

Chapter VII: Conclusion

Listening to *grogne* radio shows is a great way to keep up with current events in the Republic of Bénin, whether you are in the country or travelling abroad. They provide vivid and compelling descriptions of everyday life. I have listened to the voices of Sébastien, Clément, Valentin, and Ramanou, who have been regulars on various radio stations for many years. Getting to know them personally – at home, as well as in their workshops or offices – adds a special flavour to my memories of fieldwork in Bénin, with all the surrounding smells and noises.

I recall sitting next to 'One Two', the tyre vulcaniser, near his workshop on the main road in Natitingou, and spending time at Adam Bachirou's workshop, located near the Zongo market in Parakou, where people frequently passed by to greet each other and discuss current events. These *grogneurs* – including the female counterparts, the *grogneuses* – are emblematic figures in the Beninese media landscape, alongside eminent radio journalists such as Philibert Abibou, Honoré Nahum, and Rachida Oussou, who host these interactive shows. All those involved in the co-production of these interactive radio shows share a strong commitment to public communication, often against all odds. They clearly contribute to the participatory nature of these radio programmes, even if media participation, in the dimensions developed by Carpentier (2011:69) is here 'minimalist' or, to emphasise the more active and voluntary nature of media participation typical of *grogneurs*, rather 'selective' and mostly limited to content and performance. In any case, it does not blur the boundaries and power differentials between radio professionals and non-professionals.

Many current works in media and communication studies mainly focus on online media activists. In this context, my book also makes a plea not to neglect media actors associated with 'classic' media (e.g. radio) and their significant programmes. Indeed, the *grogne* shows enjoy great popularity in Bénin's vibrant media landscape. They demonstrate that people in Bénin are not indifferent to shortcomings and problems in their social environment, although

some issues might incline an observer to sarcasm. *Grogne* radio shows are appealing because they often address sensitive issues and benefit from a particular interplay between mass media, digital platforms, and informal, private communication networks. They remind us of the radio's ongoing pertinent role as a classic mass medium, despite the emergence of social networks and messenger services – at least in countries such as the Republic of Bénin, where the radio remains the top mass medium.

Today, both official and unofficial information circulate much faster and across a variety of media. Thus, the *grogne* radio show format adds another dimension to this ecosystem of communication, which can only be understood as related to different sites, actors, and information sources, shaped by new media technologies and expanding communication spaces.

The *grogneurs* in the Republic of Bénin have considerably refined their practices in recent years in terms of veracity and persuasive power, so they are indispensable to urban networks of communication. They intervene in both national and local affairs due to their direct concern and social tangibility. Both *grogneurs* and journalists play a significant role in a process that involves a growing articulation and interrelation of various public spheres at different levels of communication (e.g. local, national, virtual, personal, and broadcast) based on a particular convergence of 'classic' (e.g. radio) and new (e.g. mobile) media technologies.

From a functional-structural perspective on public spheres, I argue that *grogneurs* play an intermediating role by connecting different sub-spheres of communication (Chapter VI, p. 154). *Grogneurs* are present almost daily on various radio stations, so they manage their share of the changing economics of attention. They are neither stringers, media assistants, nor journalists in either a 'conventional' or 'modern' sense of journalism, including digital journalism. The *grogneurs* are not just comprised of annoyed and 'concerned citizens'; they develop and maintain public communication strategies. Although some of them may abuse their roles for personal gain, most of them are committed to veracity and honesty. Furthermore, *grogneurs* act as information brokers, as intermediaries between mass media, the authorities, and the general public. In Bénin, their role has evolved in the context of media liberalisation, which extends far beyond the scope of democratic participation.

Grogneurs are networking media actors who operate in the interstitial spaces between traditional conversation, radio journalism, and mobile and social media usage. They are part of a vibrant civil society. However, despite sharing similarities, they cannot be conceptualised as either 'citizen journal-

ists' or 'popular performers'. Indeed, *grogneurs* must be honest and authentic by basing their interventions on veracity and exactness. Nonetheless, unlike journalists, they do not have to adhere to the editorial line of the media company but also do not abide by the same deontological standards as journalists.

This uniqueness is part of their 'code of conduct'. They often differ from journalists in the nature of the issues they raise, which are often overseen by the latter. Further differences lie in how they present themselves on the air since they are often one step ahead of journalists (not in the sense of breaking the news but in presenting urgent matters promptly), as well as in their role as mediators. Despite their potentially precarious and exposed position in society, they continue to act as central media activists who turn passion into civic engagement. For the moment, *grogneurs* remain tied to the radio, and few of them are likely to become independent influencers.

Grogneurs in Benin are mainly men, as women often have less time to make repeated calls and are hesitant to expose themselves in the media. This difference corresponds with a continued male preponderance in the national public life, which results in *grogne* shows being less balanced than we would like. Conversely, different to other cases (e.g. Brisset-Foucault 2018 for Uganda), they rarely have political mentors, or aspire to become politicians.

Returning to our initial question, what explains their success and relevance? Even though social media will ultimately prevail, the position of the *grogneurs* as information brokers will also endure, mainly due to their steady veracity and personal integrity. This role offers the *grogneurs* advantages, including psychological benefits (e.g. fulfilling a passion or vocation), social benefits (e.g. a good reputation and access to debate forums), and sometimes, material benefits. In Bénin, *grogneurs* may also communicate via social media platforms or messenger services, either in written form or via audio messages. However, in the context of the country's current rigid media laws, they are cautious not to assume and relay premature or incorrect information from social networks. In some cases, they have even attempted to counteract the misinformation circulating there.

Grogneurs are media activists, using radio platforms to actively improve their social setting. They often lend their voices as advocates for community members unable to call in or those fearing the consequences of disclosure. Their continued relevance is secured by their relentless pursuit of critical public issues, which they address with directness. Ultimately, they offer radio journalists a powerful stimulus for dynamic, interactive programs and provide them sources for coverage.

The success of the *grogneurs* stems from their ability to address important issues of public life in an informed, persuasive, and technically skilful manner, as well as their capacity to convey relevant and reliable information. As experienced information brokers, they are in high demand, particularly among those who are unable or unwilling to use such media to make their issues publicly known. Consequently, the *grogneurs* have gained considerable respect and now occupy a robust position within Bénin's media system.

This position has grown stronger as the *grogneurs* have learned from previous mistakes, adapted their strategies to address legal challenges, and responded effectively to pressure from the media and the authorities. They have further solidified their influence by addressing less credible participants from their ranks and establishing productive interactions with hosts of interactive radio shows. Although they still mainly use radio shows as a medium, their role can certainly be compared to that of influencers in other contexts, who are fewer in number and less prominent in Bénin.

Finally, the communication strategies used by the *grogneurs* contribute to the increasing decentralisation of information flows. *Grogneurs* capitalise on their ability to identify important issues in their social environment, their rhetorical creativity, and their determination to communicate despite all adversities.

Future research can go beyond interactive radio broadcasts to more intensively analyse the speed of information flow across all media and public spheres, its impact on political communication, and the spread of disinformation within changing media ecologies.