

Chapter II: *La Grogne Matinal*

The Establishment of a Contentious Radio Show

'I'm sorry, I have to interrupt our conversation', Sébastien apologised, turning up the volume on the radio in his tailor's workshop. 'I can't miss that show', he later explained. Did he want to listen to other *grogneurs*? 'Yes, I want to know what they are up to'. Later, he added,

I started listening to these programmes 25 years ago on Golfe FM, and later on other stations. I began participating by calling in, although back in the day, it was more expensive. Some people even used telephone boxes, just before mobile phones became affordable. I know most of the presenters who were on air then and now. (Cotonou, 3 April 2023)

Beginnings

After 1997, the private media sector in Bénin underwent significant expansion, giving rise to new genres and production techniques that profoundly altered the Béninese media landscape. This transformation was driven by younger radio professionals who drew inspiration from Euro-American models. At that time, Radio Golfe FM, Radio Planète, Océan FM and CAPP FM were particularly successful. Additionally, the national state broadcasters, Radio Bénin, Radio Atlantic FM, and Radio Parakou, integrated new broadcasting formats. These included interactive radio programmes, call-in shows, discussions on family and sexuality (Grätz 2014a), political debates, and quiz shows. During certain call-in shows, listeners could now openly and directly address pertinent matters in public life.

These shows quickly gained popularity in both French and local languages and attracted many participants. Callers raised a wide range of issues, includ-

ing poor infrastructure, dirty roads, and complaints about ineffective public services. They also evoked sensitive topics such as corruption and abuse of administrative power.

The first such *grogne* show was launched in Bénin in 1998 by the private broadcaster Golfe FM¹. That show, called '*La grogne matinal*', ran until the station was banned in August 2023. Ambitious radio presenters, led by the journalist Jérôme Kassa (later at Soleil FM), Franck Alain Dotou, and Fréjus Quénum, were among the first to develop such a show. Later, journalists such as Benjamin Nahum (today at Radio Cotonou), Rodrigue Guézodjè (today at Deutsche Welle), and Peggy Ludovic Dagba (later at Radio Diaspora, cf. p. 148) continued in their footsteps to host these shows.

The initial purpose was to capture the audience's attention at 6:30 a.m., just before the station's 7 a.m. news began. The historic morning call-in show, *La grogne matinal*, was influenced by American models that had previously integrated call-in segments in the 1930s (Levin 1987), as well as in France. An important reference was the daily morning show *Appels sur l'actualité*, which the French international broadcaster Radio France International (RFI) introduced in the mid-1990s (Frere 2011)².

In Bénin, callers who manage to connect with a station during such shows may discuss critical comments on daily issues and societal scandals (Yabi 2003). Each caller must provide their full name and is allotted a specific time limit on the air, ranging from 90 seconds to 2 minutes. Here is an example:

My name is Djossè Gervais. I am calling from Yémicodji. The road that traverses the lake in my neighbourhood is in a poor condition and requires

1 A precursor to these interactive programs, in the broadest sense, were greeting-and-request programmes (concerts d'auditeurs), inspired by European models, see Grätz (2000). They were successful because they were broadcast in local languages. Contributions from listeners initially came in the form of letters and later, after 1990, increasingly through telephone calls. All these shows are now much easier to produce due to the ubiquity of mobile phone calls. Presenters sometimes also read messages from their mobile phones or computer screens on the air. Listeners can also use WhatsApp to contact their FM stations.

2 For the morning show *Appels sur l'actualité*, callers from any African country can express their opinions on current political issues. People are often called back to minimise their phone costs. The website of the show features podcasts of previous editions. BBC Africa offers such a show in both French or English during the audio programme 'Focus on Africa'.

repair. During the rainy season, the road is inundated, and school children must traverse the water to reach their school. (Recorded: Atlantic FM, 12.9.2018, 9.05)

Grogne can be translated as ‘angry grumble’, ‘expressing anger’, or a kind of ‘nagging’. Callers can use this airtime to raise multiple topics at once (*préoccupations*)³. In most cases, hosts only provide moderate intervention or commentary. They may summarise statements and add accurate information, but their primary responsibility is to prevent defamation or false accusations. Callers are not allowed to refer directly to individuals and must provide evidence for any serious allegations.⁴

Subsequently, other stations in the Cotonou–Porto-Novo region adopted this format, including Radio Planète, Océan FM, and CAPP FM. *Grogne* shows rapidly gained popularity throughout the country, and today, nearly all Béninese radio listeners are familiar with this type of radio programme. A group of steady callers quickly formed around these shows (Assogba 2012b), so these frequent callers have consequently become known as *grogneurs* (which translates as ‘grumblers’ or ‘complainers’).

At present, the genre has become a staple on the broadcast schedules of almost all radio stations in Bénin. The model has been met with success throughout sub-Saharan Africa, as evidenced by reports from Ghana (Selormey 2012; Nunoo 2015)⁵, Sénégal (Sonko 2010), Kenya, Uganda (Brisset 2009, Brisset 2011), DR Congo (Lokendandjala Okonda 2012), and South Africa (Bosch 2010; Hungbo 2011), as well as in Mali and Burkina Faso.

Standards, Variations, and Schedules

Although the original formula of the *grogne* shows is certainly the most widespread, other participatory programmes exist during which listeners can call in to a radio station, for instance, during political debates with studio guests. These guests may include members of civil society, political analysts,

3 Later, Golfe FM allowed frequent callers to intervene every second day only to widen the range of callers.

4 On Planète FM, for instance, the show usually starts with a reminder: ‘You cannot accuse someone without providing evidence to the radio station.’

5 In Ghana, talk radio was introduced earlier than in Bénin, especially by private broadcasters in urban areas; Tettey (2011).

or MPs who engage in dialogue with both hosts and listeners (e.g. *Décryptage*, Radio CAPP FM; *Cartes sur tables*, Océan FM; *90 minutes pour convaincre*, Radio Bénin; *Franc parler*, Radio Cotonou). During the call-in segments of these debates, multiple questions from listeners are often combined before participants are allowed to respond individually.

When comparing these types of shows, differences can be found in terms of typical topics, broadcasting practices (i.e. whether they are also broadcast simultaneously on TV or as podcasts), their place in the broadcaster's programming schedule, and the choice of guests. Some programmes adhere to the 'pure' *grogne* type, which is open to any topics and all callers, with minimal interference from the presenter. In contrast, other programmes typically concentrate on a specific topic and stir dialogue between a host and a caller. Further variations refer to the show's character, whether it is broadcast live or pre-recorded, as well as the frequency of these variations.

For example, shows such as *Allô BIP* (BIP Radio), *À vous l'antenne* (Peace FM) and *Parole aux citoyens* (Radio Cotonou) are aired almost daily throughout the week, while others have only one slot within the weekly programme schedule. Hence, the participation of their listeners differs significantly.

Some programmes allow more time for direct calls. *Allô BIP*, for instance, concedes most individual callers ample time to explain their problems in detail. As a result, some established *grogneurs* judge that programme to be unfavourable, as they then no longer find a chance to gain airtime. In other cases, however, moderators simply read out comments received via social media that were not broadcast directly. Radio Cotonou and Radio Bénin often prefilter calls with the help of studio technicians who first receive the calls. They ask about the topics to be discussed and take down callers' names before allowing them to intervene in the ongoing programme.

In contrast to other formats, some interactive shows operate with a more discussion-related modus, preferring to focus on specific topics suggested by the presenter. Examples of these shows include *Tribune libre* on Radio CAPP FM (Saturday mornings at 8 a.m., mainly hosted by Philibert Abibou) and *Échos de l'actualité* on Radio Bénin (most often hosted by Serge Ayaka or Henri N'Dah Sékou), both in Cotonou. These shows usually propose one or several main current topics (*Sujets de l'actualité* or *les faits marquants de la semaine*) for debate, most often introduced by appropriate summaries of previous news reports, statements by politicians, or elements from the station's news coverage (including interviews or speeches). These topics may also cover current events (e.g. serious accidents, rainfall, a minister's press conference, or the start of a new

school year) as well as campaigns (e.g. the need to register motorcycles and the performance of the national football team). In these formats, callers are asked to refer strictly to those proposed topics and to avoid any digression. Radio CAPP FM is known for proposing controversial topics for talk show debates. In other cases (such as the show *Opinions* on Radio Planète), the topic is, however, chosen by the host to direct opinion-making accordingly, often aligning with the political positioning of the radio station—for example, to discuss a (rather positive) decision by the government.

During the weekday shows *Échos de l'actualité* broadcast by Radio Bénin, callers are encouraged to refer to each other and have the opportunity to respond to the comments of others.

Discussion-oriented shows involve more reactions from the host, or, when applicable, from a studio guest, who comments on the callers' opinions while adding additional or contradicting arguments. In one case, Atlantic FM (today's Kiff FM, an offspring of Radio Bénin and part of the state broadcasting house SRTB) produced a live show that presented several *grogneurs* directly to a panel of discussants. It was a conference call hosted by the experienced radio journalist Samuel Elijah every Monday morning after the 9:00 a.m. news (which was suspended after his retirement).

Several stations announce these topics in advance so that callers can be better focused and prepared. They also do so via Facebook posts read during the show, for instance during the already mentioned weekday show *Échos de l'actualité*, aired by Radio Bénin. Here, hosts steer the discussion while preventing verbal abuse and defamation. The show usually deals with a current topic (e.g., police controls to ensure the obligation to wear a helmet) and receives calls from different parts of Bénin, while most are from the south. The host typically discusses issues with callers and proposes an alternative view.

As increasingly more radio stations have utilised the internet as a supplementary means to broadcast and disseminate information, *grogne* shows have also become accessible to listeners via livestreams. Currently (2025), these livestreams are offered by almost all radio stations in Bénin, including Radio Bénin, Radio Parakou, Radio CAPP FM, Radio Cotonou, and BIP Radio Cotonou, and are mostly accessed on Facebook or YouTube (e.g. Océan FM, *Cartes sur table*, on Sunday mornings and CAPP FM, *Décryptage*, on Monday mornings). Livestream broadcasting allows far-remote listeners, including expatriate listeners (e.g. students, businesspeople, and emigrants with strong ties back home), to intervene in such shows, which is, however, not often the case. To enable internet broadcasting on a usable level, most radio stations

employ or contract webmasters, while some stations also try to broadcast these shows live on Facebook. Furthermore, some radio stations also publish podcast files of select radio shows on their websites (e.g. Radio Bénin and CAPP FM). In some cases, however, the time slot allotted to callers to discuss with eminent studio guests on debate shows is edited and does not appear in the podcast version.

Stations such as Radio Parakou or Radio Cotonou offer specific Facebook pages and WhatsApp groups where listeners can post individual messages. An example is the show *Nasuba*, established by journalists from Radio Parakou, the regional outlet of the national broadcaster. *Nasuba* was promoted by then-editor-in-chief, Habib Soumanou (who assumed the position of station director from August 2019 until April 2025). Listeners are welcome to participate in a discussion (currently at 9:05 a.m.) on a particular subject (excluding Fridays, when the discussion is typically left open). The topic of the upcoming show is announced on the show's Facebook page at least one day in advance, along with the call-in numbers. The page also serves as an additional platform for sharing ideas and is utilised by both listeners and individuals interested in these topics, even if they are unable to listen live on the air (Parakou, July 2023)⁶. Radio Fraternité, a private and well-established station that also broadcasts in Parakou, produces a similar show on weekdays at 8:00 a.m. entitled *Question du jour*.

As my interviews with listeners in different regions of the country show, audience interest in political debates varies, of course, across social and age groups. However, politically sound shows are available nationwide in many different languages.

Grogne elements have also been featured in press reviews during the weekday morning programmes of Radio Soleil FM, which have been partially produced live at the newsstand *Kiosque de la morgue* in the centre of Cotonou⁷. Stations such as Radio CAPP FM and Radio Cotonou make a conscious effort to broadcast these programmes in Béninese languages as well. For instance, CAPP FM⁸ airs *grogne* shows in Fongbé, Gungbé, Adja, Yoruba, and French

6 Such parallel internet or mobile media platforms are often temporary offers only, as they depend on individuals and their services.

7 Suspended due to the closure of the station (February 2020; Reporters without borders (2019).

8 The station's founder, the experienced journalist and writer Jérôme Carlos, always maintained his independence and was a role model for many journalists in Bénin. He passed away in January 2024. 'We dare to do something here', he described as the spirit of the station in Cotonou, December 2023.

from Monday to Friday at 9:00 a.m. (see Appendix). Moreover, during his interactive shows, the host, Philibert Abibou, frequently allows callers to speak in either Fongbé or Gungbé. Sometimes, they switch between French and these languages within the same statement. Abibou argues that this allowance is more of an exception than a rule, as there are special shows for those languages. However, some issues seem too complex to be expressed in standard French, even for those with a good command of the language. (The degree of proficiency in French does not necessarily correlate with formal school qualifications.)

Most major *grogne* shows in Bénin are broadcast during the morning hours, except for shows produced by BIP Radio and Radio Parakou (in the afternoon). *Grogne* shows are sometimes part of larger programmes, such as *Le grand direct de l'information* on Radio Fraternité in Parakou. Thus, some shows compete with each other, such as those in Parakou (stations such as Arzèkè FM, Urban FM, and Radio Parakou offer *grogne* shows coincidentally at 6:30 a.m. on weekdays) and some in Cotonou (on Fridays, the French show *Grogne* overlaps on CAPP FM with those on Radio Cotonou)⁹. The discussion-type call-in shows may also compete with other programmes for audiences, for instance, during typical broadcasting times of political debates with studio guests (during talk shows) on Sunday mornings or Friday evenings. Station managers argue that, despite the competition, this positioning reflects established listening habits.

Interactive radio shows are popular in urban areas and are frequently featured in print media, especially when politicians reveal important information or announce new laws that are then discussed on the air. Some of the main broadcasting houses, which operate both radio stations and TV studios, synchronise these debate shows. For instance, Océan FM in Cotonou and Urban FM in Parakou, both belonging to the media house Matinal, synchronise the Sunday debate show *Cartes sur table*, most often hosted by Sosthène Fadairo and Aziz Adam Soulé.

9 During the *grogne* shows on Radio Parakou (Friday at 10 a.m. and Monday at 4 p.m.), callers have more time available and can intervene twice to address problems in their neighbourhoods (e.g. broken roads, frequent thefts, illegal allotments).

The table below provides an overview of the different types of interactive and *grogne* formats:

Table 1: Types of interactive and *grogne* formats

Type	Programmes, in French (selection)
Collecting style; Call-in statements of listeners with few or no additional comments by a host	<i>La grogne matinale</i> , Golfe FM (until 2023) <i>Je n'aime pas ça</i> , Atlantic FM (until 2023) <i>Allô BIP</i> , BIP Radio, Cotonou <i>Grogne</i> , Radio CAPP FM, Cotonou <i>À vous l'antenne</i> , Peace FM, Cotonou <i>Parole aux citoyens</i> , Radio Cotonou <i>Opinions</i> , Radio Planète, Cotonou <i>Bonjour chez vous</i> , Arzèkè FM, Parakou <i>Grogne</i> , Fraternité FM, Parakou <i>Les auditeurs en ligne</i> , Radio Parakou
Dialogic style; Call-in statements of listeners, most often discussing with the host	<i>Nasuba</i> , Radio Parakou <i>Tribune libre</i> , Radio CAPP FM Cotonou <i>Carton rouge</i> , Golfe FM (until 2023) <i>Échos de l'actualité</i> , Radio Bénin
Discussion-style; Call-in statements of listeners, most often in relation to studio guests debating a central topic, mostly collected	<i>Franc parler</i> , Radio Cotonou <i>Décryptage</i> , Radio CAPP FM Cotonou <i>Cartes sur table</i> , Océan FM <i>Question du jour</i> , Fraternité FM, Parakou <i>L'invité de la semaine</i> , Nanto FM, Natitingou

Almost all *grogne* shows start with an opening jingle, which emphasises the importance of the show as a free expression of opinion. The usual catchphrases broadcast by Radio Cotonou, for example, start with '*Parole aux citoyens* (word to citizens) – your voices matter! Radio Cotonou gives you the floor to collect your concerns, satisfactions and suggestions. Word to citizens – it's on 94.3, Radio Cotonou – Word to citizens: join us from Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 9.30 a.m. by dialling 40111718 or 50 52 52 73. Radio Cotonou: the voice of the Cotonois' (2025). Some jingles are comprised of a compilation of previous statements, such as the one aired by Peace FM during their weekday morning *grogne* show, including one by Sébastien, which makes him rather proud. On CAPP FM, the show *Tribune libre* starts as follows: (Musical intro) 'It's the peo-

ple who speak! Open forum – CAPP FM listeners comment on the highlights of the news! It's every Saturday from 8 o'clock to 9 o'clock' (Radio CAPP FM, August 2025).

In summary, these shows are a constant part of the programming schedule of almost all radio stations in the country.

Grogne Shows and Public Debates: Persistent Topics and News

Call-in *grogne* radio programmes are a perfect mirror of the urban everyday life of many people in metropolitan areas and address typical problems faced by most people in Bénin. Callers' complaints refer to a diverse range of issues, including defective roads, arrogant officials, brutal truck drivers, and garbage dumps around the market, as well as the rising prices of daily commodities and harsh government decisions. The programme reflects the various difficulties and struggles of everyday life. Many expressions of the *grogneurs* refer to problems of infrastructure in their immediate neighbourhoods. They often ask the local authorities to do a much better job of maintaining or repairing them, as the following example demonstrates:

[Caller:] 'Bonjour, my name is Solange Koukoui. I call you from Akpakpa'.
 [Host:] 'You are on the line, Madame'. [Caller:] 'In the second arrondissement, the streets should have been restored. Where I live, the route from Minando to Africando has not been completely finalised. So, we ask the mayor to monitor the contractor well and make sure everything will be finished to the end! Have a good day, Monsieur Mamadou Boukari!' [Host:] 'Thank you, Madame!' (*La grogne matinal*, Golfe FM, 26 October 2018)

Often, *grogneurs* advance problems they face themselves, for instance, when their children are obliged to stay home due to teachers' strikes. Other issues also concern corruption in public procurement or the non-payment of wages. Here is a random list of topics that have been addressed by *grogneurs*, based on my notes in April 2023 (Cotonou, Radio Cotonou and Radio CAPP FM).

- Drinking water scarcity in Akpakpa neighbourhoods; broken roads to a market in Sèmè-Kpodji;
- Corruption suspicions during campaigns of cadastral work; abandoned road works in Tchònvì;

- Doubts about the hygiene of the 'pure water' drinking water sold in bags;
- The bad treatment of patients in a public hospital;
- Unfinished public works in a market in Cotonou; and such.

Some of the topics that dominate these shows constantly recur: above all, the ever-present lack of electricity, with power cuts and rolling blackouts that regularly turn parts of the town into darkness. *Grogneurs* here mainly blame the *Société Béninoise d'Énergie Electrique* (SBEE), the main (parastatal) energy supplier, along with the energy minister and the president, while expressing the wish to be relieved. The second most perennial issue includes bad or defunct roads, which can cause fatal accidents, unfinished construction, and over-flooded roads and pathways, especially in the rainy season (see below).

Furthermore, the *grogneurs* often complain about broken streetlights, traffic lights, and road signs. Local issues, such as the lack of water supplies, equipment in hospitals and real estate issues (including the lack of land allocations and rezoning [*recasement*] by local administrations), can comprise most of the issues discussed by the *grogneurs*. Lastly, one of the most often mentioned problems is noise pollution. The well-known *grogneur* Ramanou Gbadamassi made the following comment:

Without us, the *grogneurs*, the condition of roads, streetlamps, and running water in the region would have been worse, because we talk about it first before anybody else. Then, authorities went to repair things, and thanks to us, things went better in many localities. (Abomey-Calavi, August 2023)

Notwithstanding the aforementioned proximate concerns, current political affairs and social problems also comprise the discursive field to which the *grogneurs* actively contribute. Gbadamassi cited, for example, the case of the recruitment of agents for the state office for social security, which, as usual, was connected to tests (*concours*). Obviously, people were placed on the list for these tests who were not even available in the country. Other candidates passed the tests, although they did not achieve the required results. Gbadamassi received such as list from a friend in the administration who had taken photos with his smartphone and from other *grogneurs* as well. It was the *grogneurs* who transmitted this information, long before other media took up these issues. Later, many of these recruitments were simply stopped and later completely reorganised.

Repeatedly, *grogneurs* in Cotonou demand the reopening of the government-shut-down radio station Radio Golfe FM. Recently, general and presidential elections, the modified electoral law, the exclusion of oppositional candidates for formal reasons, and the revised constitution (which was hastily voted in November 2025, introducing, among others, a Senate and prolonging mandates for presidents and MPs to seven years (Dahandé 2025; Aplogan 2025) have been repeatedly discussed. *Grogneurs'* critiques also addressed inadequate compensation for displaced residents in tourism development programmes (e.g. *La route de Pêche*, a strip between Cotonou and Ouidah, meanwhile outfitted to accommodate hotels, restaurants, and golf courses) and seaside promenades in Cotonou (*corniches*). *Grogneurs* also remind authorities to resolve social problems, for example missing subsidies for poor patients or help for sacked workers. Furthermore, the *grogneurs* have addressed the fate of political prisoners and the conditions of prisons in general.

In a similar regard, another debate was the affair of Ajavon. Sébastien Ajavon, a wealthy businessman, was a former ally of President Patrice Talon. Later, Ajavon became Talon's opponent. Ajavon established, among other things, the independent radio station Soleil FM (banned in 2019). In 2017, Ajavon was accused of smuggling drugs and went into exile to avoid a sentence of 20 years in prison (Duhem 2018).

Here, public information was scarce, as was the case with the appearance and conflicts reflected in the Banamè church (Tall 2015, see below, p. 53). These events triggered the *grogneurs* to elucidate the intricacies of juridical processes, which maintained a high level of public awareness. Other issues were the juridical pursuit of opposition politicians, such as Reckya Madougou and Joel Aïvo. Many callers saw these trials as essentially political, designed to exclude potential opponents.

Furthermore, some *grogneurs* always target general failures of the government, such as the lack of employment for young people and the rising consumer prices despite governmental interventions. Evoking the general political situation in the country, these *grogneurs* use utterances such as 'things are wrong in Bénin' (*ça ne vas pas au Bénin*) or 'the country is ill' (*le pays va mal*), particularly when insisting on the social aspect (*le hautement social*) of reforms, promised by President Talon for his second term in office, whereas others are more focused.

In addition, larger events, such as election campaigns, festivals, conferences, and major government operations, provide fertile ground for debate.

For instance, recurrent evictions (*déguerpissements*) of informal settlers or petty traders from public urban places caused considerable unrest due to their brutal implementation. Most callers accepted the initiative undertaken by the government as part of the new mode of governance (i.e. rupture) and the will to induce change in the country on all possible levels. They were, however, much more critical about the methods used. They criticised the harsh procedures and wished that more alternative options for vendors were created beforehand. Callers often mentioned that many people who had to earn their daily bread through informal activities were now suffering.

Other *grogneurs* have pointed out cases of arbitrary actions that involved destroying some people's stalls and shops while protecting those of others in a similar situation. As a result, many callers have expressed a desire to give those affected more time to prepare for their departure, to provide them with better warning, and to help rebuild their businesses or stalls at an alternative location. Similar critiques were issued in 2023 and 2024 by callers regarding the often-brutal means by which police officers enforce new laws and regulations on motorbike drivers, including the obligation to wear helmets.

One of the most persistent and recurring points of contention is the use of public spaces managed by local authorities. These areas, commonly referred to as administrative reserves, are intended for use by local authorities to develop communal projects or create recreational spaces. Their purpose was to be determined by the municipal councils and outlined in local development plans. In some cases, parts of these areas were misused for unintended purposes (e.g. serving as rubbish dumps), or they were even partially sold to private entrepreneurs who did not always operate in the public interest¹⁰.

Thus, the authorities (e.g. those in Abomey-Calavi) have been criticised by frequent callers for not administering public real estates in full transparency, while instead providing opportunities for private entrepreneurs in close personal relationships with them. This issue, which is also emerging in the northern metropolis of Parakou, is of particular interest to people in densely populated urban areas due to the rising real estate and rental prices for both housing and business activities (see example p. 131).

Often, *grogne* shows are part of a general upheaval of popular protest, especially in times of harsh governmental decisions, which are difficult to accept, or

10 Corruption related to real estate transactions, private and public domains alike, is widespread in Bénin and recently led to the establishment of a specialised court, the Cour Spéciale des Affaires foncières (CSAF); Linkpon (2023).

when blatant inequalities are revealed. In this regard, the tense social situation in the country at the end of January 2018, when various trade unions went on strike, found its natural echo in callers' interventions. Most *grogneurs* criticised the government for not being willing to negotiate on an equal basis, as well as trade unions for their stubbornness, while making patients or schoolchildren unwillingly suffer. Other significant issues of debate have included trials involving entrepreneurs who distributed counterfeit medications, as well as the failure of many pupils to pass the exam, which was allegedly caused by the teachers' strike.

A recurring theme in the months of September and October is severe flooding caused by heavy rainfall, coupled with the administration's inability to adapt the infrastructure.

In late February 2017, the government banned the sale of imported medicines, this time again with drastic measures, such as the seizure of stalls at local markets. Again, the *grogneurs* expressed their discontent with the methods which were applied, along with an affirmation regarding the necessity and justifications of the policy as such.

Some issues raised by the *grogneurs* have been part of larger public debates in Bénin. In September 2018, many *grogneurs*, together with other media users, protested very vividly against the significant increase in tariffs for internet usage, especially those with high data volumes, which was especially relevant for social media users. Soon after, a protest movement began to fight against these decisions, led by the association of bloggers, along with many Facebook and WhatsApp activists. Here, *grogneurs* joined and amplified a significant movement of protest, which involved press declarations of civic associations, such as the consumers' union, extensive press coverage, and a multitude of shared posts on social media and messenger services (Agué 2018; BBC 2018a).

In early and mid-2019, a central issue of critical comments raised by many *grogneurs* was the harsh reactions of governmental authorities during protests of oppositional protesters, following the parliamentary elections. At that time, oppositional candidates were banned, officially due to formal reasons (see above, p. 23). While opinions were divided about the usefulness of the new electoral law itself, it was, above all, the excess of violent actions that triggered much anger among the *grogneurs*. Most of them wished that all sides involved would simply calm down to prevent further bloodshed. Some *grogneurs* were personal witnesses of these events, whereas others argued in favour of a simple repetition of the elections.

Furthermore, the *grogneurs* often disapproved of the hasty nature of electoral reforms. The events of that year clearly demonstrated that public debates were very much shaped by contributions of callers to radio stations, predominantly by the *grogneurs*. Later, the procedures for declaring candidates were simplified slightly. Finally, in the 2023 legislative elections, several members of the opposition party *Les Démocrates* were elected, especially in electoral circumscriptions in southern Bénin (Radio France International 2023; Laplace 2023).

However, some topics that concern the press and social media have seemed to appear less frequently during interactive call-in programmes, which applies to the subject of security and terrorism. Since the beginning of 2019, the northern border areas of the Republic of Bénin have been repeatedly marked by terrorist attacks. Its consequences (i.e. fear among the villagers in that region) are well noticed by the public but were hardly mentioned by the *grogneurs*. Callers commented on this issue, for instance, during the programme *Les auditeurs en ligne*, aired by Radio Parakou on 16 September 2022. However, the topic of terrorism was almost never addressed by callers during such interactive shows, which I suspect was due to both the great distance from the incidents in the far north of the country and a reluctance to address issues of national security. In contrast, the failed coup attempt in December 2025 was an important topic.

A significant concern for many media users in Bénin was the numerous fraud cases in which individual phone numbers were misused to send fraudulent SMS messages. These texts mislead mobile phone users into fake accounts and deals. Apparently, the necessary identification procedure, in which buyers of new cell phone numbers and accounts present their identity cards, was circumvented or misused. For example, SIM cards are sold twice to disguise the true identities of those perpetrating these scams. This issue became a topic of several call-in broadcasts reporting on individual cases and proposed solutions (e.g. Radio Bénin, *Échos de l'actualité*, 11.10.2021; *Grogne* on CAPP FM, 8.10.2021). *Grogneurs'* calls contributed to enhancing information about these issues, as they were not fully addressed in other programmes. The most intriguing reports came from those who could narrate concrete cases that they, their friends, or relatives had experienced.

Nonetheless, *grogneurs* don't shy away from tough words. When six Members of Parliament (MPs) from the opposition party *Les Démocrates* (LD) defected at the end of October 2025, some callers blamed them for 'having sold their party'. It was alleged that these MPs prioritised their gross salaries over fulfilling their mandate. Specifically, it was claimed that immediately after the elections, the MPs abandoned their constituencies to take their parliamentary

seats in Porto-Novo and failed to return to address the needs of their electorate (*Tribune Libre*, CAPP FM 1.11.25).

Major scandals and national media events

In addition to the issues mentioned above related to current and changing topics of daily life, some *grogneurs* like to refer to long-standing issues, often scandals or murky affairs, which are still under investigation or have not been finally resolved. These topics include scandals such as the unfinished first construction site of a new parliament (see III, footnote 1), as well as the still-deficient compensation for families displaced due to power plant construction sites (e.g. in Maria-Gléta) or beach-side tourism projects (Amnesty International 2025).

Often, such statements are wrapped in moral appeals to authorities to resolve the mentioned problem. On 15 October 2021, Brice Sognibé noted that the agreed-upon bonus payments for soldiers had not been paid: 'This is disgraceful towards our brave men in uniform, the minister of finances should take immediate action' (Atlantic FM, *Je n'aime pas ça*).

Grogneurs were, much more than journalists, also active in condemning the circumstances under which the ICC scandal, which surfaced under President Yayi Boni, had been allowed to happen. The ICC group, beyond any governmental control, developed a nationwide Ponzi scheme. Its breakdown caused countless people to lose large sums (BBC 2019). The main instigators were sentenced, yet responsible authorities were not fully held accountable. The respective tribunal sessions were, however, covered live by various radio stations.

Conversely, a terrible bus accident became a national topic of radio debates. In January 2023, the dramatic fate of an overland bus belonging to the company BAOBAB in the town of Dassa on Sunday, 29 January 2023, caused many casualties due to a fire (Mensah 2023; Togonou 2023). The incident was widely discussed throughout the country and among the *grogneurs*. The bus hit a truck, and 22 passengers, who did not escape from the vehicle in time, lost their lives in the resulting fire. Shortly thereafter, the government took action by establishing special commissions to care for the survivors and observing a national mourning period.

The event became the subject of various caller broadcasts on numerous stations in early February 2023. The listeners expressed their sadness and anger at the poor condition of many important roads in the country. They criticised

the obvious failure of the fire brigade, which was also inadequately equipped on site, similar to the hospitals, as well as a lack of safety regulations, as bystanders took photos of the accident bus, including pictures of burned bodies.

During a *Tribune libre* show (4 February 2023), many *grogneurs* pointed out that poor roads were one of the major causes of accidents. They referred to their home region and the poor conditions of the *piste cyclable*, a separate branch line for moped riders next to the main motorway to Porto-Novo. This condition repeatedly required bikers to switch to the main road. 'We, the *grogneurs*, have been criticising these deficiencies for a long time. Now everyone is condemning it, but we have been addressing it for a long time' was the attitude of many callers, such as Paul Chodaton, Barnabé Agbekponou, Sébastien Gnonhossou, and Anselme Kpindjo (CAPP FM; *Tribune libre*, 4.2.2023).

Similar comments were made repeatedly by the *grogneurs* at the beginning of August 2021. The incident involved a bridge in the Fifadji district that was so dilapidated that it broke and required repair. The bridge was to be closed for a few days. In interactive radio broadcasts, several *grogneurs* took up this point and emphasised that they were the ones who had complained about the situation.

Likewise, *grogneurs* demanded sanctions against those held responsible for the death of two visitors of a football match at the National Stadium in June 2023 (RFI 2023), and the many victims of a further bus accident in August 2025 (TV5 Monde 2025).

Digression: Radio Trottoir, Mediatisation and Grogne Shows in Bénin

The fact that these issues, from dilapidated roads to corrupt politicians, are part of open, publicly (mass-) mediated statements available to almost all listeners is undoubtedly a remarkable shift when compared to the *radio trottoir* (Ellis 1989; cf. also Nkanga 1992, Yoka 1984): previously restricted, informal information circuits (regardless of their important social relevance). Today, scandals are being exposed while debates about the state and future of the nation have been more open than ever before. The effect of participatory media, together with social media and mobile messenger services and networks (e.g. WhatsApp), is considerably persistent, despite various attempts to control directly or indirectly the media in Bénin (Grätz 2015b). It is part of a larger, overall process of change, where the media generally play a significant role in the daily life of most people on earth more than ever before.

This process is called ‘mediatisation’ (Krotz 2001, 2007), one element of others in the larger process of globalisation. The term refers to a larger presence of political issues in public or private media. It also conceptualised the growing interconnectivity of media on a global scale, the flow of information between content and networks, and finally, the transformation of everyday culture and social relations using media of all kinds.

In the case of Bénin, mediatisation means that flows of information between different regions within the country, between people inside and outside the country, at various sites and places, as well as between different types of media, are growing and becoming more rapid and intensive. Nonetheless, locality matters. In most cases, the people in Bénin discuss domestic issues and politics more than events outside the country.

Indeed, in our case of *grogne* shows, foreign affairs find a very limited place. Most listeners certainly know who the incumbent presidents of France, Senegal and the United States are, but only intellectuals comment more boldly about them in public media. One explanation is that *grogne* shows, as a particular media genre, were not meant to discuss foreign affairs from the outset and are not considered by most habitual media consumers as an appropriate forum to do so as a matter of convention or habit.

Another argument is specifically related to the general idea of being heard, which has motivated *grogneurs* from the beginning to the present day to be heard by local governmental authorities and politicians who can ideally help to improve situations, end problematic affairs, and change attitudes in general. Such an idea, as ideal or realistic it may be (see Chapter V, p. 135), is not that easily translatable to foreign affairs where politicians operating outside the country are involved.

Here, however, things may change in the future, particularly concerning issues that involve the Béninese abroad more than ever before. The increasing speed of information flows inevitably leads to the spread of rumours.

Thus, the example of the Banamè (or Gbanamé) church, *La Très Sainte Église de Jésus-Christ, Mission de Banamè*, is particularly revealing case to discuss rumours and the impact of social media. Since the beginning of 2015, the rise of this independent church has generated considerable discussion and numerous stories, especially in southern Bénin. Founded in 2009 by a dissident priest of the Roman Catholic Church, who subsequently promoted a young woman, Parfaite, who claimed to have a revelation, while claiming to be a representative of God, the church embodies a charismatic movement of healing (Muratsu 2022a; 2022b) that was attracting numerous followers and new

adherents in the country (Tall 2015). However, her humiliating declarations about the error of other churches and the open proselytising nature of the church have provoked much polemic and opposition from people who have not accepted her attitude and public presence. Rumours have circulated that the newly elected president, Patrice Talon, is a member of the church, supports it, and owes part of his success to this support, as the church had prophesied his election some months earlier. Open manifestations against members of other denominations led to various clashes, barely covered by newspapers or radio stations.

At the beginning of January 2017, clashes in Abomey resulted in several injured people, so police officers intervened to arrest many adepts of this church. The official media did not initially cover these events, so the *grogneurs* were among those publicly drawing attention to these issues and warning of further upheaval and inter-religious unrest.

These examples demonstrate that rumours or unofficial information are no longer confined to informal popular communication or limited oral public spheres. These domains enter not only social media, but also interactive radio shows, transgressing the boundaries of 'radio trottoir'. However, *grogneurs* did not amplify popular speculation, but were rather trying to objectify these events during their interventions on air, framing them as lack of governmental control.

The Predominance of Frequent Callers

All these shows are primarily open to participation, as they allow all listeners to call in. What justifies a clear distinction between these and the *grogneurs* who dominate the shows? It is first and foremost their attitudes, their information strategies, and the sheer frequency of their calls. To exemplify their presence on the air, I analysed a sample of recordings from morning shows on Golfe FM, Radio Cotonou, BIP Radio, as well as the Saturday show on CAPP FM. Furthermore, programmes on Fraternité FM were occasionally recorded as well (due to unstable internet connections) during the periods of June to October 2018 and January to July 2022.

I recorded a total of 83 such shows, either using internet connections (i.e. livestreams or podcasts) or, during fieldwork periods, direct transmission on the air (with the help of direct or indirect recording devices). In some cases, I asked the station's staff to transfer recorded audio files of some of these shows.

Furthermore, I counted all the recorded calls throughout these shows (630) and compiled a simple list with the names and locations of all callers, along with the overall number of their interventions, as far as I could understand them, throughout these shows.

The list revealed that 22 of the most active *grogneurs* (i.e. intervening at least twice a week on any radio station) alone constituted up to 80% of all incoming calls during the mentioned *grogne* shows. Among the most active *grogneurs*, nine were responsible for 25% of all calls recorded. This sample confirmed that these *grogneurs* essentially overtook these shows.

However, these numbers do not mean that the most active callers mentioned above always make important statements or reveal sensitive information. Some of them simply discuss current issues in public life or politics in a general way, apparently eager to call in for whatever reasons (including a potential kind of addiction, habit, or zeal) to confirm their presence on the airwaves. Others wish to focus the attention of listeners and authorities on a particular problem by using the strategy of repetition over a period of several weeks, in hopes that this approach will result in a solution in their favour.

However, the reputation of a *grogneur* depends on more than the simple frequency of their presence on the air. More often, the presentation of a sensitive case, with compelling information including concrete facts and figures, which may not have been mediated elsewhere (perhaps on WhatsApp), helps to build a good reputation (e.g. in the case of Hermann Méton or Sébastien) due to this overexposure. A solid reputation as a *grogneur*, as confirmed by 'ordinary' listeners and other *grogneurs* in interviews, can be further sustained by engaging in other media activities, such as disseminating valuable information on internet platforms or appearing at other debate forums, as studio guests, or in listeners' associations.

Grogne Shows, Media Policies, and Adaptations

'*Les auditeurs en ligne* – This is the journal of the listeners, a forum in which the listeners call to grudge (*grogneurs*), to denounce everything that does not work in their environment. This interactive programme is heard by all, especially by authorities and political leaders. It is also broadcast in the national languages Bariba, Fon and Dendi' (Programme presentation Radio Parakou, November 2022, *Les auditeurs en ligne*).

A central concern for many listeners, especially for media authorities such as the HAAC, remains the issue of the veracity of such individually uttered statements. Hence, debates revolve around the modalities for addressing potential abuses, such as defamation and verbal gaffes (*dérappages*), while guaranteeing the right to counterstatements. However, protective media laws should not hinder the freedom of expression. Such debates often arise in cases of media intervention by authorities.

For instance, in 2005, the famous show *La grogne matinal* on Golfe FM was disapproved for the first time. After the assassination of the President of the Court of Appeal (*Cour d'Appel*), Séverin Coovi, at the end of November 2005, many callers made regionalist and defamatory statements. The HAAC then intervened, for instance, on 2 December 2005 and called the responsible parties to a hearing. The resumption of the programme was conceded under the condition of avoiding any such expressions while excluding listeners identified with them from the outset (Adoun/Awoudo 2007: 47). According to discussions between the HAAC and the representatives of the radio station, a new variant was agreed upon, in which personal names and addresses could no longer be mentioned by callers in their critical commentaries, while problems could be more commonly addressed.

Nevertheless, discussions on the potential risk of problematic statements prevailed. During both the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2007, further infractions, including the defamation of politicians and statements based on rumours, were recorded. After several rounds of negotiation between the HAAC and the journalist associations, some compromises were found. To avoid excessive manipulation, for example, by politicians, it was decided to pause these programmes during election campaigns (starting with the presidential elections in Spring 2006). Furthermore, it was agreed that the hosts of these broadcast formats should remind all callers of the basic rules to avoid slander.

Consequently, at the beginning, the rules of a *grogne* show are always recounted (i.e. courtesy and no blaming without proof). Most hosts then launch the show with an explanation of its character and guidelines (e.g. limited time) while asking callers to avoid assigning personal blame (*pas d'attaques personnelles*). Additionally, callers must provide their full names, current locations, and detailed information about their complaints. This opening has become the standard of all such shows in Bénin.

However, the HAAC has occasionally reprimanded radio stations for poorly handling these shows. In many cases, the stations were first of all admonished.

An example occurred recently in August 2025, when the regional office of the HAAC issued a warning to the broadcaster Arzèkè FM. During a *grogne* show, a caller criticised ‘those Christians who would leave their deceased parents for too long a time at the morgue, yet the law would allow them a delay of one week only’.

The representatives of the HAAC based their notice on two objections. First, the host had missed the opportunity to immediately correct the facts, as the law allowed each family to retain the deceased for at least one month. Furthermore, wrongly addressing ‘all the Christians’ constituted an undesirable generalising opinion in a situation of religious neutrality (Donatien Djèglé, HAAC, August 2025, Parakou).

In all cases of suspension of such shows by the HAAC, the programmes were later resumed, primarily due to the protests of listeners and media professionals. However, therefore, many radio stations increasingly used the possibility of ‘pre-filtering’ callers by first answering them off the air with a studio technician or the host, to gauge the caller’s intentions and potential issues. Hence, unwelcome interventions could be blocked or mitigated.

For example, Urbain Akakpo, the host of the morning call-in show *Opinions* on the private station Radio Planète FM, answers all calls himself off the air, demanding the respective callers explain their statements. During this conversation, he airs musical tunes. Once he gives his approval, he asks the caller to go on the air and introduces the caller to the listeners (15 October 2021). Typically, hosts of such shows demand proof as soon as they feel that delicate issues may compromise them. Typical examples include, ‘Do you have any proof of what you are saying? ... I said that you must have evidence to present such denunciations!’ A host from CAPP FM explained the following:

You must be careful. Sometimes, people are just angry and go beyond the standards of politeness. Then, you must interrupt them, try to calm them down, appease them, or, when they won’t change their attitude, to cut from the line. (Wilfried Ahouassou, July 2022)

Such proof should ideally be provided prior to the show, either by visiting the station or sending documents electronically. Conversely, some *grogneurs* underline the fact that it is not always easy to present clear proof. Barnabé Agbekponou, a young employee, despite his young age (36 in 2025), who is well respected among his fellow *grogneurs*, argued,

Proofs are a problem. Not all proofs are visual or on paper, where you can present them. What if you have seen things yourself with your own eyes, and you had not time to take an image – you are the witness. Is this not a proof? (Cotonou, October 2022)

Most *grogneurs* would, nevertheless, accept such requirements, as these may distinguish them from plain manipulators. The experienced *grogneur* in Parakou Adam Bachirou explains:

People know me. When I'm far away, they call me and tell me what's going on. Many also come to my workshop to talk about their problems. It's important to verify all this information. For example, I recently received a message about a problem at the bus station. First, I called the other side to get one side of the information, and then I went there to get the other version. And then I prepared my statement. Today, I received a complaint about the status of a public road construction project. Here is a PDF file on the project that I received from a friend at the municipality with all the details. This will help me better prepare for my *grogne* call after evaluating the situation. (Parakou, October 2021)

Such a proof is the most crucial element in cases involving highly sensitive, emotionally charged issues such as embezzlement or abuse, rather than for any given complaint (e.g. about broken lamps or poor service).

Hosts feel the need to avoid accusations from the media authorities. Various strategies used by the moderators stand out. Many hosts simply end a sensitive conversation immediately, usually with the comment 'provide proofs', 'I need details', or 'that's not polite, we want to avoid such statements here' (Philibert Abibou and Urbain Akakpo). Other hosts of these programmes are rather courteous in their rebuttal, but with the same aim of interrupting the caller and bringing the phone call to an end. Typical reactions include, 'We don't want to say that on air' (*on ne dit pas ça ici*) and 'Let's remain polite and avoid offensive statements' (Honoré Nahum, Wilfried Ahouassou)!

Other strategies journalists employ to prevent calamitous situations include pre-recording phone calls the evening before, which allows them to delete potentially inappropriate statements. Journalists usually justify this practice as a means to avoid abuses directly on the air while augmenting the technical quality. This approach allows for better control over the debate or the ability to frame them concerning particular time periods. This method became typical for Golfe FM and also Radio Atlantic FM in Cotonou. Most ac-

tive *grogneurs*, however, contest the procedure of pre-recording because quite often, their statements are not aired. Solange Koukoui noted his unhappiness with the procedure:

Very often, they will leap your statement when editing the final broadcast without any real cause. There are urgent matters to talk about, such as problems of schooling, but perhaps they fear consequences. (Cotonou, 1.1.2024)

Sébastien Gnonhossou mentioned that interest in listening to stations that apply a strict pre-recording format, such as Atlantic FM (now Kiff FM), Golfe FM, has considerably dropped (personal communication, Cotonou, 15 October 2021). Furthermore, many *grogneurs* have argued that pre-recordings lack the appeal of direct interventions and spontaneous contributions. Furthermore, debates about the possible misuse of such programmes have continued. Some *grogneurs* have raised suspicions about radio staff using this prerogative for other ends, for instance, for calling the person in charge of a firm or an authority to present the issue and pressure those concerned to offer money to prevent the broadcasting (Barnabé Agbekponou, Cotonou, October 2021). Some of these doubts (which cannot be verified) were, in fact, repeatedly raised by members of Golfe FM's listeners' club AFAS-3G, which seem, at least once, had consequences, namely the shifting of the main hosts of the show (in about 2017).

Finally, hosts may always proceed by suspending a call, simply ending the phone call (or asking the technician to do so). They do so either in cases of apparent abuse or sensitive issues, or simply when they feel that a caller has exceeded their allotted time. However, when intervening in such a way, the host uses words such as 'I am withdrawing you from the antenna' (*Je vous retire l'antenne*) or 'You have surpassed your time slot on air' (*vous avez dépassé votre temps d'antenne*; see p.108).

In other instances, the presenters mentioned personal contacts outside the shows. In her programme *Allô BIP*, Rachida Oussou sometimes asks listeners not to discuss the matter over the airwaves and to call her back after the show. This approach enables discussing a sensitive issue without direct accusations and potentially unconsciously defaming others. Furthermore, Rachida Oussou repeatedly reminds callers that they should not mention any individual names, only those of organisations in general (interview in Cotonou, December 2023). The hosts of the *grogne* show *Les auditeurs en ligne* aired by Radio Parakou even go further by disallowing callers to mention private companies. 'We don't want

to talk about these companies because it's about the development of the region in general' is a common reaction by the host. The aim here is to avoid any legal consequences at any price.

Philibert Abibou from CAPP FM also sometimes offers his personal contact information to arrange an appointment with a caller outside of a broadcast to obtain more information or to schedule an on-site appointment to verify the veracity of an issue himself.

The hosts of these shows are experienced journalists of the newsroom section (see below, Chapter III). In most cases, the hosts of these shows meticulously note every caller and the topics addressed, primarily to reiterate the most important topics that could be potentially exploited for their own productions (see below) and to maintain oversight of participation. Many stations establish such lists of callers with comments on their acceptability. This list later helps to convey information on abuses (Léon Okacé, Parakou; August 2025).

At the station Radio Non Sina in Bèmbèrèkè, northeastern Bénin, however, these minutes are somewhat more detailed. There, the topics and arguments of the listeners are carefully recorded so that they can subsequently be addressed to the matching authorities or responsible persons. In cases of more serious controversy or larger conflicts, these calls provide the occasion to produce reports on the context of the case. For example, complaints from the listeners about irregularities in the work of veterinarians led to corresponding critical reports and coverage (Bèmbèrèkè, October 2021).

In some cases, the minutes help produce a summary of the major topics addressed, which are read aloud at the end of the shows (Golfe FM, *Grogne matinal*; CAPP FM, *Tribune libre*). Many hosts display a clear distance and obvious indifference, even when it comes to moving statements, such as accounts of suffering children in defunct schools. Some hosts are extremely passive and simply greet callers and receive their calls, perhaps intervening only in extreme cases (e.g. *La grogne matinal* on Golfe FM). Other hosts, as mentioned above, are more dialogue-oriented and often ask counterquestions, demand proof, or even attempt to identify callers by their voices in an effort to establish a sense of intimacy with them on the air (Soleil FM and CAPP FM).

Philibert Abibou often asks callers to be precise and transparent about their interventions. He also adds remarks such as, 'You are the tenth caller', while inserting greetings to some *grogneurs* who have not yet called in. Thus, he continually reiterates the issues raised during the show in a short yet comprehensive way.

As mentioned earlier, stations sometimes prefer to pre-record callers' interventions (e.g. Golfe FM)¹¹. Pre-recording, however, requires some additional resources in terms of personal capacities that many local stations may not always possess. Thus, the thematically open and live format is the easiest to produce, yet it is also the riskiest and challenging one to handle for any host. In this case, defamatory allegations and unjustified accusations may always occur and require special attention, and if necessary, an immediate, strong yet well-thought-out reaction by the host. On occasion, hosts simply interrupt callers while reminding them of the show's principles: to be polite and avoid personal defamation. In other cases, hosts simply state, 'We don't address matters in this way, sir' or 'No, this can't be true'.

Sometimes, I also noticed conflicts that arose during a *grogne* show when listeners disagreed with such presenters' reactions, and contentious discussions came about between hosts and callers, for example, between Philibert Abibou and Barnabé Agbekponou, as well as between Prospère Vondjehouko and François Kantchenou. Most often, it was a matter of finding the right words to express the caller's problems more politely.

An analogous conflict occurred between Benjamin Nahum and *grogneur* Eugène Ewagnignon. In February 2024, Nahum interrupted Ewagnignon during a morning *grogne* show when the latter raised complaints against the water supplier SONEB (*Société Nationale des Eaux du Bénin*) for not paying bonuses to its personnel. Nahum argued that Ewagnignon had used the wrong wording, thereby personally inculcating the director of that firm rather impolitely.

Conversely, the practice of focusing on a specific topic for discussion has the advantage of better managing the interventions of different *grogneurs*. The aforementioned Saturday morning show, *Tribune libre*, produced by CAPP FM, is intended to focus the attention of listeners and callers on recent political issues. The host usually settles into the main broadcasting studio, whereas the technician in the main control room receives callers to put them live on the air. Then, the host starts a discussion with callers. Sometimes, the webmaster is also present to stream the show live on Facebook, which is also meant to avoid statements on delicate issues that are challenging to handle (e.g. internal discussions among the *grogneurs*) or local, general issues (e.g. defunct roads), with the hope that several callers will relate to similar issues and provide a plethora

11 This often takes the form of the simulation of a live show (i.e. le faux-direct), in which the presenter receives callers and responds to their interventions, even though the show is not broadcast live.

of diverse opinions. During the show, the journalist (mainly Philibert Abibou from 2020) often reminds the callers to keep a tight focus on the subject matter. Typical interventions of hosts include, ‘Did you tune into the show from the beginning, and do you know about the topic?’ or ‘Please, stay on topic. What is your opinion on today’s issues?’ (Studio observations 2022–2025) Conversely, when it came to controversial statements of callers, journalists often answered, ‘It’s your opinion,’ just to distance themselves from the opinions raised. This leaves space for interpretation, yet would not compromise the hosts.

Interactive and participatory forms of media production, such as the *grogne* shows in Bénin, are co-produced by hosts, technicians, frequent callers, and other listeners. These shows have become a cornerstone of the mass-media-related public sphere in this country to create, as Srinivasan and Abreu Lopes (2020) coined, a ‘mediated sociability’ based on good relationships that increasingly develop between journalists and frequent callers. Likewise, these shows are a form of political communication (see below). Selormey, in her (previously mentioned) study on similar programmes in Accra (2012), proposed the useful expression ‘mediated voice’ to conceptualise the interventions by frequent callers that express people’s worries and perspectives, as conveyed through dominant media to authoritative agencies (e.g. government officials; see also Nunoo 2015).

To conclude this chapter, we analysed the general mode of production of *grogne* shows within the respective radio stations, as well as the main issues which have dominated these programmes throughout the recent past. These shows have caught the attention of media authorities, politicians, and the broader public alike, which has led to both appraisal and contestation. Meanwhile, the genre has been established, also as a result of internal adjustments to external pressures by the radio stations (e.g. increased scrutiny in selecting callers and topics) and subsequent accommodations by both hosts and callers to these shows.

The main actors discussed here, the *grogneurs* in Bénin, are media activists and a distinct category of such. Officially, they are recognised in the edition of the Béninese media law of 2015¹². This step is important in recognising their role in Bénin’s media landscape, but it does not guarantee the absence of political pressure on them.

12 The Béninese media law from 2017 mentions the *grogneurs* in Article 22, as ‘assimilated and auxiliary to the function of journalist’, AN (2015).

In the following, I will analyse the various modes and strategies of individual *grogneurs*. What are their skills, strategies, and motives? How do they unfold their activities? The next chapter introduces these actors in more detail by pointing to common features and the great variety of personal styles, modes of action, and attitudes of both the *grogneurs* and the hosts of these shows.

Figure 5: Adam Bachirou, vulcaniser, Parakou, August 2025.



Source: Author