

## Chapter IV: On-Air Performances

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### Calling in: Styles and Strategies

On Sundays at 9 a.m., Radio Bénin airs the political talk show *90 minutes pour convaincre*. Sébastien calls in to the radio station and starts his intervention politely by greeting the studio panellists and then discusses the difficulties of enlisting voters to register. Later, he expresses his dissatisfaction with the organisation of the show. During the call-in segment, the journalists keep their responses quite brief while potentially rushing through the callers' comments. Nevertheless, Sébastien continues to call in since the show has a nationwide audience and is listened to by many people nationwide (14 January 2023).

The success of *grogne* shows among its listeners is also based on the on-air presentation, the drama it unfolds, and the rhetoric involved. Passionate *grogneurs*, such as Sébastien, always strive to improve their ability to communicate their viewpoints on the issues at hand clearly and effectively.

**Preparation** Most *grogneurs* do not simply start calling in using their mobile phones. They instead invest time in meticulously preparing their interventions, given the short time frame they have on the air, during which they must clarify the issues and precisely address the points they wish to make. They revise their notes and consult the files on their smartphone. Indeed, it is not unusual for *grogneurs* to rehearse their intended statements several times to avoid trouble once they are on the air. Adam Bachirou, a *grogneur* in Parakou, explained, 'I do not want to stutter or make spelling mistakes' (Parakou, August 2022)!

**Connecting with the station's phone line** One of the most important factors for the omnipresence of the *grogneurs* is their ability to connect to a station's telephone line more frequently and easily than other callers do. While it is difficult for

many 'normal' callers to reach the station by phone, the *grogneurs* manage to make their voices heard on every show and every time of day. Many *grogneurs* use several phones to dial simultaneously, and they are apt at dialling just in the right manner at the right moment. According to many *grogneurs*, older mobile phones with buttons to dial are much faster for this purpose than newer smart-phones are. However, using several phones is only one aspect of their strategy. Apparently, it is also a matter of experience and timing, as Hermann Méton underlined,

I always wait until the precedent caller seems to come to an end of his statement, and just in that moment, I start my own call by pushing the button, after I have already typed in the number of the station. It is a matter of experience. I know who is rather short in his statement and who is not and which host usually adds a lot to a statement and who not. To use several phones may be helpful, yet you risk confusing yourself, and once you have the phone line and are connected to a technician or directly to the presenter, you have to start talking immediately; otherwise, he will cut you off. More embarrassing even would be a negative impression, when you are on air and talk kind of strange. (Cotonou, October 2021)

However, the use of several mobile phones is more common amongst those who try to intervene at various radio stations when the time slots of *grogne* shows overlap during the daytime, for instance, in the Parakou area, as well as on Fridays in Cotonou. Some stations, such as Radio CAPP FM and Radio Cotonou, do not allow callers to intervene more than once during the same show. Nevertheless, some *grogneurs* have also strategised by calling a second time from another phone number with a different voice and identity, such as Justin Sowadan, a *grogneur* in Natitingou (August 2023). Providing a name that differs from one's real name may also serve as a means of self-protection.

**Notes, Records, and Personal Archives** Many *grogneurs* use written notes for their intended calls. The main reason for this practice, which has also been noted among frequent Ugandans (Brisset-Foucault 2018), is the effort to be precise and comprehensible. Thus, they can use their limited airtime more effectively. Adam Bachirou (Parakou) uses a booklet to note his interventions. He argued,

All my *grogne* statements, I prepare by penning them down beforehand. This is especially important when dealing with complex issues. Keeping written

records is also useful for revisiting issues. It is important to prepare an intervention also to avoid exceeding the time limit on air. (Parakou, July 2023)

More accurately, the aforementioned *grogneur*, Herman Méton, has recorded all his statements over the past eight years and archived them in his office. This strategy also aims to refute unjustified accusations (Cotonou, 15 October 2021). However, Sébastien Gnonhossou usually keeps track of his interventions by recording them on his smartphone (Cotonou, August 2025).

### Getting Attention: Staging and Rhetoric Strategies

One of the most striking features of many *grogneurs* is their rhetoric and their on-air performative habits. These are part of their strategies to seek attention (see below) while effectively engaging with politicians, audiences, and journalists and establishing their personal brands (see also Selormey 2012 for the Ghanaian case). Notably, most *grogneurs* start with the same formula: they mention their names, along with places of residence and workplaces, while adding an individual greeting. For instance, some *grogneurs* prefer to introduce themselves with a solemn speech.

One of the most well-known cases in this regard is certainly Romain Dagbomey, a *grogneur* in the large trading hub of Bohicon who always commences and closes his statements with similar words:

‘Bonjour, Madame la Journaliste. My name is Dagbomey, Romain, from Bohicon-Kpatalokoli, automatically not far from Hotel Dako. This morning, I have some concerns to tell you. My first concern – listen well, Mr Head of State, Head of Government, Mr Patrice Talon ... this morning, I would like to say that ...’ He usually ends all his statements as follows, ‘It’s Dagbomey Roman, Kpatalokoli: Bohicon, see you soon, God willing’. (e.g. Atlantic FM, *Je n’aime pas ça*, 16.3.2018)

Romain Dagbomey holds a position as a musician at the prominent church *Église du Christianisme Céleste*, where his father was a regional leader. He is well known across southern Bénin because of the ritualised opening of his interventions and because he calls almost every radio station, as well as some Parakou broadcasters. In an interview, he boasted of calling regularly to TV stations, including international channels. These distinct introductory statements are

emblematic also of many other *grogneurs*. Asked about the significance of such openings, Dagbomey mentioned, ‘Everyone has its own tone (*chacun a son cri*); listeners will automatically recognise me’ (Bohicon, October 2018).

Sébastien Gnonhossou usually addresses a radio station with a kind of hon-ouring formula (e.g. ‘*force municipale de Cotonou, bonjour*’) to start the conversation with the host of Radio Cotonou, the broadcaster in that town (i.e. municipality). He explains this approach as a mark (i.e. a brand) every *grogneur* uses to be instantly recognised by both hosts and listeners. Additionally, *grogneurs* mention their current locality, such as Roland does: ‘Here is Roland Gbemana from Ahogbohoulé!’ (neighbourhood of Cotonou). He explained:

Just when I am starting my intervention, I am determining my place. It’s just a manner of talking, it is a habit, and a way to mark my presence. (Cotonou, October 2021)

Conversely, Emile Hounnouvi usually introduces himself as ‘the one phoning from the town of the white woods (*la cité des bois blancs*)’, a colloquial name for the town of Athiéme, west of Cotonou.

Rhetorical strategies also include the citation of proverbs. *Grogneurs* utilise them to make their arguments more convincing. For example, on 8 March 2018 (*Qu’en dites-vous*, Soleil FM), the caller Dieudonné evoked the following proverb: ‘When two elephants are fighting, it is the herbs which will suffer’. Here, he referenced the unwanted side effects of the current teacher strikes: children who could not attend school and their parents who paid the school fees yet feared the invalidation of a complete school year (*année blanche*). The two elephants were the teachers and the government; it took many weeks before they came to an agreement. Other *grogneurs* later used the same proverb.

Another typical proverb that implies another meaning and has also been used by many *grogneurs* is, ‘You cannot cook omelettes without breaking the eggs’ (*On ne peut pas faire d’omelettes sans casser les œufs*). This proverb suggests that, often, negative side effects are inevitable and must be accepted when good projects are underway. This reference was once used by the highly active *grogneur* Mathieu Hontonou. He referred to a meeting of the president with the heads of the major religious congregations to explain his measures for clearing public places of unwanted religious manifestations. This policy would not please everyone (*Qu’en dites-vous?*; Soleil FM 2.3.2018).

Furthermore, on 30 January 2018, frequent caller Valentin Ayonou started his message with the following words: ‘We are in Bénin, and we must call a cat a

cat and a dog a dog' (*Nous sommes au Bénin, et nous devons appeler chat-chat, et chien-chien*). This statement inferred that things needed to be clearly addressed, not in a disguised manner. Another typical saying is, 'They should put a little bit of water into their wine,' which is used to express, for example, a wish for others to argue less rigidly in a discussion.

A *grogne* show on CAPP FM discussed the still-lingering tensions between Bénin and neighbouring Niger after the coup d'état in that country in 2023. Hence, Sébastien used a biblical quote to argue that the strict public response of Bénin's President Talon, which sided with the official disapproval of the coup by the Economic Community of West African States, had caused more trouble than necessary. He noted that one should have clearly expected counteraction by Niger's authorities, including the closure of the border between the two states. Sébastien quoted a verse from Ephesians 6, which disapproves of any threatening (*Tribune libre*, 26.7.2025).

Furthermore, in a show again on CAPP FM (*Tribune libre*, 24.10.2025), Paul Raoul Zinsou quoted an expression from the late eminent Bishop Isidore de Souza, who once presided over the National Conference in 1990. De Souza had appealed that no bloodshed should follow political tensions at this moment of transition. Thus, Zinsou used this statement to refer to the vivid debates that followed the national electoral commission's exclusion of an oppositional candidate from running for the presidency (TRT 2025).

Such proverbs, famous quotes, biblical notes, and comparisons form part of 'a good talk' in Bénin, especially during public meetings. Here, they are an element of the *grogneurs*' individual 'styles': typical, recognisable ways of addressing a given topic, with the use of local idioms, which adds a special spirit to these shows. Additionally, *grogneurs* may occasionally switch over to national languages to add commentaries or aphorisms that are difficult to express in French. Furthermore, new expressions in the Béninese version of French also appear (Assogba 2015b).

A general feature of almost all *grogneur* interventions is their practice of directly addressing and naming accountable people in administrative and political positions. Here, they usually refer to the full name and exact position related to the issue at stake. In this regard, many callers directly turn to the country's president or the mayor of a town, the district head, or directors of governmental offices. This identification is often followed by an urge to work more efficiently, which underlines their accountability. A typical example includes, 'I appeal directly to Commissioner Dédodji' (*J'interpelle directement le commissaire Dédodji*; Hounsou Prospère, Atlantic FM, 17.1.2018). Moreover, callers may di-

rectly address the head of state: 'My first concern goes directly to the President of the Republic. I speak to him with the greatest respect' (*Ma première préoccupation va directement au Président de la République. Je l'interpelle tout respectivement*; Frédéric Soubrouaté, 31.1.2018, Atlantic FM; *Je n'aime pas ça*).

Some *grogneurs* have argued that this formalising attitude is more than politeness since it is meant to underline the seriousness of their grievances. Expressions such as '*Monsieur Patrice Guillaume Athanase Talon, chef de l'état, chef du gouvernement*' are undoubtedly intended to imitate the way official media refer to the president, as a ritualised way to express honour and importance. Furthermore, these modes of addressing important issues are driven by the (not unrealistic) expectation that those addressed will personally listen to these statements (e.g. the documented case of former President Yayi Boni; cf. Sossou 2018).

In other cases, mentioning exact names and titles, such as '*Monsieur le Maire de la commune*', may underscore the expertise of an experienced *grogneur* in understanding an issue and the specific responsibilities of the authorities involved. Indeed, several *grogneurs* use to start their interventions most often with rather pathetic statements and appeals, such as 'Mister President, the country is ill, the people do not eat' (*Monsieur le Président, le pays va mal, les gens ne mangent pas*; Paul Hounkpatin on Atlantic FM, 22.2.18, *Je n'aime pas ça*), before finally pointing to quite tangible problems such as defunct roads.

Raoul Zinsou once declared, '*Monsieur, the Director of the SONEB, do you intend to poison the people?*' This opening augmented Zinsou's grievance about the obviously bad quality of the drinking water provided by this supplier in his home region (1 September 2025, Peace FM). In one declaration, Nicaise Atchadé addressed both the president and the female host of a show by avowing,

Madame! It is not right in the country now. It's not good. Oh dear! [...]. *Monsieur le Président*, you have to intervene! Madame, that's not good! It's serious! Madame! (Atlantic FM, 16.2.2018)

Similarly, Solange Koukou often starts her declarations with, 'Mister President, the country is suffering!' (*Monsieur le Président, le pays souffre*), or 'Does the president know what just happens in the country?' Laure Attiogbé often introduces such an expression as 'my cry of the heart' (*mon cri du cœur*).

As mentioned earlier, in an even more solemn kind of speech, other *grogneurs* address all listeners at once, with expressions such as 'Good morn-

ing, Béninese people!' (*Bonjour peuple béninois!* Mathieu Hontonnou, 09.04.18, Golfe FM, *La grogne matinal*), or 'Béninese and Béninese! Listen to the cry of the heart of the people, which is suffering greatly! Always call the *grogne* matinal! The people are suffering, it's not right!' (Symphorose Agbangbè, 3.4.2018, Golfe FM, *La grogne matinal*). This loud, highly emotional, yet appealing way of speaking is typical of the renowned Lady Symphorose Agbangbè (see below) and other, mostly elder *grogneurs* in Bénin, such as Nestor Avononmadégbé. They often use an additional moral appeal to address general issues. Symphorose (deceased mid-2022; Zinsou 2022) was always quite solemn in her calls. She began almost all of her statements with, 'Dear fellow citizen!' (*Chers compatriotes*). Most often, she made general statements, such as, 'Today's young people just don't want how earlier, work properly, there are too many criminals among them' (ibid.). 'Where is the world going?' she would ask again rhetorically.

However, some *grogneurs* have expressed their disapproval of such a speech act. For instance, Romain Dagbomey said, 'Only a president is entitled to this way of speaking', which would be a pretension. But [in the case of Symphorose] after all, it's OK. We are fine with that. It's her tone' (21 October 2020).

Other characteristic expressions many *grogneurs* use, especially in contexts of disapproval, are 'The country belongs to all of us!' (*Le pays nous appartient à tous*) or: 'We are not sheep' (*Nous ne sommes pas des moutons*).

Typical rhetoric includes an open self-confirmation, especially when issues resurface after being previously discussed. Here, typical statements include, 'I have been addressing that problem already for a long time', and 'We have been screaming because of that in our *grogne* calls, but nothing happened' to stress their perseverance.

**First interventions by callers** In most cases, first callers are well-known *grogneurs* who can reach the phone line as quickly as possible and start their statements with typical opening words. They greet their hosts noticeably politely (while often addressing the studio technician of the day), praise the host and the show while underlining its significance, and then introduce their issues. Most callers greet the presenter of the show personally with either a first name or family name (e.g. '*Bonjour, Monsieur...*'). Further examples include the following:

- 'Mr eminent journalist, good afternoon. I greet you and your technician on duty'.
- 'This is Mathieu Hontonnou, the servant of the people'.

- (To laud the radio station) ‘Power of the municipal administration, good afternoon!’
- ‘Today I am addressing the Director General of the National Electricity Company, with all due respect’.

Often, when the phone line is interrupted for whatever reason, the host typically says, ‘Oh, he (or she) has left us on tiptoe’ (*sur la pointe des pieds*).

In some cases, *grogneurs* and some hosts of *grogne* shows use nicknames on the air. The host of the *grogne* show, Samuel Elijah at Atlantic FM, for instance, was often called ‘Uncle Sam’. Victorien Azandoté from Radio Planète enduringly uses the title ‘Docteur Vazo’, which is also his name as an artist and actor, whereas Wilfried Ahouassou is frequently called ‘Willy’. This practice is meant to convey a sense of intimacy. However, it may be misleading, as the hosts of these shows often dislike or are unfamiliar with these expressions or, at the very least, their appropriation by people they do not know very well.

Conversely, *grogneurs* use a variety of sobriquets, such as ‘man of the people’ (*l’homme du peuple*, Mathieu Hontonou; a perfect self-image of his posture) and ‘the unavoidable’ (*l’incontournable*, Lucien Ayonou). Hosts often introduce ‘the Imam’ (Moussa Alidou) or simply ‘the professor’ (for Zakary Egonlety). Both refer to the current or former occupation of these *grogneurs*.

Addressing Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, *grogneurs* meticulously address their concerns towards those in office (e.g. the president, most often with his full name and title), including the mayor, the accountable minister, or the head of the national police. Thus, they demonstrate their perfect knowledge of the administrative landscape and establish the ‘seriousness’ of their calls. Furthermore, they use typical formulations for structuring their speeches:

- ‘I have three concerns. First of all, my first concern (*préoccupation*) ..., then my second concern ...’.
  - ‘What do I want to say today?’
- There is also a typical rhetoric to reinforce the argument:
- ‘Those responsible should think carefully about this (they should look at their copy)’.
  - ‘Think about the social that should be at the forefront’.
  - ‘I say: do the essential before any luxury (*l’essentiel avant le luxe*)’.
  - ‘Consider the situation of most Béninese in the country’.

Ultimately, there are typical formulas for counterarguments:

- ‘This is not true!’
- ‘We do not agree with the way it is done!’
- ‘With all respect, the way to do this is not appropriate!’

**Repetition** When analysing *grogne* shows with more intensity over a specific period,<sup>1</sup> it became evident that some *grogneurs* frequently repeated the same statements, sometimes for weeks. It is not uncommon for these people to read out the same text repeatedly, in hopes that their message will finally be recognised.

This practice has two effects. First, this attitude may help uphold some issues on the public agenda. Some complaints raised by *grogneurs* that became subject to such repetitions included unsolved problems related to the general recruitment of customs agents who were suspended because of cases of corruption (*concours de la douane* 2015; Sébastien Gnonhossou and Solange Koukou), as well as a similar problem regarding the recruitment of students for an engineering school in Savalou (Barnabé Agbekponou and Pierre Hounkpatin). Other issues were the then-unfinished persecution of the people liable for the aforementioned ICC scandal (Jacques Avokan and Ramanou Gbadamassi), the scandal of the unfinished construction of a new building for the National Parliament (Jean-Baptiste Adjovi), and the bad working conditions and insufficient payment of street cleaning women for the municipality of Ouidah (Emile Hounnoui).

The second effect is that these repetitions may leave other listeners and journalists, however, feeling bored. Nonetheless, they acknowledge the perseverance of these callers and the pressure their issues may exert on the authorities involved. Recently, Paul Raoul Zinsou repeatedly mentioned (on Radio Cotonou and CAPP FM) the closure of a parastatal enterprise in Porto-Novo that produced schoolbooks (*Imprimerie CNPMS, Centre National de Production des Manuels Scholaires*), which resulted in unemployment among former

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1 These periods spanned over the months of September to October 2018, April to July 2022 and February to March 2024. Here, I was able to record and analyse almost all major *grogne* shows aired by Golfe FM, Radio Cotonou and CAPP FM, plus many other shows produced by Radio Parakou, Radio Fraternité Parakou, and Radio Bénin on a less regular basis. Despite the quite different auidial qualities of these recordings, I usually listed all callers and their issues and transcribed selected calls and interactions.

employees. Sébastien Gnonhossou often hinted that the costs for dialysis treatment were no longer covered by the state, contrary to previous governments (April–August 2025).

A side effect is also that *grogneurs* brand their names, mark their positions, and enhance their reputations and notoriety (which is not always appreciated by all listeners). Finally, this method of repeated calls helps the host to lead the shows. Samuel Elijah, a long-time host of *grogne* shows at Atlantic FM, explained that this repetition makes these shows perhaps boring, but it helps the hosts who already know the *grogneurs* to better anticipate their interventions and understand how to handle them (Cotonou, October 2021).

Some *grogneurs* may be commissioned by those who charge them to express their worries, to repeat these calls. Indeed, this repetition may bore some listeners, whereas others appreciate the tenacity and perseverance of their efforts. It is, nevertheless, a means to underline the importance of one's interventions by mentioning (real or supposed) achievements, for instance, by insisting that repeated statements led to the repair of a defunct road.

Finally, some *grogneurs* are notorious for overdoing their statements with a high and loud voice that departs from a moderate style. Others are notorious for speaking either very slowly (partly due to age-related issues), such as Hippolyte Kpèdotossi, or extremely fast, such as Alassane Garba from Kandi, who aims to convey as much information as possible in a short period of time (telephone interview, August 2022). Consequently, hosts fear these takes may spoil the show.

On Friday, 4 April 2020, during the show *Questions actuelles* (9 p.m.), Lucien Dossou provocatively asked a caller, Paul Chodatou, whether his planned statement would be comprehensive, even before the latter could start his intervention, as he often discussed his feelings that overwhelmed him. Of course, Chodatou replied with much amusement, but he obviously tried to temper his statement throughout his talk (CAPP FM, April 2020).

Forms of self-assertion Part of the ritual is that the host often tries to recognise callers' voices using a simple greeting by guessing their names before they can begin to properly introduce themselves. Honoré Nahum from Radio Cotonou appears to be especially gifted in this regard, as are Philibert Abibou (CAPP FM) and Victorin Azandoté, also known as Docteur Vazo (Radio Planète, *grogne* shows in Fongbé), who also make an effort to guess callers' names, which generates considerable esteem among their listeners. When a host successfully guesses the name of the caller, the latter often answers with '*affirmatif*' (in fact).

Most callers then continue their interventions with a very kind, formal, and polite approach, greeting the host, acknowledging the technician, lauding the station, or uttering wishes (e.g. on New Year's Eve), while thanking the host for the opportunity to voice their grievances.

Some callers add compliments to honour the host. For instance, Paul Chodatou addresses Honoré Nahum from Radio Cotonou as 'our Alain Foka', which refers to one of the most prominent journalists from RFI, who has hosted call-in shows for decades. Most often, the host is also polite while inviting the caller to express their statements similarly. In some cases, well-known *grogneurs* are eventually flattered by some hosts, who mention the frequency of their calls, their often first position on the air (Sébastien; Zakary Egonlety), or their strong voice (Anselme Kpindjo).

However, this politeness does not prevent the listeners from becoming more polemical as their declarations continue. Some typical statements include, 'In which country are we actually?' (*nous sommes dans quel pays*), often used by Solange K. and Barnabé A., or 'This is not normal!' (Sébastien, François). More dramatic forms include, 'Mister President, forgive us. We are on our knees' (Solange), concerning the subject of the Law of Helmets (26 February 2024, CAPP). This approach also includes mentioning formative suffering: 'I have six children. I can't afford to buy six helmets for all of them because we also have to eat' (Claude Kakanakou, via *Allô BIP*, BIP Radio, 28 February 2024).

**Closing** To end a contribution, *grogneurs* use typical words such as, 'It's all for today' or 'Until my next time'. Rock-Yves Ahouanchédé's interventions often ended with similar words: 'For this day, I turn off the tap' (*Pour ce jour, je ferme le robinet*). Moreover, Hermann Méton often concludes his remarks with a reference to his further enquiry, marked by suspense: 'More on this issue next time' or 'I will get back to the matter soon'. These rhetorical elements serve as a marker of identity while gaining attention. Referring to Goffman (1959: pp. 132 et seq.), they can be seen as a mode of impression management.

### **Insertion: *Grogneurs* in Changing Economies of Attention**

Many of these strategies and attitudes are related to growing competition amongst the *grogneurs*, as well as amongst all media actors in the country. As the analysis of my interviews shows, this competition influences the options

and strategies of most *grogneurs* in gaining the necessary public attention and securing their public voices. One of these strategies is the choice of broadcasters to reach a broad audience:

Apart from Radio Fraternité FM, I prefer to call Radio Parakou. It's broadly listened. They broadcast at Friday, 10 o'clock, and Monday, 16 o'clock. It is followed in the entire north of Bénin and neighbouring countries. (Adam Bachirou, Parakou, July 2023)

Georg Franck (1998) coined the concept of economies of attention to merge socio-psychological perspectives and an analysis of changing media economies (Lanham 2007). It begins with the assumption that attention is a limited resource. In the realm of media studies, these insights complement the theory of agenda setting (Rössler 1997). More recently, Bleicher and Hickethier (2002) further developed Franck's approach by examining the media industry and technological options in general.

In our case, I argue that listeners have several options to follow various media, as well as grant their attention to the individual statements of *grogneurs*. To augment the probability of gaining attention, radio hosts and *grogneurs* constantly cooperate to increase their perceptibility and distinctiveness on the air. To make the shows even more appealing, they are supplemented by additional elements from the station and the presenters.

**Openings** Each show starts with an opening jingle (*générique*), most often produced at the radio station. Sometimes, excerpts of recorded statements by callers follow, combined with significant music (see below). An example from BIP Radio Cotonou is,

'Allô BIP Radio, the free airtime event on your radio. BIP Radio opens its microphones to you from Monday to Friday from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. Take the air, express yourself live on the subject of your choice, without defaming, by dialling 52526767' (recording BIP Radio, February 2024).

A particular tune stems from Radio Arzèkè in Parakou. For many years, the station used an excerpt from a speech by the former President Boni Yayi from 2012 as an opening jingle on the workdays' *grogne* show, in which he said, '*Il faut dénoncer!*' (one must criticise). Here, he seemed to encourage people to speak openly about their grievances, a statement that appeared somewhat contra-

dictory to his media politics. The piece was then repeated several times during the show to further justify the relevance of the programme.

In February 2017, the technicians replaced the intro by inserting an intriguing yet authentic statement from a small child criticising local authorities due to damage in his neighbourhood. Opening jingles and opening statements then set the stage for the subsequent, often effusive, statements from the callers while underscoring the relevance and prestige of this show. Meanwhile, the sealed broadcaster Soleil FM announced the respective *grogne* show on workday afternoons, *Qu'en dites-vous?*, in the following manner: 'Every day from 3:10 p.m. to 3:55 p.m., Soleil FM is yours to listen to. Call in to share your views on development issues.'

Of particular significance is the choice of musical titles, most often aired at the beginning and the end of a *grogne* show. For instance, Golfe FM often used to start the programme *La grogne matinal* with a song by the well-known musician Stan Tohon<sup>2</sup> *Saisis ta chance* (Take your chance), which calls for active participation while avoiding hate and defamation. Moreover, the mentioned *grogne* show *Qu'en dites-vous* usually opened with politically minded African pop music, which also helped bridge the breaks between callers.

The choice of the respective titles is also significant. For instance, the song *Gérez les tensions* by Ivorian reggae star Tiken Jah Fakoly was used several times when the subject of debate revolved around popular protests. Radio Arzèkè FM in Parakou, for example, made a similar choice to start the *grogne* show within the morning programme *Bonjour chez vous*, apart from a recorded statement of the president (see above), with a sample of the title *Je dénonce Babylone* from reggae roots singer Meta which includes these appealing words: '*C'est la dictature qui s'appelle démocratie*'. Such a reference to critical Rastafarian-styled African pop culture was also chosen to open the morning *grogne* show *A vous l'antenne*, aired by Peace FM in Cotonou, most often followed by the tune *Plus rien ne m'étonne* (Nothing surprises me anymore) created by Tiken Jah Fakoly.

Furthermore, CAPP FM opens the Friday's *grogne* show in French most often with *To Tché Wè*, a title from the African Salsa Orchestra, led by prominent musician Michel Pinheiro. It was created in 2016 with both song lines in Fongbé and French. Here, interest in improving the condition of one's country is expressed musically. The station starts the interactive show *Tribune libre* on Satur-

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2 Stanislas ('Stan') Tohon, who died in 2019, was famous for his popular Think-System (or *tchinkounmè*), which blended local rhythms and instruments (e.g. calabashes) with European and Caribbean tunes.

days with the header *C'est le peuple qui parle* (It's the people who speak) by rapper Radama Z. Moreover, Radio Parakou, throughout its Friday and Monday shows *Les auditeurs en ligne* airs tunes from the popular singer G. G. Lapino, including *Ça doit changer* (It must change), a song that comprises moral pleas.

Similarly, the song *Je rêve d'un Bénin prospère* (I dream of a prosperous Bénin) by singer Young Marley usually opens the show *La grogne matinal* on Radio Nanto FM in Natitingou. Subsequently, the show's host greets the listeners and reminds them of the 'rules of the game': above all, to avoid all kinds of defamation while remembering the limited time allocated to each intervention.

**Interruptions** As I mentioned earlier, the presenters of these programmes must avoid making defamatory statements or unjustified accusations against callers. Otherwise, the station may be fined by the HAAC based on complaints from affected individuals. However, during live shows, problematic interventions represent a challenge for every host.

During the *grogne* programmes on Radio Parakou (i.e. *Nasuba* and *Les auditeurs en ligne*), the hosts constantly repeat that only opinions 'in the sense of development' should be expressed, without regard to 'politics'. This statement apparently indicates that callers should not criticise government policy in general but instead name specific problems, preferably those that can be solved directly.

For almost all *grogne* programmers, hosts from more liberal, neutral stations (e.g. CAPP) as well as those from state media (Radio Parakou) note that criticism of private persons must be avoided, in contrast to expressions concerning public institutions and the local authorities. I suppose that in the event of such accusations, private persons are more protected by legal procedures. They may also remind them of the limited time allocated to them or ask for a more moderate intervention. When these attempts fail, the host often politely interrupt the caller and say, "Thanks, we have taken notice of your issues, thanks for your call. There is another listener on the phone line. Hello?"

Nevertheless, this step is not easy to take because, in most cases, the caller is unhappy with the procedure and continues to talk and argue. Consequently, a possible smooth course of discussion to that point in the show may be brutally interrupted by a disturbance that will affect even the most superficial listeners. Thereafter, the host must do everything to calm the situation and return to a professional mode of handling further incoming calls.

**Closing** Finally, each statement ends politely with similar words that first reiterate the caller's name and the place of the call, along with some good wishes to the host of the radio station and, often, to all other listeners. In addition, they use typical farewell or ending formulas, such as 'I close the tap for today', 'I give you back the aerial', or 'that's all for today! I'll come back to you soon.' Then, the host thanks the caller before taking the next call. At the end of each show, the hosts of most stations (e.g. Radio Planète and Radio CAPP FM) summarise all interventions and repeat the names of the callers and their issues. Often, hosts greet frequent callers who have not been able to call, again a sign of respect and interdependence.

**Hosts' flavour** Of course, the hosts' approach, conversational skills, and rhetoric are also crucial elements for the success of these programmes, especially during live broadcasts. This approach begins with a clear introduction. For example, Benjamin Honoré Nahum (Radio Cotonou) opens each morning *grogne* broadcast with a quote from an important writer (e.g. Oscar Wilde) or philosopher, which adds a philosophical note. Other presenters intersperse personal elements. For instance, Philibert Abibou (Radio CAPP FM) often uses proverbs and greets acquaintances. In cases of personal concern, he endorses reports from the *grogneurs* with his experiences. Serge Ayaka from Radio Bénin conducts the dialogical conversation during the thematically focused show *Échos de l'actualité* in a humorous style.

Rachida Houssou takes considerable time for each caller during BIP Radio's weekday open *grogne* programme, *Allô BIP*. Callers are first greeted warmly, including an exchange of wishes and small talk on personal conditions. Additionally, greetings are sent to the residents of the caller's respective location. During the show, callers are invited to express a tangible issue, which is then often followed up after the show by the station's journalists calling the respective authorities or making subsequent visits on the spot. During subsequent shows, concerned listeners often inquire about the state of affairs of their cases. Presenters then must appease them if the case is still awaiting official statements, pending further developments. However, the danger of raising expectations too high is always present.

As mentioned above, *grogneurs* monitor their performance, as well as those of their peers, by listening to rebroadcasts of *grogne* shows or audio recordings on mobile phones and WhatsApp. Adam Bachirou, a *grogneur* in Parakou, mentioned,

To hear a rebroadcast is important. First of all, you cannot always follow the entire show in its first edition. Furthermore, you have to detect your mistakes in order to prevent them. Man is not God; man can make mistakes. It's good to know it, to do better. (August 2025)

The rebroadcasts offered by some stations in Cotonou and Parakou serve the *grogneurs* as an important tool for self-control and monitoring their fellow callers. This approach also creates an ongoing competition between frequent listeners in terms of public presence and effectiveness. A closer look at their daily practice shows that their performances consist of a series of elements that they must master to achieve fame.

### **Grogne Shows as a Drama**

The above-mentioned elements (i.e. shows always broadcast at the same time, with the same introductory and opening jingles, musical elements, similar forms of address, almost the same participants, moments of dramatisation, and similar closing formulas) create ritualised sequences typical of these shows. It is obviously a public media ritual (Liebes/Curran/Katz 1998; Pross/Rath 1983), but it is also more than that. I argue that we should analyse these shows as a media ritual while considering their larger context, their place within the media landscape, and the broader political culture in Bénin in general.

In my reading, each of these *grogne* shows can be considered and analysed as a drama, in the proper sense of the term. Drama refers here to a repeatedly performed and ritualised sequence of expressions and interactions, which are in large part purposely staged by all actors involved. They all follow a kind of (unwritten) script that sets the stage, clarifies their positions, and conveys information. This definition intends to accentuate the performative aspects of these shows that make them highly recognisable.

Many listeners and the surveyed *grogneurs* also feel that how conflicts are resolved during a broadcast is an important feature. In the event of differences of opinion, presenters should be firm but polite and seek understanding, for example, by pointing out insufficient evidence and formulating a possible contradiction to the caller's statements in a comprehensible manner. Moderation is important, as the general rules (e.g. no personal accusations, insults, false information, or serious accusations without proof) are reiterated, along with

the unfortunate reality that not all callers can be accepted. Hosting a successful *grogne* show also entails maintaining a disciplined dialogue and respecting the standards of rhetoric, a crucial element of the public sphere in West Africa (Ige/Motsaathebe/Ochieng 2022).

These collective elements make *grogne* shows a particular mediatised public drama. Conversely, the shows are much more than playful performances, as the issues addressed must be both pertinent and based on veracity. Consequently, *grogneurs* must master the sources they use for their statements and use them as precisely as possible. In this regard, the following chapter sheds light on *grogneurs*' strategies to obtain information. It starts with explaining their situation in other regions of the country, explores their relationship to fellow *grogneurs*, journalists and administrative authorities, before discussing their public role in Benin today.

*Figure 7: Members of the listener's club and the station's director, Radio Nanto FM, November 2024.*



Source: Courtesy of Ezéchiél Yotto, Natitingou