PiMA

Politics and interactive Media in Africa

The Political Economy of Sponsored Call-in Radio in Zambia

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PiMA Working Papers

The PiMA Working Papers are a series of peer-reviewed working papers that present findings and insights from Centre of Governance and Human Rights' (CGHR) Politics and Interactive Media in Africa (PiMA) research project (2012-14).

The project, jointly funded by the ESRC and DFID (ES/J018945/1), focuses on expressions of 'public opinion' in broadcast media via new information and communication technologies (ICT) such as mobile phones in Kenya and Zambia. PiMA examines the political implications of such interactions in the two African countries, with a view to drawing conclusions of wider significance to practitioners and policymakers.

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Abstract[1]

This working paper provides a context for the assessment of hopes that there might be a transformation in political accountability in Africa as a result of previously powerless and voiceless populations having their agendas strengthened via interactive media. It describes the ways in which many radio programmes, on which the voices of audience members are heard live on air, are brought into being through the 'sponsorship' of groups that already have significant power and voice. These include political parties, foreign aid donors, and local and international Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), all of which have incentives to use interactive media as a tool of evangelism – to secure public engagement with, and endorsements for, their preferred visions. Using the case of Zambia, it emphasises the negotiating strategies that journalists and station owners deploy to secure resources while maintaining space to allow hosts and audience members, rather than solely sponsors, to shape the agenda of on-air discussions.

Assessing call-in radio

A rise in the ownership of mobile phone handsets, alongside a liberalisation of FM radio licenses, has lowered the technological and regulatory difficulties of running call-in and text-in radio shows in many countries in Africa. The burgeoning of this format has led to a dramatic rise in the number of citizens willing and able to air their views through broadcast media. For example, Simutanyi, Fraser & Milapo (2015) describe the growth of private FM radio and television stations in Zambia, and discuss how the state has licensed, regulated and occassionally repressed the new media scene.

Enthusiasm for call-in radio in many African countries has raised hopes of a transformation of what are frequently assumed to be dysfunctional political systems, and resulted in significant new flows of aid funding for development communications projects supporting 'demand-side governance' or 'social accountability' (Brennan, 2014). A schematic version of the idea behind such projects starts with the thought that citizens (sometimes understood as 'the poor', 'local actors', 'communities', 'civil society' or 'marginalised people'), have needs for public goods that are not being met (this may be in part why they are poor). They are not being met because the actors (government agencies, NGOs, businesses) tasked with delivering projects and policies that promote development are unconcerned about, or ignorant of, the poor quality of service – or have insufficient institutionalised incentives for paying attention. The hope is that interactive media, and particularly the confluence of mobile telephones and FM radio sets (which enjoy by far the widest ownership patterns, including amongst the poor and geographically marginal groups) can generate a flow of information into the public realm about how people experience public services and thus contribute to solving development problems: delivering books to schools, and water, power and transport to neglected communities (Ringold, Holla, Kozio, & Srinivasan, 2011).

Making a systematic assessment of the impact of development communications of any type is strikingly difficult and little academic work exists that takes on the challenge. Mary Myers notes that,

> Demonstrating the impacts of development communication has therefore become a 'domain of self-reporting' (Inagaki, 2007: 2) and often suffers from a lack of peer review, containing case-studies which are often little more than 'success stories' written to reflect positively on the implementing NGO or their funder(s) - or both. (Myers, 2009, p. 31)

This problem is particularly present in innovative types of development interventions. The knowledge that donors are considering whether to scale up experimental social accountability projects creates incentives for the production of accounts of the instantaneous impacts of call-in shows. A report on BBC Media Action's 'MAKE' project in Zambia claims:

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There are concrete examples of the programme in a resolution of a particular problem in the communities. One illustrative example is a sewerage flow that had been in a residential area of Mongu District of Western Province for over 20 years. Despite the establishment of a water and sewerage company in the area 11 years ago, no effort was made to work on this sewer effluent that had even formed a dam near a market where more than 200 people trade. After the issue was raised on Radio Liseli's Community Connections (a programme supported by the MAKE project), on which programme the provincial minister, the water company's Managing Director and municipal council District Engineer featured, the sewer problem was worked on immediately. (BBC Media Action, 2012, p. 3)

The 'MAKE' project is regarded in the Zambian media and communications community as a model of a well-resourced initiative, in which media training has successfully embedded the best practices of contemporary public-interest journalism, including the value and means of securing broad popular participation in order to hold decision-makers to account. Nonetheless, we might wonder whether having decision-makers prioritise problems they happen to be drawn to via radio programmes is a desirable form of governance.[2] We might also wonder whether detailed investigations of decision-making processes behind reported examples of 'reactive governance' would support the attribution of impact to particular conversations in this way (see Myers, 2009 for a discussion of the cutting edge of attribution methodologies).

If such impact assessments tend to focus on 'success', they also frequently identify limits to the transformative effect of development communications work. These are typically described as resulting from psychological, cultural and economic barriers to participation, i.e. the attitudes and capacities of the audience itself. Of course, such barriers are real. While surveys carried out in Kenya and Zambia as part of this project reveal a large popular audience for interactive shows on issues of governance and development, and comparatively high levels of active participation in them, they also reveal that certain resources (literacy, access to radios, phones and calling credit, time and confidence) are unevenly distributed, and that this distribution broadly correlates with demographic skews in participation rates towards the relatively wealthy, educated, and urban audiences, and quite dramatically towards males (Abreu Lopes et al., 2015).

A handful of recent studies have sought to dig deeper into the contexts in which interactive programmes occur, basing analysis in ethnographic research into particular call-in programmes, communities and stations (see for example Gagliardone, 2015; Tembo, 2013). They provide pause for thought about the techno-determinism of existing research, pointing to complexity and hybridity in the workings of both media and governance systems such that impact seems likely to result from more than just the success or failure of programmes in engaging the 'voices of the poor'. This paper does not attempt to process trace any particular political events or to attribute developmental impacts to specific programmes. It has a more modest aim – to describe how and why so many interactive radio shows have recently made it to air. It reminds us that participatory spaces are not just the result of technological possibilities, but are typically brought into being by actors with projects to evangelise, and that this is likely to affect the nature of participation encouraged, and how audiences understand and respond to any given 'opportunity'. The next paper in this series considers how the broader trends described here affect the dynamics and impact of a particular programme (see Fraser, 2016).

Political and economic context

The wider literature on participatory development, and on African media, shows a clear awareness of two important contexts in which interactive programming has emerged. This paper connects them. Firstly, it is widely understood that the ways that audiences and power-holders relate to each other in society affect the attitude of callers to engaging authority on air, and that dynamics of patronage and of party politics are important here. Writing about lessons learned from the 'Mwananchi' project, a multi-country project in Africa exploring the contextual factors affecting collective action situations, Fletcher Tembo develops a sophisticated version of this idea:

Each actor is embedded in a complex web of interests and incentives… these incentives will suddenly spur the actor to action, often in ways we might not expect: to recruit others, to withdraw their involvement, to myriad ways of acting and interacting, which can lead to less than desirable results… (Tembo, 2013, p. vii)

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2   The phrase 'reactive governance' and this critique of it was brought to my attention by Sharath Srinivasan, P-I on the PiMA project.

He goes on:

> It is unrealistic to expect ordinary citizens to hold public-office holders to account immediately after voting them into power or mandating them to deliver services to the poor. Current social-accountability programmes largely fail to acknowledge the dynamic nature of these incentive-driven power plays. (Tembo, 2013, p. viii)

Secondly, it is widely recognised that radio stations face problems of sustaining themselves financially, and that this can have an effect on their editorial freedoms. Much work on the economics of African radio assumes that the existence of radio platforms is an essential good, and the key question is how to provide sufficient finance to ensure they exist. In particular, donors worry about establishing stations through aid interventions that will be unable to sustain themselves when donor funding runs out. Mary Myers recognises that the debate around sustainability crosses over with concerns about content, noting that,

> there are several problems with the commercial funding model. From a developmental point of view, the poorer your audience, the less advertising revenue you are likely to attract, and therefore the less economically viable your rural stations are likely to be. Then you have the problem of quality of content - the more entertaining, sensational, controversial etc. your content, the bigger your audience, and the more advertisers you are likely to attract. (Myers, 2009, p. 35)

Donor think-pieces often simultaneously recognise (because it is obvious) and repress (because such recognition is devastating to the model outlined above) the thought that, in a situation of scarce funding, participatory broadcasting is invariably commercialised and instrumentalised: radio stations exist in part because their owners want to make money, or evangelise a religious, political or developmental concept. Any particular show makes it on air not simply because of a desire to hear from citizens, but also because well-positioned actors collaborate to bring discursive spaces into being, each in the belief that they have a chance of achieving some particular ends of their own choosing.

There is a frequently expressed anxiety that political entrepreneurs might abuse interactive openings, encouraging bigoted callers to mobilise mobs or promote less liberal values – ethnic violence in Rwanda and Kenya and homophobia in Uganda loom large with these anxieties. For DFID,

> On the one hand, media can generate debate and dialogue, be a voice for the voiceless, reveal wrong-doing and contribute to deepening democracy. On the other hand, media is also capable of fostering ethnic hatred and division, acting in the interest of powerful political and economic elites, and covering up and distorting the truth. (Department for International Development, 2008)

Beyond advertising revenue, Myers notes four other plausible sources of funding for community radio stations: international aid and loans, community-based income-generation, patronage and state aid. Of these, she highlights only patronage from political parties as creating a conflict of interest, worrying about

> patronage which manifests itself most blatantly in politicians buying and sustaining radio stations, in order that they promote their party political line. One example is the chain of several radio stations called 'Radio Liberté' in DRC, which are owned by the (now outlawed) presidential candidate, Jean-Pierre Bemba and his MLC party. Although the patronage option may be 'sustainable' it is hardly conducive to truthful and balanced journalism. (Myers, 2009, pp. 36–37)

In making party political patronage (for whom her case study is a warlord!) the enemy, however, Myers seems to suggest that certain other categories of sponsorship and patronage are less problematic, concluding that a, "degree of international and/or state funding is probably always going to be necessary for 'pro-poor' radio" (Myers, 2009, p. 37).

This is relatively unusual in that it expresses an acceptance of state funding. Other donor literature often perceives the state as captured by systems of patronage, and the powerful political and economic elites that worry donors include both the persistence of state-dominated outlets serving the interests of political elites, and the failure of private-sector newcomers to move beyond narrow economic interests to recover an ethic of public service media. Identifying the failures of state and private media in Africa, Francis Nyamnjoh eulogises a long-gone tradition which, while not denying the articulation of individual interests, believed that the greatest good came from a negotiated balance between various individual interests as part of a community. Media conceived in this tradition stressed negotiation, interconnectedness and harmony between individual interests and community expectations (Nyamnjoh, 2004).

A naïve donor response to the sense that participatory spaces *ought* to be informed by a public service ethic but risk being captured is to wish the world away, appealing to the possibility of non-political and non-commercial ownership and governance systems. Writing in the World Bank's *Communication for Development Handbook*, Loty Salazar and Craig Hammer make a plaintiff appeal:

> Good practice among community broadcasters demonstrates that stations should be non-partisan and non-sectarian and should be oriented to support the social development of the communities they serve… No branch of local or central government, no political party or political group, should directly or indirectly control the radio station… community radio stations should not be subject to undue influence from donors, commercial interests, and advertisers. (Salazar & Hammer, 2008, pp. 181–182)

Donors in the field also find it very difficult to engage with the realities of politics. While some wings of aid agencies are typically engaged in the energetic promotion of representative democracy, others seem to find *party* politics particularly objectionable. An interim report on a World Bank Zambian pilot project supporting interactive media in Zambia noted as the first in its list of 'challenges' for the project:

> Community Radio stations are often utilized by savvy politicians to promote a certain political agenda. One of the stations that we initially began working with had to be dropped from the pilot when it became evident that it had become so heavily compromised by virtue of substantial political funds and political members on its board. (World Bank, 2012)

The report carries on to note problems with the quality of journalism skills in Zambian community radio stations, and the quality of information that community radio staff can access in preparing programmes. It hopes that a remedy for this problem might come from co-ordination with civil society organisations who are supposed to provide the analysis to journalists, yet it also finds access to information and communication skills here problematic (World Bank, 2012).

The PiMA project, for which this paper was written, seeks to avoid brute instrumentalism. It aims to understand, through close study of particular context, what political and economic factors shape the kinds of interactive opportunities being made available to people in Africa, how people are reacting to them, and what broad cultural and political changes result.[3] This paper focuses on certain common political and economic factors contributing to active interactive broadcasting in Zambia. It uses primarily in-studio observation of the production of call-in radio shows, and interviews with donors, station management, hosts and guests. It argues that the dependence of state, commercial and community stations on an increasingly similar mix of advertising and patronage results in a convergence of show formats and editorial biases in spite of variation in the ownership and governance types of these stations. This results partly from the ways that state agencies, religious groups, political parties, aid donors and NGOs bring interactive shows into being through grants, training and especially through buying airtime, described locally as 'sponsoring' programming. The first question in analysing the political economy of any incidence of call-in radio is thus not the one typically asked: 'who owns the station?' but rather, 'who owns the next thirty minutes?' This is not to suggest that ownership is the same as control. Rather, the paper also discusses some of the ways that programme makers negotiate, resist and co-opt the agenda of sponsored shows in order to achieve their own objectives.

Practices of donor sponsorship in Zambia

In Zambia, support directly to radio stations, or for media development per se, initially came in the form of core funding (often keeping particular stations running for long periods of time) from relatively minor players within the overall aid mix: Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, Finland and the United Nations (UN) have all provided some support for the setting up and running of radio stations. Two local branches of larger international development organisations, the Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA-Zambia) and PANOS-Southern Africa, based in Lusaka, help network radio stations, provide training, and sponsor large numbers of shows themselves. Recently, BBC Media Action has provided innovative training to radio and television stations, with a particular focus on building capacity to sustain high-quality public service broadcasting. These sources between them have had important effects on the (relatively small, compared to, for example, Kenya or South Africa) mix of stations that exist in the Zambian media space.

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3   See PiMA Research Design. University of Cambridge Centre of Governance and Human Rights Website. Retrieved 2 August 2016 from http://www.cghr.polis.cam.ac.uk/research-themes/pdtm/pima/pima-research

Donor support for interactive broadcasting on these stations is substantial and growing, and a significant share of the interactive programming on social and political issues, in Zambia at least, is paid for one way or another by aid donors. Identifying exactly how much money is making its way into the media sector from aid sources is difficult because an element of 'dissemination' to, or 'sensitisation' of, the wider population is now a standard part of a vast array of development interventions, and it has become the norm for NGO workers to tour community radio stations as part of their contracts for advocacy activities. During the fieldwork period, for example, the UN's '16 days of activism on gender-based violence' had sponsored women's NGOs to buy airtime for interactive shows on every single station under consideration: this crossed state, private, commercial, religious and community stations in urban and rural settings. Similarly the Bank of Zambia had purchased airtime on almost all stations to sensitise the population to issues to do with the re-basing of the national currency, and the Electoral Commission was touring the country promoting voter education in the run up to elections.

Beyond this issue-by-issue sponsorship, the biggest donors to Zambia (DFID, the European Union and The World Bank) are all likely to launch very large programmes targeting the Zambian media over the next few years. Each presents its move into media-based monitoring as a natural evolution of projects that, since the early 2000s, have focused on participatory planning, budget monitoring and social auditing through local NGOs.

Between 2010 and 2013, DFID spent £2,100,000 via the Zambia Governance Foundation, a multi-donor pooled fund that provided significant assistance to radio stations, especially through support to shows designed to monitor development budgets. In the period 2014-2019 DFID plans to spend ten times as much, £26,000,000, on a new 'Zambia Accountability Programme'. The contract to run the scheme has been won by the British Council. The tender documents include a £10 million 'Citizens Service Engagement and Accountability Programme' (CSEP) element that

> will select and manage local organisations who have a track record in poor peoples', women and youth rights, facilitating citizen-service engagement at local level, women's representation and working with FM radio stations on governance and community issues. Community radio programmes under CSEP will be part of the programme to generate citizen engagement and disseminate programme experiences. (DFID, 2013)

The entire funding package makes the grandiose claims that this work

> will contribute to MDGs [Millennium Development Goals] in health and education by allowing citizens to monitor service delivery performance and vote. This will benefit 3 million Zambians and improve their access to services by 2019. (DFID, 2014)

According to the European Union's website, the 10th European Development Fund has set aside €5,500,000 for 'capacity building of national non-state actors' and,

> As soon as the Financing Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Zambia and the European Union is signed by both parties [there have been significant delays], Calls for Proposals will be launched through the Zambian Governance Foundation. The capacity building support will particularly target NSAs [Non State Actors] working on 'Media' and 'Access to Justice'. ("European Union External Action Service, Zambia website: Non-state actors, building democratic accountability in rural communities in Zambia," n.d.)

The World Bank has operated cautiously in media support in Zambia. The Bank as a whole began to engage community radio in the early 2000s, and Zambia was one of four countries supported by a 'Development Marketplace Grant', which both sought to influence government policy on community broadcasting and provided practical capacity-building assistance to small stations (World Bank Institute, n.d.). From June 2011 the Bank opened a relatively small pilot, 'The Accountability through Community Radio pilot in Zambia', that aimed to connect radio stations, listeners, civil society organisations and decision-makers. It focused not only on the promotion of social auditing through discussion of development projects but also on the encouragement of stations to follow-up on popular demands or complaints that emerged from audiences (World Bank, 2012). Some of its early findings were mentioned above.

The next sections outline the contemporary Zambian media scene, before describing how the availability of even the current volumes of donor funding contributes to the commercialisation of Zambian current affairs broadcasting, and how commercial and

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political incentives overlap and influence negotiations between sponsors, station management, hosts and guests over the agendas of call-in shows.

The Zambian political context

Salazar and Hammer's appeal for radio that is not subject to undue influence relies on a commonly deployed distinction between state, commercial and community broadcasters, with much hope invested in the last of the three. This distinction is also made in Zambian commentaries on the country's media scene (although religious broadcasters are often categorised as a peculiar variant of the community station). Daniel Banda for example looked at two stations in Eastern Province to consider the extent to which religious stations operated on different logics to community stations, and were more or less effective in promoting community participation, and found little difference between the two (D. Banda, 2012). The failure of both public and commercial media to live up to a 'balanced' ideal has been widely identified, particularly since the 2008 presidential by-elections, in which the ruling Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) narrowly held onto power. As the political context became increasingly competitive, the state media (ZNBC's TV and radio stations, *The Daily Mail* and *The Zambian Times* newspapers) adopted a nakedly propagandistic position and the main independent newspaper, *The Post*, responded in kind, supporting the opposition Patriotic Front (PF), whose candidate, Michael Sata, eventually won the 2011 presidential elections. The European Union's (EU) election monitoring mission to Zambia in 2011, for example, found that in news reports on ZNBC TV during the election campaign over 75 percent of time was allocated to reports on the ruling party (European Union, 2011).

The PF did not quite achieve a parliamentary majority in the elections and, for the next three years, worked to secure one by encouraging opposition members to cross the floor and by encouraging losing PF candidates to petition their results where electoral irregularities were evident. The numerous resulting by-elections kept inter-party rivalries on the boil. The atmosphere was made more tense by intra-party rivalries, especially factional battles within the ruling PF over succession of the president, whose health was in doubt during the campaign and severely affected his ability to control the party or lead the nation up until his death in 2014. Media houses have been increasingly associated not simply with particular parties, but with factions and individuals within them.

The 'hyper-politicisation' of the media and NGO scenes contributed to a scandal-mongering style of politics, in which accusations, revelations and denials of corrupt connections between politicians, judges, businessmen, traditional rulers and other public figures make up the staple news coverage. Since these revelations usually emerge in the newspapers and counter-accusations are made on radio stations, the media have in part pulled themselves into the ring, and have faced much greater scrutiny of the commercial and partisan networks linking media owners and political factions. The ways that ownership of the means of communication shapes the editorial biases of stations are thus widely debated. Much of this discussion has focused on the personalities and political connections of the well-known owners of a small number of key media outlets, especially the few significant commercial newspapers (*The Post* and *The Nation*) and television stations (*Muvi-TV*), which are all based in the capital Lusaka, as well as websites run from outside Zambia (most notably *The Zambian Watchdog*).

Outside the three main urban concentrations in Zambia, television signals are often unavailable, independent newspapers are not widely distributed, access to the internet is difficult, and radio reception is typically only available for the state broadcaster's channels and one or two local stations. Surveys of the scene draw attention to a pattern in which many of those non-state stations are funded by the Catholic Church and, in places where there is a third alternative, this often comes from community radio stations identified either with particular aid interventions, or commercially or politically influential locals ("Country Report on Community/local media in Zambia," n.d.).

One common feature of broadcasting across all of these types of media is the prominence of call-in shows, and their centrality in the generation of scandals and news. Several of these community stations have also 'become the story', most notably in the politically sensitive Western and Copperbelt Provinces (Simutanyi, Fraser, & Milapo, 2015). Call-in shows across a broad range of stations have represented an anarchic realm of argument, name-calling, libel and rumour – Zambian callers show a commitment to partisanship that at least matches that of the media houses.

Largely because the state lacks regulatory power and capacity in general, and partly because it is difficult to associate the content of particular calls or the direction of conversation on any particular topic with the stations 'making' the programmes, the Zambian

state has not systematically regulated interactive shows. Governments of both stripes – and the cadres of various parties – have indulged in arbitrary repression of particular call-in shows, harassing both legally and physically hosts and guests whom they deem to have overstepped an ill-defined line. It is difficult to conclude that particular stations or types of stations – or that interactive media, or the media in general – face systematic state repression, but all media houses have operated under a somewhat nebulous air of threat, which has become more concrete at moments of tension. In particular, around the highly contested 2016 elections, *The Post* Newspaper, *Muvi-TV*, *Radio Komboni* and *Radio Itezhi-tezhi* were all closed down, at least temporarily, for nakedly political reasons.[4] This barely seems to chill Zambian appetites for vociferous public debate of political controversies through all available fora.

Nonetheless those fora differ. While individual callers are frequently able to make telling contributions on shows of all types, the selection of topics that are officially under discussion, the choice of guests, the tone for discussion and the power to hang up on any particular caller lie in the hands of hosts and producers. Each operates according to different sets of more or less explicit rules and norms, themselves heavily influenced by the political and economic factors that bring a show to the air, and it is to those factors that this paper now turns.

Commercialising airtime – the station context

The offices of *Breeze FM* in Chipata, Eastern Province are decorated with maps of the administrative districts and chiefly domains of Zambia's Eastern Province and of regions of neighbouring Malawi and Mozambique in which the station's signal can be heard. There are lists of ward councillors, Members of Parliament (MPs) and their telephone numbers, calendars of local cultural festivals, a whole wall of trophies and awards, the daily on-air rota, curling newspaper cuttings, and posters reminding staff of their social mission and the importance of balance, non-partisanship and professionalism. Something one might not expect that in the light of those posters are the 'rate cards' stuck to the partitions between the journalists' work cubicles. Every staff member is reminded by them, and in staff meetings, that they are responsible not only for meeting *Breeze FM's* social mission, but also for keeping the station in business by selling to their contacts the main resource that the station has: airtime.

The rate-cards lay out standard prices to buy half an hour or an hour of the station's broadcasting. They segment prices according to the common categories of clientele. Political parties and international development agencies pay the highest rates. Presidential candidates pay more (around 700,000 Kwacha - roughly £75) than MPs or National Executive Committee members for an interview on the station's headline current-affairs programme, 'Political Hour'. Charges for airtime at *Breeze* vary across four typical formats that a client might request. The simplest is an advertisement – a live or pre-recorded voice-over in which the sponsor delivers a scripted message of their own to the listeners (in certain cases, the station's presenters will voice the script themselves, in many cases the adverts are played repeatedly in strategic time-slots).

Next, it is possible to buy an interview with the station's presenters of 'Political Hour'. Here it is expected that the guest/client determines the main topic and the language of the programme (*Breeze* broadcasts in both Nyanja, the dominant first language in Eastern Province, and English) as well as being given fulsome opportunities to explore themes that they determine, but perhaps not full control over all the questions asked.

Third, it is possible to buy an 'interactive show'. Here the established format is that half of the purchased timeslot is taken up with an interview, as above. In the second part, the station opens the lines for listeners to phone or text in to make a comment or to question the guest themselves. In many cases, NGOs and development agencies buy a series with, for example, ten programmes that are broadcast once a week on a defined theme, such as environmental degradation or sexual health, but with different guests and sub-themes each week. While such shows are often paid for directly by an international development agency such as the World Bank or the Finnish Embassy, the content of the show and the practicalities of getting guests to the studio and question lists agreed often falls to the local staff of a partner agency of the funder – such as the NGO Civil Society for Poverty Reduction, or the Chipata regional branch of the District Farmer's Association.

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4   Perhaps the best resource to track this debate has been the Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA-Zambia), which issues frequent 'State of the Media' reports and alerts at: www.misa.org/news-feeds/item/617-misa-zambia%E2%80%99s-state-of-the-media-reports and via a Facebook page.

Finally, and most costly per minute of airtime, clients can pay for the outside broadcast of an event, typically an election rally, with speeches going out live over the airwaves. Coverage of events outside of the regional capital Chipata, where *Breeze* is based, cost twice as much.

This commercialisation of airtime might commonly be understood as a form of corruption, or at least a practice likely to imperil public service media ethics. This is not the case in Zambia. Similar processes to that described at *Breeze* were found in all of the Zambian stations studied as part of this project, including those identifying as state-owned, commercial, religious and community oriented. In some cases, journalists themselves play a lesser role in attracting new clients – station managers or dedicated sales teams may do more of this work. The reasons are straightforward. State budgets to support the national broadcaster are under pressure, and ZNBC is increasingly expected to cover its own costs. Selling airspace to government agencies and other NGOs is one way of doing so. For commercial stations, apart from mobile phone networks, which are Zambia's most intensive advertisers, marketing tends to target a small share of the population in major urban centres expected to purchase consumer durables. Community and religious radio stations rarely have sufficiently stable sources of grant funding to keep themselves on air. Some research describes a different dynamic in community, especially Catholic, radio stations which may run on volunteer effort, secure core funding from one major sponsor, and attract support from 'members' or supporters of the station itself (D. Banda, 2012). Banda claims that Radio Maria does not accept 'advertising revenues' and is in this sense self-sufficient. Assuming one includes sponsored radio in such revenues, this analysis does not meet with this study's experience of Catholic stations today – which may simply reflect the increasing resources available for sponsored shows since Banda's fieldwork.

As a result, selling airtime rather than advertising provides a significant part of the budgets of most stations. Discussions about achieving financial sustainability, overcoming donor dependence or achieving editorial independence are rhetorical aspirations that many repeat but few take seriously. 'Sustainability' is commonly understood by stations' sales departments as attracting a sufficiently diverse range of sources of aid money and political sponsorship to keep the station afloat. Donor agency representatives attending a Stakeholder Forum reported that amongst donors there is widespread acceptance that there is no plausible 'exit strategy' from the current support going into the Zambian media sector without large numbers of stations closing ("Stakeholder forum: Interim findings from the PiMA research project, July 19 2013," 2013).

The idea that stations might make themselves immune from influence in this context appears fanciful, and station owners, guests, hosts and indeed listeners have few illusions about how the process of sponsoring airtime works. Some (but by no means all) shows announce to listeners in trails run throughout the show that they are 'brought to you by Oxfam', or the Zambian Central Bank, the Canadian International Development Agency, or the Patriotic Front. *Breeze FM*'s main competitor, *Feel Free FM*, ran trails throughout the 2013 by-elections in Chipata advertising that its airtime was available for sale to political parties and inviting candidates to drop into its office to negotiate a fee for being interviewed.

There are of course interactive shows that are not sponsored, and that set their own agendas. Amongst the most well known is 'Let the People Talk' on Lusaka's *Phoenix FM*. Its agenda is set in discussions between the production team and the newsroom. Staff claim that the slot is never available for sale, but all of the other interactive shows on political or social issues that go out in any week are sponsored. While *Phoenix* has advanced studio infrastructure and does not suffer with the kinds of problems with power supply and an unstable signal that plague most Zambian radio stations, it still faces challenges in presenting the smooth, professional image it aspires to. Guests are frequently late or do not show up. Those that do often lack communication skills, and it is a struggle for hosts to bring the subject matter to life. As a result, the number of calls coming through during other interactive shows is much lower than during 'Let the People Talk' and, unlike that programme, the shows themselves rarely make the national news agenda.

In an average week of broadcasting there are around two further interactive shows every day (see table below). A good number, but by no means all, of these are scripted. For at least two of them, it is not just the guests who are selected by the show's sponsors; they also bring their own hosts.

Table 1: Schedule of interactive shows on political and social issues, Radio Phoenix, September 2012

Time	Programme Name	Sponsor	Topics
Monday 14:30-15:30	Let's Be Responsible Citizens	Lusaka City Council (government)	Keeping Lusaka orderly
Tuesday 09:00-11:00	Let the People Talk	*Phoenix* editorial control	Topical political issues
Tuesday 14:00-15:00	ZINGO	Zambia Interfaith Networking Group On HIV/AIDS (NGO)	HIV/AIDS
Tuesday 18:30-19:30	Platform for Social Protection	Platform for Social Protection (NGO)	Promotion of welfare policy by NGOs
Wednesday 09:00-10:00	Our Voice	PANOS-Southern Africa (NGO)	Governance and gender issues
Wednesday 11:00-12:00	Tax That	Zambian Revenue Authority (government)	Policy discussion on taxation
Wednesday 18:30-19:30	Celebrating Life	Five Roses (commercial)	Health awareness
Wednesday 20:00-21:00	Keep on Trucking	Unknown sponsor	Music show with AIDS awareness
Thursday 09:00-10:00	Face the Media	MISA-Zambia (NGO)	Current affairs
Thursday 11:00-12:00	APNAC	African Parliamentary Network Against Corruption (NGO)	Corruption
Thursday 14:30-15:30	Climate change	Unknown sponsor	Environmental issues
Friday 09:00-11:00	Let the People Talk	*Phoenix* editorial control	Topical political issues
Friday 14:30-15:30	Constitutional Review Commission	Constitutional Review Commission (government)	Revision of Zambia's constitution
Saturday 08:00-09:00	Ageing Gracefully	Unknown sponsor	Self-sufficiency in old age
Saturday 10:00-11:00	Hobbies, Careers and Opportunities	Hotel Group (commercial)	Hobbies, careers and opportunities
Sunday 13:00-14:00	Government and You	Government	Ministers and officials Q&A on portfolios

Negotiating co-dependence

Much like those commissioning an artwork, sponsors describe their hopes for a product, but can never enjoy full control over what is produced from their patronage. We can, nonetheless, identify ways that show sponsors and those working at stations negotiate with each other and their listeners over what is eventually broadcast.

Perhaps the simplest means for a sponsor to control an interactive show is to supervise the list of questions asked by an interviewer and to determine under what terms callers will be invited to make contributions. At its most extreme, guests on sponsored shows arrive with a laminated card prescribing a scripted set of questions for the host to ask and a particular phrasing for the invitation to the audience to interact. This approach is most common with guests with little public profile (or public speaking experience) but a responsibility for communicating a corporate line – for an existing 'awareness campaign' (on gender based violence, for example), or a government department (the Electoral Commission of Zambia raising awareness about voter registration, for example). The guests' answers may well also be pre-scripted and, as a result, these conversations are frequently stilted.

This kind of a set-up in the first half of a call-in show has an important effect on the interactive section that follows – the most common being that listeners tune out and the interactive parts struggle to attract calls. It may be the topics that are doing the work here – call-in shows typically attract the most interaction when they touch on party political or 'scandalous' issues, and often these scripted shows are on less hot topics. In some cases, although the guest has had the ability to determine most of the questions, they will not object to a host squeezing some of their own questions in at the end. In many cases, what hosts appear to be doing here is pre-empting topics they know are likely to come up in a call-in section.

For some of the hosts, sponsored shows with scripted questions have their benefits, requiring less research and preparation time. For a host at *Radio Phoenix*, in Zambia's capital Lusaka, one of the main benefits of such scripted shows is that the guests arrive well-prepared:

> for this particular show the client decides to come up with the questions… as they come here, they come prepared and they know what they are going to talk about. (Diangamo, 2013)

In other words, the lack of experience in live interviews of many of the guests is an important concern for the stations. Scripting reduces the amount of fumbling in any conversation. State officials and NGO workers arriving to push a line may struggle under open cross-examination, and in many cases this is unattractive for the station. The same host continues,

> They might have three or four sentences, and if you ask them anything that's not on their questionnaire, they get confused. (Diangamo, 2013)

An unambiguous public service mission might understand guests unable to answer as a sign that powerful actors are being held accountable or are being revealed as incompetent. For hosts operating with limited resources, and seeking to keep listeners tuned in, maintaining a smooth and professional conversation is equally important. Scripts provided by the guest also enable stations to sell airtime to clients who want to be on air quickly without risk of embarrassing their presenters:

> here my supervisor comes in and tells me I have a programme to do in a few minutes and the guests are already here, and I am not given a script, I can't research the interview before I start. (Diangamo, 2013)

During election periods – when most money from this form of broadcasting is available to stations – politicians may be seeking to respond as quickly as possible to their rival's programming schedule and to news events. As a host at *Breeze FM* puts it:

> What usually happens of late [during a by-election campaign] is that they will just phone; 'do you have space at such and such a time? I want to come and have a programme'. So then you look around. If there is space then we just say, 'OK, maybe come at such and such a time'. Then when they come, of course we will want to get a guide what it is that we are looking at, where we should concentrate our discussion, because they are paying for that programme. It's their programme and we also need the money. It's not a community radio station. (P. Banda, 2013)

Giving a particular example, the same host continues:

> For Dora [Silya – a senior MMD MP], it was more like that, because when she initially said she was going to have a programme we prepared nicely and we even wanted to ask about the nullification of her seat, but she said, 'no, I am here not to talk about myself. I am just here to talk about Reuben Mtholo Phiri [the candidate in Chipata Central that Silya was in the constituency to campaign for], so ask me questions that are just concerning Chipata Central and not anything else'. So, you know, being the person who paid, we had to really go with her choice. (P. Banda, 2013)

Clients do not only make calculated choices about the degree of journalistic freedom to allow interviewers, they also decide between the programme formats on offer. Political interviewees are sometimes nervous of the audience of an interactive show who, unlike a host being paid to make the guest look good, cannot be invited to follow only certain lines of questioning. Again, discussing negotiations with Dora Silya for a show when she decided not to have any interaction with the audience, the same host at *Breeze* commented:

> I don't know why she preferred straight interview [rather] than phone-in. Basically I think maybe she was scared that other issues may come out, so that is why she wanted it to be a local thing just to concentrate on the politics of Chipata, not any other issue. (P. Banda, 2013)

The degree of control that sponsors are able to exercise over the content and format of shows blurs questions of ownership, and thus editorial responsibility for what is broadcast. This is reflected in the way callers and authorities respond to the shows, and who they criticise when they disapprove. Pryd Chita, of PANOS Southern Africa, a media-NGO based in Lusaka that sponsors shows on

developmental issues on a range of radio stations, revealed the extent to which sponsors are understood by political actors and the regulatory authorities to own broadcasts that they sponsor. Chita suggested in that sense those actors and authorities have editorial responsibilities similar to those of the stations themselves. During a live call-in on 'Our Voices', a PANOS-sponsored show broadcast on Radio Phoenix, McDonald Chipenze, President of the NGO FODEP, had been extremely critical of delays in Zambia's constitution-revision process, to the irritation of those leading the process. Chita, rather than the staff at Radio Phoenix, had to deal with the fall-out:

> Whoever pays for it wants to have some control over the kind of content that goes out there. Even as PANOS we want to be sort of in a way held accountable for the kind of content that goes out there … Someone called [on air] from the Technical Committee on the Constitution – the guys drafting the constitution – and said, 'no, no, no, you can't say that … You guys have not given us an opportunity to come and defend ourselves' … Tomorrow I have to meet the spokesperson of the Technical Committee… I have told the people at Phoenix to help with a slot, next week. We need to … air this discussion so that we clear this air … OK there is a semi-crisis here so we need to deal with it … You see a person from the technical committee can say, 'no this is PANOS. PANOS this is your program, so how can you allow this?' (Chita, 2012)

It is not always the case that he who pays the piper calls the tune. Stations seek to defend their reputation as independent actors (and thus the trust of their listeners) by often ensuring that, even during sponsored conversations, they cover topics their audience would like to hear discussed and project a professional image. *Breeze FM* is a relatively large station, and has secured, in spite of the pressures that surround it, a reputation for being broadly editorially independent. Some hosts at the station take a more aggressive line on whether a client should go away satisfied from a sponsored show. One asserts that it is not the job of the host to protect a guest from hostile callers:

> A: Somebody pays, and then he's expecting to get positive comments. But something else comes and it's very negative, and then you find that you are taking sides. You are now with the negative guys, whereby at the end of the interview there isn't a hand shake, because he is disappointed …
> Q: Is there any pressure from the station to say, 'these guys paid, you know, you've scared them off, they'll never come back'?
> A: No, we don't care.
> Q: So you think it's the fault of the guest for not managing the situation properly?
> A: Sure. So Breeze is what? It's not on the side of the listener. It's not on the side of the one who has paid. It's just a space. We are just there facilitating … We are just a link, we're neutral. (Moyo, Interview with the Author – 2011)

Some poorer stations are more deeply dependent on income secured during elections and from political parties, and the purchasers of airtime are well aware of this. Discussing her involvement in both the initiation and governance of a small radio station within her own constituency, Dora Silya describes her contributions to the sustainability of the station:

> Of course during elections we do lots of programmes there, and I pay for all my programmes to make sure that the radio continues to run. (Silya, 2012)

Stations look for repeat-business and for reliable sponsors. Thus, political parties think carefully about which stations to favour as they buy programming space during elections. Support provided in sufficient volumes is likely to affect the station's general editorial stance – an effect potentially much more beneficial to the sponsor than anything they can expect to achieve from any one show.

Meanwhile, opposition parties struggle to access the public media, and so opposition parties are much more likely to spend through the independent media. Wynter Kabimba, Secretary General of the Patriotic Front during the 2011 elections, explained why the PF had spent so much of its campaign funding on accessing the independent media and, once it was in power, why ministers had typically been more withdrawn from engagement through talk shows:

> We were in the opposition, the most effective channel that we had to reach out to the people, you know, was the radio, especially local community radio stations and Radio Phoenix. Access to public media was made very difficult by the MMD, you know, so we had to effectively use private radio stations and local community radio stations to reach out to the people. We did that most effectively, you know, during rallies. We paid two or three radio stations you know, on one rally, just to expand the

frequency, you know of transmission. Now we have other means of reaching out to the public, other than the radio stations. (Scott & Kabimba, 2013)

This kind of dynamic is generalised. Apart from calculations about audience share and segmentation, NGOs provide grant funding, equipment, training and other capacity support, as well as purchasing advertising and airtime through 'partnerships' in the production of shows, including call-ins, with stations that they chose for other reasons than just audience share. They might choose to work with those they identify as most capable, best governed or least politically captured, in order to buttress their institutional survival. Large numbers of sponsored shows and public announcements from state agencies have the net effect of a substantial subsidy to ZNBC.

There are, again, exceptions to this general rule. In Lusaka, where commercial media have become strongly partisan against the ruling party in the run up to the 2011 elections, MMD strategists decided that it was impractical to punish the stations financially by cutting them out of its media buying, accepting that:

> Even if they were very hostile, we still gave them business … You jump onto a taxi, and you find a taxi driver listening to a show from a radio station that you didn't expect, then it means it's important. (Mtonga, 2012)

The financial strictures facing radio stations do not simply lead to airtime being captured by the richest parties (although they buy the most airtime and advertising). Anyone willing to pay for their thirty minutes of political fame can secure access to an interview. Elias Chipimo, Presidential candidate for a small new party, NAREP, notes:

> What you find, particularly with community radio, is that … you can pay for a programme to air your views, unaltered, the only constraint being, you know, you don't say anything that would compromise the status of the radio station, and there's a pretty wide berth that allows you pretty much to get your entire message through. And so, we, we always knew that it was going to be an important medium, particularly for small parties that have just coming onto the political scene for the first time. (Chipimo, 2012)

Because of stations' desire to serve their listeners, and to provide a public service by covering the breadth of public debate, some of those buying airtime are also aware that they have something to offer the stations – their personal celebrity. Call-in shows with political personalities are amongst the most popular of all media outputs. Especially in cases in which larger stations, such as *Muvi-TV*, *ZNBC* and *Radio Phoenix*, run high-profile interactive shows that are not sponsored, they may be able to leverage this to get coverage for free. Again Elias Chipimo suggests:

> They are businessmen and so they will understand that they've got space. They need content. Because they need the content it's a bit of a symbiotic relationship. If you are not on the station then people aren't really going to be that interested in, you know, staying tuned to it. So they do want you there, but they recognize that you are just as desperate to get into it, just as they are to have you on. So at some point you reach a compromise. If you don't have the resources to be able to meet the rate that they've established … what you try and do … you try and get yourself within the cycle of invitees … Once in a while you can try and push for a slot … And they generally have tended to be accommodating again because they want the variety … They want you, and you can usually try and solicit a spot but invariably what we found is that it's them calling us and saying, 'can we get you on?' … So generally, this is also the non-campaign period … when we get close to the campaigns, then, you know, they are spoilt for choice at that point. (Chipimo, 2012)

Journalistic independence (or its appearance) on the part of the stations may also be important to the sponsor. Being grilled, and being willing to be grilled, can be an important aspect of the reputation of a player in the public sphere. Some informants see the emergence of a more interactive culture as having generated a new set of skills needed by politicians: being able to engage a hostile, unseen audience, answering an unpredictable, uncontrollable roster of questions. Choosing to appear on an interactive show during a time of difficulty for a politician can be deployed as something like Tony Blair's 'masochism strategy', through which he made public his willingness to face criticism and make tough arguments over unpopular policies in the hope that the public might at least reward his willingness to suffer public flagellation for his beliefs.

Immediately following an interview on *Breeze FM* in the closing hours of the tight Chipata Central by-election campaign of 2013, for which he did not impose a script, MMD President Nevers Mumba argued that politicians can benefit from letting a journalist set the agenda:

> I could have said, 'come on I am not going to answer you, now let's go to the elections'. But that doesn't look good, because people will think you are scared of addressing any other subject, and of course some of the issues he was raising, maybe some of our voters have these questions. And what better time to answer those questions than now? … He raises it in order to help me clarify that point, and so we allow such kind of 'misbehaviour' once in a while. (Mumba, 2013)

Where sponsors understand that a certain amount of 'misbehaviour' by hosts and callers is necessary for shows to attract engaged audiences, the agenda of sponsored call-in radio is subject to negotiation. We can see how this room for manoeuvre is established, and what use hosts and callers seek to make of it most clearly through a more detailed study of the evolution of one programme. The next PiMA working paper in this series does just this (Fraser, 2016).

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