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# Participation, Citizenship, and Pirate Radio as Empowerment:
# The Case of Radio Dialogue in Zimbabwe

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This article critically discusses audience participation and civic engagement in Radio Dialogue as a pirate radio station. As an illegal broadcaster, the station innovatively combines the use of ward committees and digital media technologies such as the Internet and mobile phones to create a participatory culture that is potentially organic, bottom-up, and democratic. While the democratic potential of participation and the digital media in pirate radio are acknowledged, they are seen as very much socially and historically contingent. While participation and the digital media are sometimes erroneously seen as synonymous with deliberative public spheres, I argue that they can also be used to support and legitimize authoritarian cultures that are embedded in the everyday, non-institutionalized forms of power. Participation is not always positive, as it can be top-down, mediated, regulated, and therefore exclusive and undemocratic. It can serve as a regime of endorsement and disapproval for political, economic and cultural power. Digital media can also be reconstructed to support undemocratic cultures that are not only embedded in radio's organizational and institutional journalistic practices, but also in the power relations concealed by the rituals of how society communicates with itself. These norms ultimately determine whether it is the voices of men, women, youth, the poor, or the elite in the community that find expression through digital media.

## Introduction

Radio Dialogue, a pirate community radio station operating from within Zimbabwe, has been denied a broadcasting license by the government for the past 10 years. Since its founding in 2001, the station has relied mostly on innovative strategies to broadcast its content to its audiences that allow it to bypass a very restrictive legal environment. Using roadcasting, a technique that endeared the station to

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the local residents of Bulawayo, where it is located, the station distributed audio cassettes and CDs containing a mix of music, news, and current affairs programming that were then played by bus and taxi drivers for the commuting public. Most of this content, mostly distributed through underground networks to avoid political persecution, was always critical of the state and the ruling party. Most of the programs highlighted the community problems of the city of Bulawayo and the general concerns of socioeconomic marginalization of the region of Matabeleland. Radio Dialogue, although an illegal entity, became popular with the community, and its news and current affairs soon found their way to homesteads, beauty salons, pubs, and beer halls. When government realized this, it reacted swiftly to ban the distribution of the station's content to the public using its armory of legislation, such as the Broadcasting Services Act (2001) and Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (2002). However, Radio Dialogue, working with sympathetic city councillors (mostly from the opposition parties), quickly established ward committees around the city, so as to take advantage of a loophole in AIPPA, which allows media outlets to broadcast or publish without a license as long as the distribution of content is limited to their membership. Twenty-nine Radio Dialogue ward committees (RDWCs) were formed, and these today play a key role in the life of the station. To date, the station continues to outwit the state through a number of creative content distribution strategies. Apart from its short wave (SW) news and current affairs broadcasts initiated in 2009, the station also uses the Internet, social media, Frontline SMS (a mobile phone text-messaging platform), and the interactive voice response (IVR) system that is popularly known as the Freedom Fone.

This article investigates the station's creative use of both ward committees and digital media in creating spaces for audience and community participation in Radio Dialogue. The main question it pursues is this: To what extent do RDWCs, the Internet, and mobile phones enhance audience and community participation in the station? Digital media like the Internet and mobile phones are generally celebrated as "technologies of freedom" (Morisett, 2004). They "excite public imagination with narratives of democratization [and democratic participation and civic engagement]" (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 3). To that end, the article discusses the potential of the Internet and mobile phones to democratize and open up Radio Dialogue as pirate radio.

*Authoritarianism and the Birth of Pirate Radio in Zimbabwe*

Historically, pirate radio stations are mostly associated with restrictive media environments that are politically and legally repressive. In authoritarian systems, hegemony is normally constructed through monolithic media systems that tend to marginalize alternative views in support of the interests of the ruling elite. When the diversity and pluralism of national public opinion is undermined by such national media systems, this normally culminates in oppositional discourses finding expression through pirate radio broadcasts and other alternative channels. In Zimbabwe, pirate radio has been part of the media landscape in both colonial and post-colonial epochs, due to an entrenched culture of state authoritarianism in the media and everyday politics. In colonial times, pirate radio emerged as part of the decolonization agenda when liberation movements used it to mobilize the masses against colonial occupation. The Broadcasting Act (1957) had created a monolithic environment where the state broadcaster, the Rhodesian Broadcasting Corporation (RBC), was the only broadcaster. Windrich (2010) argues that, under the policies of the Rhodesian Front (RF), broadcasting as an institution was organized racially to advance the political and economic interests of the white minorities. It was not democratic or participatory, as the

majority of black people were marginalized. Although the RF later started black community radio stations, such as *Radio Jacaranda* (1964), *Radio Manica* (1969), *Radio Matopos* (1970), and *Radio Mthwakazi* (1970s), these stations primarily sought to divide black people along regional and ethnic lines, so as to undermine the liberation struggle. Consequently, these undemocratic colonial media systems and policies led to the growth of pirate radio stations when black nationalist movements, such as the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), started the *Voice of the Revolution* and *Voice of Zimbabwe* radio stations, respectively (Moyo, 2010). These were mostly offshore pirate stations that broadcast from sympathetic independent African countries, such as Zambia and Mozambique. Their primary objective was to fan the anti-colonial sentiment among black communities through broadcasting propaganda that sought to mobilize resistance that could bring about political change. They largely operated on a top-down, undemocratic, non-participatory, and propagandistic model that aimed more at mobilization than empowerment. When Zimbabwe became independent in 1980, the state monopoly in broadcasting continued based on the same colonial legislation previously used by the RF. Although the national constitution clearly enshrined the freedom of expression and multi-party politics, the new black government created a de facto one-party state, which undermined the diversity of political opinion in the political public sphere. The culture of authoritarianism continued on the pretexts of national security and nation building, which were used to justify the stranglehold on broadcasting by the state (Saunders, 2000; Zaffiro, 2002). Hence, majority rule had failed not only to bring about pluralism and diversity in broadcasting, but also to deliver real, substantive civic and media freedoms. Control was not only limited to broadcasting, but also extended to newspapers. For example, public and private newspapers operated in a very restrictive environment where colonial laws such as the Criminal Defamation Act, the Official Secrets Act, and the Law and Order Maintenance Act continued to undermine their autonomy and editorial independence. Like the RF, the new post-independence government also used extrajudicial strategies, such as intimidation, torture and detention of journalists. In the late 1990s, mounting political resistance by civil society and opposition parties to authoritarianism culminated in the further reinforcement of media control by the government. In 2000, for example, Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) noted that "20 local journalists were arrested and 3 correspondents of foreign press were expelled from the country" (RSF, 2002, p. 1). Again, according to the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) and Amnesty International (AI), the following year, a total of 44 journalists were arrested and five were beaten up. In January 2001, the *Daily News* printing press was bombed, while the offices of the prospective private radio broadcaster Voice of the People (VOP) were also bombed two years later.

The fact that the post-independent government had maintained a tight grip, especially on broadcast media, since the early years of independence meant that, in reality, citizens had no space through which they could assert their newly found constitutional rights. Freedom of expression, although clearly enshrined in the constitution, was useless if people did not have access to the strategic medium of broadcasting. Despite this protracted and fossilized culture of media control, the post-2000 period has been characterized by the mushrooming of alternative media platforms, such as news blogs, Internet radio, and pirate radio. This started in 2001, when the Broadcasting Act (1957) was repealed by the Supreme Court. A prospective private broadcaster, Capital Radio, successfully contested the constitutionality of the law. Immediately after the ruling, Capital radio and FM100 started broadcasting from secret locations in Harare (Moyo, 2003). The government responded by using the presidential powers to pass an emergency law to deal with what it called the invasion of the airwaves. The

Broadcasting Services Act was enacted in 2001 with the announced chief aim of liberalizing the airwaves. The law, generally seen as more draconian than the laws of the colonial regime, prohibits foreign ownership in broadcasting and requires 100% local content for radio broadcasting. Over a decade after the enactment of this law, Zimbabwe still does not have community and private broadcasters. This stringent broadcasting environment has led to the proliferation of pirate radio as a major source of information for citizens. Apart from Radio Dialogue, other pirate radio stations include SW Radio Africa (London), Voice of the People (Johannesburg), and Voice of America-Zimbabwe (Washington, DC). Most of these stations, including even Voice of America, are run by journalists exiled from the country.

### The Bulawayo City and Matabeleland Region

It is important to give a brief historical background of Bulawayo as the community which Radio Dialogue seeks to serve. Bulawayo is estimated to have a population of 1.5 million people. It is located in the western Zimbabwe region called Matabeleland. Although there are many ethnic groups in the city, the predominant population in the city and the region are Ndebele people who migrated from South Africa in the 19th century. In post- independence Zimbabwe, Bulawayo and Matabeleland has generally regarded itself as marginalized politically and economically. People perceive the post independence nation-building and state-building processes as undermining the well-being of the region. For example, after independence, the government's wish to create a one-party state had its practical manifestation in what are now generally referred to as the Matabeleland atrocities, where thousands of people in the region were killed by the state army (CCJP, 1999). Following Robert Mugabe's one-party state agenda, government forces moved into the Matabeleland region in 1982 to destroy the support base of ZAPU, which was the only major opposition party at the time. According to CCJP, more than 20,000 civilians were massacred by the Korean-trained Fifth Brigade, whose presence in the region was purportedly to fight an insignificant number of dissidents who were allegedly linked to ZAPU (ibid.). In addition to this, a lot of people were raped, maimed, or detained, and thousands disappeared. The 1987 Unity Accord between ZANU PF and ZAPU led to the end of the killings. However, people in Bulawayo and the greater Matabeleland region continue to see themselves as marginalized and discriminated against. Internal colonization, a process by which the local elite and local resources are appropriated to serve the dominant regions in Zimbabwe, is seen as a major problem that undermines the development of the region. This has resulted in the radical politics of secession and self-determination, a politics which perceives the problem of Matabeleland as largely being ethnic discrimination. As a community pirate station, Radio Dialogue carries the hopes of the community by being a channel through which people can vent current and historical problems. Its independence from state control is seen by the community as representing the first autonomous and independent space where people from the region can truly exercise freedom of expression without undue restriction from the government.

### Theorizing the Alternative in Community Pirate Radio

Community radio is traditionally perceived as alternative for many reasons. Apart from the basic reason of standing as another option to the mainstream, there are also many other reasons which this section of the article seeks to engage with in trying to create a critical theory of the alternative. Atton

(2002, p. 10), for instance, contends that a comprehensive model of what constitutes alternative media "must be as much concerned with how it is organized within its sociocultural context as with its subject matter." In other words, a theoretically sound and rigorous framework of community radio as alternative media must pay attention not only to its organizational structure, but also to content and how it is produced, financed, and distributed. One such theory of the alternative is proposed by Bailey, Cammaerts, and Carpentier (2008), who give a typology that endeavors to address the complex and multidimensional nature of the concept. These scholars posit that alternative media, among other things, must serve the community, offer counter-hegemonic discourses to power, and be autonomous from the state and market influences (ibid., pp. 5–33). In the following paragraphs, I try to discuss each of the above factors.

Alternative media must always be in service to the community. The community, defined in both spatial and nonspatial terms, suggests a close-knit collectivity that shares a common culture and history. However, this need not necessarily be geographic, because communities can be based on interest, and furthermore, because digital technologies like the Internet have brought about virtual communities or network societies that transcend the limits of time and space (Castells, 2000). From this perspective, alternative media can function as translocal institutions, attending to and representing the interests of communities of interest—not as territorially bound entities, but "as people sharing a common condition or problem" (Popple, 1995, p. 4). With the advent of the Internet, for example, community radio is increasingly associated with deterritorialized and transnational alternative public spheres.

One of the fundamental processes underpinning community service in alternative media is participation (Bailey et al., 2008; Waltz, 2005). Alternative media are organized primarily "to enable wider social participation in the creation, production, and dissemination of content" (Atton, 2002, p. 25). While community participation is undoubtedly a kaleidoscopic concept, it is nonetheless very important in conceptualizing the role of citizens in alternative media, as it underscores the importance of openness and access to such media. Participation implies the citizens' direct and autonomous involvement in both producing stories in the media and mediating their social experiences through the media. Bailey et al. argue that "participation *in* the media and *through* the media sees the communicative process not as a series of practices that are often restrictively controlled by media professionals, but as a human right that cuts across societies" (2008, p. 11).

Consequently, participation is highly interwoven with the right to communicate, which citizens exercise not only within agreed constitutional limits, but also with a sense of civic responsibility to hold the state answerable to the people (see Dakroury, 2006; Hamelink & Hoffmann, 2008). To this end, participation and community radio as a form of alternative space appear highly interwoven, to the extent that it is difficult to speak of one to the exclusion of the other. As such, some scholars have variously defined alternative media as "participatory media," "grassroots media," or "small-scale media," so as to emphasize the notions of inclusion and participatory communication that are often embedded in alternative media like community radio. Alternative media, therefore, implies a philosophy of communicative practices that are embedded within the everyday lives of communities, as well as content that is produced by those communities. Alternative media—as opposed to mainstream media—constitute an increasingly dominant channel for civic culture. Yet, not all alternative media necessarily embody a civic attitude. As will be demonstrated later in this article, alternative media (and indeed, community

radio) must be premised on a democratic participant philosophy that discourages a top-down model of public communication in favor of a bottom-up model that mainstreams the participation and empowerment of audiences in the communication process.

Alternative media can also be conceptualized—perhaps more significantly—in terms of its counter-hegemonic role in society, which is often expressed in news values that embrace political or cultural radicalism (Atton, 2002; Bailey et al., 2008). Such media often do not only seek to challenge or question political and cultural control of the masses by the elite, but also to demystify the ruling elite's social engineering that is usually projected as natural and commonsensical by the mainstream media. Needless to say, alternative media (and indeed, community radio) are, epistemologically framed, oppositional to dominant worldviews and their social orders. They also often represent ideologies of the underdog. These rarely form part of the mainstream discourse in the elite media. In authoritarian environments found in both liberal and autocratic states, alternative media stories can covertly or overtly advance a social-change agenda through activism that underpins their informational and educational roles in news dissemination (Waltz, 2005). In the struggle to attribute meaning to events and human experience, alternative media are guided by the quest for active citizenship and the emancipation of the marginalized classes. The connotations brought by the notion of citizenship have interesting ramifying effects on alternative media as a form of civic media. Citizenship implies a commitment toward the public good in the political sphere. It is a sphere of rights and responsibilities. This commitment is based on a sense of civic duty to assert those liberties that are enjoyed individually or in unison with fellow citizens (Held, 1996). In this regard, alternative media must also be construed as being more than the mere dissemination of news and images by ordinary people, because it also embodies a philosophy of communication that seeks to emancipate the citizen from state and corporate propaganda.

### Building Organic and Digital Participation:
### Ward Committees and Digital Media in Radio Dialogue

Organizational theory is central in understanding how democratic and authoritarian media systems function, as well as the extent to which they perceive citizen participation as an important element of their discursive practices (Carpentier, 2011). In other words, the way media organizations are organized not only influences who can access and participate in them and at what level, but also what inputs one can make in public policy. However, access and participation is dependent not only on organizational structures, but also on the types of technologies used by an organization. Participation in the media in time and space is largely influenced by what mediation technologies are available to audiences and how they facilitate ease of access.

The combined use of ward committees and digital media by Radio Dialogue not only deepens the roots of the station in the Bulawayo community, but also further democratizes communication by empowering local citizens to participate in local debates without the limits of time and space. While, on the one hand, Radio Dialogue as a pirate community station is structurally organized in a way that enhances and facilitates democratic participation by its audiences, on the other hand, the use of the new digital media that are generally seen as having a greater potential for active, individualized, and interactive usage reinforces its capacity to be an alternative platform that is truly informed by community

involvement (Lister et al., 2009). Hence, the following sections of the article critically discuss how Radio Dialogue's use of ward committees and digital media contributes to the creation of organic, bottom-up, and participatory communication in local development and governance issues in Bulawayo.

*Ward Committees: A Structural Analysis of the Construction of Radio Dialogue as Participative Radio*

Carpentier and Scifo argue that "community [radio] organisations [must be] centres of expertise that not only cherish democratic practice, but [are] also knowledgeable in the actual organisation of democracy" (2010, p. 116). Theoretically speaking, community radio represents a break away from the private and public service broadcasting models which are sometimes regarded as top-down and paternalistic in favor of a bottom-up model that is anchored in the direct participation, ownership, and control of local communities. The authors identify two participatory models in community media that can be used to frame and discuss community access and participation in Radio Dialogue. On the one hand is structural participation, which must create spaces of "decision-making [that] allows members to co-decide, [albeit] in varying degrees" (ibid.). On the other hand, is content- related participation, which essentially "allows members of communities to have their voices heard thus validating and strengthening the community" (ibid.). The two are, however, not mutually exclusive, as structural participation has direct implications on the diversity of voices in community radio. The diversity of voices can also affect structural participation because it is not a fixed commodity, but a product of relational dynamics that is born out of the power play between competing groups.

The creative use of ward committees by Radio Dialogue embodies and articulates the ideal of grassroots participation and community involvement at structural and content levels. A ward in Zimbabwe represents one of the smallest population cells after the district and provincial levels (Conveyers, 1990). While the RDWCs are embedded on wards that were a product of the government's policy of decentralization in the mid-1990s, it is imperative to note that the station's primary aim in using these structures is not to replicate what is now generally perceived as the state's pseudo-participatory structures, but to promote participative citizenship based on local or grassroots community frameworks. Locality as a geographic and discursive space implies the access to a multiplicity of small, but critical community narratives by radio that provide "the key to the reversal of hierarchies of power" (Mosse, 2001, p. 16). The wards constitute the smallest community blocks, and more crucially, they also interlink with many other networks that represent the multiple layers of the Bulawayo community. These networks advance specific aggregates of interests, such as those of youth, women, and other social movements in the city, which ultimately find expression on Radio Dialogue. Although such an approach to constructing structural and content participation in Radio Dialogue is potentially exclusive, in that it may neglect the agency of very marginal groups that lack the capacity to mobilize, it has the potential to unleash the democratic impetus of the community, particularly because of the capacity of institutional and group networking. However, Cleaver (2001, p. 44) warns against the fetishization of committees and associations in participatory approaches, as they can "still reproduce locally specific configurations of inequality and exclusion." Interestingly, this applies to Radio Dialogue despite its noble intentions toward creating an inclusive and participatory radio structure.

The station has an editorial staff complement of 4 male and 4 female journalists which, while reflective of the organization's democratic structure to some degree, also shows the entrenchment of donor policies of gender equity, which are a prerequisite for funding for community radio projects. Radio Dialogue is entirely funded by donors such as the Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa (OSISA), among others. It has no advertising or community financial support.[1] Its gender equity balancing act in the employment policy, however, falls short when the other indices of ethnicity, language, and race are considered, especially in relation to other ethnic minority groups in Bulawayo. Consequently, this structural flaw is traceable to the ward committees, whose democratic deficit is that, among other forms of exclusion, they fail to capture the diversity of languages in Bulawayo. The membership of RDWCs is based on community elections, which are merely a political processes, and are not underpinned by the need to promote pluralism and diversity in the radio station. Consequently, minority languages which are very predominant in Bulawayo and the surrounding areas within the station's footprint, such as Kalanga, Venda, and Tonga, are not used at the station. This negatively affects the inclusion of these groups in the station's programming. Internal content diversity in Radio Dialogue must be seen as largely dependent on, as well as a reflection of, the external structural diversity of the RDWCs, which, as I show later in this article, play important roles in decision-making and content production. If these committees, as appendages of the Radio Dialogue institution, lack linguistic and cultural diversity, it's not only the access of minorities that is curtailed, but the range of discourses at the station. As Doyle argues, pluralism in the media (and indeed in hybrid media like pirate community radio stations) must also entail "the number of different and independent voices and the differing . . . [cultural] . . . and political opinions and representations" (2002, p. 12). Thus, the celebration of the institutional autonomy of community radio from the state and the market has often overlooked that the locus of power in communities is not limited to institutions, but extends to "social norms and practices that are practiced throughout society" (Kothari, 2001, p. 141). These social norms construct the community as amorphous, thus suppressing the cultural and political diversity in community radio.

Hence, Radio Dialogue's democratic participant model is overshadowed by the neglect of other ethnic minority languages. By using the dominant official national languages of Ndebele, Shona, and English—which are also the main languages of the state broadcaster in Zimbabwe—Radio Dialogue unwittingly reproduces the same domination and subordination of linguistic minorities because language in culturally diverse communities lies at the very center of participatory radio, especially in relation to content creation and consumption. Language determines who gets to speak and who gets to hear, and as Hochheimer (1999, p. 244) observes, "who gets to speak [and] who gets to hear . . . are crucial issues in conceptualizing democratic media systems." While the station manager acknowledged this structural shortcoming in Radio Dialogue and its committees, it amply demonstrates how the community, as a social and analytical category for community radio, should never be taken as an unproblematic and self-evident collective. Power relations in terms of language, gender, race, class, and even age are invariably part of any communication process, including even those media systems that are epistemologically and

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[1] Donor agencies such as OSISA rightly insist on gender equality in most projects that they fund. The project proposal template has a slot for the applicant to explain how the project would deal with gender issues. However, it is important that community radio broadcasters be also required to demonstrate having a democratic and inclusive language policy that is conscientious of marginalized ethnic minorities.

normatively constructed as inclusive and participatory. In Radio Dialogue, cultural power relations have clearly determined resource allocation in terms of which languages are constructed as representative of the community, and which ones are seen as peripheral. Cultural power creates subtle forms of social hierarchies that influence the selection of voices that set the cultural agenda in community radio. As such, while the Ndebele and Shona groups enjoy direct influence on Radio Dialogue's governance and content-production, other linguistic groups have been excluded, and this exclusion may extend to the unintended consequences of political and economic marginalization of those groups. The excluded communities in Radio Dialogue are most likely talked for and about, and they cannot directly influence the agenda of the station. This shows that poor representation mechanisms in participatory radio result in structural flaws that may, themselves, be based on an equally flawed conceptualization of the community that is constructed around dominant interests. Indeed, "acts and processes of participation-sharing knowledge, negotiating power relations, and political activism can still conceal and reinforce oppressions and injustices in their various manifestations" (Cooke & Kothari, 2001, p. 24). In other words, the "myth of structurelessness" in participatory communication in general, and community radio in particular, can conceal the dominant elite interests that legitimize their dominance through the aestheticized ideologies of participation and community. The two do mask regimes of ethnic and cultural power in Radio Dialogue, and power is often "tolerable only if it masks a substantial part of itself" (Foucault, 1979, p. 86). The reification of community and participation in Radio Dialogue thus shows the risks that may come with an uncritical engagement with the two processes.

However, it is important to note that, although Radio Dialogue and its ward committees are structurally limited, especially in terms of language, the committees represent one of the creative ways of involving ordinary people in the decision-making process about the station's policy and content. According to Nigel Johnson, a Jesuit priest and one of the founders of the station, each of the 29 RDWCs has "one representative on Radio Dialogue General Council, the highest policy making structure of the station to which the Trustees report" (Jonson interview, 2011). The committee members are elected by their local communities at ward level. As part of the general council that is made up of all the wards and some progressive social movements, such as Bulawayo Residents Association, Bulawayo Agenda, Bulawayo Young Men Christian Association, and others, the RDWCs are part of the rhizomatic community radio structure that allows them to influence the direction of the station's policy and content. Membership of the general council is institutional and not individual, and to a certain degree, it constructs a form of participation in Radio Dialogue that can be regarded as not necessarily democratic, but top-down, bureaucratic, and formalistic. While institutionalism is generally seen in participatory approaches as ideal for the creation of social capital through networks, it is important to mention that participation is, among other factors, ultimately shaped by the sociopolitical and ideological factors of a given epoch. For example, because Radio Dialogue was formed during a period of resistance against the Mugabe regime, its structures, from the committees to the general council, tend to exclude all community institutions and movements perceived to be aligned with the regime. This exclusion—especially from the general council, as it is a powerful policymaking body—also undermines the variegated nature of political discourse and opinion in Bulawayo. In such circumstances, therefore, participation has to be seen to be layered like an onion, with degrees of centrality and peripherality for participants. Types of discourse determine both political and cultural membership, and the selection and exclusion of participants, while also influencing who has the power to influence the institutionally embedded proceedings. Radio Dialogue and its related

structures of governance thus reflect the spirit of a historical moment as constructed and negotiated by the social forces that are actors within the invisible and constantly shifting boundaries of what they perceive as a democratic participant discourse.

Although there are evident structural and procedural weaknesses in the participatory approach used by Radio Dialogue, it is important to not overlook some strengths. The Radio Dialogue council, for example, meets twice a year, and this, in principle, provides a platform for the practical manifestation of participatory radio at the structural or governance level. The objectives of this kind of participatory radio are long-term, aiming to create a more democratic participatory culture that is based on the prioritization of the inputs of ordinary people, thus making them the key players in making and shaping the communication process in their society. As a policy space, the council allows for community debate and inputs that shape Radio Dialogue's form and content. It is a space where Radio Dialogue listens to its community.

The RDWCs also meet independently in the wards conference twice a year prior to the general council meetings so as to gather and refine the views of the community about the station and its role in highlighting local issues of public interest. As stated earlier, these ward committees blur and blend with a multiplicity of community networks in Bulawayo, thus creating an organic sense of community ownership and involvement in the radio station. This form of organization facilitates participatory communication, which Jakubowicz (2010) argues is the sinew of all democratically structured media. To a certain extent then, the ward committees provide the community base for Radio Dialogue, so that, in spite of the station being an illegal entity, it is gradually creating a fairly broad-based and society-wide participatory communication culture in Bulawayo. The station's organizational structure, albeit with limitations that are also acknowledged by management, clearly endeavors to build enduring structures of community involvement and participation that are not typically associated with pirate radio. As the station manager explains, "the creation of the RDWCs after the banning of our roadcasting by government, inadvertently took the station to its rightful owners—the Bulawayo community. Through these ward committees today Radio Dialogue is Bulawayo and Bulawayo is Radio Dialogue" (Ndebele, interview, 2011). Hence, it is interesting to note how the ban of the station's broadcasting spawned a potentially irreversible culture that represents a paradigmatic shift in pirate radio in the country. Historically, pirate radio has been associated with a top-down, propagandistic broadcasting model, but the RDWCs are creating a pirate radio model informed by a bottom-up philosophy that can potentially put the community voices at the center of broadcasting. The ward committees may not necessarily represent "maximalist forms of participation" (see Carpentier, 2011) that are associated with radical democracy, but it is imperative to note that a process of nurturing representative, institutional, and sometimes direct individual audience and citizen participation is underway. Through the ward committees, Bulawayo's pirate radio has been able to construct an organizational model that structurally and normatively expresses the values of community radio as participatory and inclusive. Its structure and governance translates community broadcasting's normative principles of open access and democratic participation into the real practice of participatory communication that endeavors to be deep and wide, comprising youth, women, and civic organizations.

In terms of content participation, 24 of the 29 RDWCs are actively involved in the station's content production. According to journalists interviewed at the station, RDWCs directly participate in some

radio programs by visiting the station for talk shows, facilitating broader community access to the station, and using digital media to generate content. They are also part of the campaign by the station to encourage people to use text messaging, mobile voice calls, e-mailing, and social media to participate in and through Radio Dialogue on issues of local and national importance. The station itself has a program called *Going Digital*, which also promotes uses of new media on radio. Apart from digital linkages with the station, which I discuss exhaustively in the next section, the station manager argued that "Radio Dialogue is always abuzz with people coming in and out. Most of these people are from different wards and the Committees themselves come to make inputs of one form or another to our programmes" (Ndebele interview, 2011). For example, youths from different wards are directly responsible for the production of *Youth Chat*, a weekly program that discusses issues that affect young people. Women participate in *Ebandla* normally as studio guests, although some of the program ideas are based on views which are sent to the station, mostly via e-mail and mobile text messages. Locally based civil society organizations also directly contribute content and participate in many political programs.

Radio Dialogue's community participatory frameworks are not only limited to the organization, but also extend to other physical spaces in the community. For instance, RDWCs independently organize live broadcast meetings in their community halls, where the station then "puts on a show on a topic selected by the local people who invite participants" (Johnson interview, 2011). The shows are like "a normal public meeting, but presented like a radio programme with jingles, local news, and audience phone-in" (ibid.). Radio Dialogue's Umthwakazi Arts Festival, an annual cultural event, is also another space where all 29 wards meet to celebrate the culture and traditions of the Bulawayo community and the Matabeleland region. This festival is used by the station as an opportunity to harvest cultural content produced by the community in the form of poetry, song, and storytelling. These two social events interweave Radio Dialogue into the Bulawayo community's political and cultural fabric, thus creating a potential for a counter-hegemonic culture of bottom-up discourses in a country where public communication has traditionally been largely top-down and authoritarian. The extension of the sites of production of content from the organization to the community reflects the station's larger endeavors to entrench itself in the community, even though it is constructed as an illegal space by the state.

**Digitizing the Community Voice: The Participative Potential of New Media in Radio Dialogue**

Community media do not "operate outside the processes of convergence and now—like many other media organisations—are using a diversity of technologies to realize their objectives" (Carpentier & Scifo, 2010, p. 116). This is even more applicable if, like Radio Dialogue, the radio station is a pirate station that operates in a politically volatile environment, such as Zimbabwe. This section discusses the appropriation of the Internet and mobile phones by Radio Dialogue and its audiences. The primary question it concerns is this: How are these technologies transforming community pirate radio in terms of the construction or reinforcement of participatory cultures between the institution and audiences on the one hand, and between citizens and the state on the other? As Jenkins argues, new media "are enabling average consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content" (2006, p. 17). They are, in principle, creating active audiences in radio who participate across the production, distribution, and consumption of content. These perceived emerging participatory cultures on radio are not necessarily

interesting in and of themselves, but in relation to how they can be said to constitute active or participative citizenship.

Apart from its website and some social networking sites such as Facebook, Radio Dialogue uses Frontline SMS and the Freedom Fone. Briefly, Frontline SMS is open access software that interfaces computer and mobile phone communication through text messaging. A computer is fitted with a mobile SIM card to allow for instantaneous two-way text messaging between a radio station and its audiences. The Freedom Fone is an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system that uses a Mobigater hub, which is a GSM device which can take up to four SIM cards of network providers, and it is usually used for toll-free connections for radio listeners. It is actually like a landline phone that has no key pad. When used as a radio, people dial the number(s) of the mobigater and listen to news recordings that have been uploaded, or leave messages of their own using their mobile handsets or the landline phone. Radio Dialogue uses this technology for both news gathering and distribution purposes, although the audience uptake is still poor because of the prohibitive costs of mobile phone calls. Again, the mobile networks currently do not offer any toll-free numbers for use by radio stations. The government has also argued that the use of the Freedom Fone amounts to broadcasting, and is therefore illegal.

Frontline SMS, however, has been successfully utilized by the station to promote interaction with audiences in the production and dissemination of news. For instance, Radio Dialogue has 2000 subscribers to its Frontline SMS service who text mostly news tips and feedback to the station's programs. According to the station manager, the station now uses public text messages extensively for story ideas. He said that, every morning, before the diary meeting, the staff checks the text messages from Frontline SMS and their e-mail for story ideas:

> It's the first thing we do every day before the diary meeting so that we can select news alerts and get story ideas for our current affairs programming. Initially, most alerts used to come from RDWCs who acted more like our citizen journalists. Increasingly, more messages are beginning to come from the people in various Wards. Through this gadget and mobile phones, it's like the community participates in our diary meetings and directly influences the news and current affairs agenda. (Ndebele interview, 2011)

The advent of mobile telephony and technologies like Frontline SMS has clearly culminated in greater audience activity and involvement in news. However, the nature of that participation is not direct, but mediated—and therefore still subject to the processes of selection and exclusion that take place in news production. Despite efforts toward the institutionalization of participatory cultures in Radio Dialogue, the station's diary meetings must be understood as performing various functions and serving different objectives in any given situation. They can at once play the roles of facilitating, amplifying, or even filtering, policing, and gate-keeping audience participation. Text messages on potential news stories from the community are either attributed or denied some news value, and therefore, the emerging civic engagement cultures rely on how democratic and inclusive Radio Dialogue is. Whereas RDWCs facilitate both direct and representative forms of participation from audiences, text messaging and e-mailing constitute mediated forms of participation that depend on Radio Dialogue's organizational cultures of production. As Carpentier (2011) observes, organizational cultures and practices are central in shaping

and influencing levels of audience participation. As he rightly contends, mediated participation, though sometimes diverse and pluralistic, is minimalistic because of the constraining nature of hierarchical structures of radio production. Mediated participation can also be seen as undercutting possibilities of radical forms citizenship on radio.

At this point, let me move on from the nature of audience participation to concentrate on changes in newsroom cultures and journalistic practices that have been occasioned by these new digital media. Radio Dialogue receives more than 20 text messages a week on news tips and requests for telephone calls from known and unknown news sources. Although I have argued that this kind of participation by audiences is regulated by the station, the appropriation of digital forms of participation involving text messaging, e-mailing, and the use of social media is, clearly, slowly changing journalistic practices at the station. For example, the unsolicited text messages from audiences mean that news gathering and dissemination have radically transformed from being the sole preserve of a journalist to being an inclusive and participatory exercise that involves audiences and professionals. Thus, radio convergence has empowered audiences to take advantage of radio to influence the content production. However, audiences can still compete with radio to independently publish the stories using other digital media platforms, such as social media and blogs. As acknowledged by one journalist at Radio Dialogue, "Technologies like the mobile phone mean that we (i.e., Radio Dialogue) have to be quick-paced in the production of news to beat the citizen journalist networks out there and we do not always succeed all the time" (Moyo, 2011). In a sense, journalistic practices are therefore no longer just pressured by deadlines, but by real competition from audiences, who are now able to self-publish using other convergent or divergent platforms. As the station manager at Radio Dialogue argued, "mobile phones and the Internet have shifted our emphasis from breaking the story, to providing critical reporting that is based on verified claims and multiple sourcing which mobile phone journalists don't always do" (Ndebele interview, 2011).

Although audience participatory cultures that are based on digital media are only emerging and still very nascent in Radio Dialogue, the use of Frontline SMS and e-mail reflect a gradual institutionalization, formalization, and functionalization of audience input in a way that consolidates those cultures. Mobile interactivity, for example, implies instantaneous communication from the community in time and space on newsworthy events taking place in the community. The convergence of radio and these digital media is therefore slowly democratizing communication by broadening citizen access and participation in the media news agenda. For example, anyone with a mobile phone who can afford texting can send story ideas to the radio station or news to their friends. Sending a text message of up to 160 characters is relatively cheap at US$.09 per message across all Zimbabwean networks. Ndebele thinks that most people in Bulawayo can afford this, as the station receives text messages even from unemployed youth and housewives who invite the station to cover to township stories in the course of the week.

**Conclusion: The Dialectic of Piracy as Empowerment**

Foucault (1984, p. 252) contends that "[organisational] space is fundamental to any exercise of power." It can be argued that space is equally significant in the construction and mobilisation of civic resistance. Radio Dialogue as an organisational and communicative space combines two radical models of

community and pirate broadcasting. On the one hand, pirate radio is normally perceived as subversive, unidirectional, and not participatory, even in cases where its overarching agenda may be to achieve progressive social change. On the other hand, community radio is normatively organised around bottom-up participatory approaches that normatively uphold the principles of democratic engagement. In Zimbabwe's monolithic radio institution, Radio Dialogue's hybridised model has opened avenues for audiences not only to participate in radio programs, but also to talk back to the state as citizens. Thus, in spite of its inherent contradictions, participation as a democratic ideal for radio is good because it is not only an end in itself, but also a means by which citizens can engage power. As the article shows, although Radio Dialogue is an illegal entity, it has created spaces for participatory communication where audiences can use multiple channels to exercise their right to communicate (RTC). The RTC is not an end in itself, but also a means to creating opportunities of civic engagement and transformative agency for the Bulawayo community.

Although this study did not perform elaborate textual analysis of the kinds of discourses in Radio Dialogue's content, it was clear that participation in Radio Dialogue extended to certain forms of civic engagement. For example, four podcasts of a program called the *People's Parliament* that was broadcast in October 2010 were analyzed. To a greater extent, the podcasts reflected civic agency that engaged well with issues of public concern in the city and the region of Matabeleland. In one program, citizens discussed how the devolution of power from the state could benefit Bulawayo and the greater Matabeleland region. One contributor, sending her comments through an e-mail read on the program, argued that the centralization of national political and economic processes in Harare was inimical to the development of the city of Bulawayo. Other concerns that citizens raised on other programs where participants used a multiplicity of channels such text-messaging and Facebook,  included problems of water shortage, refuse collection, and electricity power cuts by the municipality of Bulawayo. People complained about the lack of information on  the nature of problems affecting the local government's service delivery. In some of the programs, the city mayor was also invited to the radio studios to offer his explanations to citizens. Clearly, the nature of the concerns in the four programs that were analyzed reflected a growing sense of civic engagement by local residents. Through Radio Dialogue, the Bulawayo residents can be said to be active citizens who perceive themselves as having entitlements and responsibilities against the state. The pirate radio has provided a space for public debate, both among citizens and between the state and citizens. In the long term, Radio Dialogue can become a deliberative platform that is seminal to public opinion, and that keeps the local government in check.  However, it is noteworthy that political engagement in Radio Dialogue is not yet premised on the radical notions of democracy that impute a more transformative role to citizenship and the media as discursive cultural and political spaces. As seen earlier in this text, although the radio station is built on a democratic participant model, sometimes its structural organisation and discursive practices reflected contradictions of open access and ethnic monopolisation, community empowerment and disempowerment. This is because the material (structural) and immaterial (value-system) aspects of Radio Dialogue are themselves products of a participatory discourse which while aiming to challenge history and power, fails to completely escape the imprints of the two.

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## Interviews

| 1.  | Zenzele Ndebele      | Station Manager  | January  5, 2011  |
|-----|----------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 2.  | Nigel Johnson        | Founding Member  | January 12, 2011  |
| 3.  | Sanele Njini         | Journalist       | January 13, 2011  |
| 4.  | Munraradzi Gova      | Journalist       | January 13, 2011  |
| 5.  | Emmanuel Nkomo       | Journalist       | January 13, 2011  |
| 6.  | Jesse Dendere        | Journalist       | January 13, 2011  |
| 7.  | Clayton Moyo         | Journalist       | January 13, 2011  |
| 8.  | Gugulethu Mthethwa   | Journalist       | January 13, 2011  |
| 9.  | Thandazani Nkomo     | Journalist       | January 13, 2011  |
| 10. | Khulekani Bethule    | Journalist       | January 13, 2011  |
| 11. | Sean Ndlovu          | Technician       | January 13, 2011  |