POPULAR TALK RADIO AND EVERYDAY LIFE IN MAURITIUS

Azhagan Chenganna (CHNAZH001)

Thesis presented for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Supervisor: Professor Herman Wasserman

Centre for Film and Media Studies (CFMS)

Faculty of Humanities

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

JANUARY 2022
The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.
Abstract

This study has attempted to explore the myriad ways talk radio is tied to everyday life in Mauritius. As a point of departure, this study has considered the success of Mauritian private radio stations as a social phenomenon that deserves attention. It has delved into the ways talk radio, especially their morning talk radio programmes, are tied to notions of citizenship, democracy and development. Anchoring popular talk radio as practice, the study has used a multilevel approach to find out what do people do to talk radio, what kinds of engagement are pursued, which ethical considerations are valued and the implications for citizenship and democracy in a Mauritian context of power differentials and social inequalities. Following a three tier approach implying discourse analysis of morning talk radio, focus group discussions with listeners as well as in-depth interviews of journalists, this study has underlined the importance and significance of the new political that has emerged, highlighting the fact that the democratisation of the radio airwaves in 2002 has allowed political engagements and participation of ordinary people hitherto excluded from the Mauritian public sphere.

Against the perspective that views the public sphere as constituted unequivocally in rationality and consensus, this study contends that talk on morning talk radio is inherently conflictual and is performed in reason and affects. Anger, fear, anxiety, hope and solidarity are discursive resources that define the life trajectories of ordinary people but are also ways for listeners to “feel their way” into the stories and to bond together to create a sense of engaged community however fleeting these communities may be. The ethics of care and solidarity afforded by talk radio journalists to these communities shift understandings of the liberal democratic norms of journalism from professionalism to “interpretive communities” that are characterized by social reciprocity. Adopting a decolonial approach that foregrounds the importance of listening to the lived experiences of people, this study finally makes the case for an ethics of listening that is based on re-imagining the conditions for talk radio journalists to listen deeply to people, especially to marginalized communities as a way for journalism to stay relevant while improving the capabilities of people and consolidating the conditions of living together well.
Acknowledgements

From its inception up to the end, a lot of debts have accrued from this research. I am fully indebted to Professor Herman Wasserman, my supervisor, for his patience, feedback and comments and for his dedication. Without his support, this study would not have come to fruition.

In Mauritius a lot of people helped me throughout. I wish to thank the Non-Government Organisations, village and municipal officers and social workers who have facilitated my fieldwork in different parts of the country. Their hospitality and their assistance have greatly facilitated my work.

I am also very thankful to the talk radio journalists with whom I have discussed lengthily as they agreed to share their insights.

I wish to thank my parents, Ravindrah Chenganna and Rajendree Chenganna and my brother Sangaren Chenganna for their unflinching support and encouragement.

I dedicate this work to my father who untimely passed away.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to my wife, Nirupama, for her patience, understanding and forbearance.
Declaration

I, Azhagan Chenganna, hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and that it has not been previously submitted to the University of Cape Town or to any academic institution for publication or examination.

Signed: Signed by candidate

Azhagan Chenganna

Date: 10 January 2022
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. BACKGROUND</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Contested Hierarchies</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Shifting Grounds of Media and Society</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Popular Culture</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 The Social is Political</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Structure of Thesis</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. LITERATURE REVIEW: FROM THE INSTITUTIONAL PUBLIC SPHERE TO EVERYDAY LIFE: THE EXAMPLE OF TALK RADIO</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 The Public Sphere</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Cultural Studies</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Popular Media</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Everyday Life</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Engagement</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Talk</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8 Participation</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9 Conclusion</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Media Effects Traditions</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Cultural Studies</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Everyday Life</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Media Practices</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Conversation Analysis</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Discourse Theoretical Analysis</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 Talk Radio as Lived Experiences</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9 The Paradigm of Journalism Reconsidered</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10 Research Design</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11 Participation in Talk Radio</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.12 Participation Through Talk Radio</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.13 Talk Radio as Journalism</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.14 Limitations</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.15 Conclusion</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. COPING WITH EVERYDAY LIFE ON MAURITIAN MORNING TALK RADIO: A DIALOGIC PERSPECTIVE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRACY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Mauritian Creole as the Popular National Language</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Interpellation</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Squatting</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Verbal Abuse and Bullying at school</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 Medical Negligence</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7 Home Medical Assistance</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8 Public Housing Allocation</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9 Migrant Worker Requesting Covid-19 related Financial Assistance</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10 Media as a Site of Care and Solidarity</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11 Conclusion</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. MEDIATION AND THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TALK RADIO IN MAURITIUS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Personal Affinities</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Affordances</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Social Opportunities</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 Knowledge</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6 Truth</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7 Discussion</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8 Conclusion</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. MAURITIAN TALK RADIO JOURNALISTS AS INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.2 Boundary-Work</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 Media-Democracy Link</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 Media Freedom</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5 Truth</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6 Journalistic Skills</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7 Discussion</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.8 Conclusion</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. CONCLUSION: VOICES, ETHICS AND LISTENING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.2 Affective Publics</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3 An Ethics of the Media</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4 Listening</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. NOTES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. NOTES</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. **BACKGROUND**

A caller to a morning talk radio programme complained that she had a road accident and seven years had elapsed since, and, despite her many appeals to the police, it was only after the intervention of the private radio station that she was able to get a police report of the accident that would allow her to make her insurance claims\(^1\). In a similar way, a man expressed, through his distraught voice, his worries about the fact that he suspected that his pregnant wife had lost their baby due to medical negligence at the hospital\(^2\). Another caller explained how her mother was taken reluctantly to a Covid-19 quarantine center because she was tested positive to the disease and that she regretted her decision to part from her because her mother had died in quarantine and that she was not allowed to participate in her funeral\(^3\). These are true stories of ordinary people using the Mauritian private airwaves to fight back everyday injustices through mediation and by seeking alternative possibilities. Likewise, there are multiple stories of angst and struggle that hit the private airwaves everyday with an elderly complaining about not receiving his monthly pension\(^4\), a woman calling to explain that she was victim of domestic violence but received no assistance from the police\(^5\), an employee exposing her arbitrary dismissal from work\(^6\) or a person complaining that his land was forcibly acquired by the state with no financial compensation\(^7\).

Radio and the media generally can be a lifeline and mediated talk can touch the lives of people as much as it can enhance the capabilities of people to lead better lives (Sen, 1999). Sen refers to the fundamental democratic values constituted of the “freedom of individuals as the basic building blocks” and the “capabilities” of persons to lead the kind of lives they value - and have reason to value” (1999, p. 18). Undoubtedly, voice and its recognition is an integral part of the communicative capabilities and democratic principles that allow people to relate to each other and to reach their potential (Couldry, 2019).

Despite the ubiquity of social media and digital platforms in the contemporary media landscape, radio has successfully readapted itself and stayed relevant by its “sheer fluidity [...], its pervasive presence and its links with [...] new media” (Gunner, Ligaga and Moyo, 2011, p. 1). It remains dominant in African societies (Myers, Harford and Ssemakula, 2020) and so it is in
Mauritius as Mauritian private radio stations have successfully reinvented themselves in analogue and digital platforms allowing them to reach out to audiences, locally, nationally and in the diaspora.

In 2027, Mauritius would be celebrating a hundred years of broadcasting innovations since the launch of radio broadcasting in 1927 by Charles J. E Jollivet. The station known as Radio Maurice broadcast from his house and included highbrow programmes like opera music, literary readings and art discussions. At the beginning of the Second World War the colonial authority took over the station against a compensation to Jollivet and started to exercise tighter control over radio information. The structure of the station would evolve again in 1964 when the ‘Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation’ (MBC) was incorporated by the state and thereafter state radio and television, modelled on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The MBC began to chronicle national and global events in the wake of independence even though the values of public service broadcasting as embodied by the BBC did not permeate the organizational culture at the MBC, a station blatantly subservient to post-colonial governments.

The arrival of private radio in Mauritius dates back to 2002 and it has taken the airwaves by storm given the informative, interactive and at times irreverent and popular tone of the new stations that can arguably challenge the hierarchies of the powerful in society as much as create spaces for the development of new socialities. Three private stations were licensed to operate and this was presented as a landmark event towards the liberalization of the airwaves as new broadcasting spaces were unlocked and made available to the private sector. More than a decade later in 2019, in a second phase of radio liberalization, two additional private radio stations were granted licenses to broadcast even though since their launch the latter two seem more attuned to government objectives. In contrast to the initial phase of liberalization of the first generation private radio stations, the second generation has taken a more politicized if not partisan path. Amongst the two newly set up radio stations, one station, Planet FM, had its license revoked shortly after in August 2020 by the local Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) as it seemingly appear to have gone financially bust in its early days of operation.
At the dawn of the new millennium in 2000, when government stated its intention to liberalize the broadcasting sector, it was met with much skepticism as several former incumbents had announced similar plans but these remained emptied of any resolute action as governments feared that they would lose out on information control. Nonetheless, in 2001, in the heyday of liberalisation, when the newly established Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) led by its former Chairperson, Ashok Radhakissoon, called for private actors to express interest in broadcasting, both radio and television were earmarked for liberalization in a broadcasting field monopolized by the state.

The liberalization of the airwaves was presented as part of an ideology of democratization as, in the context of limited spectrum, the state allowed private operators to partake in the broadcasting field. It would be obviously trite to highlight that, in today’s era of digital media abundance, the principle of limited broadcasting spectrum is clearly something of the past, if not obsolete. Yet, in 2002, at the time of liberalization when private actors were allowed into radio broadcasting, the discourses of democratization were conflated with privatization insofar as private capital was allowed into the field of broadcasting, signaling to an extent the liberalization of the broadcasting market and the triumph of market capitalism. The liberalization of the airwaves also intersected with the material reality of the emergence of the Information Communication Technologies (ICT) sector and the projection of Mauritius as a ‘Cyber Island’ enthused by the authorities. Concomitant with the development of ICT, the availability of mobile telephony has bypassed the difficulties of face-to-face communication allowing participation of callers in private radio programmes through phone-ins and digital platforms. As much as the stations broadcast on air their programmes are also simultaneously livestreamed on social media platforms.

The paradoxes of the Mauritian media landscape are manifold. If radio broadcasting has diversified with new corporate entrants, television is still government-owned and driven by an ideology of state paternalism that holds unto an idea that “public service [is] serving the government of the day” (Eugland, 2011, p. 28). In other words, the Mauritian broadcasting sphere consists of a duality with the long-established private radio stations, on one side, and
state media, on the other, except for the newly licensed private station, Wazaa FM, which tends to be more inclined towards the interests of the state. Controversial national issues discussed on a private radio station during the day may get an official reaction and rebuttal in the evening news on state television. As much as government officials may choose to participate on a private radio station to communicate official information, they may also boycott a particular station by refusing to participate in its programmes. This seesawed relationship of love and hate between the private stations and the state reveals the pressures on public communication practices as varied as talk and journalism and the functioning of democracy in Mauritius.

Across the African continent, radio liberalization happened in the 1990s (Hyden, Leslie and Ogundimu, 2007) with the “economic liberalization of the African economies” and the rise of media entrepreneurs eager to tap into new opportunities (Hyden and Leslie, 2007, p. 18). However, early enthusiasm for radio liberalization in Mauritius was initially ditched by considerations of the ‘fragility’ and the fear of ‘political instability’ in the multiethnic island composed of the 1.3 million inhabitants despite the media interests of entrepreneurs and venture capitalists. Privately, politicians cloaked their discourse about the presumed ‘concerns’ that the liberalization and the new broadcasting stations may pose to the national fabric of the country by broadcasting uncivil and offensive contents likely to harm national unity in the multiethnic society. Yet as liberalization took place in 2002 and, with the affordances of ‘broadcasting delay’ technologies, these ‘preoccupations’ vanished into thin air as the programmes of the new stations got routinized into the everyday life of Mauritians as much reconfiguring nationhood and belonging.

The coming of private radio stations epitomizes the emergence of a sense of ‘Mauritianhood’ to the extent that these stations have fostered a shared national identity through the use of Mauritian Kreol a.k.a Kreol Morisien on the airwaves. In fact, the arrival of the private radio stations has molded the place that Kreol Morisien occupies in Mauritius and in the broadcasting space. It can be advanced without any doubt that Mauritian Kreol-language broadcasting has been constituted through private radio stations and its speakers. The politics of languages in
Mauritius has traditionally encompassed the recognition and practice of English and French, even though Mauritians tend to have much difficulty in speaking fluently these European languages. French, in particular, has traditionally been considered as the language of prestige and has been replicated as the language of the media in print and in state broadcasting. Nonetheless, with the arrival of private stations, Kreol-language broadcasting and the primacy of Kreol Morisien on the private airwaves have comfortably sunk commensurate with the ease and fluency of Mauritians in the local language.

From a patois during the colonial period to grudgingly being accepted in official circles in the postcolonial era, Kreol Morisien has settled in as the most popular form of communication on the private airwaves. All private stations are presented in Kreol Morisien insofar as the private broadcasters have extended and developed new strategies of engagements with audiences providing them the possibilities to participate. Popular idiomatic expressions used on private stations have flourished to the point that the names of flagship morning talk radio programmes have entered everyday conversations. “Xplik to Ka” (‘Make your case’) or “To pe fer Enquete en direct” (‘You are doing your inquiry Live’) or ‘Korek pas Korek’ (‘Right or Wrong’) have entered everyday parlance, and it is not surprising to hear such idioms used in colloquial and casual conversations.

Contemporary Western representations of media assume that the media industry has reached a point of saturation in the North as audiences of legacy media and traditional newspapers decline and the media migrates to digital platforms as part of strategies of renewal and transformation (Doyle, 2014). The same globally disruptive dynamics are occurring in the Global South (Wasserman, 2018). However, without falling into binary distinctions between the Global North and South or essentializing the Global South against the Global North, “a more nuanced social reading” (Wasserman, 2014, p. 55) is warranted, given the different contextual realities and sensitivities of the media in the Global South, radio being regarded as “Africa’s medium” (Hyden, Leslie and Ogundimu, 2002) and given the latter’s popular foothold.

Such contextualization would highlight the social relevance, significance and impact of radio liberalization in Mauritius. Unlike other countries which traditionally have a three-tier
broadcasting landscape (Chiumbu, 2014), Mauritius has only a two-tier broadcasting system with state media and private broadcasters. There is no community radio licensees in Mauritius. The co-existence of private and state ownership has significant implications for the role played by private stations in the Mauritian social landscape. By way of comparison, in the US, even though talk radio is “not monolithic” it is arguably associated with “extreme talks” (Turow, Cappella and Jamieson, 1996, pp. 3-4). Berry and Sobieraj (2014) delved into the US talk radio genre and highlighted how radio hosts and personalities often trade in outrage and incivility. On the other hand, media liberalization in Africa has wrought a private sector of radio and television that watches over state affairs in close range (Nyamnjoh, 2003). In the absence of community broadcasting licensees and given the dichotomy of state and private ownerships, a line of tension between these latter two has permanently been drawn as the state broadcaster and the private stations keep each other at a distance. Voices which are denied on state media are given space on private radio. ‘Ordinary’ people who are conventionally excluded from the state airwaves because of their vocal criticisms are given space on the private channels to narrate their stories.

A ‘glocalised’ reading that takes into consideration “the external global influences and the exigencies of the locale” (Banda, 2010, p. 125) would likely underline that Mauritian private radio stations not only use global ‘infotainment’ formats but also find their social value and relevance through mediation that allows grassroots forces to come on air and dispute varied issues such as the lack of medical care or medical negligence in hospitals or unjust labor dismissals and other abusive relations. The ‘democratization conflicts’ (Bosch, Wasserman, Chuma, 2018) understood as conflicts that pertain ontologically “to the nature of the democratic settlement” (Wasserman, Bosch and Chuma, 2018) is a distinctive character of morning talk radio as ‘ordinary’ people make vocal their lived experiences. This may come as another paradox as these stations are tied to corporate structures of private and industrial capitalism that would sway them towards “the logic of selling lucrative audiences to advertisers” (Wasserman, 2010a, p. 3) as a way to ascertain their financial viability. The economy of Mauritian private radio stations is based not only on advertising but also boosted through the organization and sponsorship of commercial events including thematic saloons by
these stations. The small media market of advertisers represents undoubtedly a challenge to the operations of the media in terms of their independence and media sustainability (Wasserman, 2021). However, does the fact that these stations create platforms for people’s voices allow forms of activism and empowerment or do they rather consolidate and reinforce existing power structures in the Mauritian society?

The morning talk radio programmes on private radio stations have settled as interactive platforms that arguably allow participation, shape identities and enable listeners to make claims and negotiate their everyday life that can make it seem antithetical “that the commercial media hail their readers and audiences as consumers rather than citizens” (Garman and Wasserman, 2017, p. ix). Nonetheless, in a post-Covid-19 world, private media may be facing challenges of viability and sustainability given the economic slowdown that has affected revenue streams as much as the fear that the Coronavirus pandemic could result in the spectre of a “media extinction event” (Luminate Group, 2020). Shiffrin (2021) asserts that the pandemic has put at the center stage the search for long term media sustainability. The latter may elicit the fact that some radio stations and media organizations seem to tether, if not downplay, their criticism of government as they look up to direct or indirect subsidies from the Mauritian state and/or from private business sectors that may keep the media outlets afloat, but may turn them into hostages of government and private interests.

On the other hand, despite its historical importance as a nation-builder, the state broadcaster maintained its course of actively doing government public relations. Interactive talk programmes on state media are scheduled, mainly with government officials and sources as hosts and hardly any contradictory voices. Despite the MBC Act which legislates that it should be impartial, its journalism is rooted in ‘developmentalism’ mirroring ministers proceeding to ceremonials and political inaugurations and journalists toeing the line of the government of the day.

Poaching part of its personnel from the state broadcaster and renovating practices that had sedimented in the days of the state broadcaster and introducing new ones, private radio has successfully created a noisy public sphere where people call-in to interact, to complain and to
express their opinions. Compared to the packaged discourses on state media, the mediation of talk on private radio, especially the morning talk radio shows, their participatory ethos and emotional affordances call for a closer scrutiny, given their embeddedness and relationships to everyday life. What does such an ethics of mediation entail?

**1.2 Contested Hierarchies**

Traditionally adopting a “political economic” approach to media (Scannell, 1996), media structures are examined from the prisms of the political, economic, legal and regulatory arenas under which the media operates. Understandably this is an important theoretical position tied to the liberal democratic framework that offers insights into the information transmission role of the media in society. The liberal principle prescribes values of individualism, rationality, and deliberation that condition the “stimulus-response model” (Dickinson, Harindranath and Linné, 1998, p. xii) of the media and audiences.

However, a closer look into Mauritian private radio broadcasting calls for a conceptualization of the audience as active agents whose practices transgress the established norms of liberal institutions. Through talk radio and audiences’ participation, institutional authorities may be contested and rules may be subverted to “create and remix content, struggle over meanings and produce new forms of political and self-expression” (Hill, Rübsamem, Askanius and Urueta, 2016). As much as thought and reason are valued, so are emotional talks as feelings as varied as pain, distress, anger, compassion and solidarity are suggested on talk radio. What kinds of conflicts and socialities are discursively constituted by the interactions that take place on Mauritian private radio stations? To what extent do audiences’ interactions displace the hierarchy of reason and emotions, and to what extent does participation foreground an ethics of care and responsibility? What are the implications for democracy, development and citizenship?

In a way, the liberal paradigm of the media has tended to undermine, if not derogatively consider emotions as “beneath the faculties of thought and reason” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 3). Yet, for the best or for the worst, emotions play an important role in the formation, evaluation and enactment of judgments. This strikes a chord with Williams’s concept of ‘structures of feeling’
which refers “specifically [to] affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity” (Williams, 1977, p. 132).

This can illuminate the workings of talk radio and particularly the fact that talk does not exist in isolation as by extension, “our personal, intimate, individual experiences (feelings) are always, at the same time, informed by collective and historical prejudices, expectations, fears, desires, conventions [...]” (Best, 2012, p. 194). For instance, an account of an individual narrating a story of injustice on talk radio may point to personal and socio-historical concerns and generate emotional reactions and engagements of varying intensities as listeners identify and recognize the emotions as being theirs too. Such a political prism runs counter to the notion of individualism that is often touted.

As a matter of fact, affects and emotions have generally been neglected in the liberal-democratic paradigm while the public sphere and participation have been envisioned as rational. Yet, the hierarchy between reason and emotions is a contested one and demands reconsideration. Wahl-Jorgensen observes that “emotions [are] neither inherently good nor inherently bad” (2019, p. 173). Bickford argues that “the ways people think and talk about emotion are part of communicative struggle over meaning and political conflict over public decision” (2011, p. 1029, original emphasis). Yet, the importance of emotions and the related ethical and moral agency in public communication has been under-researched, if not neglected. To this effect, there is need to reconsider the intersections between reason and emotions instead of relegating the latter as unworthy and as “existing in binary opposition to rationality” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, p. 11). Ahmed observes that “emotions should not be regarded as psychological states, but as social and cultural practices” (2004, p. 9). Thence, what do emotions do to people who have been unjustly treated? How are emotions tied to political and moral agency? To what extent does consideration of both reason and emotions represent pathways to human dignity and social justice? Instead of opposing reason to emotions, a discursive approach would underline the fact that they are both constitutive of power relations and contextual considerations. Hence, a cultural approach to private radio ought to go beyond
formal understanding of media and rationality, and give consideration to the lived realities of people living in and with the media.

1.3 Shifting Grounds of Media and Society

In Mauritius, the constitution caters for formal citizenship since political independence from the British. Articles 3 and 12 of the Constitution provide for freedom of expression. The constitution also defines the composition of the Mauritian population as being regrouped into four ‘communities’ namely the ‘Hindus’, the ‘Muslims’, the ‘Chinese’ and the ‘General Population’, the latter being considered a ‘residual’ category for people who do not consider themselves in any of the first three categories. This arbitrary way of classifying ‘communities’ has been criticized (Eriksen, 2019) not only because it is essentialist in that it ‘fixes’ communities on ethnic and religious lines and entrenches ‘communalism’ but also because it does not reflect the reality of the way of life of Mauritians more accustomed to hybrid, multiple and fluid belongings that transcend historical and ancestral fixations as defined in the constitution.

Multiculturalism in Mauritius is somewhat Janus-faced as it manufactures differences as well as unmakes them both at policy, individual and social levels. One of the problems that have deterred the process of nation-building in Mauritius is the ‘communal’ factor in that ethnic communities are formally categorized in the Constitution and that ‘communalism’ is used as part of identity politics during electoral campaigns when politicians use communal symbols to appeal to specific ethnic groups. Yet, despite the making of differences in the Constitution and amongst the political class, the hybridity and shifting identities that are afforded through communicative practices on talk radio indicate that Mauritians are not only civil and convivial to each other but that their everyday lives are more fluid than prescribed in the law books. Yet there is need to probe into the quandaries of formal and everyday practices of citizenship to understand how Mauritians confront inequality and seek symbolic and material resources. This is more so reflected on morning talk radio when ordinary and often marginalized citizens get into the fray to dispute resources which they have been denied or deprived of.
Mauritius has a strong welfare state making provisions for basic retirement pension, free healthcare, education and transport amongst others. Nonetheless, despite these safety nets and the “politics of distribution” (Ferguson, 2015), there is rising frustration and dissatisfaction over development and service delivery as, for instance, pensioners can abruptly be denied of their pensions, water taps can run dry for several days, squatters may be forcefully evicted from their shacks or the centralization at government level can mean that political patronage weighs in the delivery of services at the local level. These situations are compounded by power differentials and inequalities amongst citizens despite the guarantees of citizenship provided under the Constitution as the disadvantaged and underprivileged feel that ‘development’ can be an oxymoronic term which suggests different meanings for the elites and the people. The unprecedented situation related to the lockdowns of Covid-19 has put the livelihoods of the poor at an even greater stake as much as private radio stations have become spaces people turn to in moments of crisis.

Compared to the nearly centennial history of radio, newspaper publishing in Mauritius goes back to more than two centuries. Mauritius is considered to have had the “first newspaper in the Southern hemisphere” with the first printed newspaper dating back to 1773 “with India printing a newspaper in 1778 and South Africa only in 1800” (Pistorius, 2020). Nicolas Lambert was the first editor of the first newspaper known as ‘Annonces, Affiches, et Avis Divers Pour les Colonies Des Isles de France et de Bourbon’. Thereafter, newspaper printing has been developing with concomitant struggles over freedom of the press as governments try to control information if not censor the press13.

Eriksen (2020) remarks that Mauritian history “is mainly a written one, the development of its complex population, economy and political institutions known from archival sources”. If newspapers played an important role in print capitalism (Andersen, 1983) tied to the interests of the elite sugar barons and the bourgeoisie in the postcolonial state, it can be advanced that the arrival of private radio has arguably and, to some extent, disrupted the “elite continuity and renewal” thesis put forward by Colin Sparks (2009) which holds that following political change there has been a repositioning of networks and partnerships of elites. The orality of talk radio
and the democratized access have allowed popular emancipation and the development of popular collective memories given the multiple voices and stories which are shared daily on these private radio stations.

From a historical tradition of the written press, Mauritian popular radio has sparked a noisy culture of infotainment. Critics may admonish private radio as ‘Babelish’ for its cheap ‘sensational’ content with a dominance of talk, political chatter and music programming aimed at listeners for purposes of advertising. Others may ostracize Mauritian radio liberalization as a ‘missed opportunity’ for the sameness of its programmes and presumably for not providing more ‘quality’ and highbrow programmes.

At the same time private stations have catered for programmes which are popular as the Kreol Morisien language and interactivity on private radio facilitate access of ordinary people to channels whose premises are more hospitable both physically - allowing people to come and meet the radio hosts and their teams in their locales - as well as allowing people through phone-ins to enter the “ritual space” of broadcasting (Couldry, 2005) in contrast to the state broadcaster. The fact that people can access and relate easily to the private stations without much formality and in Kreol language allows participation of many as well as sharing of experiences that “illuminate social and political issues by way of relevant concrete examples” (Gripsrud, 2000, p. 298). Market research surveys point to the popularity of commercial stations which top the list of the most listened stations in Mauritius across all segments of the population. The figures of market surveys may be disputed as each station claims to be the most listened one as part of their commercial and marketing strategies. At the same time, the affordances of digital media have allowed private radio to broadcast their programmes live and online via Facebook and to reach out to diasporic audiences. Many Mauritians who have emigrated overseas would listen to private radios online. Through digital platforms these programmes allow both local and diasporic audiences to participate by liking the programmes, sharing their views and testimonies as the radio hosts keep a watchful eye on the comments and factor them into on air discussions.
1.4 Popular Culture

The popular has been assigned a “marginal position in scholarship” (Barber, 1997, p. 1) despite the fact that creativity and engagement have become even more prolific and exuberant in the face of adversity and the rhetorics of doom and gloom in Africa (Appiah, cited in Barber, 1997). As much as the popular has been marginalized, the implications of popular media for democracy and development has generally been overlooked and “this neglect”, in the words of Wasserman, is “especially striking in the field of African journalism and media studies” (Wasserman, 2011, p. 5).

Generally attention to media has been geared towards normative understandings of media policy and regulation under the frame of the formal state institutions. For instance, in Mauritius, discussions with policymakers and journalists over the media would tend to be slanted towards media laws, especially the problematic regulatory independence of broadcasting authorities. For instance, the importance of media ‘deontology’ and ethics would often lead to conversations about the ‘lack of professionalism’ of journalists and the need for them to be trained adequately and to be ‘professionalized’. In this respect, several local universities offer undergraduate programmes in the fields of journalism, media and communication even though people from the media would often complain that the young graduating professionals fail to meet the ‘standards’ of the profession. State institutions like the Media Trust which is a body funded by government organizes regular training sessions around media ethics and journalism training. Out of country training opportunities in journalism are provided by foreign embassies like the US, China and India.

The ‘independence’ of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) is constantly debated as the regulatory authority is bemoaned for being controlled by political nominees and that, akin to “many national contexts, the latest media regulation policies are used by governments as a form of hampering press freedom and investigative reporting” (Sampaio-Dias, Mabweazara, Townsend and Osman, 2019). For instance, the temporary suspensions of the licence of TopFM station during the first Covid-19 lockdown has been widely discussed under the veneer of
regulation that has been ‘ politicized ’ and a broadcasting framework that has tended to restrict freedom of expression rather than encourage pluralism and diversity (Callamard, 2010).

In similar ways, the long and protracted discussions over the introduction of the Freedom of Information Act dominate discussions about the media and the general lack of access to information. In 2013, the government of Mauritius appointed Geoffrey Robertson, a lawyer, to report on ‘ Media Law and Ethics in Mauritius ’ and to propose a draft of a Freedom of Information Act. The report was submitted and no action was undertaken at policy level for its implementation. With the participation of ordinary people on talk radio, should an ‘ ethics of mediation and listening ’ be contemplated? What are the implications?

1.5 The Social is Political

Against the norms of traditional conceptions of politics as solely the domain of public affairs, politics envisioned as “ part of everyday culture and not above it ” (Van Zoonen, 2005, p. 4) integrates both the popular and the personal as discursive activities in the performance of citizenship (van Zoonen, 2005). In the words of Mouffe, politics is “ the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of ‘ the political ’ ” (2005, p. 101). Rather than relegating that which is conflictual into the private sphere, a conception of ‘ agnostic pluralism ’ hinges on the feminist view that the “ personal is political ” (Hanisch, 1969), and that “ there are no personal solutions at this time [...] there is only collective action for a collective solution ” (Hanisch, 1969, p. 4). This prism of the everyday points to the confluence of both the private and the public spheres and the need for a framework that does not limit itself to the individual but considers the “ person in relation to others ” as part of a community (Christians et al, 1993).

The substantive richness of citizenship lies not in the formal, legally conferred status as per the liberal democratic framework but in its dissonance and contradictions with lived experiences. This conflictual paradigm which relies on a “ thick ” understanding of citizenship (Garman and Wasserman, 2017) is at odds with ‘ deliberative democracy ’ which emphasizes consensus. Advocates of ‘ deliberative democracy ’ who spell out consensus and freedom as the hallmarks
of deliberation are paradoxically at pain to reconcile these principles with equality (Mouffe, 2005, p. 8). Rather they tend to conflate both. Instead of an apparent parity that takes for granted these notions of liberty and equality and, consequently, abandons the latter, Mouffe foregrounds the notion of difference and chains of equivalence that recognize that “power is ineradicable” (Mouffe, 2005, p. 21), and that it “should not be conceived as an external relation taking place between two preconstituted identities, but rather as constituting the identities themselves” (Mouffe, 2005, p. 99). In making room for dissent and confrontation and the mobilization of affects around democratic designs confer to democracy a radical appeal that runs counter to the traditional consensus of deliberative democracy which refuses confrontation for the sake of a shared culture and, consequently, leads to political apathy and disaffection.

In fact, the “us” and “them” dichotomy that is often displayed on morning talk radio is constructed not on consensus but on agonism which aims to permanently contest hegemony and to reach temporary settlements. This radical approach comes as an antidote to representative democracy and other forms of deliberative democracy which are at risk as people fail to see their concerns represented and factored into political systems. Such a radical approach to democracy is based on discursive struggles over meanings and representations of everyday life and is constituted in acts of citizenship that are performed in the realms of the social. This is more so in a Mauritian context characterized by social and economic inequalities and tensions.

These acts of citizenship are constitutive of “attempts to insist on a thicker, substantive definition of citizenship premised on participation and voice, rather than a merely legalistic definition that reduces citizenship to formal aspects of belonging but does not address questions of participation, voice and action” (Garman and Wasserman, 2017, p. 4). As much as these acts require a substantive understanding of citizenship, they also require an ethics of the media that is not merely procedural. To what extent are confrontations and antagonisms encouraged on talk radio as part of popular engagements? Rather than mere spectacles, to
what extent do Mauritian talk radio allow effective citizenship? Are journalists ready to listen to people and to the plurality of voices? What does an ‘ethics of mediation and listening’ imply?

Sen lays emphasis on individual rights as embedded in the social, thus pointing to the need for both procedural and substantive ethics as a way to improve the capabilities of people. For him, development is envisioned as freedom and institutions like the media are enablers to improve the living conditions and capabilities of people. How does this play out on Mauritian talk radio in terms of the latter providing capabilities and social empowerment? What are the implications for democracy and citizenship? At the outset, such questions seem to put into disarray the traditional understanding of the public sphere as elaborated by Habermas.

Taking the popularity of private radio stations as a point of departure, this study aims to find out what the participatory cultures of talk radio are, especially morning talk radio and how they are tied to the lived experiences of people. It aims to interrogate the motivations and incentives for people to participate in morning talk radio and asks which uses people make of talk radio? It aims to attend to questions related to the role of reason and emotions in morning talk radio and the extent to which talk radio can move away from accusations of sensationalism to provide an ethics than goes beyond the mere conventions of the ethics of media professionals to sustain people’s capabilities to lead and live better lives.

1.6 Structure of Thesis

To begin with, the study considers the Habermasian public sphere as a contested notion. Chapter 2 provides a critical interrogation of the Habermasian public sphere by exploring the limitations of the liberal-rational framework. In line with Nancy Fraser’s indictment that Habermas’s public sphere is indispensable but is not “wholly satisfaction” (Fraser, 1990, p. 57), the chapter focuses on the contestations and limitations around the reasoned-based public sphere and participation as elaborated by Habermas and the implications for democracy. The chapter holds that Habermas’s paradigm eschews important aspects of affects and emotions that are increasingly part of participation in the public sphere and that these have implications for current understandings of democracy. Proposing a radical approach to democracy as elaborated by Laclau and Mouffe, the chapter looks into the perspectives of talk radio and its
implications for the public sphere. Chapter 3 develops a methodology based on a qualitative approach to elicit the way talk radio is tied to the routines of everyday life. A three tier approach comprising of discourse analysis, focus groups and indepth interviews have been used to understand the workings of talk radio in Mauritius, especially the ways people use morning talk radio as part of their lived experiences and everyday lives. Contesting the media effects paradigm that is often used to understand the ‘impact of the media’ and audience participation the chapter anchors and elaborates on the notion of media practices and asks what people are doing in and with talk radio.

Using discourse analysis and a phronetic approach, Chapter 4 looks into the way power is articulated in everyday conversations on morning talk radio. It looks into the grievances of radio callers and the ways reason and emotions are interrelated using the notion of ‘proper distance’ as elaborated by Silverstone (2002). In addition, depending on the structures of radio programs and the participatory intensities thereof, talk can be considered as forms of subactivism that are in themselves acts of citizenship. In Chapter 5, attention is geared to the reception of talk radio amongst Mauritian citizens and how citizens feel their way into the stories of talk radio. Instead of a media-centric approach, the chapter proposes the adoption of a decentered approach to the media by foregrounding the notion of mediation and the importance of relational ethics.

Interrogating the practice of journalism and how talk radio is changing the profession of journalism Chapter 6 enquires the extent to which talk radio journalists’ professional norms and practices are being reconfigured in the context of audience participation. The chapter argues that talk radio journalists’ role can be conceptualized as shaping “interpretive communities” (Zelizer, 1993) as through “ways of relating to others” (Rodny-Gumedé, 2014, p. 64) mainly through shared meanings, and emotional labor talk radio journalists uphold communitarian values in a Mauritian context upended by socio-economic disparities and the unfinished project of nation-building. Finally, Chapter 7 discusses the implications of an ‘ethics of listening’ and asks the extent to which talk radio creates opportunities to uphold substantive ethics that promote the ‘good life’ and the implications for democracy and citizenship. The chapter looks
into the role and importance of solutions journalism and the need to approach the media from a decolonized perspective by considering the lived experiences of citizens in a deeper and more sustainable way.
2. Literature Review: From the Institutional Public Sphere to Everyday Life: The Example of Talk Radio

Talk radio programmes have generated much attention and interrogations about its political role and potential contribution to democracy. Critics bemoan its programmes as “hot air” (Kurtz, 1996), “denigrated formats” (Livingstone, 2005, p. 18) and “talk radio chatter” (Marland and Kerby, 2010) demeaning its social value and importance. Along the spate of criticisms, there are critics who associate the medium and its programmes to hate propaganda - referring specifically to Rwanda where the government-controlled Radio-Television Libre des Mille Collines played a grievous and active role in inciting genocide (Kellow and Steeves, 2006). Others assign the format to the populist styles exemplified by American talk radio hosts like Russ Limbaugh or Australia’s Alan Jones (Turner, 2010). However, more sanguine views of talk radio abound focusing on its nimble adaptations and democratic diffusions as scholars associate the format more optimistically to the public sphere (Carpentier, 2011; Ross, 2004; Livingstone and Lunt, 1994), highlighting its participatory and democratic credentials. Importantly, talk radio is appraised for making audible the voices of ordinary people focusing on whether people and communities feel that they have a voice which is recognized allowing the possible renewal of citizenship (Hermes, 2006). In this regard, talk radio is commended as popular radio constituted of multiple publics (Livingstone, 2005) as much as it provides new imaginations of the self and of citizenship.

In this chapter, I draw from a range of research strands which includes the public sphere, popular culture, everyday life, engagement and participation as a way to interrogate talk radio as a popular phenomenon made up of the lived experiences of ordinary people. The chapter advances that audiences’ interactions and participation on talk radio should be considered as discursive and social practices, and that values of conflict and power are inevitable aspects of the public sphere. As a starting point, I provide a critical overview of the concept of the public sphere as elaborated by Habermas (1984). I argue that the Habermasian concept of the public sphere has a number of limitations, including the fact that it focuses singularly and unequivocally on reason and deliberation. Against the structural and deliberative views of the
public sphere of Habermas, the chapter highlights the notion of agonism as proposed by Mouffe (2000) and makes the case for an understanding of Mauritian talk radio, especially of morning talk radio as popular media characterized by both rational and emotional engagement as expressed through the mediation of the lived experiences of ‘ordinary’ people as much as such mediation also displaces traditional understandings of journalism. In short, the chapter calls for a broadening of the notions of the public sphere and democracy to consider the popular public sphere constituted by both deliberation and emotion engagement. It argues that popular culture is the public sphere of ordinary people (Willems, 2012) and that popular media as one of its facets “can provide spaces for democratic deliberation and the performance of citizenship” (Wasserman, 2011, p. 4).

2.2 The Public Sphere

In his seminal book, ‘The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere’ (1991), Habermas is concerned with the structural bases of the public sphere and the conditions for arguments and discussions to transform into political action (Calhoun, 1992). The bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century, notes Habermas, presented the ideal attributes of the public that met in a locale and used reason and arguments to deliberate. The public sphere emerged under the impulsion of market capitalism (Willems, 2012) and assembled in co-presence in coffee shops, clubs and saloons; the idealized bourgeois public discussed state and public affairs and the meetings were based on an “intersubjective conception of reason that emphasized the role of communication” (Scannell, 2007, p. 247, original emphasis). To Habermas “the medium of this political confrontations was peculiar and without historical precedent: people’s public use of their reason” (1991, p. 27). In the public sphere, reasoned-based deliberation was “the sole arbiter of any issue” (Calhoun, 1992, p. 13) over state affairs as Habermas “emphasized that we should at least try to break loose from our perspectives and strive for some kind of universal understanding or consensus” (Karppinen, Moe and Svensson 2008, p. 7). Exclusive and elitist in its approach, the Habermasian public sphere negates differences, assuming that participants have equal status and rebuffs any other modes of expression other than reason.
If Habermas documents the ideal conditions of the institutional public sphere, he also focuses on the reasons for its presumed decline. He uses the example of talk shows to illustrate the subsequent and arguable debasement of the public sphere. Habermas regrets that “conversation itself is administered. Professional dialogues from the podium, panel discussions, and round table shows - the rational debate of private people becomes one of the production numbers of the stars in radio and television” and under commercial pressures, talk programmes have become “a salable package ready for the box office [...] where anyone can “participate””. Pursuing his reasoning of the decline of an idealized public, Habermas notes that “discussion, now a “business” becomes formalized; the presentation of positions and counterpositions is bound to certain prearranged rules of the game; consensus about the subject matter is made largely superfluous by that concerning form” (Habermas, 1991, p. 164). Along with commodification and fetishisation and the alleged downfall of the public sphere into a presumed non-polemical space, Habermas bemoans that high culture and citizenship have been lowered to the tastes of the masses instead of “the “people” [being] brought up to the level of culture” (Habermas, 1991, p. 166). It is clear in Habermas’s formulation that the ideals of publicness are opposed to audiences’ tastes as Livingstone observes that “the talk show [...] portrays ordinary people discussing topical issues in public with experts, yet it refers to its audience rather than to the public; indeed it is often taken as representing the antithesis of rational public debate” (2005, p. 20).

For Habermas the public sphere has become the “sphere for the publicizing of private biographies, so that the accidental fate of the so-called man in the street or that of systematically managed stars attain publicity” (Habermas, 1991, p. 171). Besides, he notes that the mass media “recommend themselves as addressees of personal needs and difficulties, as authorities for advice on the problems of life” (1991, p. 172). The intrusions of private concerns into the public space that result in new configurations have presumably corrupted the public sphere as the collapse of the domestic and public spheres morphs, according to him, into a sphere of consumption (Habermas, 1991, p. 162). The paradox of the Habermasian approach to the public sphere is that it seems to privilege a centralized elitist media system and evinces notions of mediation and participation that increasingly define popular media.
Nonetheless, other scholars share the view of Habermas as they look to a sense of order and certainty in a media system that clearly “has now become provisional, partial and circumstantial” (Ang, 1996, p. 2). For instance, Blumler and Gurevitch align themselves onto Habermas’s pessimism as they argue that “it would be no exaggeration to describe this state of affairs as a crisis of communication” (1995, p. 1, original emphasis). For them the origins of the crisis are to be found in communication media as Livingstone and Lunt note that “many [scholars] including Habermas attribute public apathy to the effects of the media in undermining traditional class affiliations and transforming political debate into a managed show” (1993, p. 12). Referring specifically to talk culture, Blumler and Gurevitch contend that it is ambiguous, a double-edged sword in the sense that it blends together information and entertainment, hitherto rigidly separated domains. Whilst talkshows locate “the ordinary citizen as a significant point of reference”, Blumler and Gurevitch lament over such programmes that escape “from anything more structurally complex” and “tend [] to be slanted towards the more immediately riveting issues with strong socio-personal elements” (1995, p. 219). In a nutshell, infotainment programs like talkshows trivialize hard issues leading, according to them, to public disaffection. New cultures of participation and citizenship that are likely to emerge through talk radio are seemingly neglected as audiences’ interactivity and participation are discounted as debasing the public sphere.

Against the democratizing scope of talk radio, Blumler and Kavanagh note that talkshow programmes are exploding on the airwaves and, to them, the phenomenon represents an upsurge of “anti-elitist populism” (1999, p. 209). They note that political journalism is being dramatically transformed with the sensational co-productions of “many new and less inhibited makers and breakers of news in talk shows” whilst “the big players of political journalism no longer control the field they once commanded” (1999, p. 217). In their indictment, the explosion of “infotainment approaches to politics” (1999, p. 218) entails that “the voiced opinions of men and women in the street are being tapped more often” (1999, p. 220). The consequences of this “populist upsurge” are that the “more structural bases of political problems and process-oriented political developments” are downplayed while the personal and intimate issues of participants are brought to the fore (1999, p. 221).
that “the political arena has become more turbulent, less predictable, less structured and more difficult to control” (1999, p. 211).

The red herring over political apathy has brought Brants to focus and contradict what he terms the “infotainment scare” which is, according to him, the result of commercialization, tabloidization and Americanization lumped together as symptoms of the current democratic predicament. Contrary to those who castigate talk shows, Brants notes that the communicative talk show format “where politicians are confronted with live audiences is probably the only space where ‘ordinary people’ as ‘experience-based experts’ can put the issues they deem relevant on both the media and political agenda” (1998, p. 332). Brants foregrounds audiences’ activities and concludes that the blending of entertainment and political information that characterize talk radio shows allow the restoring of the popular in politics that reinvigorates the political communication functions of the public sphere. Willems concurs that “an advantage of conceptualizing sites of popular culture as publics is that it avoids Habermas’ elitist connotation of his concept of the public sphere” (2012, p. 21). In a way with the participation of ordinary people, there is the ‘return of the repressed’ (Garman, 2011) in the public sphere, anchoring bottom-up approaches, and this phenomenon of ordinary people’s participation in the political and popular spheres demands further enquiry rather than a mere academic telling off in the name of academic snobbery. In the Global South, especially in Africa, the participation of ordinary people in talk radio is the result of the orality and affordability of talk radio (Gunner, Ligaga and Moyo, 2011) and, in Mauritius, this participation plays out against a background of real and perceived social privileges and inequalities.

### 2.3 Cultural Studies

To address robustly audiences’ interactions, the participation of ordinary people and to make sense of the important “‘hidden debates” that develop in the realm of popular culture” (Hermes, 2006, p. 29), there is the need to shift to the area of cultural studies as it expands the dialectical interplay between culture and citizenship through the mediation of “everyday practice” (Hermes and Dahlgren, 2006, p. 261). If there is a general lament about traditional citizenship given that, amongst other things, people are less interested in serious political news
in party politics and other political settings, there is a need to consider other pathways where people get engaged through the media. Yet, political science and its corollary, political communication are too “prescriptive” as Couldry underlines the “missing link” in these academic traditions that leave a “significant gap in studying the experiential dimensions of citizenship”. Thus there is the need to shift gears to cultural studies in order to understand contemporary media engagement and participation and to grasp the “‘feel’ of citizenship” (Couldry, 2006, p. 323). Importantly, cultural studies provides an understanding of what people do to media foregrounding a broader and inclusive understanding of the public sphere, focusing on how participation is concerned with the asymmetries of power relations and “the deep inequalities that structure how individuals emerge as speaking subjects at all” (Couldry, 2006, p. 326).

Hermes and Dahlgren make the case that “given late modern sociopolitical development, cultural studies today needs to address the dynamics of democracy from its perspective” rather than from a political science perspective as they note that “cultural studies has left too much of the political domain to political science” (2006, p. 260). Likewise instead of a fixed and unitary notion of the public sphere, they note that the latter has to be considered as temporary and multiform whilst citizenship has to move beyond its formal-legal prescriptions to be considered “as lived practice” (2006, p. 206). In short, the bottom line question comes to interrogating “the practices that link private action to the public sphere, beyond the obvious act of walking down to the polling station to cast a vote […]” (Couldry, 2006, p. 324). In terms audiences, this implies the need to consider discursive and social practices and “to remember that audience-related practices only acquire significance, and can only be meaningfully comprehended, when they are articulated with other, non-audience practices” (Ang, 1996, p. 4) as the importance of mediation is centered.

Hence, instead of focusing singularly on the normative workings of the public sphere, cultural studies considers the everyday interactions and agency of audiences (Dahlgren, 1992). It interrogates, the oppositional gap and inequalities between the ‘power-bloc’ and the people and the power dialectics thereof. In brief, the ‘power-bloc’, is the alliance of the elite forces of
hegemonic domination which include powerful institutions of government, politics, industry and the media but also refers “to cultural and discursive forms, i.e control or influence over symbolic environments” (Dahlgren, 2018, p. 8). As a historical reminder, Fiske notes that the Habermasian public sphere of the eighteenth century was a product of the ‘power-bloc’ which classified news along the normative values of objectivity and truth “overshadow[ing] concerns with issues and discussions which deal with belonging, relating, boundedness; with a healthy, articulated sense of self, society and Other” (Garman, 2011, p. 5).

On the other hand, the people’s interests lie in confronting the power-bloc, even though affiliation to the ‘power bloc’ or to the ‘people’ is never definite and permanent given that identities are fluid and contextual. The people enter into “power-felt allegiances” and use “tactical resistances and evasions” (Fiske, 1992, p. 46) including humor, satire and other emotional resources like expressions of griefs and sufferings to confront hegemonies and inequalities. In the wake of such politicization, the private concerns of people take political significance in the “oppositional public sphere” as “more open, mediated communication between groups in society may not achieve consensus rather have other consequences, suggesting a reformulation of the character of the contemporary public sphere” (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994, p. 24).

In methodological and practical terms, the popular implies focusing into the interstices of struggles and conflicts and “hearing the subtle connections and disconnections between individual voices and the larger forms of “political language”” (Couldry, 2006, p. 59). Such mediation through talk radio has also to be read as “essentially a question about the ethical role of the media in public life” (Chouliaraki, 2006, p. 3) as it “tell[s] us something important about how mediation makes our encounter with distant others ethically acceptable and practically relevant” (Chouliaraki, 2008, p. 837). Does talk radio empower or sensationalize the participation of ordinary people? What difference does participation in talk radio make to the lives of people? And what are the ethical concerns in terms of democracy and citizenship?

Unlike the ideologies of objectivity and truth of the power-bloc, Fiske notes that “popular information [is] information that serves the people’s interests, not information as the servant of
an objective truth acting as a mask of domination” (Fiske, 1992, p. 47). Subjectivity, affects and emotions are the attributes of the popular as ordinary people in communities seek relationships that are based on human dignity and emancipation. Dahlgren pointedly reiterates that if we set aside emotions, subjectivity and human agency “from our understanding of politics, then we will never be able to understand, for example, the motivations, identities and passions that can launch people into the public sphere” (2006, p. 275).

2.4 Popular Media

Hence, through the prism of popular media, the intersections of discourses of the popular with notions of democracy and citizenship can be examined. Wasserman observes that the study of popular media can eschew the dangers of triviality by giving consideration to audiences’ uses and creativity through language as discourse and the extent to which “such usage may empower [audiences] as citizens to participate in political processes or challenge established centers of power” (Wasserman, 2011, p. 4). In the Global South, emotions and subjectivities, whether in the forms of indignation, outrage and anger or humor can play a crucial role as people use these affective resources through media to challenge existing oppressive power structures and to seek radical humanity and dignity. As Mauritian talk radio settles on-air and online as popular spaces of engagement and as the ‘soul beat’ of everyday life, it would be misleading to berate the popular expressed through the affective and emotional mediations of talk radio by focusing singularly on deliberations.

Yet, popular culture as a paradigm has been considered as a “residual category” and “has until recently been assigned a marginal position in scholarship” (Barber, 1997, p. 1). Caught in-between the traditions of Western modernism and nationalist elitism, the tendency has been about essentializing African popular culture along the polarizing lines of either elite or traditional artefacts without consideration to its contextual linkages to democracy and development. Barber notes that the popular straddles the binary distinctions of the elite and the traditional because it is hybrid and importantly she argues that the popular uses “all available contemporary materials to speak to contemporary struggles”. Barber observes that the popular speaks “to local audiences about pressing concerns, experiences and struggles” of
the people (Barber, 1997, p. 2). As the popular increasingly establishes itself as a serious scholarly domain, breaking away from the fixed notions of the traditional and the modern, Barber highlights its acute contemporary relevance as “genres billed as entertainment usually talk about matters of deep interest and concern to the people who produce and consume them” (Barber, 1997, p. p.2).

Despite the late emergence of African popular culture in academic literature, the field of African popular media has paradoxically remained mostly neglected. “While a significant body of literature on African popular culture exists”, Wasserman notes that “this work has not always directly engaged with the implications of popular media for contested terms such as democracy and development” (Wasserman, 2011, p. 5). Accordingly, the interface between popular media, politics and society, the overlaps and tensions, demand academic attention in order to understand the “appropriation and abrogation of global media paradigms by Africans” (Wasserman, 2011, p. 3).

This is more so with talk radio which is characterized by its liveness and the interactivity of its audiences. Chiumbu underlines the interactivity of phone-ins and notes that the “current multiple digital platforms allow even more diverse forms of utilization and engagement” (2014, p. 150). The nimbleness on air and online of talk radio has added to its popular character to the extent that a focus on popular media and people’s engagement opens possibilities to understand the complexities of “how Africans negotiate and navigate the various identity margins and cultural influences in their lives, in ways that are not easily reducible to simple options or straight-forward choices” (Nyamnjoh, 2011, p. 19). In addition, the study of popular media offers the possibilities of de-constructing dominant media theories which have been imported from the West and which do not necessarily fit into the realities of African contexts. As a way to challenge Eurocentric media theories, Nyamnjoh holds that theory building has to consider ordinary people’s use of “a combination of possibilities to relate and to exchange” (Nyamnjoh, 2011, p. 24). This reverberates with contemporary debates around dewesternization and decolonization that put into question the overreliance on Western media
ethics and proposes instead an ethics of the media based on everyday life (Schoon, Mabweazara, Bosch and Dugmore, 2021).

2.5 Everyday Life

Within elite theories, it can be advanced that notions of the public sphere and liberal democracy are conceived in minimal terms. Democracy is assimilated to consensual deliberation, citizens’ participation to voting rights. Gamson concedes that “in such a limited citizenship model, the citizen’s role is to choose periodically who among competing teams of would-be office holders will exercise public authority” (Gamson, 2001, p. 56, original emphasis).

On the other hand, rather than a singular attention to voting and elections, participatory democracy highlights the sociological aspects of citizenship and the need for citizens’ engagement and participation in everyday life. Participatory democracy lays, for instance, emphasis on deliberation as “constitutive of publics, which is both morally and functionally vital for democracy” (Dahlgren, 2002, p.2). As much as everyday life gives the “knowledge that others like us exist and that they share a sense of elation, happiness or concern” (Hermes, 2006, p. 37), consideration to the practices of daily life can avert the prevailing crisis in democracy and citizenship by interrogating why media does matter to people and “the differences (good or bad) that media make to the world” (Couldry, 2006, p. 3).

The most sophisticated version of deliberative democracy is the one proposed by Habermas as an extension of his original and now classical notion of the public sphere, even though there seems to be an evolution in Habermas’ thought as “the latter can be seen as advocating a much more plural conception of public spheres” (Karppinen, Moe and Svensson, 2008, p. 10).

Founded on the premises of reason and communicative rationality, the Habermasian deliberative model rests on “the force of the better argument” (Mouffe, 1999, p. 748). Emphasis is laid on the fact that participants have to be treated equally and impartially and that the prerequisites of openness, lack of coercion and unanimity have to be met in order for outcomes to be legitimate. Reasoned discussion is a pathway to rational decisions and this is metonymically illustrated by Chambers as “something is rational” as it can “be defended with reasons” (1996, p. 90).
Though an important paradigm of liberal democracy, the rationalistic and reasoned framework of deliberation is clearly built on a number of presuppositions which are out of sync with everyday realities. In addition to being procedural and based mostly in formal settings, the Habermasian model of deliberative democracy does not address the conflictual nature of politics notably the antagonism and struggles that can characterize it. The Habermasian model, hence, forsakes power relations and Mouffe concludes that it “denies the central role in politics of the conflictual dimensions and its crucial role in the formation of collective identities” (Mouffe, 1999, p. 752). Mouffe advocates for an alternative model which she calls “agonistic pluralism” as a way to put back questions of power, conflicts and social justice at the center of democratic politics. Such a paradigm would not forsake the importance of conflicts and emotions and would rather focus on the dialectics of reason and emotions.

Mouffe (2002) distinguishes the notion of “the political from that of “politics”, which refers to the ensemble of discourses, institutions, and practices whose objective, is to establish an order to organize human coexistence in a context which is always conflictual because of the presence of “the political”. Agonism is the result of the transformation of antagonism from friend/enemy perspectives into adversaries. For Mouffe, the “political” is constitutive of relationships and is “the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in all human society”. The “political” can take “different forms and can emerge in diverse social relations” (Mouffe, 1999, p. 754). In the agonistic framework, conflicts are ongoing and the “other” is not an enemy to be eliminated but an “adversary” involved in “an open-ended struggle for democratisation” (Karppinen, Moe and Svensson, 2008, p. 8). The outcome of such “a radical conception of democracy” is the fact that “there can never be total emancipation but only partial ones” (Mouffe, 1999, p. 752). From an adversarial perspective, political subjectivities in the form of affects and emotions have all their place and importance in the democratic process. In the words of Mouffe “the prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions nor to relegate them to the private sphere in order to render rational consensus possible, but to mobilize those passions towards the promotion of democratic designs” (1999, p. 756). That politics is founded singularly on rational and deliberative grounds is rebuffed by Mouffe. Instead, the “political” is characterized by shared reason and emotions which are the inherent attributes of the popular as the “political”
defies the “polarities such as rationality/emotion, analysis/experience, knowledge/pleasure and information/entertainment” (Dahlgren, 2006, p. 271).

While Habermas’s approach “fails to adequately theorise pluralism and power” (Karppinen, Moe and Svensson, 2008, p. 9), Mouffe’s concept of the “political” strikes a chord with feminism’s concerns with relationships based on personal and subjective experiences. For instance, the feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’ redraws the contours of the public and inserts the subjective into the political. Van Zoonen concurs that the opening up of the political space to private matters is an “important sign that politics is part of everyday culture and not above it” (2005, p. 4). Hence, in the wake of feminist movements, the definition of politics has been extended from its narrow and institutional confines to an understanding of relationships as “lived practice” (Hermes and Dahlgren, 2006, p. 260). It has to be added that Carol Gilligan’s notion of ‘ethics of care’ also echoes the feminist concern with the personal (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham, 2010) and the search for human dignity.

Referring to the porous and fluid boundaries between public and private spheres, Couldry, Livingstone and Markham observe that “media institutions have been involved in constructing and reconstructing such boundaries” (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham, 2010, p. 8). They argue that in the mediated reconfigured environments the boundaries between the public and the private, between information and entertainment and between knowledge and experience are transgressed. Van Zoonen concurs that in the “postmodern condition [...] the political has become personal and vice versa, entertainment has mixed with information, intelligence now also applies to emotions, and so forth” (Van Zoonen, 2005, p. 13). In such a reconfigured cultural climate, characterized by popular culture, Van Zoonen argues that “to set politics apart from the rest of culture is not a feasible option for the maintenance of citizenship”. She adds further that “not only will [politics] not survive the competition for spare time, but more importantly it will be separated, different, and distant from everyday life” (Van Zoonen, 2005, p. 3). Thus the “ignored sides of political communication and the democratic role of the media” (Karppinen, Moe and Svensson, 2008, p. 18) or the “hidden debates” between popular culture and the public sphere (Hermes, 2006) need foregrounding.
In this respect, Couldry, Livingstone and Markham note that attention should be paid to people’s ways of living with the media in order to understand contemporary political engagement. In their study on media consumption and public engagement, they focus on ‘public connection’ arguing that people keep connected or disconnected through their consumption of the media. In this regard, they maintain that “only by understanding the everyday practices of media consumption – and the way those practices fit into the other practices of everyday life - can we begin to understand the problem (if it is one) of public engagement” (2010, p. 5, original emphasis). In a nutshell, focus should be laid on mediated political participation that is “people’s ‘public connection’ – their lived relationship with public culture – which make little sense unless grounded in the material realities of people’s daily lives” (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham, 2010, p. 23).

2.6 Engagement

As much as civic cultures provide contextual relevance to the lived experiences of people, engagement is a prerequisite to participation, and engagement can be defined as “an energizing force [...] that enable[s] us to participate in politics, to recognize the social and cultural, as well as economic values of media in our lived experiences” (Dahlgren and Hill, 2020, p. 2). It has a necessary echo with the notion of the ‘political’ as conceived by Mouffe (2005) and is thus a subjective experience constituted by both reason and affects as people are propelled to participate as they mobilize resources from their lived experiences and the rhythms of their everyday lives. Engagement, in this sense, has a larger political connotation than the reductive meaning given to it in media industries referring primarily to corporate strategies of station managers and programme organizers for public involvement in programmes or user interactions. In the case of talk radio, engagement not only refers to the fact radio producers use strategies for public involvement and to their communicative intents but more broadly it refers to the political dimensions of talk radio programmes, that is the “subjective disposition that can propel us to do things” (Dahlgren, 2020, p. 2).

In other words, the ‘political’ is tied to the motivations of callers and listeners to get engaged via talk radio and to participate in talks which are inherently conflictual and rooted in power
relations. Dahlgren notes that both engagement and participation transcend the individual to reach the realm of collectivities through social relationships as “engagement and participation of the citizen are predicated on him/her being connected to others, by civic bonds” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 81). The ‘political’ in Mauritian talk radio also refers to the specificities of private stations given that they are simultaneously channels of talk and public feelings as much as they are also organized into ‘community stations’ in a landscape where there is no community media. Settling themselves as antithetical and different from ‘state radio and television’ they are able to position themselves as mediators of the ‘political’ allowing people to get engaged through political struggles that play out at the local, national and diasporic levels. Chiumbu observes that “the ‘audience’ is now located in local, national and de-territorialized spaces” (2014, p. 254) and, in the absence of community radio licensees, Mauritian talk radio has been able to channel expressions from various quarters disrupting conventional delimitations.

The notion of engagement strikes a chord with Raymond Williams’s (1961) notion of “structures of feeling” as it describes the “precarious balance between the forces of structure and agency, between the forces of social process and the willing” (Best, 2012, p. 194) and refers to “the potential that lies in that which is emergent and the power or agency that may derive from the volatility of social experiences in the making” (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 115). This potentiality is also captured by the term “liminality” which is according to Papacharissi a “transitional but essential stage in finding one’s own place in the story and doing so from a position that allows autonomy and potential agency” (2015, p. 124). Put otherwise, liminality refers to the “in-between” moment and “it characterizes the short time between the fall of one state of being and the emergence of a new status quo” (Van de Wiele and Papacharissi, 2021, p. 1144).

This notion of liminality can draw parallels with democratization as people are empowered to act through media as “the liberalization of public communication creates fundamentally new, often volatile and highly explosive environment, in which citizens make themselves heard and regime changes are negotiated” (Voltmer and Kraetzschmar, 2015, p. 33). Whether in transitional democracies - countries that have transitioned from authoritarian to democratic regimes - or in hybrid democracies which have a tradition of voting, there is increasing
disillusionment and apathy towards democratic institutions which no longer meet the aspirations and needs of citizens (Voltmer and Sorensen, 2016, p. 1). It is through the democratized means of communication that people get engaged. Engagement in the contemporary contexts of democratic crisis often takes the form of “democratisation conflicts” that is communicative tools, including talk radio, are used to voice out, mobilize and to protest. In other words, “democratisation conflicts” refers to the “dynamics of public communication in conflicts that accompany (attempts at) democratization” and allow people to speak up and to voice out. In this respect, Voltmer and Kraetzschmar note that “it is important to unpack the multiple processes of influence and reciprocity that drive message creation, strategic response and counter-framing” (2015, p. 9). The concept of liminality and ‘democratisation conflicts’ are also linked to each other in the sense that “individuals are neither wholly part of nor wholly divorced from their communities” (Chiumbu, 2014, p. 255) even though communities have increasingly becoming social and imaginative constructs rather than merely the primordial ethnic connotations given to it in the heydays.

Depending on contexts and civic cultures, the process of “democratization conflicts” can take different trajectories with different outcomes. The circuit of civic cultures in the public sphere proposed by Dahlgren provides the empirical and theoretical framework to understand engagement and participation. Civic cultures “consist of patterns of communication, practices and meaning; they provide taken-for-granted orientations – factual and normative – as well as other resources for collective life”. Civic cultures are always in a dynamic and changing process or a “general orientation that can offer road markers for patterns of doing and thinking, yet it can never provide definite predictions” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 103). In sum, civic cultures “serve as preconditions for people’s actual participation in the public sphere and political society” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 105). They are the “civic ‘pre-requisites’ for participation” and are “cultural resources that can promote or impede engagement (and by extension, participation) depending on circumstances and the forces at play” (Dahgren, 2018, p. 9).

Dahlgren ascertains that there are a number of factors that influence civic cultures, including family and school but his emphasis is on the media which has an important contribution to
mediated civic cultures “via their form, content, specific logics and modes of use” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 105). Dahlgren proposes six elements namely knowledge, values, trust, spaces, practices and identities as part of the civic cultures framework. He notes that these elements “are closely intertwined, and in fact, to pull them apart and identify them individually for schematic purposes may convey a misleading impression of their individual independence, but it is necessary for heuristic purposes” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 108).

If knowledge is essential as a means to participate, Dahlgren points out that “a crucial aspect of this dimension is not just the question if citizens already have the knowledge they need, but more importantly, if they are to acquire relevant knowledge, that is, if they have the viable strategies for obtaining knowledge” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 108). Put otherwise, knowledge is experientially based on lived experiences and is acquired through mediated interactions and this “is strongly related to the dimension of practices and skills”. Dahlgren adds that it “would be more accurate in many cases to talk about “information” in regard to media output: it is in the process of appropriation of information – integrating it in relation to one’s existing frames of reference and thereby making it personally meaningful – that information becomes “translated” into knowledge” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 109).

Besides, knowledge, democratic values determine engagement and participation. Both substantive and procedural values are important as part of the commitment to the rules of democracy and everyday life. Substantive values can refer to principles like freedom, equality, solidarity, justice and human dignity whilst procedural values can relate to openness, discussion and responsibility. If citizens tend to adopt a rights-based approach to democracy – citizens have recourse to the courts to secure their rights – Dahlgren argues that “the dimension of values and the necessity that these be integrated into the taken-for-granted sensibilities of daily life remind us that, fundamentally, democracy is as much about a democratic society- how people live together and treat each other – as it is about a system of institutional frameworks” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 112). These democratic values that are mediated are related to an ethics of care and human dignity.
Trust is also part of the civic cultures nexus. Dahlgren refers specifically to trust amongst or between groups of citizens. The interpersonal character between groups of citizens is here of interest. Two categories of trust are distinguished, namely, thick and thin trust. Thick trust is based on personal relationships and is a necessity for psychological and social well-being. Thin trust is especially relevant for civic relationships since it is important for the maintenance of loose bonds and relationships. Dahlgren notes that “without a degree of thin trust, collective political action becomes impossible, undercut by suspicion even toward citizens of similar persuasion” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 113). Some degrees of trust will always be necessary in order to participate and maintain social relationships as audiences and citizens.

Citizens need spaces in order to be able to interact and “in the circumstances of everyday life, there are innumerable physical spaces, sites, and settings which people may meet and interact as citizens” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 115). In addition, the media plays an important role for civic encounters as it expands both the physical and virtual spaces. Dahlgren notes that as the mass media contributes to the redefinition of boundaries between private and public spaces, “and as we continue with the interactive electronic media, we see an intensification of the sense of being co-present with others who are physically removed” (2009, p. 115). In the case of talk radio, co-presence in the studio as much as to listeners outside of the studio is a key feature.

Practices are essential to democracy. Participating in elections is considered as a civic practice that contributes to democracy. Talk also forms part of practices that require communicative competencies. Dahlgren insists on everyday life and notes that “practices must have an element of the routine, of the taken for granted about them if they are to be part of civic culture” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 117). Practices involve the capacity to frame issues, to take sides, to “recruit support, cement relationships, and follow up with the necessary organizational skills to keep the momentum going” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 118). In brief, practices entail communicative skills and are tied to knowledge, trust and values.

Finally, identities are a foundation of agency and are an important aspect of civic cultures. Identities can be defined as “people’s subjective view of themselves as members and participants of democracy” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 118). They “build on knowledge and values, they
can be reinforced by trust, and embodied in particular spaces via practices – pursuing issues by
the use of civic skills” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 199). They are neither single nor fixed; rather they
are plural as citizens enact different identities in different contexts of their everyday life as
people carry “different sets of knowledge, assumptions, rules and roles in different
circumstances” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 119).

Dahlgren asserts that “to see citizenship as one component of our plural identities may also
help us to avoid letting our democratic ideal generate a predefined, one size-fits-all portrait of
citizenship that is sociologically and psychologically unrealistic” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 119).
Identities evolve through experience and are subject to emotions. In sum, the “affective
involvement with political goals and values compatible with democracy not only poses no
threat, but contributes to democracy’s vibrancy – and to people’s sense of their political selves”
(Dahlgren, 2009, p. 119). In everyday life, people use both their head and heart to makes sense
of their experiences and Dahlgren insists that “there is no reason why we should – or even
could – function any differently when we find ourselves connected to public spheres”
(Dahlgren, 2009, p. 133).

2.7 Talk

Besides civic cultures, theories of democracy posit that talk among citizens is “fundamental to –
and an expression of – their participation” (Dahlgren, 2002, p. 2). If citizens’ engagement begins
with talk, Dahlgren notes the latter should not be studied only in formal settings as
“situationally distinct from other modes of talk” (Dahlgren, 2002, p. 8) highlighting the
importance of everyday talk. In African contexts, talk can take the forms of rumors and gossips
(Willems, 2008). In this respect, even irony and satire which are important resources of popular
culture can be considered as a way to understand the impact of talk.

Unlike the views of Habermas who considers that talk should be seen in special and bounded
contexts, Dahlgren argues that “the looseness, open-endedness of everyday talk, its creativity,
potential for empathy and affective elements, are indispensable for the vitality of democratic
politics” (2002, p. 7). Hence, the messiness, unpredictability and even the ‘conflictuality’ of talk
are a way to “put forth the view that “the political” and the individual’s role as citizen is never a
priori given, but can emerge in various ways within informal everyday speech” (Dahlgren, 2002, p. 8, original emphasis). This places at the centerstage the notion of ‘proper distance’ in mediated talk and the moral consequences thereof. Silverstone observes that “we can be blinded morally by the too close at hand just as easily as we can be by the too far removed” as he notes that “it is in this paradox of connection and separatedness and in the ambiguities which we as individuals have to resolve in our relationships with other, that the creation of an ethical or moral life becomes, or does not become, possible” (2004, p. 8).

If broadcast talk is crafted intentionally for an audience, Scannell notes that the communicative style of broadcasters tends to align itself on “ordinary, informal conversation, for this is overwhelmingly the preferred communicative style of interaction between people in the routine contexts of day-to-day life” (Scannell, 1991, pp. 3-4). The radioscape in Africa, notes Gunner, Ligaga and Moyo, has developed and grown in importance especially due to its ties to the oral cultures which are prevalent on the continent. Livingstone notes that the hosts of talk shows tend to hold the “discussion rather tightly” and yet “the programmes are [...] unique in allowing ordinary people to question and answer, challenge and support, tell personal stories and make political arguments” (1994, p. 3).

This foregrounds the ethics of mediation that is afforded through talk radio. Does talk radio extract the sufferings of its audiences to sensationalize them? Or does talk radio provide spaces for empowerment? Is there a proper distance maintained amongst talk radio hosts and participants? Is there an ethics of listening? Kasoma observes that “African journalists can bring in some fresh air into their journalism by making it once more a society-centred rather a money- and power-centred profession which always wants to have the last word on issues and hardly admits any wrong-doing” (1996, p. 96). To what extent are talk radio journalists and their audiences promoting societal agendas as opposed to individual ones?

2.8 Participation

Participation has a foothold in several fields of the social sciences and yet it “remains structurally undertheorised” (Carpentier, 2011, p. 165). It is a slippery, if not a “contested” notion (Willems, 2013, p. 1). To have a better grasp of the contours of participation and its
potentials, Carpentier observes that attention should be paid to democratic theory and, more precisely, to media participation in order to distinguish between “minimalist and maximalist forms of participation” and the ways people relate to and interpret participatory practices (Carpentier, 2012, p. 164). Participation is discursively and socially constructed (Carpentier, 2001) and minimalist versions of participation refer to forms of participation where decision making is centralized and where people select the elite through the popular will, and the focus is mainly on representation and delegation of decision-making powers. On the other hand, maximalist versions of democratic participation tend to relate to a more balanced combination between representation and participation (Carpentier, 2009) and adopt a decentralized approach as it is precisely “embedded within the structures of everyday life” (Carpentier, 2011, p. 18).

Willems argues that participation in radio can take two forms namely “unsolicited” participation in which case participants contribute to content creation on their own initiative while “solicited” participation means that “radio stations actively invite listeners to call in, SMS or email their messages or leave their contribution on Facebook” (Willems, 2013, p. 3). The availability of mobile phones and the affordances of social media have encouraged participation and “assisted radio producers to get audience feedback from listeners that they would not normally engage with” (Willems, 2013, p. 6). The key attribute of participation in the media, especially in audience discussion programmes, is the way power is organized and articulated and “the focus is shifted towards the participation of non-professionals in the professional system” (Carpentier, 2011, p. 68) as ‘ordinary people’ are allowed access while audiences are overhearing the statements which are generated. Carpentier notes that “the major questions then become how different power relations function, how within the dialectics of control voices are managed, power is shared and unequal power relations are resisted, and what discourse on the participation of ‘ordinary people’ the combination of power and resistance eventually produces” (Carpentier, 2001, p. 210).

Taking the example Jan Publiek, a North-Belgian television talk show, Carpentier focusses on the organization of the programme; its participatory nature and the way power is articulated
and resisted. At the outset, his study indicates that the production team holds control over the programme but their power is not definitive since the audience is able to negotiate and resist the power structures of the programme. Carpentier argues that power is not necessarily a negative feature but is a fluid process that reinforces the dependence of the actors involved in the decision-making process. Referring to Foucault, Carpentier adds that power is not repressive but “instead power produces knowledge, discourse and subjects” (Carpentier, 2001, p. 212). Hence, power in the decision making process is constantly (re)negotiated between the different actors involved in the talk as Carpentier notes that Foucault “strongly opposes the image of the subject as a rational being at the origin of human action, defining this subject as a historical construction, produced through discourse” (2001, p. 213).

In the preparatory stage of the tv talkshow Jan Publiek, participation of ‘ordinary people’ implies that “their presence in the media system is managed by the production team, who themselves have specific objectives, who define themselves as owners of the means of production, and who are familiar with the rules of practice within the media system” (Carpentier, 2001, p. 214). Yet, ‘ordinary people’ participating do not necessarily succumb to the control processes of the production team. During the broadcasting phase, despite the power of the host who decides who in the panel gets a turn to speak, Carpentier notes that “some of the panel members became quite experienced in ignoring the questions of the host without losing their turn” (Carpentier, 2001, p. 226). In short, Carpentier notes that “ordinary people can resist unequal power relations by taking turns themselves, protesting when they lose their turn, contesting the role of the host or simply ignoring him but only on a small scale” (Carpentier, 2001, p. 229). To conclude Carpentier notes that “the performances of the participants during the programme actually show how participation is articulated in social practice, partially fixing the discourse on participation of ‘ordinary people’ in the media system, but also in other social systems as schools and the workplace, accentuating the socially constitutive aspects of mass media” (2001, P. 214).

However, participation is a “contested” notion to the extent that it can be an illusion as demonstrated by Stremlau, Fantini and Gagliardone (2015). In their study of Somali call-in
programmes, they found that the stations may provide platforms to ordinary people to express themselves but that they are spaces where the existing power structures are reproduced and fossilized. They note that “assumptions about the role of call-in programmes as open spaces for public engagement often fail to account for the influence of existing power structures and multiple publics engaging in these programmes for a variety of reasons” (2015, p. 1521). In similar ways, Willems argues that there is a corporate logic that feeds into the marketing strategies of radio producers even though she observes that “apart from the incorporation of live phone calls or reading out of SMS messages during programmes, input from listeners occasionally also feeds into decisions radio producers make with regards to content, hereby suggesting that audiences are contributing to content production” (2013, p. 7).

For his part, Dahlgren emphatically notes that “the public sphere does not begin and end when media content reaches an audience”. Rather he argues that “this is but one step in larger communication and cultural chains that include how the media output is received, made sense of and utilized by citizens”. Dahlgren refers specifically to issue-publics “that emerge, exist for varying durations and then eventually dissolve” (2006, p. 274). And that participation entails the consideration of how the private motivations move into the public realm and “how is it that people take the step to act in relation to the political?” (Dahlgren, 2018, p. 10).

Yet, participation can be “highly constrained by the professional standards of the broadcasters, whose main objective is to make a ‘good’ programme, reducing participation to a secondary objective” (Capentier, 2001, pp. 229-230). Whither to locate participation in Mauritian talk radio, especially with regard to morning talk radio programmes? What are the kinds of participatory cultures take place on talk radio and what are the ethics involved? What are the implications of such participation for citizenship, democracy and the public sphere? These are some of the questions that this study aims to explore further.

2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have presented the public sphere as understood by Habermas and argued that it has a number of limitations, especially with regard to its excessive reliance on rationality to the detriment of emotions. We have underlined the need for a paradigm shift to cultural
studies as a way to understand audiences’ practices as social experiences based on the lived experiences of ordinary people and the public sphere being constitutive of both reason and emotions as an ‘agonistic’ public sphere. We have argued that conflictual talks, engagement and participation on talk radio can be understood from the perspectives of “democratization conflicts” as discursive practices that allow ordinary people to challenge and confront power holders of various kinds through the mediations of talk radio.
3. Research Methodology

The relationship between audiences and societies is of prime importance to understand the likely impact, or not, of the media on people and vice versa. Understanding this relationship between the media and audiences is important; as such mediation can determine the impact of the media on people’s ways of life and practices of citizenship. Classic media research has focused its attention on media effects by projecting the media as institutions that influence audiences, assimilating the latter to passive and gullible subjects of media messages. However, the stimuli-responses approach has been bemoaned for not paying enough attention to the capacity of media audiences to interpret media messages, considering the contexts in which the messages are received. For its part, cultural studies has looked at the ways people actively negotiate and interpret the meanings of the media.

This chapter highlights the need to shift from media effects traditions to a renewed agenda of cultural studies based on everyday appropriations of the media in order to understand audiences’ approaches and engagements in and with talk radio. I propose a research design which uses a three-layered strategy comprising discourse analyses to understand participation in talk radio programmes that takes into consideration the ethical and moral outcomes of discourses on talk radio; focus groups across Mauritius to understand the extent to which people are able to use talk radio to make claims of citizenship and what such habits of consumption do reveal in terms of processes of engagement and socialization. Finally, indepth interviews with “talk radio journalists” are proposed as a way to explore and highlight the impact of audiences’ involvements on journalism cultures. The data collected through the three-layered strategies have been analyzed using grounded-theory allowing themes to emerge by themselves rather than in prescribed ways to better understand the lived experiences of audiences and the changing occupational practices and performances of “talk radio journalists” and the consequences for democracy and citizenship.
3.2 Media Effects Traditions

Media research is a broad field and it has no definite trajectory but “has been a thing of fits and starts” (Couldry, 2004, p. 115). Different lines of inquiry into media research have been pursued to understand media’s influence on people. Over the last century, the history of media research has “oscillate[d] between continents and perspectives, between those theories which stress textual power over audiences and those which stress audience power over texts” (Strelitz, 2000, p. 37).

The effects tradition of the media has developed into many offshoots and approaches emphasizing the presumed uniform influence of the media on audiences. Considering the audience “simply [as] an ‘object of study’, a reality ‘out there’” (Ang, 1996, p. 4), the effects tradition is still prevalent amongst policy makers who believe that control of the media is control over the masses. Functionalist scholars and media practitioners alike analyze the media for its presumed influence on people and for its seemingly centrifugal ability to foster and reproduce social order and stability. Inspired by experimental social sciences (Couldry, 2006), U.S scholars Lazarsfeld and Merton concluded that the media “produce a ‘narcotizing effect’ [...] essentially as a result of the simplified stories that [are] offered to [audiences]” (Hutchby, 2006, p. 5). In a case study of “a marathon live-to-air radio broadcast [...] to promote the sale of government war bonds” (Scannell, 2007, p. 64), Robert Merton pointed to the assumed persuasive effects of radio that can readily manipulate people’s opinion. Hence, early media research has assimilated the media to institutions that behold important powers of persuasion on people who are easy and gullible pawns to media messages. Pitout succinctly recaps the linear tradition in that “the first scientific audience studies were done within the behaviourist tradition, which is based on the assumption of passive audiences who have no resistance against the all-powerful ‘bullet’ effects of the media” (2018, p. 390).

Inspired by the effects tradition and taking its cue from critical Marxism, the Frankfurt School assimilated the media to fetish objects of capitalism that influence and deceive the masses. It is along these same lines of deceit and deception that some scholars argue that the media have a ‘dumbing down effect’ on culture which is short-hand to manipulation and production of forced
consent. Such accusations of dumbing-down and sensationalism are often directed at talk radio. Along this critical Marxist line, the media are held responsible for moral outrage and panics as policy makers blame the media for its supposed negative influence on society (Livingstone, 1996).

Hence, the general approach to the effects tradition has primarily been a “linear model of communication” (Madianou, 2009, p. 332) with a focus on the sender and the receiver via the transmission route of the media. Effects researchers have conceived the media from a determinist perspective and concluded “that exposure to the media changes people’s behaviour or beliefs” (Livingstone, 1996, 306). Metaphorically the media is assimilated to “an ideological hypodermic needle” (Livingstone, 1996, p. 305). As observed by Livingstone, alternative versions are equally hyperbolic presenting the audience as making creative choices about their viewing preferences. In the words of Deuze “such media-centrism and technological determinism often boils down to benevolent or malevolent mechanistic fascination with the machinery of media” (Deuze, 2012, p. xii).

Conceptions of the media thence vary from utopian to dystopian ones as “findings both in favour and against effects are controversial” (Livingstone, 1996, p. 305). Media effects tradition is seemingly based on behaviorist assertions and policy makers often look to the media as convenient scapegoats to satisfy the public’s anxiety and expectations as messengers that are to be blamed. Livingstone underlines the outdated and inappropriately simplistic response of the effects tradition to the complex issue of the media and its impact noting that, withstanding the media, “we do not ask of other social influencers, what is the effect of parents on children or do schools have an effect which generalizes to the home or do friends have positive or negative effects?” (Livingstone, 1996, p. 305).

The uses and gratifications school developed as another important critical strand of the experimental dimensions of the effects tradition. It conceives of the audience as active recipients of media messages looking for gratifications through the selection of “those aspects of media output which most suited their various everyday needs” (Hutchby, 2006, p. 6). The main focus of the gratifications approach rests on a psychological and behavioral model
whereby individuals have needs that have to be satisfied, and they turn to the media for gratification and self-satisfaction. Notwithstanding its validity, this approach has also been criticized for being too behaviorist with a focus on the psychological and personality differences of individuals to the detriment of social and political contexts (Strelitz, 2000) emphasizing “a pure form of individualism” (Pitout, 2018, p. 397).

Another route explored to understand the relationship between media and audiences is the approach developed by ‘Screen theory’ which considers films and the media mainly as ‘texts’ that the audiences read in the same way as when people read books. Despite its emphasis on textual approaches, ‘Screen theory’ argues that people are able to make only bounded readings of the media since they are not free to make the interpretations that they wish. Accordingly, audience autonomy is limited since emphasis for ‘Screen theorists’ is on media producers who inscribe the media with certain messages at source. The assumption is that “there are specific meanings embedded in any media text which function to ‘situate’ the reader (the audience) in particular subject positions and disenable them from taking up certain other positions” (Hutchby, 2006, p. 7).

Despite its appeal and easy assumptions, the effects tradition of media research has hardly provided a satisfactory explanation to a comprehensive understanding of the media, particularly with respect to the latter’s pervasiveness and interconnectedness to audiences’ uses. Criticism has been directed against its artificiality – largely based on laboratory experiments - as well as its findings which are controversial, largely driven by administrative and ideological motives. Livingstone sums up the history of the effects tradition noting that “articles often describe a history of progress over the past seventy years of research which alternates between these two extremes – first we believed in powerful effects, then came the argument for null effects, then the return to strong effects etc – a history whose contradictions become apparent when old research is re-read with new eyes” (Livingstone, 1996, p. 305).

Within the effects tradition many questions about the media remain unanswered. For instance, how does it explain that spaces between the public and the private have become porous to the extent that on talk shows one can “disclose publicly aspects of one’s life that one might not
otherwise disclose to *anyone*”? (Couldry, 2003, p. 116, original emphasis). How to explain the discursive appropriations and material consequences of participation of audiences in talk shows and the ethical dispositions that are foregrounded? How do participants feel into the stories of talk radio and make moral judgments over issues as part of their lived experiences? As a guiding principle, does a media studies perspective suffice or should questions of the media be tackled within both approaches of media studies and social theory? We have to turn to cultural studies in order to probe further into those questions.

### 3.3 Cultural Studies

Cultural studies offers an innovative and relevant foray into the study of people’s lives in relation to media and communication by focusing on people’s agency and considering the uses that they make of the media. Hall departs from the institutional tradition of the stimuli and responses model of the effects traditions arguing that a media “programme is not a behavioural input” (Hall, 1980a, p. 166). By way of a critique, Stuart Hall bemoans that “it seems to have been almost impossible for traditional researchers to conceptualize the communicative process without lapsing into one or other variant of low-flying behaviourism” (Hall, 1980a, p. 166). Stuart Hall’s Encoding and Decoding model marks a definite “turning point not only for the study of news audiences, but media studies more broadly” (Madianou, 2009, p. 326).

Thus, in Hall’s seminal article Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse (1980a), emphasis is laid both on the encoding and decoding of media messages at production and consumption stages underlining the co-productions that become manifest in media. Hence, both the structure as well as the meanings of the communication process are “constituted within the rules of ‘language’” (Hall, 1980a, p. 163) and people’s agency is critical at the receiving end as “the [media] discourse must then be translated – transformed, again – into *social practices* if the circuit is to be both completed and effective” (Hall, 1980a, p. 164, my emphasis). In short, Hall is interested in the ways media discourse is produced and received within socio-cultural environments as social practices that are inscribed in particular contexts. In Hall’s view there is not one audience “out there” that is to be studied as in mediated contexts audiences are in plural “as disparate, fragmentary collections of individuals, rather than the homogeneous mass
often envisaged by earlier approaches” (Hutchby, 2006, p. 8). Hall details the communication process as a dynamic circuit and at the production stage, media producers “encode or ‘write’ the meanings of their programmes in particular ways and with particular kinds of audience understanding in mind” (Hutchby, 2006, p. 8).

Three types of readings namely the dominant-hegemonic, the negotiated and the oppositional are proposed by Hall (1980a). The dominant reading entails that audiences adhere to the preferred meanings embedded at source by media producers. In the ‘negotiated’ readings, audiences may agree “with the programme’s overall ‘message’ but [may take] issue with certain individual parts” (Hutchby, 2006, p. 9). The “negotiated codes operate through what we might call particular or situated logics: and these logics are sustained by their differential and unequal relation to the discourses and logics of power” (Hall, 1980a, p. 172). The audience may also have an oppositional reading and hence challenge the views offered by the media and criticise or reject the ideological views of the programme based on their lived experiences and the contexts of their everyday lives. In this way, Hall treats “hegemony as a discourse of meanings, whereby readers’ interpretations could represent a range of preferred, negotiated or oppositional readings” (Du Plooy, 2019, p. 197).

Several criticisms have been levelled at cultural studies including by advocates of the political economy of the media. The latter holds that cultural studies celebrates “naïve humanism” (Strelitz, 2000) and that media power should be located “in the economic processes and structures of media production” (Curran, Gurevitch, Woollacott, 1982, p. 6). The main concern of the political economic approach of the media is the problem of media ownership. However, as observed by Morley (2014) “it goes without saying that there is more to the media than questions of economics; that issues of culture, representation and signification are equally important”. Notwithstanding the relevance of the political and economic aspects of the media, a cultural studies approach marks a watershed moment in media research as it highlights that “culture and particularly popular culture must be taken seriously as a site of meaning, creativity, agency and identity” (Couldry, 2003, p. 2).
Rather than just economic considerations, cultural studies, in the words of Hall, “prefers the wider formulation - the dialectic between social being and social consciousness: neither separable into its distinct poles (in some alternative formulations, the dialectic between ‘culture’ and ‘non-culture’). It defines ‘culture’ as part of everyday life and as both the means and values which arise amongst distinctive social groups and classes, on the basis of their given historical conditions and relationships, through which they ‘handle’ and respond to the conditions of existence; and as the lived traditions and practices through which those ‘understandings’ are expressed and in which they are embodied” (1980b, p. 63, original emphasis).

Within the cultural studies framework, Livingstone and Lunt point to a growing body of literature that indicates that media audiences are media savvy and sophisticated. They assert that reception of media programmes by audiences is to be understood more as practices than as cognitive responses as audiences bear “a social responsibility to evaluate what they hear and [...] to discuss their criticisms in other social situations” (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994, p. 90).

At the Westminster School of Media in the UK, Paddy Scannell and his team burrowed into the intentional and communicative aspects of broadcasting outputs as cultural outputs, particularly the need to “recognize the liveness of radio and television, their embeddedness in the here and now (their particularity) and the cardinal importance of context and audiences” (Scannell, 1991, p. 11). Using historical archives from the BBC and taking inspiration from phenomenology, their research focused on “how talk radio interaction is conducted” (Hutchby, 2009, p. 5) “to instill a sense of familiarity and, hence, inclusiveness and sociability in the audience” (Hutchby, 2006, p. 12). Scannell’s interest focused on radio broadcasting as, according to him “its study can reveal much about the communicative character or ethos of broadcasting as an institution, about the quality of public life today as mediated through broadcasting, and more generally, about the structures of identity, performance and social interaction in today’s society” (Scannell, 1991, p. 7).
3.4 Everyday Life

Along with the understanding of broadcast interactions, the relations between media, everyday life and social practices represent a nexus that needs probing as in tautological terms “particular forms of culture are always tangled up in, and form part of, the organization and exercise of particular forms of power” (Bennett, 1998, p. 536). As discussed earlier in this study, the fields of political science and political theory often lament the present and the future of democracy as distressful, in a way neglecting the importance of agency. Undoubtedly, there have been worrisome signs about representative democracy “both representation in the formal political sense - representation by delegation in particular processes of decision-making - and representation in the broader sense of symbolization, the two aspects being linked” (Couldry, 2008, p. 3). Fears of the neoliberal order and its consequences on democracy have prompted anxieties in political and academic circles as political institutions are increasingly unable to stand up for the people and face a crisis of legitimacy.

However, as media systems become more complex and as people live their lives in media, there is the need for a new generation of research focused on citizens’ media consumption, their orientation to the public world and their related practices of citizenship. This is especially so in contexts of inequality and power differentials where ordinary people look up for channels of public expression. To this effect, cultural studies opens new and insightful avenues of thought and action about mediated public engagement. Couldry asserts that though “in varied ways, understandable only by listening closely to the voices of citizens and media consumers themselves” (Couldry, 2006, p. 1) media does matter for public engagement. While Deuze concurs that the media are “the primary definer of our reality” (Deuze, 2012, p. xiii) there is the need to develop an approach which focuses on people’s daily practices of media consumption in order to understand their lived experiences in and with the media.

It is obvious that this new approach departs from previous mediacentric traditions. Akin to media effects tradition, mediacentrism is a shortfall as it prioritizes media over social issues and conversely media marginalism is a bogus approach. Hence, there is the need to harness the possibilities of a new social theory that can develop through a “potentially interesting debate.
between sociology and media research about how to think through, on both micro and macro levels [...] the mechanisms by which media messages are embedded in social action” (Couldry, 2006, p. 15, original emphasis). Deuze asks “if our sense of the real is experienced in media, how can we think of media as elements of our lives that can help us to get closer to reality?” (Deuze, 2012, p. xvi). Such pursuits can hold firm grounds through an understanding of the social practices of the media.

In their work titled Media Consumption and Public Engagement, Couldry, Livingstone and Markham foreground the concept of “public connection” as it relates to “how and to what extent people remain oriented to a public world through media” (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham, 2007, p. 15). They reiterate that there is a need to pave “the way to a more contextualised approach to people’s everyday relations with the media” (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham, 2007, p. 26) to understand people’s mediated lives and citizenship.

The implications of such a critical sociology are pretty clear since “if contemporary societies and the contemporary world are profoundly mediated, then the principal questions for media research must be guided by reference-points outside media themselves” (Couldry, 2008, p. 1, original emphasis). In other words, such an approach implies “listening beyond the echoes”, that is to listen to “voices from right across the social terrain” (Couldry, 2006, p. 58). This approach entails “a practice of open, reflexive communication that is not an incidental luxury but a necessity” (Couldry, 2006, p. 59, original emphasis).

Hence, this means taking “seriously media’s claims to contribute to the texture of the social world and the health of democratic politics” with the caveat that “in no way to take the truth of those claims as given” (Couldry, 2006, p. 8). In this perspective, attention is to be geared to people’s mediated lifestyles, more precisely the ways people make use of the media as part of their everyday lives and the “contribution media are actually making toward fulfilling the preconditions for the effective participative democracy valued by cultural studies” (Couldry, 2006, p. 52).

Couldry underlines the paradox that the “media are, in a sense, everywhere, and yet wherever we look, the substance of media and how they work is highly particular: this image, this news
story, this interview” (Couldry, 2006, p. 4, original emphasis). Hence, people’s experiences of the media constitute a good point of departure to probe into their mediated lives through particular stories and by exploring the social consequences of the media, particularly “how the uses and appropriations of media penetrate all aspects of contemporary life” (Deuze, 2011, p. 137). Added to this is the fact that people’s appropriations of the media are often the consequences of social injustices or prejudices that they have been subjected to and given the affordability of the media; they are forced to resort to the latter as a way to challenge their situations and to seek some forms of redress and justice.

This new social theory of everyday mediation as elaborated by Couldry resonates well with Liz Bird’s understanding of the media as “firmly anchored into the web of culture”. Bird asserts that there is not “an “audience” out there waiting to be studied”. On the contrary, the “audience is everywhere and nowhere” (Bird, 2003, p. 3) insisting that in our media-saturated world, the “images and messages wash over us, but most leave little trace, unless they resonate, even for a moment, with something in our personal or cultural experience” (Bird, 2003, p. 2). Hence, the need to interrogate media practices to find out about the resonance of particular stories in people’s lives and “how people interact with the media to create meaning in their everyday lives” (Bird, 2003, p. 17).

In trying to understand the ways of living that people have with the media, Hermes highlights the fact that “to be informed” is no longer only about transmission and has a different appeal and connotation today through shared beliefs because “audience members in many ways are incredibly media literate” (Hermes, 2006, p. 28). Hence, the need to consider popular formats and the extent to which they provide resources allowing people to work through them, to talk about them and to use them as part of their lives. Hermes makes the point that there is a need to turn to the many forms of literacies and engagements that people develop in and through the media “now that “being informed” has lost its lustre for many (the decline of newspaper reading), to be replaced by the supply of and demand for experiential accounts” (Hermes, 2006, p. 34). In concurrence, Deuze asserts that “as we merge our perception of ourselves and others
with what can be mediated about us, media competencies, literacies and fitness become
paramount to the human condition” (Deuze, 2012, p. xi).

3.5 Media Practices

A new approach that considers the media as practice is warranted “as the interweaving of
multiple ‘forms of life’, including practices of representation, interpretation and reflection”
(Couldry, 2012, p. 37, original emphasis). Grounded in the “sociology of action and knowledge”
(Couldry, 2003, p. 4), the new paradigm aims “to study the whole range of practices which are
oriented towards media and the role of media in ordering other practices in the social world”
(Couldry, 2003, p. 1). In other words, media as practice is the consideration of the media not as
media texts or institutions but “as the open set of practices relating to, or oriented around,
media” (Couldry, 2003, p. 4). In a nutshell, the academic concern is driven towards media
practices in “its looseness and openness” (Couldry, 2003, p. 7). Couldry, Livingstone and
Markham point to the need to understand “mediated public connection in the space of action-
opportunities available to citizens; this is the material context in which (mediated) public
connection has meaning, if at all” (Couldry, Livingstone, Markham, 2007, p. 19, original
emphasis).

Hence, the focus is on the uses that people make of the media. Addressing a critique to the
political economy tradition of the media, Couldry notes that “unless therefore media texts [are
reduced] to being a conduit for economic signals (absurd in all but the crudest case), we are
forced once again within a political economy model, to consider what people do with the
media” (Couldry, 2003, p. 7). This new paradigm of media as practice aims to “achieve a
decisive break with unprofitable disputes of the past” (Couldry, 2003, p. 2) as media as practice
opens a “more open and inclusive paradigm for media research than previous ones” (Couldry,
2003, p. 25) as it emphasizes what people do to media.

Hence, the new paradigm asks “what types of things people do in relation to media? And what
types of things do people say in relation to media?” (Couldry, 2003, p. 11) foregrounding talk as
action. Hobart considers practices “as those recognized, complex forms of social activity and
articulation, through which agents set out to maintain or change themselves, others and the
world about them under varying conditions” (2007, p. 9). Even though Couldry and Hobart seem to have fundamental disagreements over understandings of practice, it appears that they agree over the fact that practice refers to actions that are media related. By his own admission Hobart acknowledges his understanding of practice as “radical” while Couldry views his as “‘instrumental’” as it “develops the analytical implications of certain debates and terms from ‘practice theory’ to dislodge old habits in the specific field of media analysis” (Couldry and Hobart, 2010, p. 1). It is necessary to point out that the practice paradigm rebuffs media centric approaches and “reinforces the interpretative decentring that follow from practice theory however applied” (Couldry and Hobart, 2010, p. 7). For his part, Ryfe provides a sketch of practice as “(a) a set of actions, or doings and sayings; (b) that are logically linked to one another so that they form blocks or strips of activity; (c) by what are variously called conventions, rules, or strategies; and (d) that they extend in time, meaning that practices persist as recognisable sets of actions” (2017, p. 3). Ryfe also adds that “it is only in the context of practice [...] that an action becomes meaningful, or that an individual becomes an actor” (2017, p. 4).

A practice approach “helps us address the fundamental question of how media are embedded in the interlocking fabric of social and cultural life” (Couldry, 2003, p. 24). The concern is not only about the dense and complex media environment but also and importantly “in the specificity of local experience” (Couldry, 2003, p. 10). Referring to the ways the media anchors other social practices, Couldry remarks that “a question, then, if we theorise media as practice, is how, where and for whom this anchoring role works and with what consequences for the organisation of social action as whole” (Couldry, 2003, p. 14).

3.6 Conversation Analysis

Several disciplines have looked into the study of the interactive processes of communication. Disciplines like philosophy, sociology and linguistics have had to shun away their preconceptions of talk as trivial in order to study talk as an academic pursuit of its own (Scannell, 2007). Goffman (1981) pioneered research into different forms of talk, including radio talk and DJ talk and pushed the concept of footing in relation to understandings of the self
and identity. Footing can be equated to the changes which are a “persistent feature of natural talk” and “a change in footing implies a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance” (Goffman, 1981, p. 128). Nonetheless, Goffman adopts a rather peculiar view of the self as changes of footing are approached “as defensive moves to protect a vulnerable, hidden self” (Scannell, 2007, p. 166).

There is the need to turn to Harvey Sacks in order to examine talk as “available to observation in the details of naturally occurring interactions” (Hutchby, 2009, p. 3) and as a topic of analysis of its own. Conversation Analysis (CA) approaches talk as a routine and ordinary activity of everyday life. Its relevance lies in the fact that “CA treats the work of listening as equally relevant, if not more so, than the work of speaking. In holding these two roles in tension, in an endlessly dialectical relationship with each other, CA at last begins, really and truly, to produce convincing accounts of talk as a genuinely social, interactive phenomenon” (Scannell, 2007, p. 167).

Hutchby has applied CA to talk radio looking into precisely “how [the] sequential patterns in talk reveal participants’ construction of social realities and communicative activities, and their orientations to social contexts and identity relationships” (Hutchby, 2009, p.6). In respect to such undertakings, Hutchby focuses on arguments as “interactional accomplishments” through turn-taking sequences between participants. One cannot have an argument alone as “despite the fact that participants disagree on content, they must agree, in at least a limited way, about the formal constraints of the genre in order to have an argument” (Hutchby, 2009, p. vii). Turn taking, especially the first and second turn taking sequences, are the central concerns of CA as much as the power asymmetries “conceptualised in terms of the power of certain participants to engage in communicative actions not available (or not available in the same way) to others” (Hutchby, 2009, p.9). CA’s approach has no interest in the macro perspectives of “large (but largely unseen) social forces” but is rather interrogated by the micro-text and “how the words used between two individuals display and reinforce inequities” (Hutchby, 2009, p. viii).
CA has made important contributions to the study of confrontational talk and the power relations that are enacted. In its perspective, power is defined “as a phenomenon that is both highly specific and also diffusely and pervasively present within an interaction” (Hutchby, 2009, p. 114). As such, CA is interested in the “framework of interaction within calls [that] both enable and constrain the particular kinds of argumentative activity available to and undertaken by hosts and callers” (Hutchby, 2009, p. 6). Power is located in the sequences of discourse and is akin to Foucault’s definition of power as “a practice that is exercised within a relational network equally, including those who exercise power and those who accept or resist it” (Hutchby, 2009, p. 115).

Besides turn taking, CA is also attentive to the question-answer sequences. Hutchby asserts that “questions are a powerful interactional resource for the simple reason that the asking of a question places constraints on the discourse options available to its recipient” (Hutchby, 1996, p. 484). Along the same lines, CA notes that an argument is built through interactions in “action/opposition” frames and “approaching arguments as Action-Opposition sequences in this sense allows [the researcher] to investigate participants’ use of locally emergent features of talk in constructing their disputes” (Hutchby, 2009, p. 23).

It is generally considered that talk radio hosts hold a position of power on callers as “arguments on talk radio can be ended in different ways by the host” (Thornborrow, 2007, p. 1438). Despite the power asymmetries, we wanted to find out the extent to which the host is aligned, or not, on the agenda of participants on Mauritian talk radio shows and the extent of the relevance and ‘successes’ of their interventions. We wanted to explore how hosts, callers and participants on Mauritian talk radio are able generally to resist and challenge each other through discursive transactions. Through CA, we wanted to find out about the strategies of alignment and de-alignment between host and callers allowing, or not, the resolution of grievances.

However, there is need to combine CA with Discourse Theoretical Analysis (DTA) and a phronetic approach to understand talk on Mauritian morning talk radio and the positionalities
and moral inclinations of participants in their yearnings for social justice and dignified outcomes.

3.7 Discourse Theoretical Analysis (DTA)

Despite its relevance to the study of broadcast talk, CA has been criticized for being too focused on the micro-textual levels of talk and for adopting a linguistic approach that neglects larger social issues. As such, it neglects issues of politics, importantly of the “political”, that may drive conflicts and engagements on Mauritian talk radio. In other words, CA dwells on the linguistic aspects of talk and does not consider the “discursive-material knot” which “theorizes the knotted interactions of the discursive and the material as restless and contingent, sometimes incessantly changing shapes and sometimes deeply sedimented” (Carpentier, 2017, p. 4).

We need to turn to the discursive-cultural approach of Laclau and Mouffe in order to take into consideration “the political” and issues of antagonism and hegemony as expressed on Mauritian talk radio. Discourse theory as analysed by Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau has traditionally been confined to Political Science. In Media Studies, discourse has been conventionally assimilated to consensual and reasoned based talks and rarely as conflictual and antagonistic. The need to recalibrate Mouffe and Ernesto’s discourse theory to inscribe it in the fields of media has brought Nico Carpentier to propose the concept of Discourse-Theoretical-Analysis (DTA), allowing an understanding of talk from a conflictual perspective through the prisms of social antagonism and hegemony. The blend of both Conversation Analysis and Discourse Theoretical Analysis is warranted as a way to understand both the microtext of Mauritian broadcast talks and importantly the larger frames related to identity, antagonism and the material outcomes of broadcast talks.

Carpentier highlights the relevance of Conversation Analysis and its variants like Conversation Discourse Analysis (CDA) which studies the media as “a site of power and social struggle” (Carpentier, 2007, p. 274). Nonetheless, Carpentier is prompt to highlight that “the focus clearly remains on studying the linguistic features of media texts” (Carpentier, 2007, p. 275) while the social intelligibility of broadcast talk and the political identities and struggles that are generated as a result of conflictual discourse are largely ignored. In a nutshell, discourse has hardly been
understood theoretically and analytically as antagonistic and conflictual. Hence, Carpentier calls for the application of discourse theory in media studies as “frameworks of intelligibility” (Carpentier, 2017) of discourse, that represent practices as well as the political identities that are played out as permanent ideological conflicts and antagonisms.

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their book Hegemony and Social Strategy (1985) reject the idea of a unitary and stable subject and argue that both discourses and identities are organically articulated and, hence, cannot be fixed at least on a permanent basis. For Laclau and Mouffe, the “articulation of discursive elements plays a vital role in the construction of the identity of objects, individuals or collective agents” (Carpentier, 2007, p. 267). Laclau and Mouffe assert that “the central role that the notion of antagonism plays in our work forecloses any possibility of a final reconciliation, of any kind of rational consensus, of a fully inclusive ‘we’. For us a non-exclusive public sphere of rational argument is a conceptual impossibility” (1985, p. xvii). Hence the oscillation between contingency and fixation is what interests discourse theory as hegemonies are played off as much as they are resisted.

Using Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, Laclau and Mouffe rework the concept hegemony which they assimilate to a temporary and partial consensus. If discourses and identities are contingent and fluid, Laclau and Mouffe underline the need to partially fix their meanings for practical purposes. They note that “it is vital for democratic politics to acknowledge that any form of consensus is the result of a hegemonic articulation, and that it always has an ‘outside’ that impedes its full realization. Unlike the Habermasians, we do not see this as something that undermines the democratic project, but as its very condition of possibility” (1985, p. xviii).

Mouffe states that “meaning is always constructed. There is no meaning that is just essentially given to us; there is no essence of the social, it is always constructed. The social is always the result of a hegemonic articulation; every type of social order is the product of hegemony as a specific political articulation” and yet every hegemonic order can be reversed by other hegemonies, and it is this dialectic of imposition and reversal that is of significance. Laclau and Mouffe use the metaphor of the “frontier” to indicate that through discourse a line is drawn which separates the outsiders from the insiders. Mouffe asserts that “there is no consensus
without exclusion. There is no possibility of complete inclusion, because in order to create a hegemonic order, there is always something that needs to be oppressed. And this is something which is constitutive; it is not that we could ever overcome it and eventually include it” (Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006, p. 4).

At the core of the works of Laclau and Mouffe is the concept of radical democracy which can be defined as “the extension of democratic struggles for equality and liberty to a wider range of social relations” (1985, p. xv). The concept of radical democracy resounds with the definition of the political as proposed by Mouffe as she elaborates on the political as encompassing the social rather to be limited to political institutions. In her agonistic framework, she propounds that political enemies are transformed into adversaries within a democratic set-up. Mouffe notes that “antagonism is struggle between enemies, while agonism is struggle between adversaries [observing that] we can, therefore, reformulate our problem by saying that envisaged from the perspective of “agonistic pluralism” the aim of democratic politics is to transform antagonism into agonism. This requires providing channels through which collective passions will be channeled and given ways to express themselves over issues, which, while allowing enough possibility for identification, will not construct the opponent as an enemy but as an adversary” (Mouffe, 2000, p. 16, original emphasis).

Carpentier and Cammaerts note that in her works, Mouffe “has managed to form a valued counter-balance to the dominance of consensus-centred approaches towards the political and note that “it is exactly this focus on conflict within the political and the democratic that has been inspirational for many researchers working within the field of media, journalism and democracy” (Carpentier and Cammaerts, 2006, p. 2/3).

Carpentier and De Cleen vindicate the use of discourse theory in media studies. In their restoration project of discourse theory in media studies, they call for its conversion into Discourse Theoretical Analysis (DTA) so that it can be applied to media studies for theoretical and analytical purposes. They note that “by relating DT [Discourse Theory] to the core principles of qualitative research, DT can be rearticulated as an analytical framework [and that] this translation from a theoretical to an analytical framework, supported by a diversity of
methodologies, provides us with the methodological-analytical arsenal to substantiate the
development of Discourse-Theoretical Analysis (DTA)” (Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007, p. 275).
In brief, Carpentier and De Cleen revisit discourse theory so that it is brought in the realm of
media studies in the analytical form of Discourse Theoretical Analysis (DTA) for the study of
media practices and discourses in terms of ongoing confrontations and struggles.

The interest of using DTA is that it puts the focus squarely on the discursive and material
aspects of discourse and political identities and “deals with practices in a very focused and
Foucauldian sense, as strategies that generate or produce specific outcomes, namely
discourses” (Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007, p. 278). The application of DTA to the media opens
the perspective that the “media are not seen just as passively expressing or reflecting social
phenomena, but as specific machineries that produce, reproduce and transform social
phenomena” (Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007, p. 274).

Besides DTA, an important strand used to analyse morning talk radio programmes has to do
with phronetic in the moral sense that “it suggests that studying how media stories present
distant suffering to us can tell us something important about how mediation makes our
encounter with distant others ethically acceptable and practically relevant” (Chouliaraki,
2008a, p. 837). Shotter and Tsoukas hold that phronesis is about “engaged judgment” exercised in an
“open-ended” (2014, p. 381) manner and has “to do with the ways we relate ourselves as
whole persons, not merely as Cartesian intellects, towards events occurring around us, in the
course of our practical activities in the world” (2014, p. 382, original emphasis). Flyvberg notes
that phronesis focuses on values and is concerned with “practical knowledge and practical
ethics” (2012, p. 29). Such a phronetic approach is important to understand the affective
practices and the “felt emotions” (Shotter and Tsoukas, 2014, p. 379) and the pursuit of the
morally good on morning talk radio programmes.

3.8 Talk Radio as Lived Experiences

Besides the micro and macro aspects of talk as expressed in talk radio, there is the need to
study the reception of talk radio as lived experiences of audiences. To this effect, the media
needs to be demystified from conventional views that it is at the centre of society and for that
to happen, there is a need for a sociologically driven and “a more complex account [...] than just media” (Couldry, 2006, p. 12, original emphasis).

Taking into consideration an experiential account of audiences’ engagement with the media entail “search[ing] in different ways for perspectives outside the media process from which to grasp its wider significance” (Couldry, 2006, p. 7). Instead of functionalism that considers media as centrifugal, an approach based on the lived experiences of the media would provide a renewed and pertinent agenda for media research in terms of understanding knowledge and community formations. In other words, a decentered strategy in media studies would entail “an appreciation of the conditions under which media contribute to people’s sense of themselves as effective and knowledgeable agents” (Couldry, 2006, p. 7) and “liminality’ that allows the formation of communities of affects and belongings. To this effect, there is the need to foreground different modes of knowing that listening to talk radio can generate considering that media as culture is to “shed light on how people interact with media to create meaning in their everyday lives” (Bird, 2003, p. 2).

Scholars have tended to pit audiences against publics as the latter are idealized while the former is despised. Publics are often associated with civic mobilization and political citizenship while audiences are confined erroneously to passive consumptions of the media in the private space. However, in a media ecology where everything is mediated and where audiences are everywhere, there is need to problematize the view that “public[s] and audience[s] [are] mutually opposed” (Livingstone, 2005, p. 17). In a context where the public realm appears to be shrinking and media audiences are proliferating, Livingstone asserts that “instead of bemoaning the impact of media on publics, let us ask how media (and media audiences) can and do sustain publics” (Livingstone, 2005, p. 21). For instance, Livingstone asks “if the talk show audience becomes so engaged with the issue that some of them write to their local politician, does this effect a shift from audience to public?” (Livingstone, 2005, p. 11). Hence the question of where to draw the line between audiences and publics is unresolved particularly when all moments are mediated “forcing us to refer to the media in any discussion of the definition and activities of publics” (Livingstone, 2005, p. 11). Livingstone adds that “the media do not provide a
(biased) window on the world so much as a set of resources through which everyday meanings and practices are constituted” (Livingstone, 2005, p. 21). These popular resources of the media shape people’s identity, sense of belonging and lifestyles, and it is, at this level, that “media researchers may be expected to have much to contribute, for if even if the media have proved only partially effective in informing citizens about political issues, they have proved far more effective in shaping identities and lifestyles” (Livingstone, 2005, p. 19).

Hence, the need to take into consideration “audiencehood as a layered palette of activities, attachments and investments, widely differing in intensity and importance, especially paying attention to how audiencehood is caught up in everyday social relations”. Calling for undoing the difference between audiences and publics, Hermes asserts that “practices, energies and investments (or the lack of the two) need to be our point of departure” (Hermes, 2009, p. 116).

3.9 The Paradigm of Journalism Reconsidered

In a context of audience participation, the traditional values of journalism have to be reconsidered with regards to the changing boundaries of the profession. Norms of journalism like facts, truth and reality have to be contemplated alongside the values of subjectivity and relativity and human dignity. In this respect, Zelizer (2004) asserts that there is a need for journalism studies and cultural studies to work in a mutual manner so that there is mutual maturation.

Wasserman notes that “the rise of fake news have a positive outcome for mainstream news outlets to whom audiences may start returning after they have deserted them for more individually-tailored online sites. But other factors, like the distance between elite news platforms and the majority of people, especially in a highly unequal country such as South Africa, are likely to mean that while people may trust the veracity of news in mainstream sites, they may not feel that it resonates with their daily lived experience.” Highlighting the role of journalists, Wasserman argues that their role goes beyond fact-checking and that “information that resonates with people’s experiences and makes a difference in their everyday life” is what “real journalism” is about. (Wasserman, 2017).
As regards, Mauritian “talk radio journalists”, the question is to what extent are they willing to let go of their role as gatekeepers to allow greater participation of audiences as gateways and what are the ethical implications of being interpreters of news in the mediated environment of talk radio and social media? In this respect, the boundary-work and the ethics of the media that are displayed by Mauritian talk radio journalists need to be examined given that “journalism’s ideological commitment to control, rooted in an institutional instinct toward protecting legitimacy and boundaries, may be giving way to a hybrid logic of adaptability and openness” (Singer, 2015, p. 32).

3.10 Research Design

Hutchby identifies three main types of talk shows, namely the “issues-based show which focuses on broadcasting audiences’ participation in debates about topical social issues, and usually involves some participation by ‘experts’ or, occasionally, celebrities”. The second type is “the confrontation-based show which focuses on the staged production of confrontations between friends, relations and family members, with ‘expert’ comment often provided at the end of each show in the form of a summary of moral issues either by a pop psychologist, a magazine columnist, or even the host himself”. Finally, the “third type within the genre is the audience participation political debate in which politicians and members of the public are brought together in the television studio to debate topical issues in response to questions set by audience members” (Hutchby, 2006, p. 39, original emphasis).

While Mauritian morning talk radio may involve hybrid forms that transgress the boundaries identified by Hutchby, the Mauritian morning talk show evolves mainly around ‘advice giving and grievances’ programmes. These programmes constitute the main staple of Mauritian talk radio stations in the morning and involve conflicts on social issues, including poverty, human rights, the environment, healthcare amongst others. While the morning talk shows involve personal conflicts, in the late afternoons, talk radio schedules political debates and interviews. On weekends the stations open the airwaves for views and opinions of ordinary citizens. In all these types of programmes, audiences are able to participate, even though as often heard on air, people tend to have much appreciation for the morning talk radio programmes as it seems
that such programmes have more social value given that participants are able to secure symbolic and material resources. As much as morning talk shows are appreciated, the ‘carnival’ of interviews and interventions in the evening and weekend programmes tend to be driven towards formal politics. Even though the latter is deemed critical as far as exercise of freedom of expression is concerned, especially as regards political opinion, the morning talk radio are more driven towards ethical and material outcomes than the evening programmes and their social relevance foregrounded.

‘Advice giving and grievances’ programmes are broadcast daily for almost two hours, except for the weekends. Initially the morning programmes lasted one hour but given the number of cases dealt with, on air, the programmes have been extended for almost two hours on private stations. With the lockdowns due to Covid-19, the ‘advice-giving and grievances’ have often been extended during the whole day, at least in the early phases of the lockdowns. Each of the three private radio stations broadcasts an ‘Advice giving and grievances’ programme that allows listeners to phone-in and to express their grievances live on air about many issues, and the hosts in the studio mediate with authorities and relevant parties in order to look for solutions and resolve the cases. The live and interactive discussions involving the callers, the hosts and the representatives of authorities and experts take place on the airwaves while members of the public are able to tune-in to listen both for information and entertainment purposes.

The titles of these morning programmes are self-explanatory. ‘Explik ou Ka’ (‘Make your case’ in English) is a programme which is broadcast by Radio Plus station. ‘Enquête en direct’ (‘Live Investigation’ in English) is broadcast by Radio One while Top FM broadcasts the programme ‘Korek pas Korek’ (Right or Wrong in English).

The data collected in the three-level processes were analysed through grounded theory. Charmaz asserts that “a fundamental premise of grounded theory is to let the key issues emerge rather than to force them into preconceived categories” (1996, p. 23). Through grounded theory that “work[ed] with conceptualizations of data” and “not the actual data per se” (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p. 7), selective coding has been used as a way to achieve “a
process of abstraction” (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p. 15). In other words, the collection and analysis of data meant “that the researcher’s emerging analysis” (Charmaz, 1996, p. 31) shaped the data collection process.

3.11 Participation in Talk Radio

As regards participation in morning talk radio, data was collected in two phases namely from February to March 2018 and from July to August 2020; the latter period coinciding with the aftermath of the first lockdown due to Covid-19. The two morning talk radio programmes from which data was collected for analysis were namely ‘Explik ou Ka’ of Radio Plus and ‘Enquête en Direct’ of Radio One. The justification for the collection of data into two phases was the sudden disruptions wrought by the Covid-19 pandemic. There was the time before the pandemic and the ‘new normal’ that had been set into motion with the pandemic. The two phases of data collection aimed to follow the trajectories of discourses on morning talk radio to explore the continuities and disruptions to the everyday lives of talk radio participants in the context of the first lockdown and the ‘new normal’ of Covid-19.

Hutchby notes that “the key aim of broadcast talk studies was, and remains today, to reveal the frameworks and dynamics of that interactional medium” (Hutchby, 2006, p. 11). In concurrence with Hutchby, we aimed to collect data that allowed us to consider the interactions that take place in morning talk radio programmes. But more than that, we used a combination of Conversation Analysis (CA), Discourse Theoretical Analysis (DTA) and phronesis to explore talk radio interactions and discourses and to find out what callers do to talk radio programmes through direct participation in morning programmes and the mediations and values that are afforded through such participations.

The following questions were addressed:

• What do Mauritian audiences do to talk radio, especially to morning talk radio programmes? What do they say and do on talk radio, and to what extent are they able to make claims of citizenship?
• Who are “interpellated” in such programmes and what do interactions reveal about conflictual talks, positionalities and competing values?

• What do the solutions offered on the programmes reveal about their effectiveness and limitations? What is the importance of an ethics of listening?

Using a blend of Conversation Analysis (CA) (Hutchby, 2009), Discourse Theoretical Analysis (DTA) (Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007) and ‘phronetic’ approach (Flyvbjerg, 2011), focus was on the ways talk is framed, its deliberative and conflictual nature, and the ethical and moral outcomes that are reached. This is especially so given the power differentials that are involved in morning programmes. Through analysis of a corpus of cases dealt with on morning talk programmes, the conflictual nature of talk which is constitutive of morning talk radio in Mauritius was explored and importantly the need to understand morning talk radio not just as rational talks but as encompassing emotions and judgments of sentient participants. The ‘emotional turn’ on morning talk radio that has been explored has become even more pivotal in a Covid-19 pandemic world that has impacted local livelihoods as care and solidarity become even more critical. Finally, the importance and need for political listening to achieve shared goals of social justice, citizenship and democracy have been considered.

To this effect, several hours and days were spent listening to talk radio and for the collection of data. In the first phase of data collection, a corpus of some fifty cases equivalent to four weeks of morning talk radio programmes were recorded respectively from two radio stations namely Radio One’s ‘Enquête en Direct’ and Radio Plus’ ‘Xplik ou Ka’ starting from February to March 2018. The recorded material represented a large variety of problems faced by callers. Out of the fifty cases, a non-probability and purposive sample was retained as a way to represent “particular categories of cases” (Robinson, 2014, p. 7), especially those involving the sick, the poor and needy. Particular attention was drawn to the thematic and narrative tropes of squatting and housing, violence at school and medical negligence. Three samples as elicited on morning talk radio related to housing, verbal abuse and bullying at school and medical negligence at public hospitals have been analyzed as they revealed the lived experiences of callers that evolved out of talk radio interactions and as part of everyday life before the...
outbreak of Covid-19. The latter programmes were taped and transcribed from Kreol Morisien into English for analyses.

A second phase of data collection took place at the end of the first Covid-19 lockdown as a ‘new normal’ set in. Covid-19 has reinforced disruptions as much as continuities. A series of twenty cases were recorded from July to August 2020 as the talks ranged from water shortages; problems related to the financial aid schemes that government had put in place to help workers in the aftermath of the first lockdown due to Covid-19; housing problems; health issues, amongst others. Out of the twenty cases, a non-probability and purposive samples of talks were recorded mainly from Radio One and Radio Plus and the cases related to problems of home medical assistance for the elderly; lack of transparency in public housing allocations and financial aid assistance related to Covid-19 extended to foreigner workers as discussed on talk radio are presented from the recorded samples as they reflected the lived experiences of ordinary citizens in the ‘new everyday life’.

In all, six cases are presented in this study and they have been earmarked because of their popularity and salience as often regular cases related to the social issues of housing, education, pensions, health are dealt on morning talk radio. It is not the intention of this study to analyze exhaustively and in detail all the talks that take place on morning talk radio as it would be almost an impossible task but to look into the significance of these talks, their ethical considerations and the implications for citizenship and democracy.

As indicated earlier, the talks were originally in Kreol as expressed orally on talk radio and have been translated into English. It is important to highlight the fact that talk on radio is fundamentally oral and that transcriptions and transcription conventions are not necessarily able to capture all the subtleties and nuances of orality as practiced on Mauritian talk radio. Regarding translations, Ekström, Patrona and Thornborrow observe that they can lead “to some variation in translation style (more or less literal) depending on the source language” (2021, pp. 5-6). Nonetheless, for purposes of analysis and presentation in this study, the talks have been translated and transcribed from Kreol into English by the researcher. The process involved recording the live interactions on morning talk radio digitally. Once the recordings were made
they were listened to several times by the researcher before the translation process. The recordings were closely listened to by the researcher so that the translations into English do not alter the meanings from the original recordings. Transcription conventions have been used to reflect moments of pause, overlapping talk and insistence in the interactions. Once the translations were available, time was spent again on listening to the original versions to make sure that there were no deviations in the translations or at least to check if there was variation it was minimal. The recordings and translations were shared among people who are language specialists to check whether the translations reflected the original versions and that the translations were reliable and accurate. Additionally, the names mentioned in the programmes were changed to maintain the anonymity of participants, except for the names of public institutions. The names of public officials intervening on air were replaced by ‘X’ and, in cases where there were two public officials on the talkshows, their patronyms were replaced respectively by ‘X’ and ‘Y’.

Two approaches comprising Discourse Theoretical Analysis (DTA) and phronetics have been used to study the discursive relationships between the stakeholders involved in morning talk radio. The Discourse Theoretical Analysis (DTA) perspective has been used to analyze and interpret talk that envisions the “relationship between meaning and power in social practice” (Chouliaraki, 2008b, p. 1). DTA, in the words of Carpentier, is a “critical project [...] focused on revealing the contingent nature of the social through analysis of the political, social and historical constructedness of discourses” (Carpentier, 2007, p. 276). In other words, DTA allows an analysis of talk radio as media discourse whose meanings are socially constructed as callers narrate their lived experiences and struggles on talk radio. In support to the DTA perspective, elements of Conversation Analysis (CA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) have also been used as conceptual ‘scaffolds’ to analyze morning talk radio as media discourse.

As a method of enquiry, Conversation Analysis (CA) has been developed by Harvey Sacks and Emanuel Schegloff to examine everyday talk (Pinseler, 2008). It focuses on language and its interactional properties (Hutchby, 2006), specifically the turn-taking processes as questions and answers are formulated on talk radio as part of the participatory frame (Thornborrow, 2007).
other words, CA has the ability through the analysis of sequences and arguments to attend to the ways talk is organized, namely the formulation and control of the topic, the interpersonal aspects as well as the positions and power relations between the radio hosts and participants. Pinseler observes that CA as a method “can be used to analyse the organization of talk rather than the topics that are talked about” (Pinseler, 2008, p. 73). Yet, CA has a number of limitations as it focuses mainly on language and sequences and is “resistant to linking properties of talk with higher-level features of society and culture - relations of power, ideologies, cultural values” (Fairclough, 1995, p. 23).

Thence, the need to turn to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Discourse Theoretical Analysis (DTA) in order to contextualize and understand talk radio from a higher order perspective namely, as language in society and, hence, as discourse that engages power relations. Wodak and Busch as cited in Carpentier (2007) observe that “in CDA, media are seen as important public spaces and media discourse is studied as a site of power and social struggle” (Wodak and Busch, 2004, p. 109-111). DTA, on the other hand, focuses on the theoretical interpretation of “a more general analysis of the discursive articulation of political identities” (Carpentier, 2007, p. 278). Hence, focusing on the discursive nature of talk on talk radio entails consideration to how language is used to construct talk and allows the focus on how political identities are performed in the sociology of conflicts. As for the methodological protocols for discourse theory, in line with Chouliaraki and Fairclough’s recommendations we have left the protocols “deliberately contingent and porous, rather than being contained by a universalist procedure of strict and continuous explications of research choices (either as the level of data selection or analysis)” (2010, p. 1217) and as a way to underline the “relational-dialectic conception of discourse that understands context in deliberately contingent and broad terms, as articulations of language with other ‘moments’ of social practice, and defends a purposefully porous and integrationist orientation” (2010, p. 1218).

Besides discourse theoretical analysis, a phronetic approach has been used to focus attention on the ethical and moral values of talks, highlighting the fact that discourses are socially shaped and are related to praxis and experience as “the particular and the situationally dependent are
emphasized over the universal and over rules” as much as “the concrete and the practical are emphasized over the theoretical” (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 31). Powell and Nash observe that “the study of the phronetic is more focused on the flow of ongoing lived experience than on more fixed underlying structures of discourse” (2013, p. 619). In other words, phronetics is grounded in the “practical activity and practical knowledge in everyday situations in society” (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 40) as it can also highlight the practical values and ethos of talk on radio as phronetics is concerned with “the importance of perspective and see no neutral ground, no ‘view from nowhere’” (2011, 33). In a way, phronetics as praxis can be related to the ethical sensitivities of distance and proximity between the media and participants and to solutions journalism which “offers a different way to tell stories, shifting the focus from the problem to an evaluated solution in a way that can inspire communities and audiences to take real-world measures” (Oliver, 2021).

3.12 Participation through Talk Radio

The reception and uses of talk radio by listeners are important to understand audiences’ orientation to the public world. In this respect, focus groups have been carried out to understand the participation of listeners through talk radio as part of their everyday life and their lived experiences. Gunter observes that “the methodology [of focus groups] involves bringing together a group or series of groups of individuals to discuss an issue in the presence of a moderator. The moderator ensures that the discussion remains on the issue at hand, while eliciting a wide range of opinions on that issue” (Gunter, 2000, p. 42). Du Plooy adds that focus group interviews provide “opinions and attitudes from the subjects’ point of view” (Du Plooy, 2001, p. 178).

Five focus groups have been organised around mainland Mauritius. Participants in the focus groups have been recruited on a voluntary basis and around fifteen participants have been enrolled in each group. The participants have been enlisted with the help of local actors, namely village and municipal representatives and local social activists. The areas which were selected for fieldworks comprised both urban and rural areas, namely Elizabethville in Tombeau Bay; Stanley in Rose-Hill, Curepipe, Cottage and Flacq Post. The areas represent a cross-section
of the Mauritian population, and both convenience and purposive samples have been used for the enrolment of participants. Convenience sample refers to the selection of people that are available and ready to participate. Purposive sample is defined as the selection of respondents based on the “researcher using his or her judgment to select a sample” (Du Plooy, 2001, p. 114).

The objectives of the focus groups were as follows:

- To understand the motivations of people to listen to morning talk radio;
- To explore the meanings that people get from talk radio contents and the ways they “feel into” stories of talk radio through different modes of knowing and engagements;
- To understand the extent to which “imagined communities” and communities of support and solidarities are created and sustained.

The questions that have been used as guidelines to the focus group study were as follows:

1. What motivates people to listen to morning talk radio (as compared to other programmes on other broadcasting channels) and how is their preference linked to their personal and social experiences of talk radio? Put otherwise, what are the entanglements between their personal lives and consumption habits of talk radio?

2. What meanings do they derive from morning talk radio contents? To what extent do they “feel their ways” into stories that are narrated on morning talk radio and engagements that are created?

3. Does listening to morning talk radio create a sense of belonging and community amongst listeners as an “imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology and practice” (boyd, 2011) and as “networked publics” (Papacharissi, 2015)?
4. Can listening to talk radio be linked to “a ritual view of communication”, understood not as “the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs” (Carey, 2009, p. 15)?

To carry out the focus group studies, five areas had been earmarked as they represent both urban and rural audiences, presuming that the three private radio stations are listened to in both rural and urban areas. The areas for the focus groups were selected based on their accessibility in terms of fieldwork sites and the availability of participants. The areas are Elizabethville in Tombeau Bay; Stanley in Rose-Hill, Curepipe, Cottage, and Flacq Post. To reach out to these different areas, the help and organization skills of social workers, municipal and rural councilors and representatives of local Non-Governmental organizations have had to be enlisted and they have been important and crucial links between the researcher and the local participants since the researcher did not have direct access to these participants.

The organization of the focus groups entailed coordination and a process of voluntary consent in terms of liaising with and convening the participants to the focus group study. In order to facilitate the organization, a brief was first presented orally to the local representatives in each area, explaining to them the aims of the research, precisely the intent to understand the mediations that take place through talk radio and the media, and the motivations and incentives of people thereof. The local representatives used the information presented to them to brief participants about the research and its objectives, and informing them that their participation was conditioned to the fact that it had to be voluntary.

At each meeting of the focus groups, a discussion followed as a preamble, indicating to them that the study was part of a research scholarly work and other potential published studies and that they had to give their informed consent by signing the related documentation forms comprising invitations and attendance lists amongst others. Participants showed support and participated in the study and were assured that their responses would be anonymized as a way to allow them to talk and discuss freely. Anonymity was offered as an ethical consideration given the political sensitivity of the subject, especially that participants felt and stated that they may be politically embarrassed, harassed or targeted if their names and identities were
disclosed. In this regard, they were given assurances about the anonymity of their contributions and the researcher as moderator assured them that, through “careful monitoring of the dialogue and interaction occurring with the group[s]” (Sim and Waterfield, 2019), the risk of disclosing their identities was minimized, if not reduced to null. The anonymized responses were also a way for the researcher to avoid extraction of data from the participants, and the importance of ‘giving back’ to the communities involved was foregrounded by the researcher highlighting the fact of sharing and wider dissemination of the findings to communities at large.

Around fifteen participants were present in each focus group; the session lasted around one and half hour. In total some seventy to seventy-five participants were involved in the five focus groups which comprised mixed groups of men and women, young adults and working professionals, old-age pensioners as well as participants with disability. The groups also consisted of a cross-section of people representing the economic classes and diverse ethnic groups of Mauritius ranging from 18 years old and above as the targeted areas represent more or less mix populations of diverse origins.

Elizabethville is in Tombeau Bay which is in the suburb of Port Louis, the capital of Mauritius. Despite being on the outskirts of the capital, Elizabethville is a poverty stricken area in Tombeau Bay which is an area which juxtaposes coastal areas which are wealthy with lush bungalows; other areas which are industrial estates and also areas which comprise of low-cost housing. Elizabethville comprises marginalized communities as well as migrants, mainly from the island of Rodrigues who are politically disenfranchised with some not even registered to exercise their right to vote. A focus group was carried out in Elizabethville because of the social deprivation that many of its inhabitants face, including problems of water shortage, housing, drug and alcohol addiction, unemployment, and the aim was to understand the extent to which morning talk radio could be a social lifeline for the inhabitants. The focus group session was facilitated by a local organization which is socially active in the area of Tombeau Bay.

Another focus group was conducted in the area of Stanley which is found in the Rose-Hill town and is administered by the local councilors of the Beau-Bassin-Rose-Hill municipality. Stanley is a primarily working class area. In the 2014 General Elections, it had one amongst the lowest
voter turn-outs (Statistics Mauritius, 2016). For instance, the residents of Stanley often complain of not having running water on their tap, deplorable road infrastructures amongst other service provisions because they have often been traditionally associated to opposition political parties.

A focus group was carried out in the town of Curepipe which is both a working-class as well middle-class urban area. The aim of the focus group was to know the views of people on talk radio. To this effect, a focus group was organized at the municipal town hall and comprised a mixed group of people including residents and local representatives of the town.

Lastly, two focus groups were set-up in the rural areas of Cottage and Flacq post. The meeting at Flacq post, in the East of Mauritius, was arranged as a way to gather the views of people living in rural areas and their understanding of talk radio. As for Cottage, it is a rural area situated in the north of Mauritius and it has regularly been in the news because of heavy torrential rains and consequential floodings which affect the lives of its inhabitants. The risk and insecurity generated by severe rainfall have made the people of Cottage particularly vulnerable and the aim was to understand how they use the media to confront the climate risks that they face regularly, and the engagements that they have with talk radio.

Through these five focus groups, we aimed to have a rather large cross section of views and insights into people’s experiences and engagements with talk radio. It was deemed enough to have five focus groups given that we had reached “theoretical saturation” as “the criteria for determining saturation, [were] a combination of the empirical limits of the data, the integration and density of the theory, and the analyst’s theoretical sensitivity” (Glasser and Strauss, 1967, p. 62).

3.13 Talk Radio as Journalism

Finally, I aimed to understand how talk radio and the underlying cultures of audiences’ participation impact journalism and journalists’ performances in the context of talk radio and discussion programmes. I intended to carry out indepth interviews with key experienced ‘talk radio journalists’ to find out the changing boundaries of ‘talk radio journalism’.
Questions to ‘talk radio journalists’ have been as follows:

- How do you see your role in morning talk radio programmes and journalism generally?
- What is the place of emotions in such programmes?
- Does collaboration with audiences transform the practices of journalism?
- How does journalism change with the participation of citizens?
- What are the limits of such participations?
- Is fact-checking as an editorial practice enough to sustain ‘good’ journalism?
- What are the perspectives and prospects with regards to ‘solutions journalism’?

The in-depth interviews have allowed consideration to the challenges of journalism and the extent to which journalism needs to redefine itself and reconsider its ethical frameworks to be more in line with the lived experiences of its audiences. As part of the methodology, five prominent ‘talk radio journalists’ from the main three private radio stations have been interviewed. Semi-structured interviews were carried out as guided questions were sent to them beforehand. In one case, the journalist was appointed by his media organization to speak on its behalf and, in the other cases, the journalists were contacted directly. In the case of the journalist delegated by the media organization, a few months after the interview, he left the station for other ventures. The interviews were carried out at the place of work of three journalists while two agreed to be interviewed outside their workplace. Out of the three interviews, one interview was carried out in the studio of the radio station on the International Labour Day in May 2019 while the journalist and his team covered the event when Mauritian political parties had held political rallies. The interview was carried out during the intervals of the live broadcasting of the political meetings and the commercial breaks.

3.14 Limitations

The research design has successfully been implemented providing insights, findings and theoretical interpretations regarding the routinization of radio into the lives of participants.
However, it has also a number of limitations including the fact that the corpus of data collected from talk radio may be representative only to an extent of the talks that take place on morning talk radio, given the variety and pluralism of talks on morning talk radio. Nonetheless, the data collected from morning talk radio has allowed us to dwell into the everyday lives of talk radio participants, highlighting the issues that are raised on air and extended online and the uses that are made of talk radio in contexts of real and perceived inequalities. Another limitation was related to the focus groups which were held only in mainland Mauritius and not in Rodrigues or other outer territories of the Republic of Mauritius. Rodrigues is a small outer island, part of the Republic of Mauritius, and it has no community radio despite the specificities of its local population. Radio stations that are based in Mauritius broadcast in Rodrigues and the private stations have local correspondents from Rodrigues. In a similar way, I have focused on interviewing only prominent ‘talk radio journalists’ and not journalists as a general category from the media industry. The reason for interviewing prominent ‘talk radio journalists’ is grounded on the fact that we believe that ‘talk radio journalists’ have a status and specificities of their own, especially with regards to the interactivity of talk radio. Talk radio has allowed the emergence of ‘talk radio journalists’ who, unlike traditional journalists from other media outlets do not just report news but interact with members of the public and enjoy greater popularity given their accessibility, visibility and engagements with the public. In a way ‘talk radio journalists’ are sui generis in the sense that, as radio broadcasters, they have settled as cultural icons in the Mauritian media landscape. This is the reason as to why we have focused on interviewing only prominent ‘talk radio journalists’.

3.15 Conclusion

I have in this chapter provided conceptual and methodological frameworks to examine talk in talk radio and the ways talk radio is received in Mauritius. In order to understand the interactions of participants and hosts on talk radio, I have outlined the importance of Conversation Analysis (CA) and its emphasis on turn-taking sequences. Nonetheless, I have also pointed to the limitations of CA and highlighted the need to adopt an approach of Discourse Theoretical Analysis (DTA) and phronesis in order to understand the extent to which
antagonism on talk radio is transformed into agonism in a context of ongoing conflicts and struggles. I have also discussed the need for a reception study in order to highlight the lived experiences of listeners through talk radio and the importance of gauging audiences’ relationships and engagements with talk radio. Finally, I have highlighted the need to carry out indepth interviews with ‘talk radio journalists’ to understand the impact of audience participation on journalism cultures and on the professional identities of journalists with consequences for democratic engagements and citizenship.
4: Coping with everyday life on Mauritian morning talk radio: a dialogic perspective and implications for democracy

‘Ordinary’ or mundane talk on morning talk radio seems to have become part of the national fabric in Mauritius. In the morning talk programmes callers make use of the airwaves to expose their problems about inefficiency in service delivery, including feelings of injustice that they encounter in everyday life as the radio hosts and participants attempt to mediate in-between different stakeholders to find solutions to the problems raised on air. Mauritius has a welfare system based on a wide range of social protection schemes, including free healthcare, education, basic retirement services, free transport and a number of financial aids which are offered to citizens. However, inefficiency, due to cumbersome rules and procedures, slow service delivery and lack of transparency is prevalent as talk on the airwaves reveal, for example, a wide range of legitimate grievances and clashes over values and material resources. Citizens, both ordinary and those who are represented as the ‘other’, including the elderly and vulnerable, usually go on morning talk radio programmes of private radio stations to narrate their problems and frustrations as talk radio mediates between their different conflictual stances as temporary solutions are sought.

The morning programmes of private stations are ‘Enquête en Direct’ on Radio One, ‘Xplik ou Ka’ on Radio Plus and ‘Korek pas Korek’ on Top FM and they evolve around the ‘advice-giving and problem-solving’ genre. The popularity of these morning programmes is also related to their scheduling as they are programmed during morning drive time. Besides being listened to in the private settings of houses, the programmes are also aired in public transports and other spaces.

This chapter focuses on morning talk programmes on Mauritian private stations and asks the extent to which these programmes facilitate participation of citizens through the expression of grievances with representatives of powerful national institutions who are solicited to intervene as ‘experts’. It asks what participants do and say on talk radio. Who are “interpellated” and how and what do the participatory frames of these programmes reveal in terms of conflictual talks and competing values? It also interrogates notions of distance and proximity and asks whether the morning programmes provide a rational and ‘deliberative turn’ to participants to express
their grievances and/or do they also provide an “empathetic relation to citizens” (Garman and Wasserman, 2017, p. 5)? And what do the solutions offered on talk radio reveal about their effectiveness and limitations?

4.2 Mauritian Creole as the Popular National Language

Talk as discursive social practice is crucial to examine Mauritian talk radio and yet the importance of language cannot be undermined. In order to grasp participation on Mauritian talk radio, there is the need to understand the use of Mauritian Creole as a form of communication accessible to all Mauritians. An overwhelming majority of the callers on talk radio make use of Mauritian Creole or ‘Kreol Mauricien’ to tell their stories even though some also use French or a mix of both as Mauritian Creole has linguistic and cultural affinities with French language. English is the formal and official language of Mauritius and it is mainly consigned to administration. Both English and French are associated with administration and formality and Mauritians tend to be generally more fluent in French than in English. Nonetheless, Mauritian Creole is the lingua franca as it is the popular national language shared by almost all Mauritians. In a significant way, the democratization of the airwaves has also meant the democratization of ways of expression, mainly through Mauritian Creole which has strong affinities with the orality afforded by talk radio.

Lionnet observes that “Creole is the language most widely spoken in Mauritius” and argues that “it is the subaltern language […]” (Lionnet and Shu-mei, 2005). The language of the “subaltern” can be literally interpreted as the language which has lower symbolic status than English and French which are associated with prestige (Miller, 2015). However the “subaltern” can also imply the informality and popularity of the local Creole language which is shared as the vernacular amongst Mauritians of all sections of society. Mauritian Creole is the contact language of everyday life and everyday communication. It is the language of the laity and is used mostly in informal settings even though it is also increasingly recognized and used in official settings since it has been introduced in schools as ‘Kreol Morisien’ (KM) at par with other languages of Mauritius and it has its own syntax and lexicon also.
The colonial past of Mauritius has bequeathed it with a population of diverse origins. Language policy in Mauritius has tended to privilege the inherited colonial languages namely English and French for official and administrative purposes. The ancestral languages (Hindi, Tamil, Telegu, Marathi, Chinese, Bhojpuri) are associated with the ethnic and diasporic identities of Mauritian. Both English and French are languages associated with the elites. French is popular in print media as most newspapers in Mauritius are published in French with the exception of a few print outlets which are in English. Language activists have long decried the fact that Mauritian Creole, the mother tongue of Mauritians, has been neglected even discriminated against in official language policies. It is in 2014 that Mauritian Creole language has been introduced in primary schools of Mauritius as ‘Kreol Morisien” and as an optional language (Miller, 2015).

Nonetheless, the arrival of private radio stations has allowed Mauritian Creole to enter into popular broadcasting and to kickstart ‘Kreol-language broadcasting’ as a trademark of private broadcasting. Mauritian Creole has empowered ordinary people to broker better and dignified conditions for themselves, allowing them to break the conservative hierarchy of languages sustained by the elites specifically with regard to English and French. Chouliaraki notes that language not only serves to “represent but also to act upon the world in ways that have concrete effects on people” (2008b, p. 6). The practice of Mauritian Creole on private radio has opened the floodgates to new and emerging social and political realities conjuring images of popular empowerment and social justice for ordinary citizens, especially the marginalized who may not be fluent in English and French but are articulate and assertive in their talk using Mauritian Creole.

Hence, the advent of private radio channel, has foregrounded the use of Mauritian Creole on the airwaves. A majority of the programmes on private radio are in Mauritian Creole, including news bulletins and music programmes. At a point in time, there was hardly any programme in English language, except that radio hosts would insert some broken English words in their Mauritian Creole. However at the request of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), the
private radio stations have started recently to broadcast at least one morning and one evening bulletin in English.

Hence, interactions on talk radio are primarily in Mauritian Creole and it is in its informality as a vernacular practice that Mauritian Creole has flourished on talk radio. In other words, there is no definite good and bad use of Mauritian Creole on air provided that the speaker’s communicative intentionality and the meanings of the utterances are intelligible to audiences. Scannell (1991) observes that Giddens makes a difference between ‘talk’ and language as “the latter suggests a formal system of signs and rules; [while talk] suggests the situated nature of utterances and gestures embedded within the routine enactment of encounters” (Giddens, 1987, p. 176).

Hence, Mauritian Creole, in its colloquial oral form, is broadly inclusive of all Mauritians as private radio has extended traditional oral networks on air and online. The arrival of private radio has promoted popular broadcasting and the use of Mauritian Creole has developed a deeper sense of ‘Mauritianism’ amongst the people as Mauritians are people who share the Mauritian Creole. Conboy asserts that “the link between nation and language is a crucial one” (Conboy, 2006, p. 46). Anderson (1983) explains the importance of the printing press in the constitution and rise of the nation-state in Europe. In Mauritius, the printing press, including the tabloid press, which is to a large extent in French has not been as successful as private radio stations in creating a sense of ‘Mauritianism’ and belonging. On the contrary, the use of Mauritian Creole as the vernacular has allowed private radio stations to establish, in the words of Billig, a form of “banal nationalism” as “notions, which seem to us so solidly banal, turn out to be ideological constructions of nationalism” noting that “language is a prime determinant of nationalist identity: those speaking the same language are liable to claim a sense of national bond” (Billig, 1995, p. 29). The use of Mauritian Creole on talk radio has not only allowed the creation of an ‘imagined speech community’ but also a sense of national belonging as ordinary people enact their citizenship through talks that reflect their struggles.

Conboy argues that, with globalization characterized by fragmentations, including cultural and linguistic fissures, the media have been forced to create a linguistic market in line with
nationalism that allows them to create a commercial base of their own and to differentiate it from other linguistic zones. It can be asserted that private radio stations have designed almost all their programmes in Mauritian Creole as a way to allow popular participation and to maintain their commercial power base as much as to reach out to national and diasporic audiences.

4.3 Interpellation

In order to understand the organization of talk programmes and their participatory ethos, there is a need to consider how participants are interpellated in the programmes and the subject-positions that they adopt as the discourses evolve. Drawing the concept of “interpellation” from Althusser, Berger and De Cleen define “interpellation” as an invitation to take the floor or an “opportunity to speak and a central aspect of how people’s discourse is constrained and given direction” (2018, p. 91). In other words, the process of interpellation implies taking into consideration the positionalities of participants as the discourses evolve and as they change their subject-positions through discourses.

Tracy and Robles opine that “questions are account-seekers: they do the jobs of eliciting, as well as asserting accounts of reality. Such accounts do not merely ‘abstractly’ recreate grand notions of institutional identity or official positions, but oftentimes accomplish very specific, material, everyday goals” (Tracy and Robles, 2009, p. 133). Thornborrow holds that the “functions of questions” represent a “powerful resource in talk” (Thornborrow, 2002, p. 119) and as remarked by Sacks “a person who asks a question has a right to talk again afterwards” and “as long as one is in the position of doing the questions, then in part one has control of the conversation” (Sacks, 1995, p. 49). Goffman makes the point that “notwithstanding the content of their questions, questioners are oriented to what lies just ahead, and depend on what is to come; answerers are oriented to what has just been said, and look backward, not forward” (Goffman, 1981).

However, if “interpellation” may seem to be rationally grounded, one can also be emotionally “interpellated” by feelings of injustice and oppression. Ahmed notes that a moving story is not about “‘moving on’, or about ‘using’ emotions to move away, but moving and being moved as a
form of labour or work, which opens up different kinds of attachment to others, in part through the recognition of this work as work” (2004, p. 201, original emphasis).

In this regard, interpellation can also take the form of articulations of distance and proximity in the mediated environment. Silverstone’s notion of “proper distance” recognizes that “in our relationships to each other, in their flux and fluidity we are confronted by a whole range of discursive mediations which destabilize - in both directions - the proper distance that we must create and sustain if we are to act ethically”. Adding that “we have to determine - perhaps case by case - what that proper distance is or might be when we are confronted with both familiar and novel appearances or representations of the other” (2004, p. 9). In other words, as observed by Orgad “‘proper distance’ advocate[s] media ethics that recasts the other as the crucial character in the process of communication” (2007, p. 4) and foregrounds the importance of imagination and judgment in the establishment of ‘proper distance’ (Chouliaraki, 2011).

Six cases as elicited on talk radio are presented below. The conflicts as well as the values that are disputed are highlighted. Case 1 which deals with the problem of a squatter looking for material assistance, shows that distance is often an impediment to empathy. Case 2 on bullying and verbal violence at school and Case 3 on medical negligence show that the search for morality and human dignity often requires that the radio host align himself/herself with the caller. Case 4 which deals with the problem of a bed-ridden elderly person illustrates the use of imagination and emotional judgement on talk radio. Case 5 elicits the lack of transparency in the allocation of public housing and the fact is that bureaucracy and cumbersome procedures can be fertile grounds for the propagation of misinformation and rumors. Case 6 is about hospitality and cosmopolitanism on talk radio in a Covid-19 era. In all, the six cases represent different discursive struggles as participation oscillates between rule-based and procedural approaches and more substantive engagements which are based on unstructured and emotional participation.
4.4 Case 1 - Squatting

In the case below, the caller is a woman who is soliciting the station Radio Plus on February 2018 to ask for material assistance so that she can build a house on a plot of land allocated to her and her family by the government. From her pitch creole accent it can be inferred that she is from Rodrigues Island, an outer island which is part of the Republic of Mauritius and that she has migrated from Rodrigues to mainland Mauritius, in Cite la Cure, in the suburbs of Port Louis, the Mauritian capital where she lives with members of her family as squatters.

The call openings (1-2) in the two way exchange between the radio host and herself indicate that she has been selected beforehand by the production team and solicited to intervene on air as the radio host asks her to ‘explain her problem’. ‘Explain your problem’ (‘Xplik ou Ka’, in creole) is a radio expression which has become formulaic in the Mauritian society and entered public discourse just like when people have a problem they say they will go on radio (‘Nou pou ale lors radio’, in creole) as a way to intimate that they will make their case public.

The two-way exchange between the caller and the radio host allows the setting up of a rational and deliberative frame whereby the caller is able to respond to the questions of the radio host and elicit her needs. Yet, the polar questions and answers point to a form of participation which is minimal as they are limited to yes or no responses (4-16), constraining the possibilities that are available to the caller and pointing to the structured and even constraining nature of the participatory frame. At the same time, the exchange indicates that the radio host keeps to his occupational ideology as a gate-keeper and moderator.

Rational deliberation and acting as a ‘bridge’ between the caller and the authorities are not enough in terms of participation and social empowerment. The radio host does not seem to go into the lived realities of the caller to probe indepth into her biography and the struggles of her everyday life. From the caller’s response (17) where she narrates that she lives near a river which swells during heavy rains, the radio host does not dwell into her narration of risks but seems to stick to his formal role as radio host. That she has migrated from Rodrigues Island and living as a ‘squatter’ in Mauritius could have also been elicited as part of her lived experiences. Rather than eliciting the experiences of the caller, the radio host appears to remain in a rational
frame and to align himself on the fact that the authorities may help the caller and, to that effect, she has to contact the National Empowerment Foundation (NEF), a local agency designed to work for the poor. The caller is not given the possibility to take part in the decision making process about the future course of action pointing to the limits of deliberation which is crafted in rules and procedures. Instead, the caller is requested to contact the NEF in order to be able to get access to material constructions.

The problem with such a deliberative frame is that it is grounded in the Habermasian normative model of rational and procedural deliberation. While the radio host aligns himself on the position of the authorities, there is not enough space allowing the caller to elaborate and to make her voice heard and listened to. This type of deliberative frame is commonly used on talk radio when legal problems are dealt with, especially when people need a legal advice and/or assistance and the speakers stick to rules and formalities. The exchange between the radio host and herself is not empathetic as the participation remains minimal. Such ‘participatory’ turn is not enough if injustices are to be addressed. There is the need to consider empathy and emotion talk in order to find alternatives allowing the possibilities of taking into consideration citizens’ voices.

In the case below, the caller who is a squatter is seeking construction materials to build a house.

1. **Caller:** Hello (.). Good morning

2. **Radio Host:** Yes (.). Explain your problem (.). You are live on radio

3. **Caller:** I am living in Cite la Cure. I am a squatter at Cite la Cure but I have obtained a land from government in Pointe aux Sables

4. **Radio Host:** Yes

5. **Caller:** I am looking for help so that I can build a house because I have no means

6. **Radio Host:** OK (.). right, right
7. Caller: Yes

8. Radio Host: Did you go and see that land?

9. Caller: Yes

10. Radio Host: Are there many people who have obtained land there?

11. Caller: Yes

12. Radio Host: How many children do you have?

13. Caller: I have five children

14. Radio Host: And all the children live with you?

15. Caller: Yes

16. Radio Host: And now you are looking for building materials

17. Caller: Yes, so that I can build. Because where I am now, I am near a river and as soon as it rains the water of the river swells and it becomes very dangerous

18. Radio Host: Did you go the NEF (National Empowerment Foundation)? Did you receive your land contract?

19. Caller: No. Land contract not yet. But I have paid

20. Radio Host: I think you need to go to the office of the NEF to see over there. Do you work? You get pensions?

21. Caller: No

22. Radio Host: Do the children get pensions?

23. Caller: No, the family helps me
24. Radio Host: Yes, your family helps you. I understand. We at the level of the radio we have contacted the NEF and we have left your phone number and contact details to them. Do you know where the office of the NEF is?

25. Caller: Yes

26. Radio Host: I think it would be good that you go over there and inform them that you talked on radio, specially that you do not work and receive no pensions. Do contact the NEF.

4.5 Case 2 - Verbal Abuse and Bullying at School

In the participatory frame below, the caller, a mother, is allowed on air on Radio One in March 2018 to protest against the attitude of a teacher who, she claims, has been verbally abusing and bullying her daughter. She feels strongly about the fact that her daughter has been bullied by her school teacher as her narration is emotionally charged as she uses words like ‘torture’ to narrate the experience of her daughter. She reports that she has taken the matter earlier to the school authorities and to the Brigade for the Protection of Minors but she has not been listened to as her daughter continues to suffer from the verbal violence. She has thus turned to the talk radio morning programme to make the case public and complain against the school and attempt to put a stop to the verbal bullying. The one-sidedness and subjectivity in her narration may at the outset be considered as elements that may weaken her case as critics would argue that she may be biased against the teacher and that the latter’s version has to be sought for purposes of balance and fairness and as part of the working ethics of journalists.

Yet, Carpentier and Doudaki assert that one-sided narrations “are still interventions in political struggles [...] and are, thus, powerful and strong voices” (Carpentier and Doudaki, 2018, p. 6). The radio hosts could have adopted a neutral position and deliberated formally over the story. Her opinionated version is allowed on air as she exposes the injustice that her daughter has been facing and as the opening turn sequences indicate that she is from Roche Bois which is generally perceived as being a marginalized area in the outskirts of the capital.
The radio hosts align themselves on her story as part of “authentic talk” which is “real and grounded in experience” (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994, p. 102) insisting that her case is genuine given the number of institutions that she has contacted (16). At the outset, the caller is brought into the participatory frame by the radio hosts as she is named (Elizabeth) and geographically located (Roche Bois) as part of her public identity that establishes her position. Besides being warranted to uptake the floor as a ratified participant, in the ‘preface’ or framing utterance at the beginning of the conversation, she positions herself as having a case to make as she has “a complaint to make about a school” (4). She makes her case through self-identification as she provides biographical information about the personal circumstances of her daughter who has been admitted to a school since two years and that “there is a teacher who each time tortures her morally” (8).

The radio hosts recognize her complaint and allows her to develop the chronology of the different actions that she has taken, including going to the school to try to meet the teacher, the meetings that she had with the school director and that she has made a complaint at the Brigade for the Protection of Minors. In fact, the caller is allowed to narrate the story and make evaluative judgements (“she talks a way that she is not supposed to use in class” (10); “she behaves like a kid” (12)) as she argues that the teacher is not supposed to use expletives against children and that her behavior is not professional. Bickford underlines the need for consideration of the affective and evaluative dimensions of political communication as the dispassionate and overtly rationalized discourse of the powerful often “obscures or undervalues the role of emotion in political interaction” (Bickford, 2011, p. 1025) and perpetuates communicative inequality.

In fact, just as in the above case about the woman asking for material help to build a house, women’s voices to private radio stations reveal that women often speak for others or on behalf of others as they use their voice to raise intersectional problems faced by people in their close vicinity, including their children or members of their families. In the case of the verbal violence, the mother has had to resort to the morning talk radio programme as a last recourse as the matter has been undermined at the school and by the Brigade for the Protection of Minors.
(‘Brigade des Mineurs’). The conversation is of private and personal significance to the mother and yet the fact that she calls the radio station is not only an amplification of the problem but also a project to politicize it as the radio hosts are the ones to liaise with the anonymous institutions for remedy.

Unlike traditional interviews where the radio hosts can anticipate the answers, in this case, the radio hosts do not seem to anticipate any answer. Rather they are thinking loud trying to explore the avenues and possibilities to address the problem (25) as they use their “felt emotions and moral sensibilities” (Shotter and Tsoukas, 2014, p. 377) to exercise judgment. They turn to the spokesperson of the Ministry of Education for a solution. The anger of the caller is transitioned as she is informed that a meeting will be held and that she has to attend and report the outcome to the radio on the same day or the day after. That she has been able to obtain a meeting is the result of her successful activism on talk radio. Critics may argue that she is looking at her own narrow interest and not at collectivity.

However, her activism is a form of citizenship. Bakardjieva speaks of “subactivism” which she defines as “a kind of politics that unfolds at the level of subjective experience and is submerged in the flow of everyday life. It is constituted by small-scale, often individual, decisions and actions that have either a political or ethical frame of reference (or both) and are difficult to capture using the traditional tools with which political participation is measured. Subactivism is a refraction of the public political arena in the private and personal world” (Bakardjieva, 2009, p. 92). Critics often argue that such demands on talk radio is individual and narrow. But it is also a form of subactivism that is all the most interesting for an understanding of political participation at a sub-level.

In the case below, the caller explains that her daughter is a victim of verbal abuse and bullying at school.

1. Radio Host 1: It is 10h30 on air (.). We will take the direction of Terre Rouge to Roche Bois instead but it is in the vicinity to meet Elizabeth (.).

   Elizabeth, good morning
2. Caller: Good morning

3. Radio Host 1: Speak

4. Caller: I have a complaint to make regarding a school.

5. Radio Host 1: What is the name of the school?

6. Caller: Hortensia School it is found in Port Louis

7. Radio Host 1: Hortensia School yes ..hh speak

8. Caller: It is two years since my daughter is there. Since last year she is admitted there. Now this year it will be two years that she is there. There is a teacher who each time tortures her morally.

9. Radio Host 1: Yes

10. Caller: And she even has no manners in the way she talks to my daughter. She talks a way that she is not supposed to use in class.

11. Radio Host 2: hmm

12. Caller: because she is there to teach the kids and she is not supposed to use such words. She behaves like a kid. Can I say the words she uses?

13. Radio Host: No: no: no: they are words like savage, donkey, animal

14. Caller: That’s it, that’s it! This time my daughter each time she speaks wrong to my daughter and I go to the school the next day she is absent. Each time she does my daughter something the next day I go to school she is absent and I never meet her. Finally I had to meet the Child Protection [Brigade.

15. Radio Host 1: In any case it is not normal that you meet the teacher. You need to meet
16. Caller: But I went to the office before and the office informed me that she is absent today and she is absent. Several times I went to school. Last year there was a head master and now there is a head mistress and I informed her about the situation and each time the teacher does something wrong she is absent.

17. Radio Host 2: Is the CDU (Child Protection Unit) aware of the case?

18. Caller: Sorry

19. Radio Host 2: CDU to::o

20. Caller: Yes, I informed the Child Protection Brigade about the case. They visited the school last Thursday.

21. Radio Host: No but the question that should be asked to you is whether your daughter is alone to be given such a treatment? Or else does she talk like this to everyone in her class?

22. Caller: No but I talked to my daughter she tells me that she does so with other children but even more with her

23. Radio Host: Hmmm, what is the age of your daughter? 10 years?

24. Caller: she is aged 10

25. Radio Host1: Did you talk to? to whom did? no... we will call an officer at the school, a headmaster... we need to talk to them it is not normal. And now we have [an officer from the Ministry of Education] who is aware of the case.

26. Radio Host2: Yes he is already aware. We sent him an email. Only that headmasters
they will not intervene. It is the ministry who will intervene in this case.

[X] Good morning

27. X: Good morning. So concerning this case, the ministry is aware and we have asked a ‘report’ about it and.... following the complaint of the parent.... We are aware that the Brigade for the Protection of Minors has been informed of this case and that last Thursday the members of the Brigade for the Protection of Minors went to the school and had a meeting with the teacher and the headmaster and it has been decided that the situation has to be remedied as quickly as possible and thus we are planning a meeting this week and the authorities of the school will contact the parent and, based on the information that I have, the meeting will take place on Thursday at 2h30 p.m at the school and for us, what is most important.... We are not in a position to say or confirm those pieces of information which we have in our presence but at the internal level, we have done the needful and, of course we are inviting the parent so that the situation is remedied quickly and that the child continues to go to her class in all trust, calmly so that she can continue to learn.

28. Radio Host 1: Do you have other complaints of this type particularly with regard to the teacher in question?

29. X: No, no, no, no it is the first time that we are receiving a [complaint

30: Radio Host 2: Ok]

31. X: And thus and we are acting in consequence

32. Radio Host 1: Let’s say that we do not see a parent warn so many people if the case [....]
33. X: I understand the parent perfectly as well as the child. It is difficult to accuse X or Y. The important thing is that everything settles down.

34. Radio Host 1: So Thursday at 2h30 pm?

35. X: Thursday at 2h30 pm if the headmaster has not already contacted the parent.

36. Radio Host 1: We will ask her. Elizabeth are you still here?

37. Caller: yes

38. Radio Host 1: You heard. On Thursday there is a meeting at 2h30pm. You need to go to school. On Thursday afternoon or on Friday morning, you contact us and let us know.

39. Caller: Ok, I will.

4.6 Case 3 - Medical Negligence

In the following case, the caller narrates his experience of medical negligence and the sufferings that he has been enduring as the case has elements of a medical scandal. He called the station, Radio One, in March 2018 to expose the medical conditions and negligence that he has been through for two years and to express his frustrations over the fact that he has been let down by the hospital system and that he is having to go overseas for treatment despite the fact that the doctor in the public hospital has given him re-assurances him that he can be treated locally.

At the outset, the caller is given the possibility to make a long opening statement exposing his problem. He has sent photos and videos via WhatsApp to the radio station to show evidence of his deteriorating health conditions. Open-ended questions in the participatory frame allow him to narrate his health situation, to expose his griefs and explore possible solutions with the help of the radio host. Participation in this case is based primarily on empathy and outrage as the
Popular Talk Radio and Everyday Life in Mauritius

radio host aligns herself on the experience of the patient to criticize the healthcare system, its inefficiency as people are treated as “guinea pig” until “the patient becomes a corpse” (45).

The caller recalls the pains and humiliations that he is suffering as a minor health problem has turned into a life-threatening disease and that he felt humiliated as he fell in the toilet of the hospital and that his “clothes were wet with human poo” (22) and that he could no longer bear staying in the hospital. The caller aims to salvage his dignity and his intervention on radio is to put on public record and to politicize the fact that he has been victim of medical negligence and that he is not being supported to go overseas for a life-saving treatment.

In the discursive exchange, two worlds collide over the meanings of the patient’s illness namely that of the lived experiences of the caller who is willing to take back control over his life and the procedural and rational language of the representative of the ministry. The language of the patient is grounded in a medical-revivalist discourse in the sense that he is struggling through discourse to have a medical and human solution to his problem despite the fact that his medical condition is worsening while the discourse of the representative of the ministry is grounded in a medical-rational language. Carpentier and Van Brussel distinguish between the medical-revivalist discourse whereby “patients need the right to know about their condition” (Carpentier and Van Brussel, 2012, p. 107) and to take back control over their health situation against a medical-rationalist discourse which is grounded “on the so-called technological imperative: for every medical problem, a purely medicalized technical-rational solution [is] sought, rather than a reflexive one” (Carpentier and Van Brussel, 2012, p. 106).

In the case of the patient, he is willing to take control over his pathology while the representative of the ministry has a discourse steeped in procedures and rational discourse. Suffice for the radio host to express outrage over the case for the representative to move away from his technocratic discourse and to reconsider the case of the patient.

The outrage expressed by the radio host is equivalent to fiery anger. Nussbaum contends that anger can be destructive. However, she posits the term ‘transition-anger’ which is based on the “combination of a forward-looking focus on welfare and anger’s recognition of wrongfulness” (Degerman, 2017) and, in the case below, the category of ‘transition-anger’ provides a
framework to understand outrageous reactions and the ways they can transform a situation and provide for redress as Nussbaum explains that ‘transition-anger’ is about finding out “how outrageous [a situation is]. Something should be done about that” (Nussbaum 2016, p. 35).

In the case below, the caller is exposing medical negligence that he has undergone in a public hospital and seeking solutions for his medical problems

1. Radio Host: Let’s get to St Paul where we will find Andy. Unfortunately, it is a painful case and it is heart wrenching to hear the story of Andy as in addition I have been able to watch the videos and photos sent by Andy. Andy, I leave you to tell us your story this morning.

2. Caller: Yes. Good morning. I am Andy and I am calling you regarding a case of medical negligence which I have suffered.

3. Radio Host: So Andy what is your age?

4. Caller: Sorry

5. Radio Host: Your [age]

6. Caller: I have [45 years]

7. Radio Host: [45 years] Go on

8. Caller: I was in good health. While cutting my toenails short, this has created some complications where they gave me bad medicines which have aggravated my situation and now since two years I move from home to hospital, and hospital to home and the ministry has done nothing to heal me. My situation is getting worse day by day and now, since I have got a contact in India to follow a treatment, the hospital now is saying that they will see so that I get the treatment in Mauritius itself. But I am not begging but I am now denouncing a case of medical negligence.
and I was getting Rs 50000 (1237 USD) per month now I am without anything with a monthly pension of Rs 9000 (222 USD) and Rs 9000 is not enough to buy the medicines and to incur all the expenses that I have to do every month and that is why I am willing to see what can be done at the level of the ministry.

9. Radio Host: And now it is important to remind that you are supposed to take a flight to India tomorrow

10. Caller: Yes we are supposed to fly to India tomorrow night and now we are in anguish as we do not know... I cannot tell you that it will cost X, Y but it is when we reach there that we will know how much it will cost

11. Radio Host: Andy you have sent me photos via WhatsApp and I can tell you that I have been really shocked and the photos pained me because before you speak on radio we had some time to exchange off the air. It is very evident that we have to work on a case before we bring the case on radio. I have spoken to you and tried to investigate and now when I received the pictures (.) in both of your legs there is practically nothing. So when you went they amputed a toe, two toes and you found yourself with all the ten toes amputed.

12. Caller: All the ten(.)

13. Radio Host: How come this happened when only one nail was affected. You know I am not a doctor and on technical matters I cannot intervene but when I see things which are shocking I do not see only ten toes which have been amputed. I see that there are only your ankles and now you have sent those photos where we can see that your skin is falling off your
body. This is producing dark spots, pores from which water is expunging from your body

14. Caller: In fact the complications started when they gave me medicine which was not adapted to me. I was a person who took practically no medicine and I found myself at the hospital giving me twenty three medicine pills per day. And this started to disrupt my whole system causing renal problems.

15. Radio Host: But when they saw that the medicine they gave you was not proper for you your doctor

16. Caller: He is supposed to correct and give me another medicine

17. Radio Host: Similarly. Let’s take the example of the baby which happened yesterday. They gave him an injection which was not good and unfortunately it is painful for the family who lost a baby

18. Caller: Yes

19. Radio Host: By God’s grace you are still amongst us but they gave you a medicine that was not good for you. They did not change the treatment

20. Caller: From what it appears, the last report that I received from India I understand that my blood has been contaminated and that I had an allergy with all the medicines. But the doctor who is in question in Mauritius told me that they can heal me but it is for two years that I have been coming and going to the hospital. They have treated me like a guinea pig where they are trying all sorts of medicines on me. They gave me one medicine called Urex for one year and this has aggravated my condition. It has eliminated everything. Supposedly it eliminates water in the body system but the medicine has worsened my situation
21. Radio Host: But when you return to the hospital and you see your doctor what does he do?

22. Caller: I can add in between quotes that I have had a very bad experience where I fell in the toilet which is in such a state - excuse me for the expression but filthy water. For five minutes I fell down and I cried for help no one came to help me and when I told them this, they say you have to stay at the hospital sir. But I took discharge and I left because it is not possible. I was staying there and they were giving me only one pill and if I tell you my state. My clothes were wet with poo and it was not obvious to stay there anymore.

23. Radio Host 1: We are talking of Victoria Hospital in Candos.

24. Caller: Victoria Hospital in Candos. If you go there around 8 o’clock in the morning you can see the state of the toilets and then you tell me

25. Radio Host: But in the overseas treatment when you told them that you are making arrangements to go to India what did they tell you? That the treatment is being given in the hospital?

26. Caller: That the treatment is being given here and why do you have to go to India? But for two years we were not able to do anything.

27. Radio Host: But I want to put a question to the Ministry of Health this morning. A question that can raise awareness amongst them about their department. If there was a possibility to give the treatment in Mauritius why did this patient, Mr Andy, have had to wait for two years, that they have waited for his conditions to worsen and then they let him go. I
would like that an investigation is carried out on this. We have the representative of the ministry with us.

28. X: Good morning

29. Radio Host: You are the press attaché at the Ministry of Health and I know that yesterday you and the minister were busy regarding the two cases where unfortunately one baby has died. We send our sympathy to the family but in relation to the case of Mr Andy did you see the photos that I sent you?

30. X: Yes I saw the pictures in the morning

31. Radio Host: What was your first reaction?

32. X: Well, I heard Mr Andy talking and his case is very painful

33. Radio Host: Did you see the pictures? They speak for themselves

34. X: Yes, yes I saw the pictures. Mr Andy’s case is very painful and I personally take part in his pain and suffering. But, first of all, I need to check his file to see what treatments have been done and you were saying that he has waited for two years to get the overseas treatment. We have a procedure for that. I think I had stated it on radio. There are two cases when a person does not benefit from this. First, if the person has a salary or a household income of more than Rs 50,000 (663 USD) and second which is I think applicable with regard to Mr Andy is where the treatment is available in Mauritius. If the treatment for his ailment is available in Mauritius he would not benefit.

35. Radio Host: He would not benefit

36. X: He would never benefit. But no one would benefit. In the case of Mr
Andy, in fact I have just received his file [silence on air]

37. Radio Host: Hello

38. X: Please give me one second

39. Radio Host: I know that the representative of the ministry is speaking in all legality.

He is a public officer and he is giving us the ministry’s version but if it could have been treated you don’t need for the person’s situation to get worse and that it reaches this stage to get him the right treatment.

40. X: no, no. I should look into his file and talk to his doctor to know what treatment he has received and know for what problem he came to the hospital. It is true that the photos speak for themselves. But first I need to see what treatment was given to the patient, talk to the doctor, talk to the director of hospital. Where his case has reached if we can probably, probably, have a special case to see if we can help him so that he can undergo his treatment overseas. I tell you this is at the level of the ministry.

41. Radio Host: And now tomorrow the patient has to take a flight to go

42. X: Yes, so yesterday I was informed of the case and now you are telling me that he is leaving tomorrow and he is going at his own expenses, right?

43. Radio Host: Yes, he had already made a request and it was not approved. At times you as a Public officer you cannot say anything but there are cases and there are doctors in our hospitals who honestly, some work diligently but there are some who [unfortunately

44. X: No, no] surely I agree with you but this is not specific to hospitals but in
all sectors. There are some sectors where we have a lot of difficulties in the recent past in hospitals. I can tell you that the ministry and the minister are taking action. In all his public meetings, the minister calls upon doctors to look well after their patients, to show empathy to them and to [communicate

45. Radio Host: And not use the patient] as a guinea pig. We give him a medicine and isolate him. And now when I look at the caller’s case, it is truly outrageous. If the patient tells you that the ailment given to him is not good, change it! And if you say that the treatment is available in Mauritius give it to him! What are you waiting for? That the patient becomes a corpse?

46. X: no, no we cannot go to this point...

47. Radio Host: But this is what happens unfortunately

48. X: I understand. I can understand your anxiety but I need to get into his file to see what treatment

49. Radio Host: I rely on you to treat this case as a special case, please

50. X: Ok (.) I will do the needful to look into the case of the patient [...]

51. Radio Host: Andy did you hear?

52. Caller: Yes

53. Radio Host: So you heard the representative of the ministry. He will try to send a special request at the ministry, at the department of Overseas treatment to see if you can go overseas the soonest. I believe that if the needful is done tomorrow itself it would be better for you. Personally it would be
good if the minister can look into this file and the photos which were sent. Ok Andy?

54. Caller: OK

55. Radio Host: Let’s wait for a favorable reply from the hospital.

### 4.7 Case 4: Home Medical Assistance

In the case below which was dealt with on Radio Plus in August 2020, an elderly person of 66 years who is bed ridden after a road accident is in need of homecare medical assistance given that she has hardly any mobility. The “interpellation” takes place through both reason and emotions even though her medical condition can only be grasped from an empathetic and emotional point of view. Her short breath, slow pace, mumbles and pain in the voice indicate that the elderly is in pain. Old people are generally underrepresented and/or misrepresented in the media and ageism tends to stereotype old people as, in this case, whereby the caller is perceived as a “fourth ager” that is “inactive and unable to live independently” (Loos and Ivan, 2018, p. 163). Some elements of background to this case reinforce this perception as it is her neighbor who has made arrangements so that she can call and intervene on the station to make her request for the regular visit of a doctor to her place as much as her daughter and sister have to look after her.

If the representative of the ministry who intervenes as an ‘expert’ tends to make his point rationally marking a ‘distance’ between himself and the caller, it is not the case with the radio hosts. Both radio hosts tend to show ‘proximity’ to the caller eliciting her situation through questions and answers (8-30) and at some point (40) one radio host asks the representative of the ministry to “imagine” the condition in which the caller is and to listen and “to feel in her voice” (41) her difficult situation. The ‘imagination’ and the judgment that the radio hosts echoes the notion of ‘proper distance’ that Silverstone (2004) elaborated on. The case is resolved as the radio hosts propose ‘hope’ to the caller (63). Proximity, faith and hope are central to the exchange between the caller, the radio hosts and the representative of the ministry.
The representative of the ministry goes into much length to explain the policy of the ministry and that the minister has extended the service of home medical assistance to all people who are already under the assistance of a carer. This comes in the form of an announcement (36) that the representative of the ministry makes. However what is also underlined is the way the radio hosts justify the request of the caller through emotional judgment. Against the yardstick which is often used as a normative rule of thumb by journalists, the case illustrates that talk radio hosts and journalists also use emotional judgements to emphasize the need not for rationality but for moral sensitivity. This disposition of an “ethics of care” underlies the reality of the intersection between rationality and emotions. To imagine and to feel in the place of another person reflects the need for a more humane and caring society based on a journalism that is empathetic and moral.

In the case below the caller is an elderly, seeking home medical visits.

1. Radio host 1: We will move on with the case of Mrs Monique who is in Camp Levieux, Rose Hill. She is 66 years and (. ) there is a problem after an accident and Mrs Monique, good morning.

2. Caller: Good morning, madam.

3. Radio host 1: So we will equally welcome Mr X from Social Security. Mr X, good morning.

4. Mr X: Good morning.

5. Radio host 1: Thank you for responding to our call.

6. Caller: Yes, good morning, sir.

7. Radio host 1: Go on, we listen to you.

8. Caller: (. ) I met with an accident and I think it has been three years. I don’t quite
well remember when and my children have the dates. I had an accident and went to the hospital [inaudible mumbles] and the police came to enquire. They never came to enquire but they came in Camp Levieux but they never... I do not know.... They say the file is lost... (it is) all a problem with them.

9. Radio host 1: Alright. Then what happened? After the accident you had a number of problems...

10. Caller: I went to the hospital. There was no doctor and then my daughter got angry and went to the, went to the superintendent and told that I had an accident and to look after me. At last, several doctors looked after me and told me there was nothing, and that I could go back. After two weeks of stay at the hospital, I went back and I had blood clots and pain and blood clots... I returned to the hospital and when I returned to the hospital and they did an injection to me and they poked the needle into me...

11. Radio host 1: so, so, following this you have had to undergo an operation after that?

12. Caller: yes, yes. They carried out an operation and now I cannot walk at all.

13. Radio host 1: OK, so you are telling us that since you have undergone the operation you cannot walk at all?


15. Radio host 1: So you remain bedridden.


17. Radio host 1: So now you are making arrangements and wish to have a home doctor,
is it right?

18. Caller: Yes. yes.

19. Radio host 1: Hmm (.) But who helps you now at home?


21. Radio host 1: Hmm (.) so everyday she looks after you?

22. Caller: Yes.

23. Radio host 1: Do you receive a pension for invalids now?

24. Caller: Invalid (.) no. But only an old age pension...

25. Radio host 1: Ok, Ok. Hhhm (.) so you are telling us there is a person who helps you?

26. Caller: Yes

27. Radio host 1: Do you receive a carer’s allowance? You know what we mean?

28. Caller: That is Rs 3000 [75 USD]?

29. Radio host 1: But now you are telling us that you wish a doctor comes to visit you at home?

30. Caller: Yes

31. Radio host 1: So let’s listen to Mr X

32. Mr X: Good morning

33. Caller: Good morning

34. Mr X: When you are calling me now, there is a good news.

35. Radio host 1: Hmmm (.)
36. Mr X: You know, minister, madam minister Dawreeawoo has taken the decision, you know in the budget speech there is an announcement that to receive a visit at home to all those who are suffering from handicaps and are receiving a carer’s allowance.

37. Radio host 1: Hmmm

38. Mr X: So what is happening is that the minister is announcing that all people, the decision has been recently taken, all people who receive a carer’s allowance are entitled to a visit at home.

39. Radio host 1: Hhhm of a doctor

40. Mr X: Yes, it has already been decided. Yesterday itself, in fact the day before yesterday, there was a meeting and all procedures are in place and there are a number of doctors recruited to respond to this application. Given that you have provided your name, we will verify and see to it that you receive this at soonest based on the most urgent cases so we think that Mrs Monique can be placed on a priority list.

41. Radio host 1: Already Mr X talking to Mrs Monique you can already imagine in what condition she is. You can feel that in her voice.

42. Mr X: Hmmm

43. Radio host 1: that she is really in a difficult situation

44. Mr X: That’s why I am telling you that madam minister has taken the decision saying that we should not create more difficulties for people who are already in problem. In the past you had to apply for such a service but the minister Dawreeawoo says if the person already receives the service of a
carer, there is no need to create additional difficulties. So, the decision is taken that all persons without exception, without application will receive the visit of a doctor.

45. Radio host 1: So you tell us it was an announcement in the budget and now we are moving towards action.

46. Mr X: Yes, action definitely

47. Radio host 1: When do you think it would be a reality?

48. Mr X: No (. ) the measure is already a reality. In the past, we expected the person to ask for the service and then we provided it. As I am telling you, madam the minister, Mrs Dawreeawoo, says that if the person is already as we say laid up, and cannot move and is in need of another person and at times they do not have a person to do the necessary. So we said we send the doctor to the person and, if there is no need of doctor the person is going to say so. If there is need of a doctor, the doctor will visit him/her eventually and make prescriptions

49. Radio host 1: So the visit is going to be once a month on a regular basis?

50. Mr X: Regular visit

51. Radio host 1: hmmm

52. Mr X: Given that I am on air, I would request all people that they have a medical certificate given that they are under treatment and to keep that handy so that the doctor does not prescribe other medicine which [may ....

53. Radio host 1: Can] you remind us that in the past people of a certain age received
a doctor’s visit?

54. Mr X: Yes, now as from this year, there is no age limit. Even if a child is born and has the need of a carer, he will be eligible to receive the visit of a doctor.

55. Radio host 1: Or else can we know how many people are receiving the carer’s allowance

56. Mr X: Approximately 16,000 of elderly that are above 60 and 7000 who are under 60.

57. Radio host 1: so 23000 persons?

58. Mr X: Approximately

59. Radio host 1: so there are 23000 persons who will receive a regular visit of a doctor at home?

60. Mr X: Yes

61. Radio host 1: Can we know when does this become effective?

62. Mr X: I told you it takes effect immediately.

63. Radio Host 1: So, Mrs Monique can keep hope

64. Mr X: yes, we take note and we would not restrict her from this service

65. Radio host 2: Can you verify if Mrs Monique receives a carer’s allowance?

66. Mr X: Yes, I verified she receives the carer’s allowance. And it is not a problem.

67. Radio host 1: Well, this is very good news. Thank you...
4.8 Case 5: Public Housing Allocation

On air in October 2020 on Radio One, the caller explains that she has applied for a house from a public housing company and is enquiring about the fact that, despite her application, other people whom she claims to know have been granted a house and not her despite waiting for some fifteen years. The exchange between the caller and the representative of the public organization which allocates social housing is heated and radical in tone as the caller is defiant and implies that there is no transparency as she is supported by the radio host (6), illustrating the possibilities of “democratization conflicts” that morning talk radio has afforded. The caller seems to inscribe her talk in the “protest paradigm” (Mercea, Iannelli and Loader, 2015) as the matter casts doubt over transparency and good governance over the allocation of public housing in Mauritius as she narrates her experience that every time her application is delayed (1).

The response of the public representative gives no assurance and is crafted in rules and procedures as he tries to debunk the argument of the caller who is adamant at the lack of transparency. Importantly the “advice” of the representative of the public organization does not help to create trust in public institutions as he makes an appeal to the public not to believe in “gossips” (21). However, the way he explains things and the presumed lack of transparency seem to be conducive to people reacting cynically and mockingly to the ways public institutions fail to create a relationship of trust. The role of the media to ensure greater public accountability is highlighted as the media, through the participation of the caller, can play a monitorial role as the watchdog of power.

In this case, the caller is complaining about unfair treatment for social housing

1. Caller: [...]They tell me I have to wait, I have to wait or they tell me there are documents missing or there is money lacking (.) and last time I went I brought all documents and my money was ready again everything was postponed, do you understand?

2. Mr X: No, no
3. Radio host: Mr X, what can you say since fifteen [years...

4. Mr X: I do not have your file in front of me but what I can tell you is that they do not always tell you this. When you come for an interview, I am sharing the message to listeners too, when you come for an interview at the NHDC [National Housing Development Corporation] you are given a letter (. we tell them in the letter that you have to come to the office on this date, on this day, at this time. In the letter, it is written that, if you cannot attend (.), you have to phone us on this number or another number to tell us whether (.) just to allow us to know if you are sick on that day or whether you did not have money to pay transport on that day. We do it intentionally. When you come for the interview, it may be that there is a paper missing in your file and then we ask you to come back until your file is complete (. when the file is completed, then we send it on the Board(.
now, when we send it to the Board (.), it means the file is completed but it does not mean you are getting a house (. often I hear people saying that I was eligible for a house and I did not get. No! Your file was complete to go to the Board for a house and you did not get it because there is the catchment area(.) we verify (.) if a person lives in Calebasses, Arsenal, Terre Rouge and lives near there, automatically, he will get priority over people who live a bit far, who live in Beau Bassin, Curepipe.

5. Caller: Only that there are people who live in the same area as myself and obtained a house after my application, after [me.

6. Radio host: This] is what we are hearing at the [moment

7. Mr X: He] may have obtained before you because you live in St Croix, madam.

8. Caller: From the same area as myself, St Croix!
9. Mr X: No, madam, madam, it is impossible because I am on the board. If a
[person

10. Caller: And... yet I am telling you!

11. Mr X: Then madam if you tell me you know, then do me a favour, write a letter
to the authorities concerned and you complain that you know a person
who lives in the same area as yours and who has applied after you and
has obtained a house and ask for an [enquiry.

12. Caller: OK, yes.]

13. Mr X: Do an enquiry. You write the letter and I will answer.

14. Caller: OK yes(.

15. Mr X: Because there is transparency, madam, and you do not need to know
somebody to get a house(.) This government came and said that each
Mauritian who deserves to get a house will get one. There is no need to
know somebody to get a [house

16. Caller: And yet] the person got a house

17. Radio host: Listen to me, Sylvie. What we can [do

18. Mr X: I cannot...

19. Radio host: what you can do, what you do if you feel that your rights have been
flouted and that people have been favoured, then you give the name of
the person in full and the house and I can send this to Mr X and ask him
to enquire and explain to us how a person who applied after you got a
house before you and that you did not receive one.
20. Caller: OK, yes

21. Mr X: You know, [...] if you allow me(,), there are people who called me yesterday and told me that they have neighbours who have already obtained a house in Chebel (,) the board for Chebel has not even been conducted (,) people listen to all sorts of gossips (,) there are people who have already obtained a house in Petite Julie(,) no board for Petite Julie has been held, people listen to what others say (,) you should not listen because people are also wishing you bad luck.

22. Radio Host: No, I invite you to investigate (,) I will get information from the caller

23. Mr X: OK, I will give you [a reply] directly. ..

4.9 Case 6: Migrant worker requesting Covid-19 related financial assistance

In the case below, aired on Radio One in July 2020 in the aftermath of the end of the first Covid-19 lockdown, a migrant worker from Seychelles Island who has settled in Mauritius is complaining about the fact that, with the lockdown, he has not been able to work and has not received the financial assistance that the Mauritian government has put in place because of Covid-19 and the lockdown. The exchange is not acrimonious but rather points to an ethics of hospitality and cosmopolitanism as, despite being a foreigner and thus not having the Mauritian citizenship, he is informed that he will not be left behind and will receive the financial assistance for the first lockdown due to Covid-19. That his accent sounds different from local Mauritian accents is not a problem as he is allowed on air and the difference in nationality is accommodated. Just as for Mauritians generally but importantly for Mauritians in precarious occupations, Covid-19 has particularly impacted the low wage workers, including the Bangladeshi, the Indians, the Malagassy and Seychelles migrants working in Mauritius.

In the case below, the caller who is migrant is asking financial assistance due to Covid-19 lockdown

1. Radio host: Listen to his accent
2. Caller: Yes, yes, I have my identity card from Seychelles (.) I have not received my Mauritian national identity card (.) and I was not able to request the [financial] assistance but, when I went to request my Work Permit, I used the same identity card and I was able to get it. I wanted to know what happened that I did not get it [the financial assistance]?

3. Radio host: It makes... did you go and ask if you would get or not get?

4. Caller: No I did it on mobile phone(.) I asked a friend to do it on mobile [phone.

5. Radio host: How] many years you live in Mauritius?

6. Caller: It is fifteen years that I live in Mauritius

7. Radio host: Mr X, for a Seychelles citizen who does not live in Mauritius and this is clear in his accent this morning (.) fifteen years he is living in Mauritius, he is working in other words (.) despite his meagre salary he is contributing to the economy given that if you buy a packet of milk you pay taxes, you buy a packet of salt you pay taxes( . ) what happens? Is he eligible or [not?

8. Mr. X: Exactly.] There are many foreigners working in Mauritius (.) they too have been through the lockdown and so, we could not remain insensitive to them (.) so now their employees have made requests... there are Bangladeshis, Indians, etc (.) nonetheless, they will have to follow some regulations that is the employer is contributing to their pension plans for them too(.)

9. Radio host: Ahhh

10. Mr. X: And our friend from Seychelles, Jericho, it is fifteen years that he is in
Mauritius and I do not believe that he has no contract with his employer? I do not think that his employer is just employing him like that and paying him at the end of the month (.) no, you should be within the law, right and pay for his pension plan

11. Radio host: Sure

12. Mr X: If all is in good standing, I do not find why the employer cannot make a request on behalf of Jericho (.)

13. Radio host: If the employer is not willing to do that, can Jericho personally do the request?

14. Mr. X: No. No. Then he will have to report the case to the ministry of labour...

15. Mrs Y: In the application for self employed assistance scheme, it is well stipulated that you should be of Mauritius, above 18 years old...

16. Radio host: A citizen

17. Mrs Y: A citizen of Mauritius. But as my colleague said, if your employer has included you on the payroll, then you are eligible(.)

18. Radio host: Yes, there are many data (.) like Malgasies working with a firm... like Bangladeshis too they have benefited from same because they have an employer

19. Mr X: [Yes] an employer and they have a right to Government to Wage Assistance Scheme, not the self-employed assistance scheme (.)
4.10 Media as a Site of Care and Solidarity

This chapter has elaborated on six cases as they have been dealt with on morning talk radio. Almost all the cases have indicated how antagonism has been transformed into agonism through co-optation and dialogue. The outcome of the ‘democratization conflicts’ on talk radio can be in the forms of getting an appointment with the authorities, or in the reconsideration of a case and/or a temporary settlement. In each of the cases, the distance and proximity between radio hosts and participants can make a considerable difference. For instance, when the radio host adopts a distanced approach as in Case 1, participation can be minimal as the caller is hardly provided with the necessary space to make his/her voice heard. However, each time there is an ‘emotive’ turn and a disposition of proximity and care is afforded to participants (Case 2 on verbal violence at school, Case 3 on medical negligence, Case 4 on Home medical assistance, Case 5 on lack of transparency and Case 6 on the provision of Covid-related financial assistance), there is the possibility for callers to make their voices heard through the narration of their lived experiences and to secure better outcomes for themselves based on the negotiations that take place through talk radio. This also highlights the fact that participation of ordinary citizens is intimate, personal and political to the extent that their engagements are based on political subjectivities as their personal conditions take political significance.

As indicated earlier, the first corpus of data were collected in 2018 and a second phase of data were collected in July 2020 after the end of the first lockdown in Mauritius. It has to be highlighted that the ‘return to the new normal’ related to the ‘new everyday life’ of the Covid-19 era indicates that morning talk radio has opened a durable avenue of engagement with regard to solutions journalism. Rationality is not good enough to understand the grievances and claims of callers. In fact, in order to understand discursive engagement on talk radio, there is need to understand the intersection between rationality and emotions and, that for solutions journalism to be effective, there is need for radio hosts and participants to use their imagination and reflexive judgment through listening. In this way, a disposition of care and solidarity entails consideration of the voices on talk radio as empathetic voices that are seeking social justice and human dignity in contexts where their lived experiences are often undermined, if not subdued. The originality of morning talk radio lies in the fact that
consideration is given to the lived experiences and everyday life of ordinary citizens. The pandemic world of Covid-19 has placed in the center stage the need for greater empathy and solidarity, especially as the inequality gaps tend to widen.

Hence, the interpellation of callers on talk radio should not be understood only from a discursive point of view but also through phronetics as practical solutions are sought even though these solutions are temporary ones. Critics may argue that morning talk radio provides for a ‘thin’ engagement that provides low forms of activism. However, as Beck argues such activism “is simultaneously an example of how the impossible task of finding biographical solutions to systemic contradictions is imposed on individuals” (Beck, 2007, p. 685).

4.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have used a discourse theoretical perspective and phronetics to analyse the use of talk radio by ordinary people. We have argued that morning talk radio is part of everyday life and that it allows people, including the marginal and the vulnerable, to make their voices heard and to participate in public life as active citizens. We have underlined the consideration of talk on morning radio not only as rational but as intertwined with emotions and that this ‘emotional turn’ is a way for ordinary citizens to engage themselves as citizens. We have underlined the fact that grievances and claims on talk radio are political as they mobilize political subjectivities. In a way, morning talk radio allows acts of citizenship on the part of participants and puts to the fore the possibilities that solutions journalism can offer in terms of participation and journalism’s trajectories to stay relevant.
5: Mediation and the Lived Experiences of Talk Radio in Mauritius

This chapter aims to study the intertwinements of talk radio to the lives of Mauritian audiences by seeking to understand their reception and practice of the medium and the processes of socialization thereon. Drawing on the concept of mediation (Couldry, 2008) which is characteristic of contemporary mediated societies, the chapter enquires about the habits of practice that people have of talk radio and how these practices tie to their ways of life and their expectations of journalism, especially with regard to talk radio journalism.

In view of these interrogations, five focus groups have been set up across different parts of mainland Mauritius to find out about the lived experiences of people with talk radio and the media generally, and the kind of action, sociality and reality that are generated thereof. The aim is to consider whether people “feel their way” into the stories of morning talk radio through different ways of knowing and the extent to which a sense of belonging to a ‘community’ of listeners is fostered through listening to talk radio, especially to the morning sessions. The expectations of audiences towards talk radio journalists are also explored. The findings have been classified in tropes.

Even though socialization through talk radio is generally considered to be typically deliberative and sustained through rationality, this chapter aims to interrogate the extent to which affective and emotional practices can contribute to mediation and to socialization. The overall implications for citizenship, media ethics and the public sphere are discussed.

A woman in her seventies living in Elizabethville, a poverty stricken suburb in Tombeau Bay, Mauritius points out:

Muddied water ran on our taps over several days despite many calls to the Central Water Authority (CWA). The situation got intolerable and out of exasperation and anger we decided to make a call to a private radio station and the solution was found almost immediately as clean water was available again.

She regrets, nonetheless, that
Journalists only come to our area accompanied by politicians for inaugurations or when there is a tragedy. Once an inauguration is over, they forget about us even though they are aware of the serious problems of housing, unemployment and drug addiction in the area. I do not mean that they [journalists] are not helpful but they could have been more of a service, for example, to the youths as generations after the other we are living in poverty.

The above assertions are those of an elderly woman living in Elizabethville, Tombeau Bay. Elizabethville is a marginalized, poverty stricken area in the suburbs of Port Louis, the Mauritian capital. It is an area composed mainly of workers in the informal sectors, including domestic care and labour spheres. The ‘we’ that she refers to in her first statement is a community of residents of the area who impelled and encouraged her to make the phone call to the radio station. She dwells on her experience as a local female activist and her agency on talk radio that allowed her to express anger and to protest over the distribution of sullied and unclean water as well as the mediation through talk radio that allowed her to restore clean water distribution service to her area. She is, nonetheless, also nuanced and critical of the media as gatekeepers as she finds that the media is present in her area only at the time of an “event” highlighting citizens’ expectations of the roles that journalists ought to play.

This chapter focuses on mediation through talk radio by examining citizens’ daily practice of it. By practice, we mean the active participatory role of the listeners while at the same time not losing “sight of the more mundane, internalized, even passive articulation with media” (Bird, 2011, p. 504) and the practices that are replicated and extended online. It questions the connections as well as the disconnections through media consumption, the subjectivity/ies and the ethical demands that talk radio in mediated contexts makes on citizens and vice versa, and audiences’ expectations towards journalists. In other words, it interrogates the importance of socialization and relational ethics and asks the extent to which participation in and through talk radio is facilitated through structures of rationality and emotions, and the contributions of such media consumption, if it contributes to anything at all in terms of living well in the media.
5.2 Personal Affinities

Traditionally the dominant view is that broadcasters and the media are meant to perform a duty to inform people so that the latter are able to exercise their rights as members of a “legally defined community of the nation state” (Marshall, 1992). As much as this approach views citizenship as a formal “entitlement” (Couldry, 2006, p. 322) endeared with the responsibility of holding political representatives to account, it also reifies politics unto itself (Hermes and Dahlgren, 2006) to the extent that it falls “prey to the ‘electoralist fallacy’ which holds that democracy can be reduced to the holding of elections” (Friedman, 2019, p. x). Such an approach to citizenship appears to be “thin” (Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2011, p. 106) as it does not consider aspects of media consumption in everyday life and the obligations that such consumption entails.

Against the grain of the established norms of the informed citizen exercising her/his rights at the ballot boxes, what could “cultures of citizenship” (Couldry, 2006, p. 323) look like? What if practices of citizenship involved agency based on people’s consumption of news at their own pace and on their own terms? What if, instead of a uniform notion of ‘shared culture’ associated with liberal democracy, citizenship meant experiences based on shared interpersonal concerns and practices in networked publics? As suggested by Couldry media consumption can perhaps “adopt a less prescriptive approach to the possible interrelations between ‘culture’ and ‘citizenship’” tapping rather into “the experiential dimensions of citizenship, studying what it actually feels like to be a citizen” (Couldry, 2006, p. 323, my emphasis).

The liveness of talk radio can be considered as weaving audiences into publics to ensure “a potential connection to shared social realities as they are happening” (Couldry, 2004, p. 3). Nonetheless, citizens tend to personalize the news that they receive based on their personal affinities with the news and its relevance to their lives. Deuze observes the affective dimension of people’s attention to news in that “the way people interact and communicate with the world seems to reduce it to their most intimate, direct and real-time personal engagement” (2008, p. 853). Pantti and Wahl-Jorgensen underline that an array of feelings define subjectively the way
news is consumed ranging from disparate feelings of hope, fear, anger, solidarity, etc as people reflexively engage with news and discussions based on their personal experiences.

This is no different with talk radio which is consumed for several motives echoing to an extent the uses and gratifications theory that focuses on people’s uses of the media (Hunt, Atkin and Krishnan, 2012). A woman participant in a focus group in Stanley-Rose Hill holds that radio is a daily companion to her everyday life even though she asserts that she is generally more prompt to listen to issues that matters to her personally.

[Dories] I wake up with the radio and listen daily to private radio stations even though I am more alert than usual, especially when people phone-in to testify about events that happened to them... For example, someone calls the station for not receiving a pension regarding his physical invalidity despite being completely eligible to a pension. Or parents testifying to their difficulties of raising children and asking for help regarding juvenile delinquency... or a road accident that claimed the life of a person.... The first thing that comes to my mind is: “what if the same problems occurred to me or to one of my relatives?” I share the same concern and feel the need to pay attention to these events as they may also happen to me.

Similarly, in a focus group carried out in Cottage, listed as a flood-prone area in the North of Mauritius and regularly affected by flash floods in the past years, one resident, who is also a social worker in the locality points to his consumption of media in these terms:

[Ramesh] I am on the lookout for information regarding the weather.... when it starts raining, we are in angst that the rains may turn into flash floods... and tune in to radio and social media to get updates and the testimonies of people who have been victims of natural calamities... This is the third time that my family has been affected by flash floods. The authorities have made several promises to us regarding mitigating and protecting
ourselves against such climatic situations but we are outraged and
desperate as our situation is pretty vulnerable.

In both cases, listeners to talk radio seem to invest themselves personally and interpersonally in
the news provided in the media as they form an opinion and knowledge based on their own life
experiences and experiences of people in their immediate entourage. The trigger to their
interest in the stories that they listened to on talk radio is that the latter strikes a chord to their
personal lives and the experiences of people whom they know (Gamson, 1992).

At the outset, the stories told on morning talk radio become objectified and rationalized
through the experts and authorities whose deliberations and views are relayed by the media
through the “strategic ritual of objectivity” (Tuchman, 1972) - through reference to sources
with expertise and whose deliberations are consumed as formal and reason-based arguments.
Yet, listeners also identify personally and subjectively to the stories on talk radio and, in the
words of the feminist scholar Rosalind Gill, “what is out there’ is turned in here” and more
precisely “the social or cultural ‘gets inside’ and transforms and reshapes [...] relationships to
ourselves and others” (Gill, 2008, p. 3). Far from the abstract and complex nature of news,
listeners tend to personalize the news from the media and in a way to “own” the discussions on
talk radio by integrating them to their lives, especially the morning editions on the grounds that
they reflect their own experiences.

Bird points to this aspect of media consumption arguing that “audiences [...] approach all kinds
of news from an unstated perspective that essentially asks: “What can I get from this
information, or this story? How does it apply to my life, and why should I pay attention?” (2003,
p. 24). Put differently, news and discussions matters if they are of relevance and significance to
the listeners’ lives underlining “the inexorable interplay between public and private in shaping
civic skills” (Hermes and Dahlgren, 2006, p. 262).

This relationship between rationality and subjectivity or emotionality becomes more
heightened in the context of “risk society” (Beck, 1992) or life in “liquid times” defined by
Bauman (2000) as living in a society “where uncertainty, flux, change, conflict, and revolution
are the permanent conditions of everyday life” (Deuze, 2007, p. 504). This condition has been
exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic as people use their agency and creativity to exercise sense-making with regards to health hazards and uncertainties but also to keep on check the perpetuation of structural inequalities and injustices that affect them (Nyamnjoh, 2020).

In such contexts, the importance of lived experiences and subpolitics is pivotal in terms of media consumption and participation in news (Cottle, 1998). Wahl-Jorgensen points to media consumption arguing that “citizens who participate are fueled by both rationality and emotions, ranging from love to hatred, and encompassing disgust, fear and care” (2018, p. 28) as much as she points out to “an emotional turn” that “has opened up for a more nuanced appraisal of the role of subjectivity and personal stories in the articulation of the common good” (2019a, p. 1).

### 5.3 Affordances

Affordances relate to the possibilities of action as Hutchby argues that “affordances are functional and relational aspects which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action on relation to an object” (2001, p. 444). Mauritian listeners point to the differences in the organizational cultures between the private stations and the national state broadcaster, the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation (MBC). Private stations tend to be more accessible, privileging a more friendly and conversational style with its listeners, whether in their discussion programmes or entertainment and game shows. They are more phatic emphasizing the soft aspects of talk and news as they give more space to the human side of stories and to chatter. On the other hand, the MBC is bemoaned for being austere and acting as the mouthpiece of government and its ministerial agencies; relaying news from official quarters of government through the churning of ministerial press communiqués and as having recourse to edited vox pops to represent the views of the people, instead of privileging real conversation and interaction with the latter. Private stations are very much the antithesis of state media and are more inclusive than state media.

Besides, vox pops which are ‘packaged’ to represent the views of people towards the government - mostly favorable views towards government action, the MBC has come up in reaction to private stations with programmes like ‘Anou Bouzer’ (Let’s Shake Up) which is a TV show representing the state broadcaster assisting needy citizens and softening its approach to
news and programming. On its side, government has also recently launched a portal service, the Citizen Support Unit (CSU), structured in the form of ‘participatory governance’, allowing citizens to complain about a government service. Citizens are supposed to go online on the government portal and make a grievance about a government service which would be investigated by the authorities with a response to the griever and followed-up on the airwaves of the state broadcaster, the MBC. However, these initiatives differ from the activities of private radio since they are procedural and cumbersome as one respondent in the focus group in Flacq Post observed about inclusion and exclusion in broadcasting programmes.

-Raymonde- My brother suffers from Parkinson’s disease and I wanted his case to be broadcast on the national TV show. However, in order to participate they asked me to present the medical certificate of my brother and they informed me that they needed to seek the approval of the Ministry of Social Security in order to record his testimony. You have to follow complicated bureaucratic procedures in order to participate in such TV and radio shows while on private radio you can intervene directly.

The affordances and inclusivity of private radio also intersect with social media as these channels extend themselves online to create communities of followers and networked publics. One young participant in the focus group of Curepipe asserted that:

-Diane- We follow the private radio online through their social media walls. We get updates about events through their social media pages as well as through the media personalities who work in these private stations. They interact and share contents regularly on Facebook. We can like and comment what they share. As much as they are influential, if something is worthy of attention, we can also record an event on our mobile phones and share it on the WhatsApp accounts of these private stations.

Such affordances are “social opportunities for expression and connection” (Papacharissi, 2011, p. 317) in hybrid media systems (Chadwick, 2017) highlighting the fact that listeners are not mere consumers of talk radio as through social media, particularly through the WhatsApp
accounts of private stations; they are able to produce information, often acting as witnesses and at times bypassing the gatekeeping function of the media by posting directly on social media.

The convergence of platforms, especially radio and social media points to the “multiple levels of domestication and appropriation that mirror the complexities and contradictions of local contexts, all generally affirming the fact that the adoption of the digital technologies should be seen as having a cultural and social logic that points to their ‘social shaping’ nature” (Mabweazara, 2015, p. 3). For example, as much as the radio personalities are popular and appreciated as ‘icons’, they are also ‘policed’ if not mocked and ridiculed online by audiences when they deviate from their traditional demeanor to appear to be too cosy with powerholders. Such online mockery can take the form of humorous posts and satirical memes about them as radio listeners look up to these media personalities for their authenticity. Social media have opened up new vistas allowing listeners of talk radio and users of social media and mobile applications to be both consumers and producers of information. Papacharissi points to new media as a platform which “reinforce[s] the social affordances of online environments, by fostering interaction that is primarily interpersonal and founded on norms of everyday interaction adapted to the online setting” (2011, p. 305). Private radio stations, through talk radio, have been ingenious in their use of social media as often the morning talk shows are streamed live on Facebook, allowing listeners to interact and participate to build communities of listeners whether in terms of sharing radio contents and sharing of feelings and emotions.

5.4 Social opportunities

It would be erroneous and naive to believe that the stories on talk radio only have an individualistic and/or even narcissistic appeal to them. Bird remarks that “we need to think of [...] stories as emerging out of the culture, and as then sparking a broader set of interrogative narratives and discussions among the people” (2003, p. 30) pointing to the need for meaningful engagements.

In the focus group in Rose-Hill, one woman brought up the case of her brother-in-law whose house was mortgaged and was put on sale by the bank from which the latter had contracted a
loan. After taking the matter on air, a number of other aggrieved clients of the bank called the radio to share similar problems of expropriation by the bank and in this way this turned out into mass campaign of protests against the practices of banks and other lending institutions.

[Mary] My brother-in-law had problems regarding the repayment of a loan to a bank. Due to the unfair and abusive practices of the bank adamant on putting his house on sale, his house was put on sale by levy. It is through private radio that we came to know that he was not the only one facing such a problem as he told his story on radio. In a way, we were relieved to know that it triggered public attention as a group of people came forward to explain that they were in similar situations.

In the above case, public outrage and protest over the higher interests charged by banks and money-lenders, cozying up with lawyers, to sell the mortgaged houses of their debtors forced the government to set up an inquiry into the practices of ‘sale by levy’ in Mauritius. But how did mobilization through collective action take place in such a context forcing government to look into the practices of banks? Critics are generally prompt to point to the ‘sheepish culture’ of the Mauritian citizenry who hardly mobilize to take to the streets, except in cases like that of the ‘sale by levy’ or the case of late Sandra O’reilly. They also point to the ethnic fragmentations of the Mauritian citizenry as a deterrent for political mobilization and collective action. Others also state that Mauritians are too cynical and self-centered individuals to mobilize in collective action for the common good. Others also point to the high level of debts of Mauritian households that stifle any attempts to raise voice and to protest.

Nonetheless, the statement above highlights that a story on talk radio can snowball by garnering public engagement and turning into collective action. It points to latent shared grievances and the “in-between-bonds of publics [and] forms of expression and connection that frequently help liberate the individual and collective imaginations” (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 4). Talk that turns into action depends on the intersubjectivity of listeners and “the availability of social opportunities to put to use elsewhere the public knowledge or information gained from media consumption” (Couldry, 2006, p. 330). Importantly the affective dispositions to action
and engagement - expressed in the protests against the abusive practices of the banks and solidarity towards the victims - highlight the need to move social movements away from the prism of “rational choice roots” towards the “emotional commitment [of individuals] to action” (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012, p. 751).

Gamson foregrounds three components of collective action and social movements namely the “injustice component” that “focuses on the righteous anger that puts fire in the belly and iron in the soul” (1992, p. 32); the “agency component” that highlights the possibilities to change the course of events through collective action and the “identity component” which establishes the adversarial element between “we” [who are] “typically in opposition to some “they” who have different interests or values” (Gamson, 1992, p. 7). In the statement above, the three elements highlighted by Gamson are not only manifest but intersect to strike a chord with the view that “the role of anger in social movements [is] an important resource for collective mobilization and empowerment” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018, p. 4).

As much as there can be feelings of collective anger, there can also be manifestations of collective solidarity. Often to call the media and radio stations can be the last resort of the caller and the call is received by listeners emotionally as listeners feel their way into the story (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018) and feel the need to bond together in acts of solidarity. Several calls on private radio point to the solidarity networks that are provided on talk radio programmes. For example, the sick who has to undergo surgery overseas would ask for financial support from listeners in the form of calls for donation. Critics may argue that these calls for solidarity are opportunistic but in the focus group in Rose-Hill, a participant underlined the network of support, solidarity and hope provided through talk radio on private channels.

[Kevin] The mother of a handicapped girl called a radio station and argued that her daughter wanted to go to school but is on a wheel chair as she is handicapped. She needed to have transport facilities to take her to her school. In this way, people called and proposed their help to pick and drop her at school. Similarly, another woman whose daughter had to go overseas for a surgical treatment was able to call the radio and ask for
financial help and contributions. In this way, the public can participate to alleviate the sufferings of the caller.

5.5 Knowledge

Talk radio on private stations contributes to critical pedagogy and literacy as audiences get experiential knowledge from listening to exchanges. At the outset, one cannot participate in the public sphere and “act successfully as a citizen in the absence of knowledge” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 76). Journalism is “a social form of knowledge production” (Meditsch, 2005) and in the words of Dahlgren “it would be more accurate in many cases to talk about “information” in regard to media output: it is in the process of appropriation of information - integrating it in relation to one’s existing frames of reference and thereby making it personally meaningful - that information becomes “translated” into knowledge” (2009, p. 109). Such experiential knowledge, notes Borkman, is based on sharing personal experience over a situation and “consequently, the individual learns how his problem is both similar to and different from that of others, which forces him to utilize the knowledge selectively to fit his situation” (1976, p. 450).

For example an issue which has a legal aspect may be discussed and deliberated on the air with the help of a lawyer. Similarly an issue about consumer rights may be discussed and the rights of consumers explained as “political citizenship deals with issues related to the formal rights (and duties) of citizens, and is most often mediated by traditional categories of news about current affairs and politics” (IPSP, 2018, p. 46, original emphasis). Notwithstanding formal knowledge shared by experts, knowledge sharing based on experiences of ordinary citizens can be assimilated into “self-help models” in that they assemble the “attributes of experiential knowledge” through the build-up of a network of peers that “band together to resolve the problem through their mutual efforts, with experiential knowledge being a primary basis of authority in decision making” (Borkman, 1976, p. 452).

One participant, an elderly woman, in the focus group at Flacq Post observed the following:
[Katty] I am not literate... when we have a problem with the police, we now know what to do. In the past, we did not know where to go and what to do about police brutality but now we know our rights as people talk about their experiences with the police and where to report such brutality. With the private stations, we can be supported and we can help each other out. There is a form of public instruction that takes place on private radio and supportive networks are provided.

Even though the Mauritian Constitution ensures the safeguard of basic rights and freedoms, it does not cater to access of information and to the protection and entrenchment of socio-economic and political rights. Citizens complain about the withholding of information by state officials who have to adhere to the Official Secrets Act (OSA) despite the promise of several governments to legislate in favor of a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Often people, especially the poor, do not even have basic information about housing facilities, financial services and training opportunities to mention only these. However, talk radio has significantly reduced the “knowledge gap” given the role it plays in terms of providing people with critical knowledge and pedagogy. Talk radio on the private stations provides greater details about current affairs and the fact that they broadcast live allow them to disclose information which may take days before being broadcast on the state broadcaster.

Public service broadcasting is often pitted against entertainment-centered, market-driven media on the assumption that “market-based systems, by delivering more soft than hard news, impede the exercise of informed citizenship” (Curran et al, 2009, p. 6) and that “continued deregulation of the broadcast media is likely, on balance, to lead to lower levels of civic knowledge” (Curran et al, 2009, p. 22). However, this is clearly not the case as much as it can be disputed in Mauritius as, despite the fact that private radio may be criticized for providing more soft news, they are also appreciated for having helped to reduce the knowledge gap by taking on the hot issues in the Mauritian society in a subversive way. Public service broadcasting in Mauritius is state-led and is bemoaned for censoring information critical of the government and for providing only “good news” about the government and society and as part of “sunshine
journalism” (Rodny-Gumede, 2016). In contrast, whether abuse by government officials or corruption, private radio are able to take on these issues frontally and/or in derisive ways.

The melodrama orchestrated by radio hosts and audiences as well as their anger and mockery on air emphasize not only what can be considered to be the “carnival nature” of talk radio but also allow citizens to be informed about the state of affairs. One respondent in Flacq Post observed the following:

[Shafeez] The MBC censors and hides a lot of information, especially with regards to politics and the political opponents of the government of the day. Information is censored while on private radio the information is broadcast in real time.... The radio hosts on private stations may also use satire and mock the authorities and experts. For instance, one radio host gently mocked a policeman on air suggesting that he should be careful when giving road fines to VIPS because one of his colleagues had been transferred for having fined a political VIP... This information about the transfer of the policeman was not broadcast on the state airwaves.... It is only on private radio that we got to know about this while the radio host mocked the police representative rubbing salt on the wound...

5.6 Truth

There is “a firm assumption among journalists that journalism takes shape in the newsroom, not amongst the public” (Zelizer, 2004, p. 6). However, listeners, especially the marginal, tend to view and represent truth in news in multiple ways, especially expecting that the latter can be woven together as part of their lived reality and is contextually relevant to their lived circumstances. This has implications for journalism.

If citizens are able to connect through talk radio they also disconnect when it comes to journalists sensationalizing and ‘hurting’ ‘ordinary’ citizens, especially the marginal living in disenfranchised communities. This is particularly relevant in regards to inequalities prevalent in the Mauritian society and the need for journalism, according to focus groups participants, that
solves problems in society instead of creating ‘media hurts’. Hence the need for journalists to
go beyond their conventional news values to emphasize the contexts in which journalism takes
place and the social role that journalism can play. In the focus group at Elizabethville, Tombeau
Bay, one listener asserted the following

[Rachele] Journalists focus too much on politics as well as often they can stigmatize
communities representing them as areas plagued by drug addiction,
unemployment and other social ills. These stigmatizations can hurt
people and communities. The media could play a more important role in
social support and, if they care they can be partners in the development
of our area. The media tend to be confrontational and play politics but in
reality our problems are more complex and subtle than what they
represent.

Related to the above, listeners tend to criticize the speed with which the media work and the
pending sensationalism that such speedy pace can result in. Listeners find that the media tend
to report in fast ways and not address the structural and systemic problems in place. On the
contrary, listeners tend to emphasize the need for slow forms of journalism that takes time to
understand their problems and propose solutions, instead of focusing only on their monitorial
and watchdog role. As one respondent in Cottage argued:

[Jose] They dramatize a lot. They choose sensational cases to broadcast while others
which are important but not sensational are not considered. Ok, one person calls
and receives his pension in two days but what about the other 200 persons?
They consider the case of an individual but not the system. Instead of focusing
on one case, they ought to carry out indepth investigations and give a realistic
point of view of the situation. Following the flash floods in our area, they
covered the ‘event’ in sensational ways but when they left we had the feeling
that we have been abandoned and left behind to our fate.

Hence, listeners view the role of the media as being more than that of monitorial and
facilitative. For listeners, private radio can play other roles including that of ‘guide dogs’ and as
local relays and ‘development partners’. This is specially the case when it comes to localities which are disenfranchised and cut-off from local decision making powers given that government tends to centralize and concentrate power within its hands.

5.7 Discussion

This chapter has investigated the ways talk radio on private stations is consumed in Mauritius. It has interrogated the extent to which media consumption of talk radio and the media generally allows citizens to connect as they ‘feel their way’ into the stories on talk radio as well as they have expectations of talk radio based on their personal needs and experiential knowledge. In this respect, the chapter has underlined the importance of considering subjectivity/ies and emotions in the way people consume news in the public sphere. Liberal democracy has based its understanding of media consumption and citizenship on rational-critical principles on the same model as the Habermasian public sphere. People are supposed to consume news rationally. However, as highlighted through the focus groups, it is a chimera to oppose rationality to emotionality as people consume news as part of their lived experiences and everyday life which is a mixture of both reason and emotions. Unlike the erroneous assumptions that emotions make bad citizenship, the chapter has highlighted how feelings of subjectivity shape the way people consume news - away from the abstract and complexity of news - and how feelings of anger, solidarity, resentment can trigger social movements which are latent and liminal, providing a leverage for social engagement and action.

Critics argue that emotions open the avenues of populism but it is our contention that even populism cannot be discarded as it is a way to mobilize and engage people despite its complexity and multifarious forms. In the words of Wahl-Jorgensen the importance of emotions represents “a force that may unite or divide, and assist or cloud our deliberations, but is ultimately inseparable from rational decision-making” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019b, p. 3)

Secondly, this chapter has underlined audiences’ expectations of journalism and the need for people to be listened to if journalism and the media are to stay relevant. In Mauritius the media has historically been elitist as embodied by the broadsheet l’express newspaper and other news outlets as well as the state broadcaster. However, talk radio on private stations has opened the
space for deliberation but importantly the need for ordinary people to be heard as a way to maintain social peace. The extension of private radio channels on social media in the forms of hybrid media highlights the fact that talk radio is not only a gatekeeper but has also turned into a gateway as people feel their way into stories of everyday life and allow them to cathartically expiate the injustices that they may have been through.

Hence, instead of only acting as a ‘watchdog’, the need for the media to be ‘guide dog’ has been underlined. As highlighted in the chapter, people experience disconnection from the media when the latter misrepresent them or that the media only construes its action to its monitorial role or watchdog function. The need to think of news consumption beyond the terms of truth, fact and reality also underpin the need to think of journalism beyond its monitorial and watchdog role towards forms of slow journalism or local journalism or even ‘developmental’ journalism. The need for slow journalism is a way to reassert the importance of journalism and to think of journalism beyond its traditional confines.

Finally, the importance of rethinking media ethics is highlighted in mediated societies characterized by hybrid media systems. Media ethics is based on the conception that media ethics concern journalism as a profession. Living well in and through media, in the formulation of Couldry, highlights the need for an ethics of mediation that foregrounds the social responsibility of the media but also the duties and obligations of citizens as “not only does media practice matter to all of us, the media production process potentially involves all of us” (Couldry, 2010, p. 67). Importantly, the need for media ethics “would have to be located in relation to local histories of cultural, political and social struggle, as well as the power relations underlying contemporary global-local exchanges” (Wasserman, 2010b, p. 75). This also underlines the importance to address listeners as communities of struggles and solidarities.

5.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have focused on mediation and argued that citizens often consume information and news because it has a personal and subjective appeal to them and we have also argued that, instead of considering socialization as a reason-based process, there is the need to also consider the subjectivity/ies and emotions that get into news consumption as
people feel their way into the story of the media. In the context of mediation and media consumption, we have underlined the need for a rethink of media ethics as not being the sole responsibility of journalists but citizens equally. In the next chapter, journalists will be interviewed to understand the way the profession is being redefined in the context of mediated societies and the need for journalism to be considered as part of an interpretive community.
6: **Mauritian Talk Radio Journalists as Interpretive Communities**

Professionalism is the dominant frame through which journalism is traditionally approached (Singer, 2015) as the Enlightenment values of freedom, rationality and truth are foregrounded (Schudson and Anderson, 2009). Notwithstanding the liberal claim that the media serves purposes of participation and deliberation, there is a disjuncture between the professional paradigm of journalism and the contemporary social realities of journalists increasingly in connection with audiences as much as the latter is willing to be producers of information as “citizen journalists” (Robinson and DeShano, 2011). This chapter attempts to understand the extent to which talk radio journalists’ professional norms and practices are being reconfigured and recalibrated in the context of audience participation and heteronomy.

The data consist of semi-directed interviews of five Mauritian journalists who are full-fledged talk radio journalists of different private radio stations, and the chapter aims to understand their practice and the departures from the normative values of journalism as established in the liberal paradigm. Loosely aligning themselves on strategies of segregation and co-optation (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2015) Mauritian talk radio journalists view their practice as fluid and relational with the public. The chapter argues that talk radio journalists’ role can be conceptualized as shaping “interpretive communities” (Zelizer, 1993) as through “ways of relating to others” (Rodny-Gumede, 2014, p. 64) mainly through co-constructed meanings and emotional labor they uphold communitarian values in a Mauritian context upended by socio-economic inequalities and the unfinished project of nation-building.

To start with, it would be trite to view Mauritian journalism as a commercially oriented, market-based activity, especially regarding private media stations owned by media owners and corporations driven by profit motives. The uniformity of programmes on private radio may point to the dynamics of commercialization and low risk taking in programming and the lack of diversity and pluralism thereof. Private radio stations trade mainly in advertising and compete in the same broadcast market category as the state broadcaster which, despite receiving a monthly public levy, also taps into the advertising market throwing down the gauntlet to the private stations. Under much structural economic constraints1, talk radio journalists would
presumably be drawn to the craft of journalism literally as “merchants of truth” (Abramson, 2019) as they appeal to elite and profitable “market segments” (Wasserman, 2005, p. 164). In a similar instrumental view of the market, they would be pursuing audience engagement as a way to gain audience attention to generate revenues.

It is a simplistic and easy truism to hold that commercialism encouraged by media owners can turn news media professionals merely into clickbait journalists as an occupational activity. Such a view can be contested given that it is grounded in “a narrow conception of the public and its interests” (Wasserman, 2010a, p. 244) and neglects the lived experiences and motivations of talk radio journalists as a political category. Against the stance of the “normative biases” (Zelizer, 2004) of journalism, this chapter states that Mauritian talk radio journalists are more akin to shapers of mediated communities that extend their relationships beyond the closed understandings of professionalism that more often “disconnects journalism from its context, leaving its entanglements in webs of social relations unexplored” (Carlson, 2017, p. 3).

There are contradictory impulses at the heart of journalism’s professionalism as journalists are supposed to support market-driven media as much as they are encouraged to support public deliberation (Garman, 2005). They are called upon to work in the interest of the elites as much as they are summoned to social transformation. The paradox in the Mauritian context is that private radio may belong to media conglomerates but their journalists are themselves largely progenies of working-class communities. Even as they engage in the marketplace to serve the interest of elite categories as part of commercialism, this does not happen at the expense of relationality and interdependence with their audiences (Carlson, 2017, p. 23). This may also point to the paradoxes of capitalist media which may as much be profitable as to develop an economy of relationality.

Rather than a mere political-economic approach which sees journalism only as the business of reporters and media entrepreneurs, a cultural approach to journalism reveals that, for journalism to be socially relevant in the everyday lives of their listeners, talk radio journalists deviate from the professional norms of the liberal framework of journalism. In other words, as “interpretive communities” Mauritian talk radio journalists’ attempt to view their craft as
articulated “in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems” (Zelizer, 2004) as their journalism explore communitarian values that provide for the transformation of society. James Carey (1988) contends that communication is not just the transmission of information from one person to the other but a power struggle over the representation of the world. Rather than based on individualism, such representation is understood in the words of Christians as “a community of persons in relation” (Communication Cache, 2020). Berkowitz and TerKeurst hold that “interpretive communities” are mediated and socially constituted groups along meanings which are “constructed, shared, and reconstructed by members of social groups in the course of everyday life” (1999, p. 125).

The current state of journalism in Mauritius as reflected globally demonstrates that the landscape “represents a break with the monopoly of journalistic storytelling” (Anden-Papadopoulos and Pantti, 2013) as talk radio journalists shun away from any form of isolation and as new actors actively enter the fields of news production and consumption. Notwithstanding the “newfound diversity, hybridity, and [...] messiness (Deuze, 2019, p. 2) of journalism, in the Mauritian context audience participation on air in talk radio programmes is more structured and formalized than participation on social media despite the interconnected and hybrid character of the platforms. Yet, in the face of much tension and competing demands between the maintenance and the extension of the boundary what are the lived experiences of talk radio journalists with regard to audience participation and engagement in a media ecosystem which is fragile and liquid? What do the media-democracy links highlight about the practice of talk radio journalism? To what extent do talk radio journalists negotiate to create communities even as the latter may be fleeting? And how does this impact and/or alter the notion of ‘professionalism’ as traditionally understood?

6.2 Boundary-Work

The metaphor of the boundary can be helpful to make sense of the transformations that are taking place in journalism even though participation in journalism is inherently fluid, contingent and a “never settled” object (Carlson, 2017, p. 23). Wahl-Jorgensen observes that the “idea of boundary work has been particularly crucial in understanding perceived incursions on
[journalism’s] professional turf” (2015, p. 175). Liberal understandings of the boundary in journalism emphasize binaries which oppose journalists to publics, hard to soft news, public interest to national interest, rational to emotional experience, objectivity to subjectivity and individuals to communities. However, a dynamic and fluid understanding of the boundary shifts in journalism emphasizes the conjoining epistemology of journalism based on “not only, but also” (Chadwick, 2017, p. 4, my emphasis) as the hybrid nature of journalism is highlighted.

The rhizome is a metaphor which goes “up, down, sideways” (Manovich, 2005) and the “rhizomic” boundaries in journalism are useful as they allow us to avoid superficial categories and oppositions which do little justice to the complexity of everyday life in journalism. For instance, oftentimes, mainstream media is opposed to community media on the ground that the latter is more oriented towards the social dimensions of community than towards professional journalism often conceived as “‘News is what the editor says it is’” (Zelizer, 2017, p. 13). This opposition is counterproductive as this chapter highlights the hybrid character of talk radio journalism which caters for community purposes as through participation by both talk radio journalists and non-journalists ‘community media’ features, and values are factored and incorporated into mainstream talk radio journalism. In other words, Mauritian mainstream private radio stations can be considered as a platform where “people from different types of movements and struggles meet and collaborate” (Carpentier, Lie and Servaes, 2001, p. 13) and this is more so given that there is no community radio licensees in Mauritius. In this way, “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1987) are created. These ‘communities’ may be temporary and fleeting and yet they activate the personal and collective bonds in-between publics (Papacharissi, 2015).

This is especially so as in the Mauritian context where radio broadcasting is a duopoly with state and private broadcasting, and there is no specific licence category given to ‘community radio’. The representation of private radio as a “hybrid media system” incorporates both elements of mainstream and ‘community media’ as “feelings of community” are produced and upheld as citizens are allowed to participate as ‘persons-in-relation’ forming communities. Such
a view challenges notions of professionalism as conventionally understood as journalism is viewed as top-down rather than reciprocal.

Carlson underlines the orthodoxy that may prevail as “in spite of the looseness of journalism as [a] distinct activity” and given the institutional position of journalism in society, “journalists very much view their work as a practice of great social importance and defend it against incursions from non-journalists” (2015, p. 9). Through strategies of “boundary maintenance” (Bishop, 2004, p. 31) journalists claim freedom and autonomy and wall off outsiders as a way to maintain “greater authority and legitimacy in the eyes of its audiences” (Harrington, 2012, p. 6). As rightly suggested by Wasserman “these attempts may only serve to reaffirm a journalistic orthodoxy and police the boundaries of ‘professional’ journalism, rather than reconnect journalism with its audiences” (2019, p. 230).

6.3 Media-Democracy Link

In similar ways, the media-democracy link conventionally advances the view that the media has to hold governments to account and that, through rational deliberation and consensus-making, the media contributes to enhance the public sphere (Chuma, Wasserman and Bosch, et al, 2017). An unfettered press “opens the way for a potentially critical or even adversarial stance” (Christians et al, 2009, p. 143). Normative values like objectivity, accuracy, impartiality and verification are foregrounded as part of the procedural values of journalism to meet “standards concerning checking the facts, being critical of news sources and being impartial” (Stromback, 2005, p. 339).

At the same time, affective and emotional labor that is invested in journalism is rendered invisible and undermined as “emotion/reason dichotomy [is] employed to assist in drawing the line between ‘quality’ journalism and popular” (Pantti, 2010). Such an opposition between quality and popular journalism and rationality and emotions is counterproductive as Wahl-Jorgensen observes that “storytelling does not occur at the expense of conventional practices of objectivity, but rather operates in tandem with these practices, as she posits a “strategic ritual of emotionality” which enhances the power of the stories because of its ability to cultivate compassion or feeling with others” (2019, p. 169, original emphasis). In other words,
journalism provides an “emotional compass that we - as audience members and citizens - can use to orient ourselves in a confusing world” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, p. 10).

Rationality does not need to be opposed to emotions as “participatory journalism” or “citizen journalism” often reflects a personal and subjective account based on storytelling which can contrast and dispute the “‘dry, distancing, lecture-like mode of address’ of traditional journalism” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2015, p. 171). Hence, the need to render visible the emotional and community features of journalism and to consider the ‘emotional turn’ in the public sphere. The bottom-line being that of acknowledging the “limitations of the [liberal model] and accept[ing] that the media cannot claim to represent the citizenry in all its diversity unless it allows a greater role for citizens to co-construct news agendas and collaborate in the narrativisation of everyday lived experience” (Chuma, Wasserman, Bosch et al, 2017).

6.4 Media Freedom

Putting tough questions to authorities, scrutinizing political institutions form part of the elements of watchdog journalism. This adversarial stance entails that journalists carry out investigative reporting that unearths corruption and police the boundaries of the profession by being confrontational and upholding the ‘public interest’. Such a task is arguably achieved by being on the ‘attack’ against power holders, even though the scrutiny seems to be exercised more pronouncedly towards the government than towards business and markets entities.

Article 12 of the Mauritian Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, even though press freedom is not mentioned explicitly in the constitution. Media laws are part of the legislative arsenal that condition the workings of the media as journalism practice, mainly its lapses and shortcomings, are penalized under the criminal law. Generally, press freedom is equated to journalists exercising the profession ‘responsibly’, implying within the industry codes of ethics and legal parameters defined by the laws. The imperative for journalists to be responsible comes as a regular reminder to them, if not an injunction, by the Mauritian political class who often chastise them for their adversarial reporting. In the same vein, the existence of colonial laws like the Official Secrets Act forbid public officials from revealing official information to journalists as much as there is no freedom of information laws.
Adhering to and cherishing the ideals of media freedom form part of the preoccupations of journalists who consider journalism as a key social institution. Direct confrontation is generally seen as part of a healthy democratic set-up that determines the media and state relations. Considering the ideals of the profession and difficulties to access information, Mauritian talk radio journalists work with media intermediaries like press attachés and other public officials who are sources of power and information. Cooperation and conflicts with the latter are part of the journalistic practice even though the possibility of enlisting the support of the audience is much valued and appreciated.

One talk radio journalist observed the following

Without criticism and dissent, there is no democracy, and it is our duty to investigate and to expose that which is hidden about maladministration and wrongdoings. Decision-makers are very nervous about criticism from the media and are averse to being grilled and held to account... There are press attachés whose interaction with journalists starts on the premise that everything has to be confidential.... and several of our emails to them are left unanswered.... To sort out such issues, you need to ascertain that you get the audience to react over the problems that you are reporting on... In case you do not have the cooperation of press attachés and government sources, you can ask members of the audience to call and comment on the inaction or inefficiency of these officials... As much as you can get the attention of your audience, you have an important ally on your side... who acts as a defense and a moral conscience to your work.

This form of popular build-up consisting of audiences’ support does not compromise the ‘rituals of objectivity’ (Tuchman, 1972) to which journalists are supposed to abide by. Such polarizations are considered to be healthy. Exercising as watchdog journalists does not entail only reasoned and dispassionate approaches but also include emotional labor insofar as the emotional reactions of audiences can set into motion ‘acts of citizenship’ in that “ordinary people becomes agents with voices that [...] shape news narratives” (Garman and Wasserman, 2017, p. 5). Soliciting the reactions of audiences as much as enlisting them as public witnesses requires an emotional labor on the part of talk radio journalists. Instead of a direct ‘clash’ with
Popular Talk Radio and Everyday Life in Mauritius

sources of power, inviting audiences to ‘call out’ their inefficiency or abusive attitude is a means for talk radio journalists to act as watchdogs by relying on the power of the multitude. This “outsourcing of emotions” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019) to non-journalists allows the latter to express emotions and talk radio journalists to comment on these emotions.

However, not all talk radio journalists view their role as being that of a vehement critical voice against government. Other talk radio journalists tend to view their role as less confrontational and more ‘developmental’ as they purport to ‘only’ act as a bridge between the state and civil society in the ‘national interest’. They envision their role as ‘mediators’ working in a dialogical and ‘constructive’ way with public institutions, without aggravating further the conflicts and polarizations in society. This posture may be less popular amongst some talk radio journalists but the adoption of a ‘developmental’ posture does not mean that the power of the media is forsaken, and that the audience is not mobilized as a ‘powerful resource’ to ‘witness’ and ‘watch-over’ the attitudes of authorities.

One talk radio journalist opined that

Private radio is a fourth estate and it has the power to force change but it is in the best interest of political stakeholders or their representatives to intervene promptly on the airwaves given the number of people listening to radio programmes... In some ways, we are a parliament of the people. We work with several ministries like the ministry of housing and social security which deal mainly with the public at large. A problem which is not resolved on air can become a big national issue embarrassing further the minister or the political class. It is better that they [the authorities] act quickly and work collaboratively with the media... Consider that our role is that of a bridge or a facilitator between the public and the authorities.... We do not aim to be directly offensive but seek the collaboration of public institutions.

In a similar vein, in the spirit of Stephane Hessel’s (2010) “Time for Outrage: Indignez-vous!” talk radio journalists are also discerning about social injustice and this does not forbid them from getting emotional and expressing anger, outrage and/or sympathy over issues related to the lived experiences of citizens. The ‘street’ types of journalism provided through audiences’
and talk radio hosts’ interactions are clearly different from the narratives provided by government sources. It is most probably in the gap between the lived experiences of ‘ordinary’ citizens as provided by phone-in callers and the official versions of authorities that the legitimacy of talk radio journalists rests as one talk radio interviewee observed that anger is a ‘positive’ resource that can be used by journalists to bring change and social justice.

[We aim to] do everything possible to help the needy and the vulnerable, give them a voice and to fight with all our force against social injustice. It may be that at times we show a slight aggressiveness, discontent or even anger but we aim to change the course of events by putting an end to police brutality, restore the pension of an elderly, ensure the building of houses for the needy, etc. These are everyday battles and they are waged passionately out of the guts of our commitment to the profession.

Another talk radio interviewee remarked that more than a profession, his work has morphed into a social calling:

Many do not realize the place that these radio stations have come to occupy in the lives of citizens. It may appear banal to fight against something wrong or even ordinary to provide assistance to help someone. It is in the banality of our everyday battles that we gain our legitimacy. We attend to the social needs of people... a woman battling cancer can count on us as much as the elderly who has not received her pension... It is said that Mauritius tops the United Nations World Happiness Report. This is total bull***t as people undergo a lot of sufferings because of social injustices and you just have to talk to people on the street to find out... Apart from the years of political embers which were grounded in revolutionary ideas [in the wake of Mauritian political liberation and independence], the arrival of private radio stations has triggered a process of social change. It is the dysfunctions of the administrative and bureaucratic systems that have made our programmes popular.

The above views reveal the contextual realities and complexities of working in the Mauritian media environment. Private media and journalists who are too adversarial in the libertarian understanding of media freedom can be tagged as affiliated to opposition parties and
opposition media and can be directly the subjects of political retaliations, if not political revenge and boycott. On the other hand, government officials may have expectations from the media to fulfill ‘patriotic’ and developmental goals in the ‘national interest’. In 2021, the Mauritian government made amendments to the Independent Broadcasting Act to introduce controversial clauses related to administrative penalties and the setting up of an “Independent Broadcasting Review Panel” with the objectives to “summon a person to appear before the Review Panel” to “(i) to give evidence; or (ii) produce documents in the possession, custody or control of the person or persons named in the summons” (Section, 30H (d)). Section 22c(5) of the 2021 IBA (Amendment) Act reads that “the Authority shall consider the past conduct of a licensee prior to determining whether or not to renew a licence” (IBA Act, 2021).

Such complexities of the Mauritian society can also point to journalists avoiding overt opposition to the political establishment by counting on the power of the multitude constituted by their audiences and popular support. These negotiated positions of being a ‘watchdog’ entails that paradoxically they uphold communitarian values. As much as they subscribe to the normative values of being objective, they also “outsource” the emotional labor to their audiences as an “injunction to care” about important issues” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, p. 58) and as part of a ‘community’. In similar ways, the labor of emotions point to the fact that their journalism can be less distant and more engaged than provided under the liberal framework of journalism. This relationship with audiences is not manipulative or opportunitistic as some critics may say. Rather it points to forms of journalism - adversarial as well as more collaborative - where individual journalists work as persons engaged in society and with the collectives represented by their audiences to shape ‘communities of interest’ that may point to ‘ubuntu’ journalism as the emphasis is shifted from “defining the media’s role primarily in terms of its relation with the state to that of its relation with the community” (Wasserman and De Beer, 2005, p. 200).

6.5 Truth

At the outset, journalists are considered to be the honest brokers of truth (Deuze, 2005) even though Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) refer to truth as “the first and most confusing principle” in
journalism. The trade in journalism is based on an understanding of truth that rests on methods of gathering facts, verification and reporting that ascertain the ‘expertise’ of journalists to meet a specific deadline. Through the principles of the 5W’s and H (Steyn and De Beer, 2004) journalists are supposed to report truth in “functional” (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007) ways insofar as the reporting is based on “agreed-upon methods of objectivity” that is sourced “from official quotations and documents” (Robinson and De Shano, 2011, p. 7).

Yet, truth has become even more difficult and complex to discern in the era of ‘fake news’. Fuchs (2020) notes that there is “no accepted definition” of fake news, if not that in the post-truth world, the latter has been weaponized to take on “credible sources”. Generally the term ‘false news’ refers to online content that “lacks journalistic norms” and has the deliberate intention to deceive and malign people. The phenomenon of fake news, academically discussed under the label of false news, is an illustration of “critical incidents” (Tandoc, Jenkins and Craft, 2019) in the information ecology provided by social media and sets journalists distinctly “apart from other groups in society” (Robinson and DeShano, 2011, p. 2) as verifiers and fact-checkers. This is also true of Mauritian talk radio journalists inasmuch as they stand as news verifiers debunking false news, mis- and dis-information even though they do so as part of their routine work as there is no independent fact-checking agency or industry or international collaboration to debunk false news as such in Mauritius. Nonetheless, as “critical incidents”, false news gives the possibility to journalists to reflect on their practices, values and professional identity and conversely to reassert their role as “interpretive communities”, allowing their positioning as trusted sources of information.

It is especially during national and international events or crises that rumors, false news and disinformation tend to spike. Events like elections, flash floods, the prolonged lockdowns related to the outbreak of the pandemic Covid-19 and the Covid-19 vaccination campaigns tend to be fertile ground for the spread of false news and conspiracy theories. These spikes are exacerbated when political communication from government sources often seems to elicit interrogations, confusion and lack of decisiveness more than any other thing. The rise of false news has, to an extent, vindicated the role of journalists as fact-checkers and news
professionals who through “‘news repair’ of contrary stories” and checking at primary sources through “exclusive access to the power elites, [...], have this power to explain the news to society” (Robinson and De Shano, 2011, p. 3).

One talk radio interviewee noted the following about news verification and production emphasizing the role of talk radio journalists in having ‘several deadlines’ upholding news as a discursive construct.

Information on social media is unverified, unfounded and characterized by its virality.... In fact, information which is fake circulates very easily and catches people’s attention in disproportionate ways and is amplified through sharing... and it is up to us to counter such falsehoods. People are not always critical thinkers and media literate as they tend to live in their bubbles that comfort their presuppositions... In an attempt to be first in reporting and to livestream on Facebook, even journalists fall into these traps given the race to a scoop... The ‘advantage’ about talk radio is that, if you misreport in a radio news bulletin, you have the possibility to correct it at the next bulletin... and on social media. Unlike newspapers, you do not have one single deadline but several deadlines with radio bulletins which are broadcast every hour and relayed on social media. Debunking fake news is not an easy task but as regards misinformation or wrong information, with talk radio, you have the possibility to retract a piece of news, to correct a mistake on air and to relay the retraction as much as you can continue the discussion online...

The above statement points to an understanding of truth that is not “certainty” (Fuller, 2001) and that does not necessarily rush to meet a specific deadline but a conception of news that is provisional and a work-in-progress. Such work-in-progress considers news not in an abstract form but as relational and fluid. Scanlan calls for a rethinking of the deadline in journalism noting that “in another of those delicious paradoxes that make writing such a continually challenging and rewarding activity, we see the writing task not as one of making a deadline but rather a series of deadlines that every piece of writing requires” (2003, original emphasis).
Fact-checking and debunking fake news are crucial but are limited in perspective as to what journalism ought to be. That journalists act as fact-checkers as they source information from official power centers is hardly satisfying as audiences feel mistrust towards liberal institutions, including towards journalists who are perceived as part of the elite society. Hence, the need for journalists to reconnect with audiences and the lived experiences of people. Wasserman (2020) accurately highlights the fact that the fight against “the “infodemic” of misinformation” cannot be won and truth upheld if journalists do not take seriously the lived experiences and everyday lives of people.

In Mauritius, people, especially the marginal populations, often call on talk journalists when they have experienced discrimination, resentment, humiliation and use talk radio as a catharsis to obtain social support and solidarity. As part of social reciprocity and the everyday lives of listeners, journalists have become people to whom they narrate their lives as much as journalists are called upon to put on the line their own sensitivity and personal ethics with regard to the experiences of truths shared by their listeners. The authenticity of people who have been ‘hurt in their flesh’ cannot be undermined as much as the ‘intimacy’ that they share with journalists and such ‘intimisation’ is “marked by the blurring of boundaries between the private and the public, the personal and the professional” (Steensen, 2016, p. 3). The shared intimacy hinges on psychological and moral support to the needy but also a duty of sincerity and care towards them. In other words, the limited understanding of media harm as often understood in codes of ethics of the media industry is just too skewed and unproductive. Instead a compassionate and caring approach to the lived experiences of people is based on “moral literacy” understood as “moral behavior in interactive terms, with reporters, scriptwriters and producers operating in the same arena as citizens themselves” (Christians, 2004, p. 251).

One talk radio journalist interviewee observed the following with regards to the ‘affective’ relationships that they create with listeners, especially with regard to personal and reciprocal relationships.
As talk radio journalists, you may be a social influencer but more than that you build personal ties with your listeners as you maintain close relationships with them. Some travel and call from faraway [places] to meet us... We need to be true to ourselves and cannot fake our relationship with listeners by giving them false hopes. We often have to share their personal stories as they confide to us and we need to be understanding given that they have their own problems and have come to us to request help... Given that I am a mother myself, I have my maternal instinct and wear my ‘mother cap’ to understand their problems, especially their domestic and family problems.... Often we also make ‘calls for solidarity’, for example, related to providing the educational materials to children whose families are in poverty... providing a wheelchair to a handicapped person or making appeals for financial contributions to help improve the living conditions of a person whose house has accidentally caught fire... These calls are done on air but we have our small group of followers online. These calls for solidarity aim to help people and to foster healthy and sustainable communities by appealing to the generosity of people. We try to heal people who have been through personal and social tragedies, different problems related to drug addiction, homelessness, drug addiction... and somewhat bring some respite from the blazes of life.

Hence, beyond the ‘calls for solidarity’, there are “behind-the-scenes” and “below the surface” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, p. 57) activities that entail the personal ethics and morality of talk journalists as much as a sincerity of purpose. At times the latter may consider their listeners as “very demanding” and at other times as “clientelist”, and their relationship with their listeners may have an emotional toll on their own lives.

Understanding that journalism is not only about fact-checking also entails that journalists have intuitive and perceptual decisions regarding the news judgment process. Relating to a journalism of everyday life requires research and fieldworks that can be ‘time-consuming’, unlike desk or “telephone” journalism that can become dominant in newsrooms. Research and on-the-ground works bring journalists closer to people and allow them to meet up with people
in communities that provide them with first-hand accounts from their lived experiences. One talk radio highlighted the following:

Often journalists complain about not finding newsworthy stories... however, at the radio station, often your callers are a source of information.... Take the example of a mother who complained that [on paper] her child has been adopted when in reality that was not the case. It is the officers at the civil status services who messed up... causing prejudice to the family. We have had to go on the field to meet the representatives at the civil status office, ask the services of an attorney and make a request so that the mistake is corrected. On our investigation, we found that the mother who contacted us was not the only one in that situation as we met with other aggrieved parents.... Following that, we decided to make a programme focusing on the mistakes of the civil status services and providing advice as to how to correct such mistakes... At the same time, the complaint of the mother became a news item in our bulletin...

Another aspect related to private radio talk programmes is that it has allowed and facilitated the use of the Kreol language, the most commonly used and shared language amongst Mauritians. The arrival of private radio stations and their talk programmes has without any coercion provided space for ‘the appropriation of the language of the people’ on air and put talk radio journalists on an equal footing with their audiences. This has given Mauritians the possibility to express themselves without difficulty in their own language and to make their case forcefully on air as much as to consolidate ‘Mauritianism’. The use of the language has allowed the restoration of the dignity of the ordinary caller who, literate or not, has the possibility to maintain horizontal communication (Poindexter, 2016) talking directly to authorities and receiving instant comments on air as well as follow-up administrative actions thereof.

Consider the comment of one talk radio journalist:

The use of Kreol language has easily entered the homes of Mauritian with the arrival of private radio without even anyone noticing. This has been achieved quietly without any political contention. In the past, Mauritian political alliances have hit the wall over the
use of the Kreol mother tongue in broadcasting. At the national broadcaster, journalists used to talk in French, even with members of the audiences. However, with private radio, the use of Kreol has put down a psychological and social barrier to the point that anyone can get on air and interact with us. In this way, common Mauritians are able to use the language as a political resource to make their case and this has wrought dignity and worth, especially to people who are marginalized.

6.6 Journalistic Skills

Talk radio journalists contend that they are supposed to show professional skills in carrying out interviews and interact with audiences. At the heart of the programmes, they argue, is the audience who determines the ‘success’ of programmes by the number of calls received from listeners, the number of people watching their programmes live as well as by the kinds of interaction and collaboration that they get on- and off-air as well as online. If journalism practice is based on the rule of the inverted pyramid (De Beer, 2004), the practice of storytelling is what characterizes exchanges between talk radio journalists and their audiences. Based on narration, journalists create spaces for talk and deliberation about the experiences as much as the opinions of people. The sharing of feelings through storytelling is typical of talk radio journalism and personal storytelling can be considered as a “guarantor of authenticity, and relatedly, as a means of cultivating compassion” as much as such storytelling techniques “have the capacity to foster new forms of community, based on an understanding of concrete, lived experience” (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019, p. 66).

The pace of communication in society has increased dramatically. Harmut Rosa (2013) refers to this “acceleration” as “the shrinking of the present”. Generally, the fast pace of media impacts negatively on the professional identity of journalists as they have less time to investigate “outside their usual circle of interest and influence” (Wasserman, 2019). Taking time to listen and to self-reflect as part of “slow journalism” may point to the need for a different journalism than the one usually practiced at a fast pace. Craig observes that to “promote the values of slow journalism is to care about those who practice the craft and to recognize the value of what the practice provides, to care about how journalist interact with others, and it is motivated by
the recognition that care is required in the practice as it explores, critiques, and communicates what is happening in the world” (2015, p. 462). Such a journalism of a different temporality from the traditional one drives “its focus to those on the margins as people of respect and dignity” (Wasserman, 2010, p. 86) as much as it interrogates the extent to which journalism is providing space to people’s realization of their capacity in a diverse and multicultural world.

One talk radio journalist observed the following:

There are people who live in destitution and there is the need to tackle such problems as poverty from the grassroots. Inequality is real as there are people who work during the day to feed themselves at night [....] I have been to an area called African Town [in the South of Mauritius]. I have witnessed children walking around without any shoes or shirts, the shack houses are made up with a few corrugated iron sheets as the ground serves as a floor to these houses... It is unbelievable, that in the 21st century, people are living in such conditions. Do the authorities have a responsibility? Should we [radio stations] focus on the revenue streams that cater only for the elites? Or as media people, are we supposed to care?

The need for slow journalism is about going deep and providing substance to journalism by encouraging the work of local non-governmental organisations as part of community listening and upholding solutions. This form of communication is based on the “importance of the ‘politics of listening’ in organizing and analyzing community projects for speaking up and talking back to the news media” (Dreher, 2010, p. 96). Such community media interventions operate in respect to those historically marginalised from public communication.

One talk radio journalist observed the following:

There is need for both kind of news - fast and slow forms of journalism. We need to be able to practice different varieties of journalism, not only reporting but also going in-depth, looking into the rehabilitation of prisoners, street children and poverty alleviation and, in this way, we aim to be close and locally engaged by helping through participation.
These communitarian values based on reciprocity, participation and human dignity are not opposite to liberal values but are complementary. In considering the poor and other marginal populations, slow journalism can provide for an engaged journalism that is at the heart of communities and that is fulfilling with regard to the needs of society.

6.7 Discussion

The Mauritian model of journalism is traditionally conceived on a liberal model of Western inspiration. Values of autonomy, objectivity and social responsibility are considered as part of the professional norms that define journalism. And yet talk radio journalism indicates a change in the texture of journalism, making it more relational and participatory. Journalists inscribing their practice in the everyday lives of their listeners do not do so out of sheer privilege but as a way of making their journalism stay relevant and meaningful. Through participation journalists create “interpretive communities” whereby meanings are shaped collectively with audiences and an ethics of care is aspired to in the practice of journalism. Talk radio journalists tend to view themselves as ‘insiders’ as the webs of their journalism weave into the lived experiences of their audiences.

This journalism which is based on reciprocity and mutuality is not practiced at the expense of the liberal notions of journalism. Rather they are complementary. Understanding that journalists put emotional labor into their work and that news is discursively constructed points to a journalism that relates to the notion of ‘ritual communication’ as advanced by James Carrey. Hence, journalism is apprehended as much as “a cultural means of identity and community and self-expression - as it is about the functional transmission of information” (Lewis, 2019)

In similar ways, that journalists “outsource” emotions to their audiences as a way to exercise their role as watchdogs points to a framework in talk radio journalism where reason and emotions are complementary and not in binary forms. Approaching journalism as a ‘ritual communication’ points to an epistemology in journalism that is relational and that is people-centered instead of being solely preoccupied with elite and official sources.
6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the shifting boundaries of talk radio journalism and that has argued that, for it to stay relevant and resilient talk radio journalists have to extend beyond the traditional understandings of journalism to incorporate the participation of audiences into their practice. Through strategies of cooptation and segregation, talk radio journalists position themselves as shapers and interpreters of communities that challenge professional understandings of journalism.
7: Conclusion: Voices, Ethics and Listening

This study has sought to explore the multiple ways Mauritian talk radio programmes, especially their morning talk shows which are routinized into the lives of people and the implications of such routinization for citizenship, democracy and development. Private radio stations, it is argued, enjoy considerable popularity because they facilitate participation of ordinary people, especially the marginalized, giving them access and the possibility to anchor the problems of everyday life into the broadcasting schedules of morning talk radio shows, allowing them to define their perspectives into wider contexts. Through approaches using methods such as discourse analysis and phronesis, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, this study has sought to get insights into the participatory cultures of talk radio, its textures rooted in experience and meanings and the implications for citizenship, democracy and development.

First, it has attended to the question as to why people, especially the laity, participate in and through morning talk radio, enquiring about the motivations and incentives for such participation and uses. It has attempted to understand the underlying rationale and dynamics behind the mediation of talk radio in Mauritius, arguing that talk radio constitutes in itself an active space of the political which seeks voices from ordinary and peripheral spaces and confronts them to powerholders to create possibilities for engagement and effective citizenship.

The originality of Mauritian talk radio lies in the fact that it provides voice to people as the latter are able to use talk radio to narrate their experiences, to talk back to structures of power and to look for alternative life projects. Tapping into the resources and stories of everyday life, talk radio is able to position itself as a popular platform of dissent and disagreement as it widens the gap to polarize and escalate the conflicts into social contexts as much as it works concurrently towards narrowing the gap to de-escalate and settle the confrontations temporarily. It is argued that this double articulation of escalation and de-escalation is political in the sense that it acknowledges differences and political subjectivities in the forms of a “vibrant clash of political positions and an open conflict” (Mouffe, 1993, p. 6) as much as a temporary settlement thereof. The resolution to the conflict is partial inasmuch as the political
identities of participants on talk radio are conceived not in essentialist but in fluid ways as these identities would morph in other hegemonic and relational contexts. In brief, talk radio becomes a “battlefield on which hegemonic projects confront one another, with no possibility of a final reconciliation” (Mouffe, 2018, p. 64). Through conflictual talks and interactions, talk radio forays into the political, defined by Mouffe (2018) as a site for hostilities and struggles operationalized through a frontier between ‘us’ and ‘them’ within an ‘agonistic’ framework that views such conflicts as irreducible and settlements as never fully achieved.

Voices on talk radio are able to take adversarial positions and, through orality, to make claims to both material resources and to human dignity in a Mauritian context where social injustice and inequality is ripe, especially amongst the working class in the informal sectors and those in the care economy. Covid-19 has undoubtedly exacerbated these inequalities. It is argued that the voices on morning talk radio are performed through callers’ rational and emotional “works” and constitute “acts of citizenship” (Isin and Nielsen, 2008) in that they are forms of “everyday experience of political participation” (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham, 2010, p. 43) the latter proliferate outside the field of politics and allow ordinary people to discursively factor their hopes, desires, fears, anger and aspirations into alternative projects and thus to disrupt hegemonic decisions by powerholders. Before their participation on talk radio ordinary people remained subjects and outsiders to policy decisions. In a way, conflictual talks in the pre-talk radio era were suppressed and were unafforded in newspapers and have found new spaces of liberation on talk radio, facilitated through oral networks and the accessibility of the medium.

Research has conventionally addressed the media from a political economic perspective considering the structures and the presumed effects of the media. However, it has less broached the media as routinized into the lives of listeners as cultures that interrogate both elements of structure and agency to ask what do people do to media and what the consequences of such uses are for democracy and citizenship. Through participation on private radio stations, talk about everyday problems as varied as problems related to the delivery of services like pensions or lack of healthcare services at a public medical facility center; the abusive character of an employer or a problem of neighborhood civility or the need for public
solidarity can take a political turn revealing socio-economic disparities as they are narrated daily in the subjectivities of callers. To this powerholders and political agents are forced to address people not as masters or subjects but as persons in relation who disagree. In the search for a midway, antagonism is turned into agonism - i.e. the disagreement is not between an ‘enemy’ that has to be eliminated or destroyed but between an ‘adversary’ that is “somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put in question” (Mouffe, 2000, p. 102).

The stories would have remained untold if it were not the antagonistic turned agonistic character of talk radio that mediates through the “micro-discourses and practices” of everyday life (Bakardjieva, 2009). Mauritian talk radio has positioned itself in a significant way as radio trottoir or ‘pavement radio’ (Ellis, 1989) where struggles are enacted, talks are subversive, especially in a Mauritian context of socio-economic inequality exacerbated by elite privileges and ethnic and class differences. To the discontent of its critics who may bemoan its ordinariness and banality, talk on talk radio is not hot air or gossip but “acts of power” (Mouffe, 2005, p. 21) insofar as peoples’ investments in media can defy the logics of powerholders until a temporary settlement is reached, and such recognition of the political involves “a choice between alternatives that are undecidable from a strictly rational point of view” (Mouffe, 2018, p. 62).

Beck poignantly observes that, in the context of our “individualized society”, people are having to negotiate to “seek biographical solutions to systemic contradictions” exacerbated by the lack of institutional solutions (Beck, 2001, p. 264). The personalized storytelling on talk radio constitutes the mainstay of morning talk radio as the traditional shades of the private and the public realms are transgressed and as uncertainty and anxiety characteristic of “risk society” (Beck, 2001) are magnified through mediated conflictual relationships and biographical reflexivity.

For instance, when a 42 year old woman feared that she was having the symptoms of breast cancer¹ and that at the hospital without any mammography test she was administered some pills as a remedy to her ailment, her disappointment and anger on talk radio rang a bell into the
as she sought to publicize and politicize the ‘treatment’ she received. In the absence of proper tests at the hospital, she had to go to a private clinic to have her cancer diagnosed while at the hospital, she was told that her medical records had disappeared as she had narrated on talk radio. Following her story of distress on radio, another breast cancer survivor and activist called-in to provide witness testimony to the lack of service at the hospital, to support and express solidarity to the account of the aggrieved caller. Meanwhile, the station called the hospital administrator as the anger productively amplified into a social and political problem, reinforcing the ‘we/them’ dichotomy as the private matter took a political persona relayed through talk radio and social media platforms. Following her radio intervention, the case of the patient was handed to the hospital administrator who agreed to follow up the case as the patient received the support of the breast cancer activist and the affiliated support of a local non-governmental organization specialized in breast cancer care.

These types of media engagements point to the ways media practices of personalized storytelling connect and transform the subjective experience of callers that “spills out of the social into the political, or at least has a strong potential to do so.” (Bakardjieva, 2009, p. 99). Such participation which amounts to subactivism is neither coerced nor the “15 minutes of fame” in the media spotlight (Van Zoonen, 1998, p. 121), but voluntary participation as participants talk about their private and/or mundane lives and, in so doing, have clear motivations as to what they are in for through their participation and the consequences for their life projects.

As highlighted in the focus groups carried out as part of this study, the affordances of voice allow people to discursively construct the collective through “networked publics” who Papacharissi notes are “publics defined by the sharing of information” (2015, p. 126). The stories on talk radio are made up of information which consists of deliberation and the emotional works of ordinary people, and the “publics” connect and share these stories from dispersed sites of reception. Through “referential” work (Liebes and Katz, 1990) or parasocial interactions stories of participants on talk radio are shared and echo with the experiences of other listeners as recipients “feel their way” (Papacharissi, 2015) into the stories as potential
political agents capable of mobilizations. Rather than thinking of audiences as isolated, the notion of ‘public’ is more relevant to Mauritian talk radio in that listeners connect, engage and are networked through ICT and social media (Chiumbu and Ligaga, 2013), and share as much information as emotional bonds that allow the formations of audiences into “affective publics” (Papacharissi, 2015).

This fluidity of talk breaks open many boundaries, including the private and the public, the subjective and the objective, the insider and the outsider, the self and the collective, highlighting in the words of Barber “the shifting, mobile, elusive space of the ‘popular’ […] which deconstructs all the oppositions” (1997, p. 8). In such hybrid media environments of popular media where boundaries collapse and where the political and the popular converge, Van Zoonen notes the ambiguity that “one can live with the pleasure of continuous surprise and transgression, with the pain of a limitless and ungraspable experience, or with pleasure and pain both alternating and coexisting” (2005, p. 13).

At the outset, talk radio may appear to be an unlikely space for political agency and engagements given its commercial and capitalist inclinations. Bosch underlines the paradoxes of talk radio in South Africa which “despite its interpellation of citizens as consumers” also “illuminates debates about the nature of the public sphere” (2011, p. 75). This is reflective of Mauritian private media where radio stations owned by private people and conglomerates have opened avenues for dissenting voices and conflictual views that have enriched the Mauritian public sphere and democracy with a diversity of voices and opinions in spite of their capitalist and consumerist orientations. Against the grain of those who argue that private radio stations are profit-making industries that promote market consumerism and “voyeuristic altruism” (Chouliaraki, 2011), this study has argued that it is because of the private capitalism of talk radio that a redefinition of the traditional media-state links has been made possible in Mauritius; allowing the challenge to the power and privileges of decision-makers in a context where state controlled media represents the status-quo, if not “sunshine journalism” (Daniels, 2017), that manufactures a doctored image of government. Because of private capitalism and their contradistinction positioning to the state, private radio stations have the ability to
circumvent the powers of the state. Nonetheless, it should not be understated that the private stations are capitalist media that endeavor to economic rationalization and profit-making. The paradox of capitalist media as is the case of Mauritian private radio stations is that as much as they aim to be profitable they need to maintain social relationships.

Mauritian state-controlled media cannot fulfil this role of addressing the social and political concerns of the grassroots given its organization tied to traditional politics and its coziness with state institutions, leaving this vacuum to be filled by private stations through talk. Talk in Mauritian Creole easily fill the air and does not require a lot of financial investments on the part of these private stations, if not that of providing access to their airwaves through telecommunication and ICT devices. Critics may argue that stories on talk radio are selected - often based on their sensationalism - and that they are interrupted and punctuated with advertising for pecuniary purposes.

However, it is the contention of this study that it is the popular-cum commercial orientations of private radio stations that place them at arm’s length from the state and that ground them in the social realm and allowing them to take on conflictual issues from the grassroots. Had it been otherwise, they would have been feudalized to the state and its interests even though amendments to the IBA act in 2021 aim to thwart media freedom and to reprimand. Audiences eagerly engage with private radio because of its social anchorage and ideologically avowed distance from the state and its propaganda, its firebrand counterculture and/or anti-establishment. In other words, private radio envisions itself as an ideological contradictor of state power even though regulatory and economic pressures are increasingly used by the state as attempts to intimidate and police popular media.

The decentralization of voices, from the center and the periphery, has marshalled talk radio into a hotspot of contestations and conflicts that activates everyday agonistic democracy. Unlike South Africa, where the advent of post-apartheid democracy took place in 1994 as part of the so-called ‘fourth wave’ of emerging democracies, Mauritius can be characterized as an ‘old’ democracy that has a tradition of electoral democracy since the nineteen sixties. However, affiliations to traditional political parties have declined as much as voter apathy and cynicism.
have become manifest insofar as the political situation on the island-state converges with that of ‘new democracies’ as citizens face “disillusionment with the integrity and efficiency of existing democratic institutions, polarization” (Voltmer and Sorensen, 2016). Unlike representative democracy that tends to eliminate conflicts as a threat to provide for consensus, the democratization of the airwaves has deepened the Mauritian public sphere. If elections as part of electoral democracy provided people with a vote, Mauritian private radio stations have provided them with a voice. These voices form part of ‘democratisation conflicts’ that allow ordinary people to seek human dignity and access to social resources.

For over more than fifty years of independence, the debates over Mauritian constitutional and electoral reforms have stalled and, if it was not for the democratization of the airwaves, at least for private radio stations knowing that television is still state-controlled. The socio-economic malaise and citizen apathy would have deepened as social and political issues of everyday life would have been pushed back into the shadows. Talk radio has rendered audible the stories that constitute the struggles and aspirations of the Mauritian people. The democratization of the airwaves has peacefully channeled otherwise social unrest and political turmoil. It comes as no surprise that a survey conducted by Kantar (Indian Ocean) and published in December 2020 indicated that political apathy and defiance towards traditional political parties are increasing while respondents to the survey indicated that, in matters of trust, they prefer private radio stations and the media generally.

7.2 Affective Publics

This study has also sought to attend to the role and importance of affects and emotions in talk radio. At the outset, in the deliberative model of liberal democracy, rationality is pivotal as reason aims to foster consensus and democratic legitimacy. Deliberation and reason are foregrounded while emotions are supposed to take a backseat (Papacharissi, 2015) as they are considered antithetical to the objectives of rationalization. They are frowned upon on the grounds that they make for ‘bad citizenship’ and that conversely deliberation and rationality provide for ‘good citizenship’ (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019a).
Against the grain of the rational deliberative Western model, Mauritian talk on radio is as much deliberative as it is emotive and emphatic as listeners make use of talk and a spectrum of affects and emotions which includes griefs and tears, fear and anger, humor and laughter and care and solidarity. In the affective and moral economy of talk radio, talk can take as much a deliberative tone as an angry one to show impatience or outrage. At other times, these emotions can turn into passionate talks when they become subversive and ‘carnivalesque’ constructing a “world without rank or social hierarchy” (Fiske, 2008, p. 116), and providing a “glimpse of a community of plenty, freedom and creativity” (Conboy, 2008, p. 114). Without eschewing the importance of rational deliberation which is manifest on talk radio, it is argued that affects, emotions and passions are potent and translate the experience of struggles of the laity.

Talk can become ‘carnivalesque’ on Mauritian talk radio through the impulsion of participants and talk radio journalists who may request members of the public to call-in as “affective publics” to show support and solidarity to a cause; to mock and ridicule an official decision - for example, the punitive transfer of a police officer who fined a close relative of a minister. Rather than mere audiences, listeners are not just publics (Chiumbu and Ligaga, 2013) but sentient and “affective publics” which “are mobilized and connected or disconnected through expressions of sentiment” (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 125). If in the morning talk radio emotions exult around personal and social issues; the same carnival of passionate talk takes place in the afternoon talk shows when participants call-in to take position around broad political matters to the notable difference that morning talk radio affords a larger diversity of voices and allows both symbolic and material outcomes.

How to account for these affects and emotions in talk radio, especially the morning editions and their impact on democracy? To discard them as counterproductive to deliberative liberal democracy leads to a conceptual impasse that does no justice to the somatic character of democratic talk and the struggles of everyday life. Instead of trashing these sentiments, affects and emotions as worthless and irrational, this study has made the case for their consideration as part of a “ritual view of communication” (Carey, 1989). Instead of vilifying them like the
Elephant in the room, a “ritual view of communication” provides an understanding of talk not just as transmission but as “drama [which] does not describe the world but portrays an arena of dramatic forces and action” (Carey, 1989, p. 17). The emotional affordances refer to the popular struggles for dignity and citizenship.

In this study we have not made a clear-cut distinction between feelings, sentiments, affects, emotions and passions as we did not aim at a theory of emotions as much as to understand how emotions are discursively produced and help to frame the everyday life. Through discourses, these feelings and emotions are at times elevated and, at other times, lowered within a community of practice and of shared “modalities of belonging that are articulated as strangers connect and attach to each other” (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 117).

In the words of Wahl-Jorgensen, emotions are “potentially politicized or politicizing interpretation of bodily affect in the context of public discourse” (2019, p. 7, original emphasis). And given their political character, affects and emotions in the media need to be grasped as communicative and strategic resources for persuasion and engagement (Bickford, 2011). Nussbaum points out that there is the need “to grapple with the messy material of grief and love, anger and fear, and the role these tumultuous experiences play in thought about the good and the just” (2001, p. 1-2). To downplay or ignore emotions as irrational and unintelligible is to our own peril because it is the contention of this study that it is by undermining and discarding emotions that people are left disenchanted and disfranchised from the democratic process. In other words, the democratization of the airwaves has allowed the mainstreaming of people’s emotions into broadcasting and through the consideration of these emotions and their moderation, Mauritian talk radio is able to “shape the element of hostility in a way that defuses its potential” (Mouffe, 2005, p. 5). Affects, emotions and passions create a sense of bonding through communities of belonging as people tune into an issue or a particular problem to also “affectively attune with it, that is, to develop a sense of their own place within this particular structure of feeling” (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 118).

This study makes the case that the advent of talk radio has heralded an affective and emotional turn in broadcasting reflective of everyday life. Erstwhile in a pre-talk radio era, communication
between the authorities and citizens remained impersonal, cold and austere. The show up of emotions during interactions on talk radio, it is argued, should be valued not just as psychological states but as “social and cultural practices” (Ahmed, 2004, 9). Suppressing or rejecting these emotions would imply a disjuncture between the ontology of the human being and the fact that recognizing emotions in broadcasting allow their moderation and pacification through peace-making. In the words of Bickford “the ways people think and talk about emotion are part of communicative struggle over meaning and political conflict over public decisions” (2011, p. 1029, original emphasis).

Instead of opposing reason to emotion, Bickford holds that “emotions are indeed central to the kinds of creatures humans are, but what is crucial to moral and political perception is the interaction of emotion and reason” (2011, p. 1026, original emphasis). This holds true with regard to Mauritian talk radio where reason and emotions hinge onto each other, providing the rhythmic flows of talk radio. Talk on talk radio is colored by emotions which are constituents of the teleological compass of judgment as to what citizenship ought to be in contexts of inequality and injustice. For instance, Bickford notes that “anger works as part of accurate and political judgment” (2011, p. 1030) as Ahmed observes that “the ‘aboutness’ of emotions means that they involve a stance on the world, or a way of apprehending the world” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 7). In similar ways, compassion and solidarity point to the type of human that we aim to be and are enacted through the ritual view of communication. Traditionally, journalists shy away from emotions in the name of objectivity as they police the borders of their profession by acting as gatekeepers. However, the interviews carried out with talk radio journalists indicate that they increasingly view their role as reciprocal with the public as they act as gateways and “interpretive communities” (Zelizer, 1993).

This combination of reason and emotions point to the limitations of the deliberative model of democracy in the affective economy of talk radio but also to the shortcomings of the notion of the public sphere as elaborated by Habermas. Instead of solely basing the public sphere on communicative rationality, this study has made the case for an understanding of the public sphere as socially constituted (Thompson, 1995) and worked through emotions. It is also the
contention of this study that emotions plays a critical role in everyday life and are reflective of the struggles of people.

7.3 An Ethics of the Media

Talk radio and the media can be bemoaned on the grounds that they trade in emotions and sensationalism, feigning solidarity with the people without necessarily creating the conditions to humanize them. Likewise, critics may contend that talk radio is an industry of “mass deception” (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2006) that shape mediated emotions and expressions of solidarity condescendingly. For example, pity towards the needy assumes an “arrogant proximity” that presupposes a “false sense of ‘common humanity’” between listeners and distant sufferers (Chouliaraki, 2011, p. 18). Such feelings of pity can cynically mutate into ‘ironic solidarity’ for narcissistic fulfillment and the pleasures of donating rather than for human vulnerability and recognition per se. Put simply, mediated emotions are expedited hurriedly without taking time to engage into the lived experiences of people, especially the vulnerable and the need to listen to them as a way to produce new understanding and knowledge.

In both feelings of pity and ironic solidarity, Chouliaraki opines that there is a “failure of communication” to the extent that, in the “spatialities of solidarity” (Silverstone, 2003), the ‘other’ is an outsider without the media finding the ethical sensitivity and distance to address their problems as injustices that require reflexive judgment and empathetic imagination. In other words, there is no ‘thick’ engagement of the media towards the lived experiences of the everyday. Along a similar line, talk radio can be accused of “outsourcing” pity or solidarity to its listeners - calling upon their ‘generosity’ or ‘good heart’ - rather than assuming an ethical sense of responsibility towards the vulnerable. For instance, the poor can be allowed forays into broadcasting by raising their voices but issues of poverty framed under a rhetoric of pity hardly does any justice to them. So is the case with ‘ironic’ solidarity which offers no possibilities of empowerment and, in both cases, the poor remains trapped as subjects of poverty. Coupled with these impediments, the torrents of emotions and sensationalism on talk radio can appear to de-sensitize the public through the daily “spectacles” of misery and suffering.
How to avoid the traps of “compassion fatigue” (Moeller, 1999) and circumvent the related claims that the media sells emotions and solidarity for purposes of sensationalism and entertainment? What ethically grounded “proper distance” (Silverstone, 2003) should the media have towards distant sufferer(s) that empowers them with new capabilities? In Couldry’s words, “media ethics must address media’s contribution (positive or negative) to the possibilities of living well together” (2006, p. 117). Such an engagement would consider the substantive ways the media can expand the capabilities of people so that they “can lead the kind of lives they value - and have reason to value” (Sen, 1999, p. 18).

This brings forth the third question that this study has attempted to understand: how can talk radio provide for an ethics that goes beyond the mere conventions of media professional ethics to best serve all in society? Beyond existing media codes of ethics, what ethical sensibilities and value systems can guide Mauritian media to contribute to a better life in a context of media abundance and public cynicism about the media sensationalism? Equally, how can the media broaden our understanding of each other in the multicultural context of Mauritius and what forms should such understanding take?

The Western framework of media professional ethics provides for a minimal set of social responsibilities for the media based on not causing harm as the latter should provide accurate information, factual truth and balance (Caldwell, 2011). In Mauritius, problems of media ethics are often dealt with at the level of the courts due to the laws that criminalize press offences. Indubitably, the most powerful and affluent in the Mauritian society are able to have recourse to the courts to ask for redress. How about an ethics of the media that encompasses all in society and is based on everyday life, social conviviality and care? Wasserman observes that the question of media ethics has largely been addressed in terms of procedures and notes that “there has been less agreement on what the substantive outcome of these procedures should be and what [should be] the material effects of ethical media practice” (2015, p. 66, original emphasis).

Such procedural understanding of media ethics places at the center stage a Western understanding that the media have an adversarial role to play in terms of unearthing corrupt
practices and bad governance. The watchdog role of the media has become so pivotal in Mauritian journalism that it supersedes all other roles that the media and journalists can or ought to play in society. For instance, this role is so overpowering that some critics argue that the media is the fourth estate, and that it plays the role of an agent of opposition, if not outright anti-government. While Mauritian media can be viewed as parochial and arrogantly adversarial, this polarized attitude breeds cynicism, mistrust and negativity towards the affairs of society. Without falling into the other extreme of positivity and sunshine journalism, can Mauritian journalism adopt a “decolonial” perspective that considers its role as a guide dog to society and foregrounds local “ways of being” and knowledge production” (Schoon, Mabweeazara, Bosch and Dugmore, 2021)? Can constructive journalism offer an alternative to existing practices of journalism?

Constructive journalism, notes McIntyre and Sobel, is an “emerging form of journalism that involves applying positive psychology and other behavioral science techniques to news processes and production in an effort to create productive and engaging stories, while remaining committed to journalism’s core functions“ (2017, p. 5). Under the umbrella of constructive journalism, three forms are identified, namely, peace journalism, solutions journalism and restorative narrative as they are grounded into the everyday. Before considering the ways Mauritian talk radio journalists can have a more interventionist and constructive approach based on empathetic imagination and reflexive judgment, there is the need to look into the universal proto-norms of journalism which constitute the moral backdrop to “various ethical imperatives for the media” (Wasserman, 2015, p. 70).

Protonorms are accepted ethical principles and the protonorms of human dignity, truth telling and nonviolence are proposed by Christians and Nordenstreng as basic ethical principles related to the sacredness of life. Rather than an overreliance on Western media ethics, Christians notes that the protonorms allow “us to start over intellectually with the holistic notion of humans as humans-in-relation rather than with a truncated notion of humans as rational individuals” (2010, p. 7).
In the Mauritian context, human dignity entails consideration to the multiethnic composition of the Mauritian population - mainly descendants of slavery and indentured labor - and the fact that the nation-building project is an unfinished project given that there are large segments of the populations who remain socially excluded and invisible, their voices unheard. Despite the recommendations of the Truth and Justice Commission Report (2011), Mauritian History is not taught at all levels in schools. Ethnic polarizations, class inequalities and the political blame game that exist in the Mauritian society are consequently exacerbated in the absence of historical knowledge and contextualization. Access to lands, to decent housing and basic sanitation are social problems as the poor are forcibly displaced, either because they are considered as ‘squatters’ illegally occupying lands or because they have to leave to allow development projects. Restoring human dignity is about empowering the needy and breaking the barriers of racism - communalism in the common parlance - that is embedded in the Mauritian society and to which the poor and vulnerable often fall victims. In the wake to Mauritius’s independence in 1968, the indigenous populations of the Chagos Archipelago which forms part of the Republic of Mauritius have been forcibly uprooted and exiled to mainland Mauritius as their sacrifice salvaged the independence of Mauritius from the UK. Can it be that journalism provides for a less polarized society through “listening for untold histories” (Dreher, 2017, p. 17) that can illuminate problems of the present?

The protonorm of truth-telling implies that not only should the media be a watchdog to the powerful interests in the Mauritian society and demand transparency and accountability (Mauritius has yet to pass a Freedom of Information Act) but it should also be able to cater for a diversity of voices and act as a guide dog to everyday life as a way to foster trust. For instance, the youths, migrants and other workers in the informal sectors are largely absent from the media. Truthtelling is about the media providing opportunities to people, those affected by various social issues, including financial indebtedness, social deviance and violence, poor housing, poor educational achievements, climate change to share their experience and to create opportunities for solidarity and resilience. Can it be that through new ways of knowing based on listening at local community levels these voices are better represented in media contents?
The nonmaleficence or nonviolence norm refers to the need to avoid harm but also to redress the injustices of the past through an ethics of care. Couldry argues that it is the media’s role to increase the potential of people and to create the conditions of their realizations. Importantly it is about reducing the many gaps and polarisations that exist in the Mauritian society - gender, ethnic, class, sexual, geographical - by creating the possibilities of a resilient and sustainable society based on a culture of ‘positive’ peace. Mauritian media deals abundantly in negativity that impacts the psychology of people to the extent that out of fatigue, people switch off from the media. To care is also about reflecting on the ways the media can inspire people. This also entails combatting false news, misinformation and conspiracy theories which can endanger the social and moral fabric of the multiethnic Mauritian society.

Putting these proto-norms to work as part of constructive journalism is a way to give substance to journalism practice. Such an approach favors the local and the ‘thick’ of the lived experiences of people. Rather than relying on Western methodologies as “singular ways of knowing” (Schoon, Mabweazara, Bosch and Dugmore, 2021), such an approach acknowledges different ways of being, knowing and knowledge productions. The idea is to “advance a complementary dialogue between methodologies and concepts that come from very different “epistemic locations” but, especially between the Global North and the South” (Schoon, Mabweazara, Bosch and Dugmore, 2021, p. 7). Such an approach would be based on a different tempo to journalism in the form of slow journalism which takes time to listen to people and considers people’s experiences as “epistemic sites of knowledge production” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Slow journalism that provides for thick, ethnographic and deep reporting into communities may act as a corrective to traditional, fast journalism and the underlying fatigue and indifference that accompany it (Le Masurier, 2015). In the words of Wasserman slow journalism ought to be based on “the imperative for media to not remain prisoners of their market segments but strive to contribute to greater social cohesion” (2015, p. 69).

7.4 Listening

This study has proposed an ethics of listening rather than just speaking that can offer an alternative to the dominant norm of speaking that prevails in journalism (Wasserman, 2012).
The act of listening, notes Bickford, “must require a particular kind of attention to one another” (1996, p. 12) and the starting point is on “learning new ways for the center to hear rather than simply requiring the marginalized to speak up” (Dreher, 2010, p. 99). This approach entails “listening in dialogue” and views journalism as a process grounded in social relations that “abandons individual authorship in the traditional sense and engages a more participatory mode of story production, where the agenda is set by the journalists, but includes the input of the people, citizens and the community who are at the center of the story” (Reid, 2020, p. 193).

For instance, the obligation imposed by the Mauritian state coercing people to vaccinate themselves against Covid-19 and to have booster doses has triggered a backlash with conspiracy theories and anti-vax movements that refuse the vaccine obligation. The polarisations around vaccination demand a journalism that, instead of stigmatizing the anti-vax takes time to listen to their concerns and to dispel misunderstandings that may have cropped up.

The question that remains is: how to operationalize such an approach of ‘deep’ listening beyond the paradigm of interactional exchange that exists on air. What mechanism can talk radio put in place that allows social listening that “brings the voices of distant others in the same space-time as ours and allows them to be heard side-by-side with our stories”? (Chouliaraki, 2011, p. 24). As part of this study, we have argued that Mauritian private radio stations can be considered as community-cum-commercial radio stations. This is more so given that there is no private community broadcasting licensees in Mauritius. As community-cum-commercial stations, how can talk radio contribute to foster resilient communities? In other words, how to operationalize the notion of social ‘listening’?

Haas elaborated on the concept of “civic mapping” as a way “to both enhance audience interest in journalistically-mediated political information and citizen involvement in democratic processes” (2008, p. 1, original emphasis). Referring to a study conducted by Harwood (2000), Haas observes that journalists tend to spend time primarily on two layers of information - namely the official layer of information and the reactions of ordinary citizens to the official information. It is argued that, instead of focusing on mainly two sources, what Harwood refers
as the “usual suspects”, there is a need to diversify the sources of information beyond the official and the response of the laity. This diversification which is referred to as cognitive civic mapping is about opening the circle of sources to include the “official layer of local governmental institutions; the “quasi-official” layer of local municipal leagues, civic organizations, and advocacy groups; “third places like community socials, places of worship and dinners; “incidental” encounters on sidewalks, at food markets, and in backyard; and the “private spaces” of people’s homes” (Haas, 2008, p. 1).

The cognitive approach is complemented by what Campbell (2002) terms as “structural civic mapping” which aims to improve the problem-solving capacity of citizens and this would consist of identifying “the “structural holes” in given social networks; that is, the “places where [social] ties are weak or non existent” (Haas, 2008, p. 3). This structural approach consists of ensuring the participation of local populations in finding solutions to local problems. In parallel ways, Couldry notes that these gaps can be equated to “media injustices” which he refers to as the media not giving due recognition to communities. This lack of recognition refers to the “possibilities of individuals, groups and whole societies being injured through deficits or imbalances in the operations of media institutions” (Couldry, 2012, p. 207).

What does this entail for Mauritian journalism? Listening may entail listening to the voices of the youths whose media practices are changing and, to their experiences, in a context of increasing graduate unemployment and economic uncertainties. Faced with the problems of political apathy and disenfranchisement, listening to the voices of the youths may create the possibilities for journalism to regain trust amongst the youths. In Mauritius, the youth is hardly represented in journalism and creating the possibilities for listening to them is to enable their participation.

Listening may also take the forms of listening to the anti-vax movements around Covid-19 and the vaccine hesitancy. It may also entail listening to local communities, especially to vulnerable groups in those communities and to families. Rather than dealing with the problems of drug addiction, household indebtedness, street children, health, violence and crime as isolated
problems, inserting these problems into their proper context can provide robust, community and sustainable solutions to these problems.

Mauritius has developmental aspirations in terms of infrastructures. However, these developments have affected local communities in a profound way because of evictions and dismembered landscapes. Whether the cutting down of centennial trees, the eviction of people from their homes demand that the voices of the communities which are affected are heard. Climate change is an area where listening is pivotal as a way to build resilient communities and documenting the changes thereof can entail listening to these communities and committing to revisiting these communities over time as “an intergenerational saga” (Sutter, 2019) is a challenge that slow journalism or solution journalism can address in a sustainable manner.

This study has attempted to identify the role and significance of the participatory cultures of talk radio in Mauritius highlighting the need to take the lived experiences of people and their emotions seriously. It has made the case for an understanding of the public sphere as not singularly rational based but as being made up of rational, affective and emotional engagements. While highlighting the ways talk radio engage with the experiences of people, this study has also made the case for a ‘thick’ engagement of talk radio towards society. In this respect, it has addressed the importance of an ethics of the media that does not use the emotions of people for purposes of entertainment but rather that provides the possibilities of capacity building and emancipation. To this effect, this study has made the case for a decolonial approach based on listening and new ways of knowledge production from the margins as a way to improve peoples’ ability to live well in media.
8. NOTES

Chapter 1


2. Recorded on Radio One, on 15 April 2021.

3. Recorded on Radio One, on 15 April 2021.


5. Recorded on Radio One, on 18 March 2021.


9. The three private stations are Radio One, Radio Plus and Top FM. Radio One is the first private radio station that started broadcasting in Mauritius on the 12\textsuperscript{th} of March 2002. It is owned by Viva Voce Ltd which has also invested in WebTV productions. Radio Plus belongs to the Defimedia conglomerate which publishes daily newspapers and has channels online and on WebTV. The radio station started its operations in April 2002. TopFM started broadcasting on 31\textsuperscript{st} December 2002 and has also a WebTV production station. The three stations have an active online presence on social media platforms.

10. The two new entrants in the radio broadcasting market are Wazaa FM and Planet FM which were licensed to broadcast in May 2019.

11. The licence of Planet Fm was revoked as the station faced several financial problems.

12. The state broadcaster, the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), is funded by a public levy as well as through advertising, making it both a public-cum-commercial institution
13. Amendments to the Newspapers and Periodicals Act in 1984 that constrained newspaper editors to guarantee an exorbitant sum of money in order to be able to publish.


Chapter 3

1 Transcription conventions

(.) Short pause of less than .5 of a second

[Hello

What] Overlapping talk

So in our street Marked stress

Chapter 5

1 The public outcry over the issue of sale by levy brought the Mauritian government to set up a Commission of Inquiry on the system of sale by levy and whether it creates undue hardship to borrowers and debtors. The Commission submitted its report in August 2014.

2 Late Sandra O’Reilly was victim of a double rape by men in groups in the night on 16th July 2002. Despite being sexually abused, she found courage to go on a private radio, disclose her identity, tell her story and speak up against the rapists. Following her testimony, Mauritians would take to the street in a mass protest to denounce violence against women while police proceeded to the arrest of the accused.
Chapter 6

1. In 2019, TopFM radio station lodged a case in the Mauritian courts contesting the attribution of two licences to new entrants in the broadcasting landscape namely Wazaa FM and PlanetFM.

2. The licence of TopFM was cancelled by the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) in April 2020 for two days while the IBA stated that it had suspended the licence because of ‘breaches in news broadcast’.

Chapter 7

1. Radio One morning talk radio programme, 26 August 2020

2. Often radio hosts have been accused of being anti-government and anti-public officials. Representatives of the public trade unions have often criticized talk radio hosts for allegedly being against public officials.

3. The Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), the regulator of the broadcasting sector, has suspended the licences of private radio stations over a number of hours. These suspensions have been perceived as acts of intimidations towards the stations


9. BIBLIOGRAPHY


Fraser, N (1990) Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy. Social Text, No. 25/26, pp. 56-80.


Wahl-Jorgensen, K (2019b) Questioning the Ideal of the Public Sphere: The Emotional Turn. 

Routledge.


