. Gũkũ mūciĩ mũtũmagira kii gwakia tawa na kũrũga?

2. Nayo radio yanyũ itũmagĩra kii?

Úthikĩrĩria wa radio?

1. Thĩnĩ wa thikũ ithano cia wiki rĩ, (Wambere nginya wagatano) úthikagĩrĩria radio mathaa maigana?

2. Mũthensya ya Juma na Kiumia rĩ, tu, úthikagĩrĩria radio mathaa maigana?

3. Gweta ceceni cia radio irũa úthikĩrĩrie wiki Ŭno ihĩtũkite?

4. Nĩ kameme karĩkũ wendete mũno?

5. Nĩ kĩĩ ěgũkenagĩa radio Ŭnĩ Ŭno?

6. Njũra tabarĩra iria wendete mũno na ceceni irũa cĩkoragwo?

Úngĩenda gũthikĩrĩria maũndũ maya, ũhingũragĩra kameme karĩkũ?

1. Maũhoro na maũndũ kuuma kũndũ na kũndũ

2. Nyũmbo

3. Tabarĩra cia ũthomithania?

4. Matangatho na imenyithia

5. Imenyithia cia ikũũ

6. Maũndũ wa ũtetĩ ma gũkũ matũrainĩ na bũrũri

7. Maũndũ wa ũtetĩ ma thĩ cia na ũna

8. Ûhoro wa ũrĩmi

9. Mathako

10. Ûhoro wa ũgĩma wa mwĩrĩ

316
11. Tabarira cia ndini na witiika

12. Ngeithi

13. Mathako wa kamemeini na mathekania

Üthomi wa ngathiti

1. Wiki irahutukire ri, urathomire ngathiti maita maigana?
2. Í kúgúra úragúrire maita maigana?
3. Angíkorwo níurathomire ngathiti na ndunagura rí, warutire kú ngatheti?
4. Ngathiti iría úratoomire irarí ya rúthiomí rúrikú?
5. Ní ûhoro úríku ûthomaga múno ngathítini?

Kwírórera TV

1. Íra úrequired TV mathaa maigana?
2. Úreroire TV kú?
3. Ní tabaríra írikú úrequired
4. Ní tabaríra cia múthemba úrikú wíroragíra múno TV iní?
5. Wíroragíra tabaríra ici níkí?

Athikíríria kùnyitanira úmemerekianí

1. Níûri wandíkíra ceceni ya radio marúà? Angikorwo níûri wandíka, Wandíkrte maita maigana?
2. Níûri wáhúra thime? Ceceni írikí na maita maigana?
3. Níûrí watúma SMS radioíini? Ceceni írikí na maita maigana?
4. Níûrí waingrra macindano ma radio? Ceceni írikú?
5. Níûrí wacinda kínde macindano iní ma radio? Ceceni írikú?
6. He münde ûí wega úrí wacinda kínde macindano inír ma radio?
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW/GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Interview/Group Discussion Guide

1. What is your favorite radio station?

2. When you are alone, which radio station(s) do you usually listen to?

3. Why do you listen to this radio station(s)?

4. What stations do you listen to when you are with your family?

5. Can you explain why?

6. In the family setting (at home), how are decisions made about which radio stations to listen to? Who decides? When are they likely to decide or not?

7. What type of programs do you find in different radio stations?

8. What are the differences and/or similarities from one station to another?

9. What type of content do you like to listen to? Why are you interested in this type of content? Which radio station do you feel gives you the best of this content?

10. Among all the radio stations available, which one that you feel most associated with?

11. What attributes of the radio station(s) make you feel this way?

12. Can you name the particular program(s) that you listen to? Explain what they are about.

13. How would you describe your ideal radio station?

14. We have different languages that are used on the radio. How does language influence your everyday radio listening?

15. How does radio shape you identity as a member of Kikuyu ethnic community?

16. In which circumstances would you prefer a vernacular station to Swahili/English stations?
17. In you view, how does the content of vernacular radio stations compare to that of (a) Swahili radio stations (b) English radio stations

18. Have you changed your radio listening habits in the recent past? What is the relationship between the recent violence we experienced in the country and your (a) radio listening (b) feelings and perception of the place or radio?
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW/GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Interview/Group Discussion Guide Kikuyu Translation

1. Nĩ tabarĩra ěrikũ wendete makĩria?
2. Hĩndĩ ěria wĩ wiki rĩ, nĩ kameme karĩkũ ùthikagĩrĩria?
3. Ùthikagĩrĩria kama gaka nĩkĩ?
4. Nĩ kameme kariku mũthikagĩrĩria rĩrã mũũ hamwe ta bamĩrĩ? Nikĩ?
5. Rĩrĩa mũũ, mũcũĩ̃ rĩ, mũtuaga atia ceceni ěrĩa ikũhĩngũrũrũwɔ? Nũũ ugaga? Nĩ mahinda marĩkũ matũaga?
6. Thĩnĩ wa tũmeme tũrĩa tũrĩ kuo rĩ, nĩ tabarĩra cia mũthemba ūrĩku ikoragwo kuo?
7. Tũmeme tũtũ tũhananaine na tũtĩganĩte atia?
8. Ùthikagĩrĩria tabarĩra cia mũthemba ūrĩkũ? Ùciendeire kĩi? Nĩ kameme karĩke ùiguaga ùthikagĩrĩria maendũ mau ũkaigua ũganĩire?
9. Thĩnĩ wa tũmeme tũother, nĩ karĩkũ ũiguaga ke hakũhi nawe makĩria? Nikĩ ġĩtũmaga ũigue ũguo?
10. Njũra tabarĩra ĭmwe wendete gũthikĩrĩria? Ŭmĩendeire kĩ?
11. Kameme karia gakinyanrũ kũri we kangoŋkoroŋ wana atia?
12. Thiomi iriaϊ itũmagĩrũwo kũmemerekia gũkonainie atĩa uthikũrĩria waku?
13. Ùthikũrĩria wa radio witanitwo atia na gũkorwo wĩ Mũŋkũyǔ?
14. Nĩ mahinda marĩke wendoŋa gũthikũrĩria na rũthiomi rwa Grkũyũ na ti Gũthũŋũ kana Gũthweri?
15. Õkũnönü rĩ, ceceni cia maũndũ marĩa matangathagwo nĩ ceceni cia Gĩũyũ marĩŋgĩthangĩte atĩa na ceceni cia (a) Gũthweri (b) Gũthũŋũ
16. Úthikiriria waku wa kameme niücenjetie kwa njëra o yothe matukũ mahítükite?

17. Úngĩũrio ri, mbštika īrika įronekanire thutha wa githurano ni ikonainie atia na įmemerekia?
APPENDIX E: BROADCASTER QUESTIONNAIRE QUESTIONS

Broadcaster Questionnaire Questions

1. Please give a short description of your radio station.

2. Who are your primary target audiences? Has there been any change on the targeted audiences at any point of your station’s broadcasting?

3. In your view, what is the most important determinant of your target listeners? (Probe on factors such age, region, settlement, and economics).

4. In your view, how does your radio station compare with other radio stations in the industry today?

5. What is the core content in your broadcasting? Has this changed in the past?

6. How do listeners participate in your programming?

7. How would you describe the relationship between your station and the listeners?

8. Looking back to the last few years of broadcasting, what are the emerging directions in radio broadcasting in Kenya?

9. What is your station’s perception of rural listeners?

10. How do you envisage the future of radio broadcasting in Kenya?
The amendment, detailed below, and submitted for the following research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Ohio University. Approval date of this amendment does not affect the expiration date of the original approval.

Amendment: Add radio broadcasters group

Project: Radio Listening Habits among Rural Audience and the Place of Vernacular Radio in Kenya

Project Director: George Wakaba Gathigi

Advisor: Steve Howard

Department: School of Telecommunications

Jo Ellen Sherow, Director
Office of Research Compliance

Date 5-8-08
A determination has been made that the following research study is exempt from IRB review because it involves:

Category 2: research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior.

Project Title: Radio Listening Habits among Rural Audience and the Place of Vernacular Radio in Kenya

Project Director: George Wakaba Gathigi

Department: School of Telecommunications

Advisor: Steve Howard

Rebecca Cale, Associate Director, Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved by the IRB (as an amendment) prior to implementation.

Date: 2/22/08