In the late 1980s and early 1990s, following the breakup of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the United States as the sole superpower, many developing nations experienced intense pressure, internally and externally, to switch from single-party to multiparty rule. Multiparty administrations were perceived as better alternatives to single-party administrations, which were labeled dictatorial and tyrannical. Multipartyism was believed to provide more freedom of expression, in addition to checks and balances on officials in government; however, as this article will show, it did not always do so, especially when the opposition failed to oust the incumbent government from power.

This article provides a historical overview of language use in Kenya before and after independence. It argues that the language policy adopted by Kenyan administrations was aimed at sidelining most people from active participation in making decisions and ordering their own lives. The paper argues that the mere adoption of multiparty democracy did not guarantee freedom of expression, especially where a change in administration did not take place. Even though multipartyism saw an increase in the number of newspapers and radio and TV programs in different languages, the authorities continued to limit freedom of expression, through legislation and the misuse of police forces. The paper concludes with suggestions for ensuring freedom of expression and the empowerment of local languages.

Introduction

The breakup of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the United States as the world’s sole superpower ushered in new international alignments and balances. The requirement of multiparty democracy, which had been tied to the disbursement of economic aid, shocked the governments of developing nations. Multiparty systems were advocated as substitutes for tyrannical
and dictatorial single-party regimes. Advocates held that multiparty democracy would give people more freedom of choice and expression, and would allow for checks and balances on the governing party. In 1990, after 33 years of *de facto* and *de jure* rule under one party (the Kenya African National Union, KANU), the government of Kenya bowed to internal and external pressure and allowed the reintroduction of multiparty democracy; however, the political opposition failed to dislodge the incumbent party in the general elections that followed, and KANU ensured maintenance of the status quo in many aspects by controlling the dissemination of information, thus limiting majority participation in the political and decision making processes. Control of information came in the form of limited or total denial of radio and television airwaves to the opposition parties by the (state-controlled) information machinery; persistent denial of licenses for operating private radio and television stations and control of programs for existing stations; censorship of the press through threats and confiscation of printed media; harassment of editors and journalists; beating up of people associated with the opposition and dispersion of opposition political gatherings; and denial of permits to stage plays in local languages in theaters.

In censoring the media, there was no major difference between the Kenyatta and Moi reigns, which occurred before the reintroduction of multiparty politics. In fact, after the opposition's failure to oust Moi and KANU from power in the 1992 and 1997 elections, the government continued to censor the media. This censorship forms a major part of this paper's argument.

Such censorship has contributed to the deterioration of Kenya's economy since the early 1980s. The dissemination of information correlates highly with economic development (Bamgbose 1991), probably because well-informed people know best when to invest and engage in certain economic activities. Most newspapers and magazines that were targets of censorship carried articles on business and weather, and ran state announcements. Such information is crucial for many economic endeavors.

A characteristic of the single-party era that carried over to the multiparty era in Kenya was limited freedom of expression in local languages. In the early and mid-1990s, newspapers, radio and TV stations, and programs in local languages emerged in Kenya. This paper seeks to evaluate how the Kenyan government has responded to the language-policy issue in this new era. More than 42 languages are spoken in Kenya, and the government has failed to recognize them (apart from Kiswahili) as national languages and to invest in their maintenance and development. Multiparty democracy provided an opportunity for people to challenge the government's stand on its language policy. The paper looks at the validity of embracing the former colonial language (English) as a tool for national unity in multi-ethnic Kenya. Further, the paper questions whether the language policy adopted in Kenya was aimed at controlling information, thus reducing the participation of the wider population in making decisions. The paper will
conclude by proposing a language-policy model for Kenya. An introductory explanation of the language situation before and after independence [but before multiparty democracy] is necessary to show the current language situation in Kenya.

The Colonial and Missionary Period

Early Christian missionaries introduced the first newspapers to Kenya in the final years of the 19th century. The earliest documented regular publication in Kenya was Taveta Chronicle, first published in 1895 by the Reverend Albert Stegal, of the Church Missionary Society (Karanja 2000). This publication targeted Europeans, locally and in Britain. The first English-language weekly was the Leader of British East Africa and Uganda Mail. This paper identified with settler interests, and was published first in Mombasa between 1899 and 1904, and then in Nairobi in 1908. The Observer was published in Malindi in 1901 and 1902. Upcountry, the Fort Ternan Times was published in the Kericho area and targeted settlers, soldiers, and railway staff. Other newspapers were the Nairobi News, published in 1905; Times of East Africa and the weekly Nairobi Star followed it. Another weekly, the Globe-Trotter, began in 1906 but survived for only three years.

Individuals did not fare well in the news trade, but churches did. Kikuyu News, a Church of Scotland Mission monthly journal, was in circulation from 1908 to 1957. Lenga Juu [Aim to Heaven, or Aim High], published by the Anglican Church, was launched in 1916 in Rabai, near Mombasa. At the same time, the Roman Catholic diocese of Nyeri launched Wathiamo Mukinyu [The True Friend]. These newspapers helped spread the missionaries’ aims by using local vernaculars; Rabai is predominantly Swahili, while Nyeri is predominantly Kikuyu. Of the mainstream publications, the East African Standard stands as the oldest still-running newspaper, having started in 1902. Another early Mombasa weekly was the Mombasa Mail.

As expected, the major English publications were overtly biased in favor of the white settlers’ cause. Soon it became clear that other interest groups [Africans and Indians] had to find their own public voices. Consequently, an Indian press sprang up, as did African-led and African-targeted publications. Indian papers included the weekly Gujarati newspaper Samachar [News], The Indian Voice, Hindi Prakash [Hindi Light], and East African News [a bilingual, English-Gujarati weekly].

One of the first non-European publications to oppose colonial politics was the East African Chronicle, published first in 1919 by noted industrialist and democrat Manilal Ambalal Desai, who attacked colonial discrimination against Asians and Africans. He thus set the spark for inclusive political activism that saw him join forces with individuals who later emerged as the pioneers of Kenya’s freedom struggle, men including Harry
Thuku, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, and Achieng Oneko, who went on to launch their own publications and newspapers. Desai inspired the Kikuyu Central Association (KCA) to launch such publications as Tangazo (Announcement) edited by Thuku.

After World War I, Africans and Asians in Kenya openly began to question and oppose policies and laws deliberately set to entrench white domination. In the 1920s and 30s, Thuku's Tangazo, KCA's Mwigwithania (edited by Kenyatta), and Owiti's Dholuo Luo Magazine were part of a steadily growing alternative voice to the official colonial government's point of view as broadcast by the prosettler mainstream press. Alternative newspapers became the medium through which views counter to the official or prosettler line could be disseminated.

When it became clear to the settler and governing classes that the native and Indian publications threatened the entrenchment of the white rule, government officials recognized the need to develop a moderate (pseudo) African press that would support official policies. In late 1921, the Native Affairs Department began issuing a monthly progovernment propaganda bulletin, Habari. The white-led missionary churches joined the official campaign to keep antigovernment, anti-European, and anti-Christian papers from gaining readership among literate Africans in their parishes.

With the onset of World War II, aware that former African soldiers would return from the war more enlightened and would agitate for their people's rights, the colonial government again began producing newspapers specifically for Africans. Thus, Baraza arrived in late 1939. It replaced another government Department of Information Swahili weekly, Habari za Vita [War News]. Baraza turned out to be Kenya's first successful indigenous-language newspaper.

The colonial government also launched district publications to counter local vernacular newspapers; however, the official newspapers "for Africans" did not prevent the emergence of the more politically critical and independent vernaculars. By the late 1940s, Kenya had no less than seven weeklies, most notable among them Mumenyeneri [The Caretaker] and Ramogi. By the 1950s, most nationalist leaders who had emerged to champion the causes of their various interest groups and aggrieved communities had started newspapers to propagate their views and concerns. The Kenya African Union (forerunner of KANU) had Sauti ya Mwafrika (Voice of the African); Akamba's People's Party, under Paul Ngei, had Uhuru wa Afrika [Independence/Freedom of Africa]; James Gichuru launched an English weekly, the African Leader; Bildad Kaggia edited Afrika Mpya [New Africa] and Inooro ria Agikuyu [Whetstone of the Kikuyu]; Fred Kubai and J. D. Kali had Kilio cha Mfanyi Kazi [Worker's Lament] and Mkamba, a journal of the Akamba Union; Muinga Chokwe launched Kenya Mpya [New Kenya]; and D. K. Sharda, Pio Gama Pinto, and Kaggia cooperated on New Africa.

The colonial government hit back with repression. Editors of numerous newspapers appeared in court on a plethora of charges. Influential white settlers, through their representatives in the Legislative Council, demanded
the banning of radical newspapers. The government followed with amendments to the 1906 Newspaper and Books Ordinance and suppressed the African newspapers with an outright ban on all of them. Girthal Lal Vidyarthi helped fill the vacuum by launching the Swahili jicho (the Eye), which, with Baraza, were the only two newspapers targeted at Africans.

In the late 1950s, the colonial government conceded to limited political activity among Africans. The district political associations that emerged soon launched their mouthpiece publications. Examples of such publications were Uhuru (Freedom), run by Tom Mboya’s Nairobi’s People Convention Party. KANU relaunched Sauti ya Mwafrika. The Kenya Federation of Labor launched a bilingual English-Swahili journal, MfanyaKazi (Worker). A white reactionary element remained active in the press, opposed to the gains made by nonwhites. Prosettler-supremacy diehards ran papers such as East African News Review, Comment, Kenya Weekly News, Independent Comment, and News Comment. Despite the obstacles, the early African and Indian papers were popular: they challenged unpopular authority, restored the confidence of Africans in their capacity for political action, and gave African and Indian journalists a taste of their power to influence their destiny.

Radiobroadcasting grew as a propaganda tool for colonial and postcolonial governments and remained so until recently, when the government allowed individuals and the private sector to start FM radio and television stations. Radiobroadcasting had begun in 1928, when, to cater to white settlers, British Africa Broadcasting Limited went on the air; to cater to African soldiers and their families, it introduced a 30-minute Kiswahili program during World War II (Odero and Mamweru 2000). In 1953, the African Broadcasting Service was launched, broadcasting in Kiswahili, Arabic, and vernaculars to propagate obedience to the colonial government during the height of the Mau Mau (freedom struggle) insurgency.

**Language and the Media in the Single-Party Era of Kenyatta and Moi**

**Newspapers and Magazines**

Given the colonial repression of the media, at independence Kenyans expected the flow of information to be guaranteed; however, it was not. After independence, the only newspaper that dared print editorials critical of the government was the church-sponsored Target, but that was not until 1965, when the new editor, the Reverend John Schofield, turned the publication from purely clerical expression to political and social commentary; this switch increased its circulation from 7,000 to 21,803:

The Christian newspaper had turned into hard-hitting tabloid and the general public went for them in full force attracted
by their bold approach that even the regular dailies of the day would not dare publish against certain government policies and practices. (Odero and Mamweru 2000:14)

This newspaper had emerged as an opposition sympathizer when Kenya's first vice president, Oginga Odinga, had fallen out with Kenyatta, and had moved to begin an opposition political party, Kenya Peoples Union (KPU). Scofield's freedom was short-lived. When he published a commentary that neither party, KANU and KPU, had produced anything that remotely resembled a coherent manifesto for the voters to consider, he antagonized the government. This commentary followed an article that had claimed that government suppression of the opposition by force would encourage subversion. Scofield then questioned the diversion of government funds for the construction of the KANU party building, the Kenyatta International Conference Center.¹ The attorney general, Charles Njonjo, bitterly attacked him, and Scofield was forced to resign in 1968.

Since the official media organs tended to be mostly reflective of the ruling elite's viewpoint, people who felt disenfranchised by the political center protested and sought to make their views known through participation in underground publications, including Pambana, Mzalendo, and Mwananchi. Many people, especially university professors and political activists, whom the government believed to be associated with these publications were arrested, detained without trial, tortured, forced to confess on fabricated charges, and jailed.

Before the reintroduction of multiparty politics to Kenya, there had been three English dailies, the Daily Nation and the Standard (both privately owned), and the Kenya Times [owned by the former ruling party, KANU]. In addition, there were two Kiswahili dailies, Taifa Leo (a sister paper to the Daily Nation) and Kenya Leo (a sister paper to the Kenya Times). The only weekly newsmagazine that appeared was the Weekly Review (Mazrui and Mazrui 1998). Nevertheless, freedom of expression was quite limited. People who dared to air too-critical voices on local issues were soon silenced (Kadhi and Rutten 2001). In 1989, Beyond, a magazine published by the National Council of Churches of Kenya, was banned for exposing fraud in the 1988 "queuing elections," during which voters lined up and waited to be counted, instead of casting their votes secretly; its editor was jailed for failing to remit returns to the registrar of books and newspapers. The Financial Review, published since the middle of 1986, was also banned in 1989 and its editor forced into exile after it had revealed fraud by powerful government officials. Over the years, a wide range of magazines have come and gone.²

Beyond gained the attention of readership among the secular public for its incisive commentaries and criticism of government policies. In July 1987, authorities recalled its August issue when they learned it was carrying the full text of an open letter to the president from Oginga. The letter questioned the ruling party's actions—which amounted to the "dis-
enfranchisement of a large section of the electorate," and concluded: "the ideal situation was to revert to the multiparty system." When it opposed KANU's discredited and controversially unpopular "queue-voting system" in 1988 and published what it claimed to be evidence of outright rigging, the government banned it.

Some weekly magazines failed for economic reasons, but politics often played an underlying role. *Weekly Review* (1975–1999) was a popular secular magazine among decisionmakers and opinion leaders; however, diversification into subsidiary publications, coupled with low advertising support, made it fold. *Viva* magazine (launched in 1974) stood out as the most notable women's magazine. It tackled political and social issues from an explicit dimension not seen before in Kenya, attracting a sizable readership of both genders. It antagonized the KANU government when it attacked incipient repression and muzzling of freedom of expression. Whether this stance contributed to its demise has yet to be established. It ceased publishing in the late 1980s.

In the push for more political latitude in the one-party state, the *Nairobi Law Monthly* (edited by Gitobu Imanyara), *Finance* (edited by Njehu Gatabaki), and Nyamora's *Society* set new standards of courage in a hostile territory. Their commentaries on the critical issues of the late 1980s and early 1990s played a part in the eventual collapse of one-party dictatorship. The editors of these magazines suffered KANU harassment in one form or another, including detention, confiscation, and destruction of printed copies. Publication of these magazines has since become irregular. Another factor that hampered them is the cost of production and marketing, especially because they are published in English, a language in which only 16 to 20 percent of the population are proficient.

**Radio and Television**

Television was started in Kenya in 1964, but has not been fully developed. It reaches only 35 to 40 percent of the Kenya population (Okello, 2000). Television programming is 85 percent foreign and 15 percent local (Okello, 2000). It is important to note that broadcast media (radio and television) are potentially influential especially in countries where low literacy levels make them the most accessible sources of information. Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), the state broadcasting station, was incorporated in 1961 to enhance broadcasting in the country as political independence became imminent. It was nationalized in 1964, and switched propaganda masters from colonizers to independence leaders. It was later named Voice of Kenya (VOK) and then renamed KBC. Wholly owned by the government, it operates under the Parastatal Act, which gives it some autonomy, primarily to generate revenues.

The radio division of KBC offers three services: the English Service, which broadcasts in English (the official language); the National Service, which broadcasts in Kiswahili (the national language) for 19 hours a week;
and the Regional Services, which broadcasts in 15 local languages. Regional Services are divided into: 1) Central station (Kikuyu, Kikamba, Kimaasai, Kimeru, and Miembul); 2) Eastern Station (Somali, Boran, Rendile, Burji, and Turkana); 3) Western Station (Luo, Kisii, Kalenjin, Kuria, and Teso.) Broadcasts in the vernacular service are usually for four hours each day, two in the morning and two in the evening and the content includes translation of national news, with limited local content (Okello 2000). Since more than 42 languages are spoken in Kenya and only 17 have been allocated time in the broadcasting timetable, the majority of ethnic groups have no access to information in their local languages. KBC radio broadcasts school and religious programs. The audience reach for radio is about 98 percent of the population. Although the KBC is a state corporation, its presentations have not changed from the time it was owned by the government. Its radio and television programs ensure that the ruling party and government leaders enjoy what may be termed as “sunshine” presentations, while opposition leaders and people considered opposed to the government are painted in somber colors.

Toward the end of the single-party era in Kenya, there were two broadcasting stations: the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), which ran and runs both a radio and a television station, and the Kenya Television Network (KTN), which runs only a television station. KBC was government-owned, but KTN was KANU-owned. The 1989 Act (which transformed VOK to KBC) made KBC a commercial enterprise, but with certain powers derived primarily from its link with the political establishment. This relationship was illustrated by the opening signal tune for the station’s radio news bulletins, which was an adaptation of KANU Yajenga Nchi (“KANU is building the nation”), the party’s anthem. With intense pressure from the opposition, this anthem was phased out. In the pre-1992 days, presidential events took as much as 15 minutes of a 25-minute bulletin (Kadhi and Rutten 2001). The TV used both English and Kiswahili languages.

KTN was the first private TV station, and it came into operation in April 1990. It was launched by the Kenya Times Media Trust, established in 1987 by the ruling party, KANU. Most Kenyans had expected KTN to be independent, but it was obviously sympathetic to KANU. Probably because of strict local media rules and censorship of the press, foreign broadcasts, especially in Kiswahili, such as those of BBC, Voice of America, and Radio Deutsche Welle, became respected alternative sources of news for a growing number of Kenyan listeners. Though radio has a wider reach, the government’s control over KTN’s programs ensured that whatever was aired was aimed at instilling patriotism and obedience to the ruling elite. People opposed to the government could not get their views broadcast. Even if those who had access to radio could hear opposition opinions on foreign broadcasts, such broadcasts could not be used to mobilize the populace. Such mobilization requires local and persistent advertising, and in addition to the cost, local media dared not carry an opposition advertisement.
Language and the media during the multiparty era

With the restoration of multiparty politics to Kenya in 1991, the floodgates of free expression were expected to be opened, and a multitude of new publications began pushing their points of view; however, many were suspected of being bankrolled by establishment politicians as countermeasures to the antigovernment criticism contained in the genuinely pro-opposition papers. The scenario was reminiscent of the colonial era, when the government sponsored newspapers for Africans purely to entrench its point of view while diluting radical protest. Many Kenyans hope that, with the NARC government in place, this situation will not repeat itself.

The advent of multiparty politics and the liberalization of airwaves saw many newcomers in radio, television, and print media, which provided alternative sources of news. These developments came while Kenya was undergoing many changes in the political, economic, and social spheres. The role of the media became more pronounced, as it took on the challenge of informing the public of what was happening. Even though the right to information is fundamental to all individuals, this right is often infringed upon by governments that capitalize on ignorance and lack of information on the part of their populations. According to the Kenya Human Rights Commission (1998) by 1991, 20 publications had been banned.

Newspapers and Magazines

Soon after the reintroduction of multiparty democracy, Kenyans witnessed an unprecedented explosion of press “freedom.” Numerous opposition magazines and newspapers were publishing important reports about sensitive issues—reports that had hitherto been unthinkable. Some issues touched on corruption of key personalities in the government, fraud, and land grabbing; however, because of high rates of illiteracy, the cost of printing, and linguistic inaccessibility, such issues reached small numbers of readers. Such inaccessibility made it hard for the opposition to utilize the print media to educate and mobilize the masses in censuring their leaders. Utilizing the radio would have increased access to information.

The introduction of a multiparty political system in 1991 ushered in some political tolerance, which relaxed repression. Since the beginning of the multiparty system, many English-language weekly newspapers have appeared in Kenya, namely The People, the Weekend Mail, the Nairobi weekly, The Guardian, The East African, The Star, Kenya Confidential, Weekly Sun, Expression Today, Dunia, and Exposure (Mazrui and Mazrui 1998). At the outset, there seemed to be freedom of the press, but the KANU government devised a new tactic of frustrating this freedom. Earlier journalists had faced torture, detention without trial, banishment of their publications, and confiscation of their printing presses, but KANU’s war against the media in the multiparty era took less draconian forms.
After using delaying tactics in issuing licenses to operate private print and broadcast media, the KANU government used the judiciary to legitimize its campaign to silence the media. This tactic began in April 1998, when former president Moi attacked the independent press. There then emerged a trend in which powerful individuals in government rushed to court to apply for orders restraining newspapers from publishing adverse information about them. Within three weeks, ten prohibitory orders, restraining different newspapers from publishing defamatory information, had been granted (Karanja 2000). Three editors were charged for publishing alarming reports. On 20 August 1998, the Court of Appeal jailed Tony Gachoka, editor-publisher of the Post on Sunday weekly magazine, for six months for contempt of court, after he had published an article alleging widespread corruption in the judiciary and accusing Chief Justice Zachaeus Chesoni of having received a US$400,000 bribe. The magazine was ordered to pay a fine of US$14,000 or to cease publishing.

Even before 1998, journalists were jailed for their reports. For example, in 1994, Bedan Mbugua, editor of the weekly newspaper The People, and his reporter David Makali, were sentenced to six months in prison for contempt of court after publishing an article criticizing a judgment by the Court of Appeal. Since then, magazines and newspapers have been slammed with heavy legal suits and countersuits that have threatened their survival. In March 2002, a high court awarded the influential politician Nicholas Biwott KS 20 million against The People magazine for defamation.

Attacks on media freedom also took on a threatening face. In February 1999, a dozen men kidnapped and tortured Makali, executive director of the Media Institute, a freedom-of-expression watchdog. The attack came after the institute’s journal, Expression Today, had published an article linking a senior government official to drug trafficking. Fred Gumo (once an assistant minister in the president’s office), whom the story implicated, had earlier warned that journalists who wrote “nasty things” about leaders would be “beaten up.” These activities clearly indicate that the severity of government response to its critics was not restricted to the days of single-party rule.

To counter the opposition, the KANU government directly sponsored some newspapers, pamphlets, and magazines, including Expression Today (associated with Fred Gumo), Dunia and Exposure, both of which printed progovernment views. The KANU government had a paper printed in Kiswahili (Kenya Leo), the national language, thus ensuring a wide readership. A similar scenario was evident in the broadcast media.

Radio and Television

The broadcasting media showed an increase after 1991. Before the liberalization of the airwaves in the mid-1990s, no private individual was allowed to operate any apparatus for, or connected with, radio communication for the purpose of broadcasting; however, even after promising to liberalize the
airwaves, the government continued to exercise monopolistic control over the broadcast media. This is evident when one analyzes the ownership and program content of the new radio and TV channels. The move to liberalize airwaves has attracted many applicants for radio and television; however, only a few have so far been licensed, with limited frequencies. To date the following have been licensed:

1. Capital FM, the first commercial radiobroadcasting medium, is a sister company of the East African Standard. It broadcasts foreign music to a Nairobi audience. News intervals have been introduced, including Reuter’s wire stories, a business summary, and highlights drawn from news carried by the East African Standard.

2. Royal Media Services was granted VHF television and FM radio licenses in April 1997. It has a Nairobi-based radio station called Citizen FM. It broadcasts music with only a hint of a current-affairs program, called “Yaliyotokea.” With powerful frequencies, Citizen FM is second only to the KBC in reach. According to Media Review (1999), it can reach 70 percent of Kenya’s population. It could become an important tool for offering alternative news and information to the Kenya population, and it could become a formidable competitor of KBC; however, it may not meet these goals because its ownership is affiliated with KANU. The circumstances surrounding the allocation of the licenses have provoked debate. Royal Media applied for a license in 1993 and when the license was denied, unsuccessfully took the matter to the High Court; but when the owner, S. K. Macharia, became affiliated with KANU, the license was granted. People, especially from the opposition, argued that Macharia was an asset campaigning for the KANU party in the opposition stronghold of Central Province, occupied predominantly by the Kikuyu community. In April 2001, its transmissions were put off the air, after the corporation was accused of setting up illegal transmitting sites (Daily Nation on the Web, 26 April 2001).

3. Nation Media Group received a license in May 1998 to operate television and FM radio stations in Nairobi only. It was launched in October 1999, and has a 60-kilometer reach. Even though the Nation Media Group has the capacity to broadcast to other parts of the country, the government restricts it in fear of its influence on the public. Nation Media Group’s license was issued eight years after being applied for.
4. British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) received an FM license for radiobroadcasting in 1997, following a presidential directive. This station lacks thorough news content [Kadhi and Rutten 2001]. There were questions as to the value of awarding Kenyan frequencies to the public broadcasting organs of foreign governments when opportunities for presenting Kenyan information to a Kenyan audience are limited.

5. Kenya Television Network (KTN) was the first private television station to be granted a license by the government, and it went on the air in 1990. According to Okello, (2000), at the outset people outside KANU believed that KANU owned it, and KANU then sold it to the East African Standard in March. It was originally intended to run on a subscription basis, but this idea was shelved. Broadcasting is exclusively in English, and the station runs 24 hours a day. It transmits CNN signals and other foreign programming. Local news is broadcast in short bulletins. It was originally accessible to Nairobi residents only, but it has expanded to Mombasa, Nakuru, Kisumu, and Eldoret.

6. Kameme FM broadcasts in Kikuyu, promotes Gikuyu culture, and profiles Kenyans who have made great contributions to the country. Because of its ethnic inclination, it has received threats from the government, and even from president Moi himself (Daily Nation on the Web, 13 October 2000). To counter its influence, KBC started a parallel Kikuyu broadcasting station (coro FM) with a powerful signal.

7. Stellavision Television (STV) is owned by Hillary Ng’weno. It carries solely foreign materials. As the local partner of Sky Television, it broadcasts TV Africa.

8. Cable Television Network (CTN), registered as a private company, is licensed to retransmit signals from stations such as CNN, BBC, and Sky TV, and programming from the Asian subcontinent. It has elements of community broadcasting, in that it specifically targets the Asian communities living in Nairobi and Mombasa. Access is via subscription, and it is installed through a cable-network system.

9. M-Net is a satellite package from a South African company. It is commercially oriented, carries no local content, and is relatively expensive.

10. Voice of America (VOA) launched a 24-hour FM station on 24 June 2001. Its programs include “Africa Journal,” “VoA
News Now,” “Special English,” “Talk to America,” “Music Mix,” and news updates in Kiswahili.

11. Waumini FM, a Roman-Catholic-owned radio station, was launched on 6 July 2003, and its coverage is religion-oriented (East African Standard, online edition, 7 July 2003). The Roman Catholic Church had tried to launch it earlier, but the government had denied it a license.

Events so far show that opening up the airwaves has led to increases in the number of stations on air under ownership deemed supportive of the ruling party. Stations on air are aware of their limits. Apart from Kiswahili, existing television stations do not utilize local languages.

Another change is the rise of independent content providers who are not affiliated with any broadcasting stations. They fill in the gap left by the state-controlled Kenya News Agency (KNA). They include local information and communication businesses and NGOs such as the African Women and Child Information Network, with a focus on gender reporting, and Interlink Rural Information Services, which mainly reports on development issues in rural areas. The formation of new, local freedom-of-expression NGOs, such as the Media Institute and Network for the Defense of Independent Media in Africa, testify to the increased willingness of the profession to address state hindrances to journalistic practice by organizing the legal defense of journalists facing state charges for merely carrying out their work.

Language in Creative Arts

In theater in Kenya, while English plays are common, strong competition comes from Kiswahili, and increasingly, Gikuyu. Theater in local languages tends to attract much larger African audiences than theater in English (Mazrui and Mazrui 1998).

When the Kiswahili version of the Government Inspector (Mkaguzi mkuu wa serikali) was performed in the national theater, the hall was fully packed. However, the operations of popular culture have not been without a hitch. In 1982, Ngugi wa Thiong'o’s efforts to stage a play in Gikuyu (Ngaahika ndeenda) were thwarted when he was denied a permit, the building they were using was bulldozed, and the organizers were detained. The authorities argued that the play was instigating the people to rebel against a democratically elected government. Even as recently as 22 March 2002, a group that had gathered to watch a play (Ngoma cia aka) organized by Wahome Mutahi,3 a commentary writer for the Sunday Nation, was ordered to disperse. Authorities claimed that staging the play amounted to a public gathering, which required notifying the police; they further claimed that the play had scenes that were obscene and pornographic. This was a clear indication that as long as KANU was in power, information flow was going to be controlled.
With KANU losing power in the latest general election, journalism in the private media is lively and informed, and the era of self-censorship has largely passed. The climate of media freedom has improved, though incidents in which journalists are arrested and harassed continue to be reported. On 29 September 2003, Tom Mshindi, *Sunday Standard* managing editor David Makali, and associate editor Kwamchetsi Makokha, were arrested a day after the paper had published the confessions of a suspect involved in investigations of a high-profile case, the murder of Dr. Crispin Mbai, an official of the country’s constitutional review conference (*East African Standard, 29 September 2003*). On a positive note, the NARC government licensed a few radio stations like the Waumini radio, and on April 29 it announced that it planned to license four internet service providers.

Although English faces competition from some local languages in the performing arts, its status in the written creative arts is more secure. The readership interested in novels, plays, or poems in Kiswahili or other local languages seems narrow. English literature enjoys a much wider readership than literature in local languages. Popular literature from the West—by James Hadley Chase, Harold Robins, Sidney Sheldon, Danielle Steele, and others—is in higher demand than the English works of African creative writers like Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Chinua Achebe, and Wole Soyinka.

**Cushion against government’s harshness**

In order to ensure their safety, journalists took various steps; for example, to cushion its editorial coverage, Lonrho Kenya (which until 1997 owned *The Standard*) always appointed a chairman closely linked to the head of state, irrespective of qualification. During Kenyatta’s rule, Kenyatta’s son-in-law Udi Gechaga was the chairman; and when Moi took over, Mark Too (a close associate of the former president) was appointed chairman.

Another step was self-censorship. Kenyan leaders routinely maintained that the government did not censor journalists and that press freedom was a deeply cherished value, but in reality a range of subjects were taboo, and self-censorship governed the selection and slant of the news. For example, in March 1987, when former president Moi was faced with questions about alleged police torture and the illegal detention of political dissidents, Kenyans learned this only from British and American broadcasts.

**The Internet and Other Media**

Many people see the Internet as a means for poor countries to leapfrog stages of development (De Beer 2001); they argue that the future of Africa lies in “digital bridges.” The Internet supplies a new route around the problem of infrastructure. To make wise decisions, participants in a democratic process have to be well informed. According to de Beer (citing Ward 1995), a badly informed populace is an easy target for totalitarian rulers who manipulate
the media and suppress information. According to Ott and Rosser (2000), where available, the Internet provides the following advantages over the rest of the media:

1. Greater access and influence. There is greater access to political representatives and to information about issues, decisions, and pending legislation. Individuals can communicate directly with their elected representatives, and indirectly through easier access to issue-advocacy organizations and other media.

2. The Internet has eased access to international advocacy organizations and international media, so organizations can maintain pressure on regimes with questionable commitment to liberal ideals and democratization. For example, human-rights advocates have been quick to utilize the Internet to publicize abuses and repressive practices by various regimes.

3. The ease and affordability of on-line publication have effectively circumvented government censorship and control of national media: newspapers have published on the Internet in defiance of government bans; and from the Internet, journalists have obtained information that governments have tried to conceal.

How likely is it that the Kenyan government will allow the inroads of digital communication through the Internet? The reluctance of the former government to liberalize the Internet may explain why the former Kenyan government took so long to settle on liberalization of Telcom-Kenya. Despite pressure from the World Bank and IMF, the government allegedly wanted to maintain a large share for itself and sell the rest to bidders who could easily be manipulated.

In theory, the growth of the Internet has given people around the world access to unprecedented quantities of information, though with different levels of quality (De Beer 2001). As in the case of other sources, information on the Internet is not freely available throughout the world, mostly because of economic underdevelopment. Not many people in developing countries can afford a computer, and even where one is available, getting a telephone line is not easy. Cybercafes have become a booming business, but they are located mostly in urban areas.

**Toward a Working Language Policy**

In Kenya, as in many multilingual African states, language policy remains a thorny issue. In theory and on paper, Kiswahili is Kenya's national language, but English is the official language. In some spheres, these languages operate at par; but in most cases, English is given priority and
greater prestige. For example, Kiswahili was not a compulsory examinable subject in primary and secondary schools until 1985, but English had been for decades. Apart from declaring Kiswahili the national language in 1969 and a language of parliament in 1974, the government has yet to invest in developing the language.

In education, the language of instruction is supposed to be the mother tongue for the first three years (where possible), or the dominant language in a given area. However, due to the prestige accorded to English, many parents, especially in urban areas, prefer to take their children to private schools, where instruction in English begins on the first day of formal schooling. It is obvious that even where practiced, instruction in the mother tongue for the first three years does not prepare students to produce and access materials in it. For people to produce and access information in local languages, instruction in these languages needs to go beyond primary education. In addition, teachers need to be trained in instructional methodology in these languages. Since this policy was enacted, no institution has offered teachers training in local languages, apart from Kiswahili. Educational materials need to be made available in those languages.

Other local languages serve extensively in businesses, in market transactions, and social events. Only through empowering these languages can the government ensure maximum participation of its populace in their sociopolitical and economic development. This is so because these are the languages that people use in their day-to-day interactions. Since most African countries are multilingual, their governments must ensure that their citizens get information in the languages with which they are comfortable. Governments should also ensure that their people have the freedom to express themselves in whatever language they want. It is only after establishing this line of communication and freedom that a populace can be mobilized for engaged development. Just as politicians lure voters by appealing to them in their local languages, they should appeal to them when mobilizing them in local development.

It thus appears that a three-tier language policy is a way of addressing language policy in Kenya. In this model, instruction should be made available in local languages, while Kiswahili remains a compulsory subject in all educational institutions for intranational communication, and English remains a compulsory subject for international communication. Only through this model can information available via print and electronic media be meaningful to Kenyans. Such a model could see an increase in production of print material and electronic programs in local languages. Since NARC defeated KANU in the latest elections, held on 27 December 2002, it is hoped that the new government will ensure and allow the flow of information without interference, and will process the remaining license application for private radio, TV, and Internet providers. In addition, the new government needs to revitalize the KBC so that it opens up more programs in other local languages, both on TV and radio.
Conclusion

Despite Kenya’s government’s allergy to criticism, there is evidence of qualitative change of content, especially in the print media. Existing newspapers have become bolder in their hard-news coverage and editorial-news analyses of Kenya’s political and economic environment. Cartoonists now draw pictures unthinkable a decade ago. For example, one could not imagine a cartoon depicting former president Moi with a gourd of milk, depicting how his life would be after retirement. On the same subject, it has become common for cartoonists, when quoting the former president, to make a joke of his Kalenjin accent. Given his temperament and the power he wielded in the single-party era, such jokes could not have been featured without serious consequences.

Control of the flow of information has had negative effects on Kenyans’ lives. As Bamgbose (1991) notes, communication in the sense of mass media is directly correlated to national development: it ensures a flow of information on various aspects of a country’s socioeconomic life. Bamgbose adds that in agriculture, it could disseminate information on fertilizers, pesticides, high-yield varieties of crops, appropriate planting seasons, irrigation, preservation, and marketing outlets. In health programs, it could provide information on environmental sanitation, nutrition, preventive measures, first aid, immunization, family planning, prenatal and child care, and other things. In rural and community development, it could give appropriate guidance on how to set up and run local projects, where to seek assistance and necessary input, and how to organize cooperatives and similar organizations. In mobilizing people to undertake political and economic development, media represent a powerful instrument: they make expert knowledge available and provide a forum for discussion, leadership, and making decisions; they help citizens find alternative ways of earning a living, raise family socioeconomic status, create demands for goods (thus stimulating production), and widen the base of those sponsoring enterprises. Given the high rate of illiteracy and over-dependence on foreign languages, the mass media is more likely to effectively reach the masses in their local languages, and by utilizing the power of the radio.

The multiparty era has seen an increase of newspapers, magazines, and radio and TV stations and programs, but the English language has dominated that increase, with minimal additions from Kiswahili and Kikuyu and almost no other African language. Tanzania is often cited as an ideal model for a decisive move to adopt Kiswahili as its national and official language. Tanzania invested tremendous financial and human resources toward developing Kiswahili to meet the linguistic needs of the state and society at large; however, the Tanzanian government has done virtually nothing to encourage the development of other local languages. In Africa, many view linguistic heterogeneity as a threat to national cohesion. Linguistically homogeneous nations are not necessarily cohesive (for example,
Somalia]. Most countries that form a model of success are linguistically heterogeneous. A good example is the United States. Democracy in Africa would develop on a firmer base if African nations pursued language policies that reduced dependency on Western languages and sought to consolidate the use and development of some of their languages for wider communication [Mazrui 1996].

Even though the multiparty era has seen an increase in the number of newspapers, magazines, and radio and TV stations and programs, the society is still less integrated, horizontally and vertically. Horizontal integration refers to social communication across linguistic and geographical groups, while vertical integration refers to interaction between different strata of the society (e.g., between the elite and the masses). While English is a liability in vertical integration, African languages are an asset in fulfilling this role, because they ensure interaction and accessibility between the elite and the masses. For multiparty politics to thrive in multi ethnic Kenya, the country should adopt a language policy that ensures integration and participation, vertically and horizontally. This has to be a policy that provides room for local languages and ensures that they can thrive and compete with foreign languages. To ensure full participation of the masses, rigorous and deliberate efforts must be put in place to increase literacy in a multilingual model: one’s native language, the national language, and a Western language. In the long run, the masses would be able to access both print and broadcast media. At the moment, there is overreliance on radio, which is more subject to censorship. To ensure freedom of speech, expression, and the flow of information, legislation that enshrines these freedoms should be passed.

The Internet offers realistic and positive possibilities for the future, if modern technology is put to use in a more creative way to bypass censorship and authorities’ access restrictions. It is time for African leaders and their people to come to grips with the reality that citizens want and need access to information, and, as evidenced by unlicensed political rallies (which pushed the Kenyan government to allow the reintroduction of multiparty politics), they are willing to defy authoritarian measures that inhibit the free flow of information, especially if those measures suppress their potential and ability for socioeconomic and political development.

NOTES

1. The ownership of this building is still controversial, and the current (NARC) government has threatened to repossess it from the former ruling party (KANU).

Christian magazine, to promote young people’s wholesome development. In 1984, Signpost, an interdenominational effort, was launched to encourage theologians and scientists to cooperate on the search for answers to life’s problems.

3. Wahome Mutahi ran a theater group that performed at social gatherings; he died in August 2003.

REFERENCES CITED


