

Radio in Accra: Communicating among Linguistically and Ethnically Diverse Audiences

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This article explains the change in radio programming in Accra, Ghana, in terms of the concepts of hybridization, hegemony, and the public sphere. It argues that private radio has transformed communication among linguistically and ethnically diverse groups of people. It discusses how local language use, especially Akan, on radio has assumed national significance, by examining the dynamics of the use of local language by private radio to reach a linguistically diverse audience. And it makes the claim that this approach to radio programming has improved and expanded the democratic function of the electronic voice medium.

Introduction: Giving Up Radio Monopoly

In this article I address the following issues: (a) How is private radio changing the forms of presentation and programming in radio in a culturally diverse country like Ghana? And (b) how is private radio using local language? I answer these questions by examining the radio industry in Accra, Ghana, after policy changes between the late 1980s and 2000. I discuss how the use of local Ghanaian languages, especially Akan forms of representations, has assumed significance on radio in Accra as a result of new forms of programming and representations. I contend that this practice indicates that changes in government policies in the media industry have led to the emergence of forms of representations that exhibit the use of local Ghanaian symbols and images on radio, and that this dynamic of representation has evolved forms of programming that facilitate free discussion and exchange of ideas in a manner reminiscent of Habermas' (1989) public sphere.

Radio broadcasting in Ghana started with the establishment in 1927 as an electronic mass communication medium an alternative to traditional forms of mass communication like the use of talking drums. By July 31, 1935, *Station Zoy* had been established in Accra, the capital of Ghana with relay stations in the regional capitals of Sekondi to the west, Kumasi in a central position to the north and south, and Koforidua to the east of Ghana.¹

Ghana regained its sovereignty from the British in 1957, after which the existing broadcasting network came under the control of the government. Broadcasting was used for nation building. Since then, broadcasting as a political tool has been exploited by successive Ghanaian governments. That is, until the 1990s, when liberal (democratic) political and ideological transformation in government led to a change in broadcasting practice in Ghana. In the context of this paper "liberal politics" or "liberalism" as a political principle refers to the initiative on the part of the Ghanaian political authority to adopt democratic policies (between the period of the late 1980s and mid-1990s) that allowed private individuals or groups to operate broadcasting stations that participated in the programming and the dissemination of electronic media content to the Ghanaian public. Liberalism emerged in

¹ Capitals towns of the Western, Ashanti and Eastern regions of Ghana.

Europe as an ideology of emancipation against the aristocracy, and it is often considered as having roots in the protestant traditions. Fukuyama (1992), Shin (1994), and Joseph (1997) asserted that liberal-democratic model of governance has been one of the global phenomena of the 1990s. Undoubtedly Ghana participated in this global phenomenon, which impacted all sectors of the Ghanaian societies including the communication industries.

Methodology: Methods, Sources and Procedures

The approach to gathering data and analysis in this research is rooted in the qualitative interviewing and document analysis tradition. Interview data and analysis were done based on the premise that researchers can gather large amounts of information on a subject and then ask critical theoretical and political questions by placing issues in a larger social and historical context (Neuman, 1997). In this study, I used examples of pioneering local language radio stations to discuss the broader dynamics of the use of local language by private radio stations in Ghana.

I gathered data through in-depth-interviews, document study, and library research. The data were examined to identify themes that were explained in terms of the theoretical concepts of hybridization, hegemony and the public sphere. The interview data were collected using an audio recorder to record the comments and statements of respondents for subsequent transcription and analysis. Interviewing is suitable for gathering information that is related to incidents, histories, institutionalized norms and statutes (Jankowski & Wester, 1991). Also interviewing is a suitable data collection method in studies where there is little or no literature on the subject; respondents are reluctant to put answers in writing, and quantitative information is difficult to obtain (Patton & Sawicki, 1986). Also policy and other legal and legislative documents were analyzed.

An interview guide was used in conducting the interviews. A document protocol worksheet was used to examine documents in a systematic manner. I transcribed the interview data and examined them for themes, and also compared them with published and archival materials (documents and library sources) for corroborative purposes.

Private Radio from the Ground Up

The 1994 establishment of *Radio Eye*, a private radio station by Dr. Ives Wreko Brobbey preceded the change in official broadcasting policy. Brobbey began private radio transmission tests without obtaining approval from the government on the basis of a provision of the 1992 Ghanaian Constitution that states:

There shall be no impediments to the establishment of private press or media; and in particular, there shall be no law requiring any person to obtain a license as a prerequisite to the establishment or operation of a newspaper, journal or other media for mass communication or information. (Chapter 12, Article 162, sub-section 3)

As a consequence of the Brobbey action, in 1995 the government of Ghana under Jerry John Rawlings deregulated broadcasting, and started issuing radio frequencies to private broadcasters. Since then, private radio broadcasting, most of which are commercial FM

(Frequency Modulation) stations, have been operating in Ghana. During a radio interview on JOY FM's "Front Page" program in November 2004, 10 years after Radio Eye, Brobbey noted that his action presented the Ghanaian parliament ideas on how to approach the deregulation of the electronic media industries. The initiative to deregulate the electronic media industry was further consolidated by the enactment of the National Communications Authority Act (NCAA) of 1996, and the repeal of the Telecommunications (Frequency Registration and Control) Decree of 1977 that was enacted by the Supreme Military Council (S. M. C.). The repealed decree was restrictive because it limited participation in the broadcasting industry and sanctioned the operation of Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) as a government monopoly.

Section 3, Title 2 (The objects of the Authority) of the 1996 NCAA stipulated that the Authority will:

- (b) Ensure that communications systems operators achieve the highest level of efficiency in the provision of communications services and are responsive to consumers.
- (c) Promote fair competition among persons engaged in the provision of communications services. (National Communications Authority Act, 1996, p. 4)

The Act indicated the willingness of the Ghana government to allow private participation in all aspects of the communication industry. This invigorated the media industry, and media practitioners felt free from restraint. This freedom manifested through the establishment of new broadcasting stations, as well as new and innovative forms of representations and programming in the radio industry. As a result, by 2001 there were over 25 FM radio stations and numerous community radio stations in Ghana, compared to the three national radio stations *Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) 1* and *2* (Short Wave radio) and *GBC FM* that existed before 1994. Accra has about ten private radio stations. Initially, most of the new private radio stations in Accra like *Joy*, *Choice*, *Groove* and *Vibe FMs* broadcasted in English. Local language use in the Accra market by private radio stations started with *Peace FM*, followed by *Adom FM*, *Obgonu FM* and *Happy FM*.

According to K. Brenya Managing Director of *Peace FM*, the station is a subsidiary of the Despite Company. He noted that:

The Despite Company started as a music production company. In the course of our music production the initial idea was to promote Ghanaian and African music on the airwaves. We learned the other stations [private radio and even government owned stations] were all playing foreign music without giving prominence to Ghanaian music, and the Ghanaian music industry was suffering. We obtained license in 1997 and after two years we established Peace FM. Peace FM came on the air in May 25, 1999. (Personal communication, August 22, 2003)

A. B. Ocansey, the Program Manager of the station *Adom FM*, had this to say about his station:

Adom came into existence when Multimedia Broadcasting Company bought majority share in Arrow Communications, which had Groove FM on 106.3 frequency. When Multimedia bought Groove they brought it to Tema² and then changed the name from *Groove* to *Adom*. They did not just change the name, they also changed the programming format as well. *Groove* was mainly an R&B station, but with *Adom* we changed the format and we [*Adom*] became more local oriented in terms of music and the language. (Personal communication, August 22, 2003),

Private Radio Changes Media Practice in Ghana

Private participation in the electronic media industry in Ghana served as a dynamic force that unleashed a vibrant and multifaceted radio programming. Ghanaian radio before the early 1990s was largely the mouthpiece of the government and reflected a limited aspect of the diverse culture of Ghana, and it sought to present a homogeneous Ghana. Although this approach was effective and relevant in the period after independence and up to the mid-1970s, by the 1980s the “government mouthpiece approach” had outlived its usefulness because the social, political, and economic issues which confronted Ghana were different. Ghanaians yearned to articulate issues of national importance in a manner that reflected their culture and traditional forms of representation (Blankson, 2000). The emergence of private media helped create a media culture that catered to this need.

Private media practice in Ghana since the mid-1990s exhibited traditional forms of representations by dissipating the idea of homogeneity and uniform identity similar to what is characterized by Algan (2003) as post-independence political thought and media practice. In the period before policy change, Ghanaian media projected national identity and homogeneity by using mostly English to articulate and disseminate information. Even though Ghana’s linguistic diversity was recognized, it was mainly for the purpose of using local languages to inform non-English speaking Ghanaians about issues and programs of national interest. But in the mid 1990s, private local language radio stations introduced new programming as indicated by A. B. Ocansey (personal communication, August 22, 2003):

Because of it [local language radio] people can express themselves comfortably in a mother tongue or at least in a language which is easier for them to communicate in. As a result, more people comment on national and social issues. And we are in a better position to disseminate information on national or social issues of all kinds. It has made communication easier and more people are showing greater interest in issues concerning them. Its [local language radio] programs lay bare all issues in a language the people understand. So it is well listened to.

Similarly, A. Hughes, a Senior Program Officer in the features and documentaries unit of the English language department of Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, (GBC) commented:

When it [local language radio] came it was like a thunderbolt as far as the communication networks were concerned, because it was something new. It was a

² The city which has Ghana’s main sea port.

novelty, and people really did not understand why *Peace FM* wanted to communicate in the local dialect. But it did catch on well with the listeners, and it was realized that about 70% of Ghanaians do not speak English very well or are semi-illiterate, and could not actually appreciate and understand what were said on other radio and television stations when programs were communicated in the English language. So you could find a lot of people who listen to *Peace FM* because they could identify themselves with the programs which turned out to be human centered. They [local language radio station] were stations that developed programs that the ordinary man on the street or the illiterate [non-English speaking Ghanaians] in the village could readily identify with. So it really caught on well. Advertisement and most announcements were all done in the Akan language. (Personal communication, August 21, 2003)

Local language radio presentation and programming styles are more in harmony with Ghanaian traditional forms of presentation. The force behind this change is the interplay of national and traditional values. I will explain this change in terms of the concepts of hegemony and hybridization.

Representing National Ideals with Local Language and Symbols

Ghana's media practice has transformed within the past decade. The current media culture is fed somehow by the ideological postulation of Ghanaism. J. B. Danquah³, a leading political and philosophical personality in pre and postcolonial Ghana, espoused the Ghanaism ideology. Danquah defined Ghanaism as individual freedom and personal worth (Danquah, 1968). The principal ideas of Ghanaism, as expressed by Danquah, are a synthesis of the values commonly shared by the ethnic groups of Ghana; however, in his exposition on Ghanaism, Danquah used Akan⁴ language and symbols of representation. The use of Akan to explain Ghanaism is a classic example of the complexity of identity representation in postcolonial Africa. The ethnic diversity of African countries poses a great challenge to the use of traditional symbols and values to represent national ideals. This is because it is difficult to implement a single local language policy that could be adopted by all groups, and in many countries any such attempt creates tensions among nationals.

Ghanaism as an ideological construct emphasizes individual freedom, initiative, and enterprise (Adu-Boahen, 1988). Given that Danquah was one of the founding fathers⁵ of Ghana, it seemed natural that the operating media system in Ghana before the 1990s would have been characterized by the free flow of information, freedom of expression, and the use of traditional forms of representation, but this was not the case. Ghanaian governments until the mid-1990s imposed media restrictions. Electronic media was state owned and English was the dominant language used on two of the three national radio stations. Access to these stations was limited because of the nature of their programming; they functioned largely as a

³ J.B Danquah is known as the doyen of Ghanaian politics

⁴ Akan ethnic group is the majority in Ghana.

⁵ Founding Fathers are known as "the big six" namely J.B. Danquah, Kwame Nkrumah, Ako Adjei, William Ofori-Atta, Edward Akkufo-Addo, and Obestebi Lamptey.

government mouthpiece. But media practitioners pushed for press freedom and access to these stations and for the right to set up their own private electronic entities. Commenting on the social, political, and economic conditions of Ghana in the late 1980s, Adu Boahen indicated the need for a true Ghanaian system, one with the free flow of information of all sorts, free and public discussions of national issues at all levels of society. He pointed out the need to break the so-called “culture of silence,” by freeing the mass media to do business without government limitations and by allowing freedom of association (Adu-Boahen, 1988). Ghanaians wanted a more dynamic media environment with programs that address all issues; political, social and economic.

The deregulation of the broadcasting industry in the mid-1990s facilitated the desired change in electronic media practice. The result of this change is the transformation of forms of representation using conceptual and literal ethnic artistic signs and symbols to present and discuss issues of social, political, and economic importance. The adoption of ethnic forms of expression in radio programming led to a surge in the use of Akan forms of representation in the expression of Ghanaian national issues by private radio in Accra. This change in media culture happened as an orchestrated action on the part of the forces of press freedom, and an involuntary action of deregulation on the part of the ruling government at the time.

The size of the Akan speaking population and the comprehensible nature of the Akan language combined with the complex social and political conditions in Ghana to change radio programming. I examine this change by focusing on private radio practice in Accra using examples of early radio programs and popular radio presenters to illustrate this phenomenon.

Local Language Use and Audience Patronage

The market share of the audience of the stations that broadcast in Akan and other local languages was astonished at its inception. A. B. Ocansey explained that:

Statistics (Ghana All Media and Product Survey (GAMPS)) have proven that a good number of the people in Ghana do not understand English. Also it was proven that about 70% of the population speak Akan or have an appreciable level of proficiency in the Akan language. So if you are broadcasting in the mass market like we do and you hope to reach the numbers, you want the language which will get you the numbers and that is Akan. (personal communication, August 22, 2003)

This reality caused English-formatted programming stations to explore the use of local languages. For instance, the management of *Joy FM*, a leading English speaking private radio station, established *Adom FM*, a local language station that used predominantly Akan in Accra, a Ga speaking area. But the first Akan speaking radio station in Accra is the famous *Peace FM*. This development caused many other radio stations that initially used English to change and use local languages, mostly Akan, side by side with English. Some of the early *High-life* and local language programs developed by other radio stations in response to *Peace FM* were, *Choice FM's Highlife Paradise* and *Odo Ne Asum Dwei*; *VIBE FM's Nkomode*;

Radio Gold's *Opanin Kyere*, *Sika Futuro*, *Yereserew afa adwen*, *Afrakoma*, and *Odo ye wo*,⁶ these are all programs done in Akan with Akan titles (Blankson, 2000).

The use of local languages on radio is not new to Ghana. The state owned GBC 1 (radio) used local languages, but its programs were mostly translation of GBC 2's English programs. The point of departure is that GBC approached broadcasting without reflecting the totality of the Ghanaian culture; it played down ethnic culture even though it used local language in its broadcasts. But private radio's use of local languages presented content in a culturally significant manner because it wanted to bring in the audience and facilitate better communication. Akan's success in private radio practice is the result of the confluence of cultural forces negotiating for effective communication that was best facilitated using Akan language, symbols of representation and other Ghanaian cultural forms.

There is the continuous search for the right language for communication in the mass media in Ghana. Language use has become very important because of concerns about effective communication and audience participation. The adoption of Akan language and forms of expression should be perceived as a mere appropriation of an ethnic culture to facilitate effective communication. Given that about 70% of Ghanaians are proficient in Akan, the language offers a more probable opportunity for communication among an ethnically diverse Ghanaian population in Accra. The practice where Akan is used by radio stations in Accra should be seen as an instrumentalist approach by radio stations to build audience among Ghanaians as a way of facilitating communication without necessarily undermining all other cultural forms both Ghanaian and non-Ghanaian. Critical theorists claim that instrumental or technical rationality is more interested in the method and efficiency than in purpose. It delimits its questions to "how to" instead of "why should" (Kincheleo & McLaren, 2000, p. 282). It is evident that in the attempt to ensure efficiency, the radio stations that use Akan in Accra developed new ways of programming as an approach for better communication, audience attraction, and retention. To this end, the concern for efficient communication and audience attraction on radio stations like *Peace* and *Adom FMs* far outstripped any other considerations in their programming efforts.

Consequently, Akan cultural forms of representation are not used against the Ga-Adanbe, Ewe, or Moshie-Dagbani (ethnic minorities in Ghana), but rather as an instrumentalist approach to communication by radio stations to create a forum for discussion and the promotion of effective communication. Radio content in Ghana is becoming increasingly Ghanaian with a limited foreign component due to a renewed sense of programming and the focus on the use of local languages. The phenomenon unfolding in private radio in Ghana could be identified as *intense hybridization* in programming, because it allows Akan linguistic cultural forms to emerge as a main form of expression on some radio stations. Throughout this process of changing radio programming, some stations in Accra are facilitating effective communication through the use of symbols and forms of representations of a local language, Akan.

The process of this transformation is complex and should be understood in terms of Barker's (2000, p. 117) use of the phrase "rhizomorphic and disjunctive" "cultural flow"

⁶ The meaning of the Akan program titles in English: *Odo Ne Asum Dwei*-Love and peace, *Nkomode*-Sweet Talk, *Opanin Kyere*- The elderly teach, *Sika Futuro*- Gold dust, *Yereserew fa adwen*- Make fun and learn, *Afrakoma*- an Akan female name, *Odo ye wo* - Sweet-heart.

because it is “characterized less in terms of domination and more as forms of cultural hybridity.” The idea here is that there is a subtle cross cultural negotiation of the use of the language such that even though the language is that of a local ethnic group, its use on radio is national; because it presents issues, concepts, and ideas from a Ghanaian perspective and not an Akan ethnic group perspective. Barker described cultural hybridity as not a one-way flow from the west to the rest of the world, but also as the impact of non-western ideas and practices on the west. In the same way, the use of Akan on radio in Ghana is a complex mix of the quest for a local language that could facilitate effective cross-ethnic communication by focusing on national issues. This is similar to Kachru’s (2006, p. 109) claim that “the documented models of English...stems more from social and attitudinal factors than from reason of authority. The use of Akan is not an imposition on the radio audiences by political leaders for communication purposes. It is rather adopted by private radio stations as a way of reaching a greater number of it potential audience.

The relations of power among the ethnic groups in Ghana are complex, and like Sarup’s (1993) description of ethnic power relations, all ethnic groups in Ghana share power through informal negotiations like the innovative adoption of Akan on private radio in Accra. The use of local languages in private radio programming in Ghana is best understood when the phenomenon is considered as a postcolonial, or better still, a 20th century quest for effective communication in ethnically diverse Ghana. It is non-cohesive because as expressed by N. D. Crabbe (personal communication, August 27, 2003) “private stations have used their autonomy to explore how best to use the local languages in their programming with no restraint.” It is somehow identical to what Bamgbose (1991) describes as the choice between a Language of Wider Communication (LWC) and a Language of Narrower Communication (LNC) in the discussion on language use at the national level in African countries.

Non-Cohesive Hybridization

The search for effective communication approaches in radio broadcasting in Accra resulted in the use of Akan. This posed a challenge to other minority groups in Ghana, who have strong affinity to their culture and language and would not like to see their culture and language diminished in comparison to a dominant language like Akan.

The rise of Akan as a main language on some radio stations in Accra did not happen through government adoption of Akan as an official language. It has happened as a negotiated non-cohesive hybrid cultural phenomenon, due to the nature of the language, the search for authentic forms of cultural representations for effective communication, and the number of Ghanaians who are proficient in the language. According to the 2000 Ghanaian Census figures, the Akan speaking population stands at 49.1% of the 18.8 million population and is by far the dominant group in the country. The other group percentages are Moshie-Dagbani 16.5%, Ewe 12.7%, Ga-Adangbe 8%, and 3.9% foreign nationals (Ghanaweb.com, 2002). The distribution of population together with the nature of the Akan language has facilitated the use of Akan cultural forms of presentation in non-traditional Akan areas more than any other ethnic group.

This dynamic in local language use brings into focus a politics of ethnicity that has received attention in postcolonial times. Politics of ethnicity is a cultural concept centered on norms, values, beliefs, cultural symbols, and practices that mark a process of cultural

boundary formation (Barker, 2000). Although ethnical issues are often perceived as divisive and disruptive, its manifestation in radio broadcasting in Accra is positive. It illustrates a non-cohesive hybrid cultural development because in a country like Ghana with a wide variety of languages, Akan provides the most common shared form of cultural and language representations in private radio practice in Accra. This form of dominant cultural representation in communication is not oppressive because it does not endeavor to practice the “politics of otherness” as discussed by Barker (2000 p. 116), and it does not create separate ethnic and political sphere for only Akan. Rather, it has led to the creation of a form of program content that seeks to facilitate communication across ethnic groups without exception and is not hegemonic. The use of Akan on *Peace*, *Adom*, and *Happy FM* was mainly a corporate decision and was not mandated by government. The management of these radio stations could have chosen the Ga language, the language spoken by the Ga Adangbe ethnic group of the Greater Accra region, or they could have chosen English, which is the official language of Ghana. But they chose Akan because about 70% of Ghanaians are proficient in the language and could be effectively communicated with using the language. This echoes Bokamba’s (2008, p. 233) claim that the use of Lingala in entertainment is appreciated throughout Congo “irrespective of mother-tongue loyalties.”

According to Bourgault (1995), the concept of hegemony, like cultural imperialism, depends at heart on a notion of imposition and coercion, also Barker (2000, p. 10) explains hegemony as implying “a situation where a ‘historical bloc’ of powerful groups exercise social authority and leadership over subordinate groups through the winning of consent.” Accra radio audiences listen to some forms of music and radio programs that use Akan literal forms of representation willingly without having it imposed on them. As a result, the dynamics of representation on private radio in Accra cannot be explained in the strict sense of hegemony, but rather as a non-intimidating form of hybridized media practice. The use of Akan language on major private stations like *Peace* and *Adom FM* in Accra has happened in a social and political environment where there is a search consciously or unconsciously for effective communication through the use of culturally suitable forms of representation.

Commercial radio programming in Ghana since the mid-1990s demonstrates an increase in the use of local languages as the preferred medium of communication. In the dynamics of post-1995 radio broadcast programming, Akan has emerged as the dominant language and cultural form on some radio stations in Accra. Many of the early private radio stations and most of the new stations have resorted to the use of local languages. *Radio Gold*, *Vibe FM*, and *Choice FM*, started broadcasting in English but had to experiment with local languages and now run programs in English and local languages, usually Akan. *Peace FM* and *Adom FM* are the two stations that started broadcasting in Akan and have been very successful. The result has been the production of content that uses local language without sacrificing topical issues of national interest. A consequence of the success of the *Peace FM* model is the development of the community radio practice by Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC). The state sponsored GBC has set up various community radio stations country wide. These stations broadcast mainly in local languages that are not necessarily Akan.⁷ The move by

⁷ Obonu FM -Greater Accra Region, Garden City Radio – Ashanti Region, Radio Central – Central Region, Twin City Radio – Western Region, Sunrise FM – Eastern Region, Radio B.A.R - Brong Ahafo

GBC to set up these stations helps to eliminate any potential tension that may have arisen as a result of the use of Akan in non traditional Akan areas like Accra. By using Akan in broadcasting in Accra the pioneering private radio station *Peace FM* caused broadcasters in Ghana to reexamine their use of local languages in broadcasting. The outcome is the recognition of local language use in broadcasting as an effective way to reach a critical mass of the potential audience of a radio station. It is a demonstration of the ongoing change in the use of language in the Ghana media industry, which is supported by Mufwene's (2008) observation of language development that is driven mainly by local social and economic factors.

“High-Life” as Primary Music Content

Peace FM changed the typical Ghanaian radio musical format by playing mostly Ghanaian “high-life” music. High-life, as a Ghanaian music genre, is a product of a hybrid culture; highlife musicians use Ghanaian and European musical instruments to play music that is a fusion of Ghanaian and other cultures, especially African or Black music forms. *Peace FM*, like all the local language radio stations, features a mixture of old and new forms of high-life, from “dance band” to “hip-life.”⁸ Many Ghanaian musicians write and sing in Akan or combine Akan and other Ghanaian languages in their songs. They compose in a myriad of Ghanaian highlife genres namely; Dance band, Palm wine, Burger High-life, Concert party, Osode, High-life reggae fusion, Guitar band, and Hip-life (High-life and Pop fusion) music. This form of programming is different from radio programming in Ghana before the 1990s because the content is largely local and deviate from the “government mouthpiece approach” (old programming). The old programming involved playing mostly western music, interspersed with local music, while the new programming has reversed the order -- more Ghanaian and less western music. The nature of this programming shift has cultural implications, because it involved the reconsideration of Accra radio music content that favored the use of Ghanaian language and music products as the primary criterion for inclusion. Also, it exhibits notions of identity because it reflected Ghanaian culture in a way that suggests that previous programming was not Ghanaian enough. As emphasized by Nii Daki Crabbe (personal communication, August 27, 2003) of Obonu FM, Ghanaian music dominates radio stations’ playing lists by about 80%. According to him, “the fact is we (the stations) are promoting our culture.”

Such programming formats helped create descriptions of Ghanaians with a particular cultural heritage, as expressed through particular music genre or language use. Barker (2000) describes such phenomenon as characteristic of the post structural essentialist notion of identity, because it resorts to the use of language and cultural forms to construct identity, without which it assumes identity, cannot exist. This notion is expressed in a statement made by A. B. Ocansey, who noted:

Region, Volta Star Radio – Volta Region, Radio Savannah – Northern Region, U.R.A. Radio - Upper East Region, Radio Upper West - Upper West Region.

⁸ *Dance band* is the authentic form of *High-life* music, while *Hip-life* is a Ghanaian rap music art form.

What we want is to be known as the local radio station. So that when someone visits Ghana and wants a station that will showcase the life style of the people in Ghana, it is Adom FM. That is why it is a policy here that none of our program is in English. We do not play any western music apart from reggae which is Caribbean and Afrocentric to a large extent. (personal communication, August 22, 2003)

Similarly, K. Brenya (personal communication, August 22, 2003) of *Peace FM*, while commenting on *Hip-Life* artists, indicated that, “yes, these guys are using proverbs and rhymes and that is good because it [local language] was losing its image. These kinds of rhymes have always existed but were not being heard of.”

Traditional Presenters on Radio

Odiefu⁹ of *Vibe FM*, Rokoto of *Radio Gold*, Maame Dokuonuo of *Choice FM* and Reverend Owusu Ansah of *Joy FM* popularized the use of local language (Akan) on other private radio stations in Accra that predominantly broadcasted in English. Their styles of presentation, the issues the addressed and some of the names the presenters adopted were traditionally symbolic. The name Odiefuo used by a radio presenter was symbolic. As a presenter, Odiefuo became a liberator, rescuer or redeemer who functioned as a social critic. As a liberator, rescuer or redeemer, he questioned authority and demanded explanations for political actions and decisions. Odiefuo was very outspoken; such a radio presenter symbolized the breaking of the “culture of silence.”

Rokoto’s¹⁰ program was set within the notion of an Akan traditional court environment, the chief’s palace. The name of the presenter is not significant, but the setting of the program within the tradition of adjudication or arbitration is symbolic. The program invited the audience to present contemporary social issues that were analyzed and judged on the air. The symbolism in this presentation is dual. Rokoto spoke only Akan and was perceived as an icon of the rich Ghanaian culture. To have such a symbol of Akan cultural richness featured on programs of national significance in the nation’s capital, that is traditionally Ga speaking, carries a lot of meaning. It denotes an illustration of a negotiated identity of a diverse people in a subtle, non-cohesive, hybridized manner. Rokoto’s program was not to be perceived as an Akan program, but just a program any Ghanaian could tune in and relate to the issues, regardless of their ethnicity.

Maame Dorkounou’s investigative reporting on *Choice FM* is an example of radio investigative reporting which was aimed at exposing moral decadence in the Ghanaian system. Her handling of issues indicated the probing nature of Ghanaians. Although there is no symbolism in this form of program, the use of Akan to broadcast the program in a Ga speaking area bears testimony to the nature of the language as comprehensible to non-ethnic Akans.

⁹ *Odiefu* is the Akan word for a redeemer or savior.

¹⁰ *Rokoto* has since retired from his radio career and has been appointed as a chief in a Ghanaian town close to the Eastern regional district capital of Oda.

Public Sphere

The notion of the “public sphere” refers to the emergence or creation of a realm of social life in which some public viewpoint can be formed, because the realm is accessible to all citizens (Habermas, 1989). People behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion, in a manner that guarantees freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions about matters of social, political, or economic concern. Today newspapers, magazines, radio, and television are the media of the public sphere (Habermas, 2001). Private electronic media in Ghana started first with the establishment of private radio stations, and later private TV stations and Internet Service Providers (ISPs). This has improved Ghana’s democracy and public discourse, because Ghanaians could freely discuss and exchange ideas and viewpoints. Radio stations, through their talk shows and call in programs and the use of popular TV entertainment personalities, have gotten people interested in the topics and the programs. Radio programs give Ghanaians the impetus to engage in social, political, and economic debates formally and informally. The intensity of these activities has led to the emergence of Akan radio programs like *Wo ba ada naa*,¹¹ a program which discussed female-male relations and sexual issues. *Morning Show – Kokrokoo* deals with social and political issues. Others are *Woo How Ni Sen – What are your concerns*, and *Epuo Ni Empuo–Face to face*, a debate on issues as indicated by K. Brenya (personal communication, August 22, 2003) of *Peace FM*.

Apparently, the political decision to allow private participation in the electronic communication industries has created an electronic public sphere. It allows the discussion of more sensitive and controversial political and social issues by society without fear of victimization or intimidation by the government. The state regulator (The National Communication Authority, NCA) acted somewhat as the initial facilitator of the industry environment that allowed private radio to become active participants in national debates. Initially government was uncomfortable with the activities of the electronic media, but it became obvious that the government of Ghana was prepared to allow the media to do its job as long as it did not break the law. As indicated by Habermas (2001, p. 102); “only when the exercise of political control is effectively subordinated to the democratic demand that information be accessible to the public, does the political public sphere win an institutional influence over the government through the instrument of law-making bodies.” The exercise of political control over the media in Ghana became subordinated to the democratic demand of making information accessible to the public, especially with the repeal of the Criminal Libel Law on July 27, 2001. As a result, the media won an institutionalized influence over government through the instrument of law, and radio and all other electronic media function in Ghana as the arena for public discussions.

Public opinion refers to the tasks of criticism and control that public bodies of citizens use informally and formally. Public opinion, by definition, comes into existence only when a reasoning public is presupposed (Habermas, 2001). It is not fully explained what Habermas meant by a reasoning public. The concern with media practice, including radio broadcasting in Ghana, is that sensationalism is creeping into the delivery of content. And there is a growing concern about such practice and the effect it may have on the listening public. The

¹¹ Literally translated as, “Is your child asleep?”

expectation is that a reasoning public as indicated by Habermas will reject sensationalism. It is not clear how the audiences of local language radio stations in Accra are dealing with sensationalism in the media content. This scenario prepares the ground for media scholars interested in studying the relationship between the use of language and audience reception of media messages to research into how the choice of language used in radio broadcast is impacting the reception of media messages. This will help create a profile of radio audiences in Ghana. Such research would be beneficial to media practitioners, especially in their decision making in management and content creation and programming.

Despite the use of traditionally symbolic forms of presentation of programs as illustrated by Odiefuo of *Vibe FM*, Rokoto of *Radio Gold*, Maame Dokuonuo of *Choice FM* and Reverend Owusu Ansah of *Joy FM* on some radio stations in Accra, it should be understood that the Ghanaian public, true to the principles of the public sphere as indicated by Habermas,, does not turn to the local radio stations as “representative” of the court of a prince endowed with authority, but rather to an institution regulated according to competence (Habermas, 2001). Private radio has become an institution of the public; it is effective in the promotion of public discussion. It has become the forum for discussing, raising awareness, and promoting commerce. Radio, like other media, promotes development and provides entertainment.

Private radio and most of the other private media are now confronted with the reality of funding their businesses. Private funding and proprietorship has changed the way the media is managed and practiced. The management of private radio in Ghana exhibits efficiency and social responsibility. Radio practitioners are now more focused on meeting public expectation rather than catering to the needs of the government—and the success of a station depends on how well it caters to the expectations of its audience.

The dynamics of radio programming in Ghana is a clear indication of the democratic development of a public sphere within which Ghanaians can exercise their right to free expression. The electronic public sphere of the radio has caught on with Ghanaians, who are using the media platform to address issues of national concern using symbols and representations that are culturally appropriate. A growing number of Ghanaians have come to realize that their opinions and sentiments on national issues could be aired without being prosecuted. Prior to the current phenomena of open public debates on the radio stations and other electronic media, access to the public forums to voice opinions was limited.

Conclusion

The days of the exclusive government-operated media were characterized by extreme control that sometimes led to program cancellation as directed by government officials. After deregulation and the repeal of the criminal libel law, both private and government sponsored media practice self-censorship. Self-censorship connotes freedom to determine what is distributed through the media channels. The typical self-censored environment in a democratic system allows journalists and media content providers to put out a wide variety of programs. However, media self-censorship has complications, but essentially it does not limit press freedom in the manner government-censored systems do. This approach to media practice is not what pertained in Ghana prior to the mid-1990s. The media under government pressure and coercion lacked improvisation and experimentation in practice, and that stifled the growth of the radio industry economically, socially, and politically.

Economically, the government-owned radio stations had stunted growth, in that they were not able to take care of their own cost of production. They failed to attract audience and advertisement money, and they lacked sound management practice. This impacted all other aspects of operations, especially programming. The stations had to depend on government for funding and the government did not always give broadcasting the priority it deserved. With the introduction of private broadcasting, radio got a new lease on life, but was fraught with the challenge of how to reflect the social, political and economic environment in a culturally relevant manner. With the use of local language in Accra, private radio proved its willingness to improvise and experiment in programming. Radio in Accra has remained the easiest, quickest, and relatively inexpensive means to bring issues to the public. As a result, being on the radio or using the media to reach the public is synonymous to going public in a culturally symbolic way.

The media, especially radio, functions as a ready and easy source for public debate on all issues, and the media now enjoy greater press freedom. One of the greatest social achievements in Ghana in the 21st century is the growth of press freedom, which is symbolized by the repeal of the Criminal Libel Law on July 27, 2001. The administration of J. A. Kuffour¹² emphasized that the law was repealed in order to expand the boundaries of freedom (Africa News Service, Inc., 2001).

It is not improbable to harbor the notion that other African countries may be having similar media experiences. It will be worthwhile studying how representations and media symbols are evolving in other sub-Saharan African countries in the 21st century, as new policies and technologies offer greater opportunities to content creators to reach larger audiences across local and international boundaries. For example, WorldSpace Corporation is programming on its satellite DAB (Digital Audio Broadcast) services to Africa. In 2000, WorldSpace launched DAB to Africa through its AfriSat satellite. Its current programming is delivered to audience through special receivers over a wide geographic area covering many African countries. WorldSpace's DAB is bringing diverse media content to a large audience of different ethnic and national origin. Much of the content originates from cultures that are different from the cultures of the audiences; it will be useful to find out how this extensive service across national boundaries is being received. Perhaps the hybrid programming of Ghanaian radio could offer some clues as to how to reach diverse, and multicultural groups. Also the dynamics of local language use in radio in Accra throws light on the possible relationship between the use of language and audience reception of media messages. This issue merits some form of research.

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¹² President of Ghana elected during the 2000 general elections in Ghana.

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