



CHAPTER 4

Radio, Women, and Life Within Marriage

What the beard says comes from the braid.
—(Bambara proverb)

INTRODUCTION

This chapter enters the complex domain of marriage and women's role within it and examines the associated structural, cultural, and legal entanglements from the perspectives of radio listeners on the one hand and radio on the other. It focuses on a content analysis of radio output broadcast by Studio Tamani in Mali and Studio Kalangou in Niger in 2018–2019 and the associated listener responses and determines the extent to which radio's empowerment discourse aligns with that of the audience and the effectiveness of the programmes' approaches when dealing with specific issues within marriage. The analysed programmes all pivot around marriage, questioning what is considered acceptable in the broadcasts and by the listeners and to what extent (for example, polygamy) and what is not (for example, child marriage). It is important to recall that the radio studios under discussion here are run by a Western-based media development organisation with its own agenda and mission statements, and the programmes are additionally funded by international organisations (UNICEF in this case), which also have a specific agenda. The two radio stations, however, are run in-country by local editors and local teams of journalists whose own social norms might conflict with those of the organisations

running or funding the studios. Tensions, or misalignments, between discourses can therefore be expected, especially when addressing sensitive marriage-related issues. Between them, Studio Tamani and Studio Kalangou cover the ‘life’ of marriage from ritual preparations (FGM), marriage contracts (including the rights and wrongs of child marriage), to life within marriage and violence, but they only touch on the end of marriage, possibly attributed to the silence attached to divorce and the sidelining of widows within society. The chapter discusses three aspects that bring together the overarching themes of women’s empowerment and radio: the conception of hegemonic masculinities; the use of voice on radio, building on the previous chapter; and radio’s use of testimonies to reach audiences. Based on a content analysis of radio broadcasts and listener feedback, the chapter explores the tools and obstacles that radio may face when addressing sensitive marriage-related issues. Whilst the chapter focuses only on Studio Tamani and Studio Kalangou, and they are not necessarily representative of all radio output in the two countries as we have already discussed, the challenges they encounter when covering these topics will be faced by radio generally in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, and the listener feedback can be applied more broadly.

HEGEMONIC MASCULINITIES AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT

The discussions centre around relations within marriage between women and men within a patriarchal society where hegemonic masculinities as a normative framework prevail. Hegemonic masculinities, as developed by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 832), can be defined as follows:

the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men’s dominance over women to continue [...]. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men.

However, to sustain this hegemony, compliance, if not coercion, is required among social actors (Gramsci, 1957). This compliance and the associated dis/empowerment are examined from various angles, including the subordination of women in marriage and whether this alters dependent on marital status (married/divorced/widowed) and the subordination of women towards men within marriage to other women and female

family members (also discussed in Chap. 5 on inheritance). The complex relationship between empowerment and passivity within marriage is discussed to show that while these two concepts may in some cases be interdependent, a more nuanced approach must be used. In other words, it is possible for one actor to be empowered without another being passive. We have discussed the option of ‘power *to*’ (Rowlands, 1997: 13) or a ‘generative or productive power [...] which creates new possibilities and actions without domination’ whereby empowerment can occur without disempowering others or creating or reinforcing passivity. However, passivity, whilst defined as a state of acceptance of what happens, without active response or resistance, should not be perceived as the direct opposite of empowerment. Actors can remain empowered, and others can make choices within those constraints; whilst this situation is disempowering to the latter group, it does not mean they are passive. As Kabeer states, ‘there is a distinction, therefore, between “passive” forms of agency (action taken when there is little choice), and “active” agency (purposeful behaviour)’ (2005: 15). We examine this conception of the passive empowerment of women within marriage in this chapter. This builds on the ‘disempowering empowerment’ seen in the previous chapter on finances when we saw how gaining the choice and alleged freedom to work was considered the best choice from a poor selection of options for women and only led to them being further burdened. Here, we see that a woman’s choice to remain silent or ‘passive’ within a violent marriage is a conscious decision within an oppressive environment yet can result not necessarily in an improvement to life but not a worsening of it. Therefore, if we invoke the first and second choices of empowerment (Kabeer, 1994) discussed in previous chapters and their relevance here, we can question whether women have a choice with regard to, or within, marriage and/or whether a more subtle choice is made, which is, in fact, to engage passively with events and decisions and thus remain silent but gain some improvement to life.

Empowerment can also not be given freely; there is always a cost. For women to be successfully empowered, a shift in the power relationship must occur, meaning that men, as the oppressor, must recognise that they will inevitably be disadvantaged by any changes in the oppressor/oppressed relationship (Freire, 1968 in Shefner-Rogers et al., 1998: 321). As Bandura (1997: 477) says:

Those who exercise authority and control do not go around voluntarily granting to others power over resources and entitlements in acts of

benevolence. A share of benefits and control must be negotiated through concerted effort and, oftentimes, through prolonged struggle.

Alongside the concepts of hegemonic masculinities and women's empowerment, the significant contribution of radio also threads through the chapter. Radio can be used as a platform for women to be represented and heard over space and time, triggering changes in behaviour through persuasion and inclusion. The chapter uses the opportunity to examine how the use of voice, as discussed already, can be an empowering tool. Much has been said about voice—'giving' a voice, being 'heard', etc.—particularly within development circles in relation to marginalised or disempowered communities. However, there are few discussions on the details; maybe it means giving elite women from a particular region the opportunity, sometimes tokenistically, to raise their visibility by speaking at large conferences or the UN. Often, a more significant shake-up of oppressive structures is needed to extend this tokenistic gesture to collectives by creating an empowering environment (Heywood & Ivey, 2021) to allow groups to take (rather than being given) the voice, or at least have a clear representative speaking for them, fighting their corner. We examine radio's technologically mediated and voiced production of marginalised women, noting how voices on this platform are made more powerful in contrast with other media platforms by virtue of the fact that all messages and emotions are distilled into the voice alone, with no other cues, visual or otherwise.

RADIO OUTPUT AND AUDIENCE RECEPTION

Being attentive to both the radio output and audience reception allows the chapter to compare the mediated voicing and hearing of women and women's rights. It also considers the dominance of women's voices in broadcasts about women's issues, questioning whether this stereotypes women presenters and guests and whether there is a case for replacing women's voices with men's. To answer this, it asks whether audiences prefer the status quo where women are the trusted mediator of women-related topics and whether this results in men listeners, representing society's decision-makers, feeling sidelined, not engaging, and reinforcing their attitudes towards their relationship with women.

A content analysis of two marriage-related series (28 programmes) from Studio Tamani in Mali and Studio Kalangou in Niger forms the basis

for discussion here. Using a content analysis will allow the findings to be applied more broadly to the current role of radio in the countries. Studio Kalangou discussed child marriage over the course of several weeks in four debate programmes and 13 magazines, and Studio Tamani reported on domestic violence (six broadcasts) and female genital mutilation (FGM) (nine broadcasts), using the varied format of debates, magazines, documentaries and motion designs discussed in Chap. 2. As outlined in the Introduction, 20 listener focus groups in each country debated these topics and marriage more broadly before and after the programmes were broadcast (80 FGDs in total). The listeners were selected from predetermined categories: rural or urban, married women, unmarried women, and men, thus ensuring representativeness, and were interviewed at a mix of urban and rural community, and commercial radio stations in and outside the respective capitals. Respondents were asked to respond to general questions on marriage-related themes and more specifically about the broadcasts in their respective countries.

Cultural tensions between the Global North and South and between cultural norms and legal texts on marital issues are considered and radio broadcasts' approach to these, with a particular focus on *témoignages* as a tool to facilitate listeners' identification and, therefore, engagement with the topic, possibly generating behavioural change.

LISTENERS' CONCEPTION OF EMPOWERMENT WITHIN MARRIAGE

Focusing purely on official definitions of 'empowerment', be it from academic or grey literature from the Global North and South or from institutions such as the UN, would obviously be one-sided and limiting. Top-down imposed definitions exclude understandings of this term formulated by the very people who are at the centre of empowerment projects, serving only to perpetuate the subordination and oppression of women. By interrogating listeners' perceptions, their understanding of empowerment becomes clearer, particularly regarding marriage and self-perceptions within it, the position of, and relationships between, men and women, perceptions of each group vis-a-vis each other, generational differences and repercussions when one party crosses the demarcation line. For example, what are the perceptions of women in triggering violence or solving violence? Are these perceptions polarised? What are men and

women's definitions of equality within marriage, or is it a question of complementarity?¹ As the audience is an integral part of radio broadcasting, understanding its interpretation of key terms and practices is essential. Listener feedback from the FGDs was therefore used to provide the following additional contextual information on marriage and empowerment.

Simply asking how listeners would translate '*autonomisation*' into local languages was illuminating. Empowerment was translated into French as '*autonomisation*' during the FGDs, yet it was clear that, with every translation, the definition and therefore understanding of the term would change. Empowerment in English has its root in 'power', while the French term *autonomisation* suggests independence and individual agency (Biewener & Bacqué, 2015). Young unmarried women respondents in Mali clearly linked the concept of empowerment to independence, providing the Bambara word *kanassirmourola* [independence]. They interpreted independence as being from men, being 'free' psychologically and financially, and having freedom of expression. Using various terms such as *musokakal-léréta*, *musokayéréta*, and *katsémuso* (*muso* meaning woman, *kalléréta* meaning to take charge and *kayéréta* meaning to take care of), empowerment was translated as the woman takes care of herself or takes charge. As one respondent clarified, 'it means helping oneself first and then helping one's children and family too'. To be independent, you had to work as this would provide financial independence: '*Autonomisation* means, first of all, that the woman has to work. And work is what pays. But if you depend on your husband, you are not autonomous'. However, they clarified that work would only be beneficial if it led to self-development, and this was more important in the long term than just the money, which would mostly go to the family in any case. The role had to be transformative and allow them to gain self-respect. This was associated with the on-going narrative linking empowerment and education. Many, especially younger, women preferred the French term '*émancipée*' or emancipated or liberated. For them, this goes beyond *autonomisation* and includes not only independence from men, but greater agency, greater respect of that agency, and recognition of a woman's training and education. It reflects a 'modern' woman, but still within an African context moving away from the 'normative, linear and ethnocentric vision of development imposed on the continent' (Bajoit Guy, cited in Barry, 2007). Education and training for

¹ More detailed analysis of listeners' understanding of empowerment on a broader range of topics and its alignment with radio output in Niger can be found in Heywood (2020).

all women, and not just young girls, was perceived as vital for empowerment—not just a right—and formed the basis for any life improvements. It was also apparent that a lack of education should not impede progress. Listeners confirmed that the lack of education affected all of society but that a divide existed between women with education and those without and, therefore, with and without the associated opportunities.

Men and women had different understandings of other associated terms. Many of the men were reluctant, even embarrassed, to acknowledge, for example, the concept of ‘obedience’ in their marriage, instead linking it to ‘mutual respect’. In this instance, they justified women’s subordination by giving examples of when wives would also tell them what to do within the household and that each person had specific roles in the family. They suggested that life within marriage was a two-way arrangement: women must bring up and educate the children and also must keep their husbands on the right track.

For education, even the wife can educate her husband. If she sees that her husband is on the wrong track, she can channel her husband and then put him back on the right track. There are husbands who are not good. Women are really complementary. There are men who don’t understand and who put the woman down, they think they are superior, whereas in everyday life, in a home, it is mutual aid that must be there. The man must help the woman, the woman must help the man. We have to help each other. (UMIM)

The stereotypical image of women as natural peacemakers, or the voice of reason, prevails. It is in this role that society allows her some authority, but this does not result in individual enrichment; rather, it benefits the household. Similarly, it is they whom husbands consult when unsure. One woman recounted how the General Assembly in Mali was often suspended overnight as ‘la nuit vous porte conseil’ [the night brings you advice] and ‘le meilleur conseil se trouve sur l’oreiller’ [the best advice is found on the pillow], explaining that these suspensions allowed men to consult women, be they wives or mothers. The same expression ‘la nuit pour conseil’ [the night for advice] is also used when men are embroiled in heated discussions with other men and they say this, meaning they will go and talk the problem through with their wives overnight. This then led the respondent to mention the Bambara proverb, ‘Ce que dit la barbe vient de la tresse’ [what the beard says comes from the braid], highlighting the power of

women behind men and the respect men may give them.² However, as other respondents commented, it can mean that women carry all the responsibility but are not allowed to have the power.

Returning to definitions of obedience, as could be imagined, women's opinions contrasted sharply with those of the men. They made it clear that there was a difference between what marriage should be and what it was in reality.

Here, to obey means being ready to do anything for him. Ready to do anything for the man. While the man must also do everything for his wife. Whatever the woman has to do for the man, the man also has to do for his wife. But here, we are considered slaves. The woman is put at the disposal of the man whenever he wants, as much as he wants. (UMWIMb)

Many younger married women challenged this, saying that things have changed and that the most important thing for women to escape their oppression was communication:

No. That's not how it is anymore. There is mutual respect. But to say 'obey', we're not in the old days ... In a sense, it's accepting something from the other. It's a compromise. You have to have a compromise and then I think the basis of all this is communication. We have to talk to each other. We have to communicate. (RUMW3)

From the confidence of their current single status but with second-hand experience of marriage via their extended families, the young women mocked the naivety of questions concerning empowerment once married, adamant that independence, or empowerment, would no longer be possible. In other words, *autonomisation* defined by them as independence had a generational but also status meaning to this group and suggested continuing pre-marriage life as they currently knew it and avoiding 'leaving yourself to the mercy of men' (UUMWIM).

Q: Can you be empowered or independent if you are married?

A: Not in our country. If you are married, you have no choice. You have to stay in the family. But when you are not married, you have time. You can go and do business; you can go and do work to earn money. But when you're married, you're deprived ... when you're married,

²<http://bamada.net/promotion-feminine-au-mali-un-voyage-dans-lhistoire>

it's over. In our country, even if you work, it's on your man's orders. In any case, if your husband doesn't agree, you don't work. Even if you are a civil servant. (UUMWIM)

They did, however, go on to state that their own 'more empowered' pre-marriage lives were also restricted and that they were reliant on their father's permission to go out, work or mix. They also translated *autonomisation* as 'freedom' [liberté]: 'Whether it's freedom of expression or any other form of freedom, but that you are a free and independent woman. That's empowerment in my opinion' (UUMWIM). The main hindrances to empowerment for these young women were marriage and the ensuing children: 'Once married, you have to fight even more to become empowered. Not just for yourself but for your children too.' They also mentioned male siblings, many of whom were fearful that giving women too much power would be disadvantageous to men, suggesting that male empowerment and associated patriarchal anxieties are entrenched at an early age and that women, as the family's educators, are complicit in this process.

Once married, women's understanding of empowerment shifts, adding an additional layer of complexity and helping to explain how difficult broadcasting meaningfully to a general audience on this topic can be. Empowerment no longer means individualised independence because the family unit will always take priority, and married women perform a central role in it. There are therefore no single beneficiaries of empowerment among married women. Instead, they suggested that it meant the 'freedom' to be able to work to gain financial independence to support themselves and their children. There was no suggestion from the women that this work would replace their existing onerous household obligations or that the latter would be shared with husbands. Without such structural changes, this form of empowerment can only disempower women by having more to do. The choice is not an empowering one: either work more to the point of exhaustion but be able to use the money to improve the household's wellbeing, or not work and therefore not be able to provide for one's children.

There was little disagreement among the women respondents that men, in the majority, felt superior and that women had to accede to their demands, be it with regard to caring for children and husband, going out of the home or sex. The idea of being able to refuse sex to one's husband was shocking to the younger married women. An audible gasp came from one recently married young woman as she imagined the repercussions of

ever turning her husband down, even if it were late at night or if she felt ill, reflecting widely indoctrinated societal norms. ‘Normally, it is the woman herself who asks the man if he needs her before going to bed. You have been told to do this ever since school. And before you get married, mothers repeat it...’ (UMW1M). If a wife disagrees and an argument remains unsolved as marital relations occur, the resulting offspring will not be ‘béni’ [blessed] as it would not result from a contented union. Women are therefore taught to submit and be acquiescent, despite another young married woman stating that depriving women of this agency to refuse sex was ‘a form of violence because often you don’t want to, you’re tired. The husband comes and says, “You have to do this, this is why you’re here, religion demands that you do this” so you’re obliged’ (UUMW1M).

Just as women are not a homogenous group, contradictions among men regarding their own expectations of their role and position were common. Male respondents had their own understanding of empowerment. Hegemonic masculinities—a discourse that legitimises men’s dominant position in society and justifies the subordination of women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and therefore their disempowerment—was justified by many of the male respondents through their conception of ‘complementarity’ rather than competition, where men are the central figure and the ‘breadwinner’ and women are the carers and homemakers. Shifting the power balance in favour of women would alter the husband-wife relationship and was used frequently as an excuse to prevent women from working:

As for empowerment, when men leave the home and women leave it as well as men, who will be left in the family to educate and raise the children? Not everyone can leave. There has to be at least someone in the family. I go out to earn the money for the condiments and the necessities for the family. If I go out and the wife goes out to do the same, then we are still the ones taking care of the family’s needs, not the women. What women earn is their concern. It is up to them to solve this, not the men. (UM2M)

This concept of complementarity rather than competition between men and women was a strong theme in the focus group discussions, with men believing it and women resigned to it. Empowerment was perceived as being a Western concept that was difficult to relate to or implement within Malian or Nigerien society.

Q: Do you think that gender equality is more of a concept, a notion that comes from the West, from where we come from?

A: There are two ways of answering that. First, it came from the West. Second, it is a concept that is performed mostly in the workplace. When you are in the workplace, you are equal, but at home, there is no equality between men and women. It is the man who is the king. Whatever the man decides, the woman does. (UUMW2N)

Empowerment within a Malian or Nigerien context would therefore have to be shoehorned into existing social norms rather than becoming a substitute for them: ‘marriage requires patience, mutual respect and friendship within the performance of traditional gender roles’ (Rebhun, 1999 in Brzezinska, 2021: 261). This is important when looking at radio broadcasts, as social norms are the immovable framework within which debates are conducted with little scope for change.

‘Empowerment’ therefore had generational conceptions, with younger respondents’ definitions aligning more with individualised development definitions than older married women and men, where women are understood within the family (Biewener & Bacqué, 2015; Mama, 2011) and beneficiaries of women’s empowerment would be the household.

WHOSE VOICE?

The two studios in this case—Studio Kalangou in Niger and Studio Tamani in Mali—both produced a series of programmes directly related to marriage in 2018–2019. Studio Tamani’s programmes focused on domestic violence and female genital mutation (FGM) and were in the formats described previously (debates, magazines, portraits, motion designs). Studio Kalangou’s series, comprising 45-minute debates and 3-minute magazine programmes, focused on child marriage covering a range of topics from child marriage and Islam, means of recourse, health risks, the legal framework, the role of the police, education, NGO involvement and traditional practices. In both series, the radio studios broadcast awareness-raising information, yet a fine line existed between providing information enabling listeners to make their own informed decisions and providing direct advice and advocacy. In this case, radio was used as a vehicle to articulate and disseminate narratives held by, sometimes opposing, experts, listeners, vox pops and associations. According to Fondation Hirondelle’s

website, empowerment through radio, unintentionally, suggests a top-down approach through the phrase '*giving* voice' to women.³ However, do the programmes *give*, or do the women *take* that voice and, given the multilingual and multicultural context of the two countries and the above-mentioned interpretations of empowerment, to what extent do the programmes reflect the intersecting oppressions associated with child marriage, domestic violence and FGM? Whatever the case, the studios face an enormous challenge in balancing these taboo topics in their radio programmes. They must combine 'spoken' and 'heard' voices, the styles used, and the very diverse audience to whom they broadcast, representing a range of cultures, religions, and political positions. The following content analysis of the broadcasts helps answer this.

Studio Kalangou's series was funded by UNICEF, whose own agenda aligns with the UN SDG5, target 5:3: 'Eliminate [by 2030] all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation'. UNICEF's (2019) key partners are regional political structures, governments, civil society organisations and communities, and development partners. Whilst this approach draws directly on a development definition of empowerment, by addressing the underlying conditions that sustain child marriage, a feature of Studio Kalangou's programmes here, and by calling for specific laws to protect girls' rights, the UNICEF-funded series broadcast by Studio Kalangou still raised the voice of women and responded to the listeners' own definitions of empowerment. Studio Kalangou's empowerment discourse also aligned with that of the audience. The programmes did not undermine or attack prevailing social norms but rather targeted persuasion, inclusiveness, and 'light touch' encouragement with relatable examples to inform their audience. Women were represented by studio experts during debates and lay women in the magazines.

The complex issue of voice and intervention, or time on air speaking, on radio programmes is important when discussing women's empowerment. This is wide-ranging and concerns not only the voice of the person heard on radio (in-studio guest, presenter, rural vox pop, etc.) but also whose voice they are representing (members of associations, rural or urban communities, specific age groups, and even donors or the radio studio, for example) and who they are reaching (women, men decision makers, policymakers). Tension exists between the number of guests invited to

³<https://www.hirondelle.org/fr/donner-voix-femmes>

programmes and the amount they are permitted to speak. In this Studio Kalangou series on child marriage (17 programmes), for example, there are more women than men participants (57% women, 43% men), which could be justified by the subject matter of the broadcasts. However, 'talk' by men (presenters and guests) was proportionately greater than their number of appearances (54% men vs 46% women). Regarding just guests invited on to the various shows, the number of male participants was 34% against 41% women, yet this was inverted for their corresponding airtime (41% for men and 23% for women). This increase in talk by male presenters and guests is at the expense of female guests, whose coverage time is significantly reduced in comparison with their appearance percentage. Therefore, when on air, men gain more airtime, intentionally or not.

That men gain more airtime than women, regardless of their physical number in the studio or in the field, is even more important when discussing radio; women, if they are not talking, are effectively silenced because of the lack of their visual presence. The number of women on 'women-related' programmes, in other words, programmes whose themes could focus on women's lives, issues or perspectives, could also suggest that the topics under discussion only concern women. However, if men should be involved in women-related discussions to trigger societal change, then a greater male presence in such programmes would reinforce their essential role in empowering women. This would require either the presence of progressive men in the debates prepared to challenge prevailing normative hegemonic masculinities or a strong counterpart to a man who was challenging his own disempowerment. However, a male presence on radio could lead to even more male talk, reinforcing acceptance of the prevailing self-perpetuating male dominance (see Spender, 1985).

Focus group respondents were generally in agreement with this and held clear opinions on women's voices on radio. One focus group discussion with unmarried women respondents in Mali ended in great hilarity after they reflected that there were definitely more men than women on the radio and that women did not tend to cover men's subjects, but then they did not appear able to define what a 'man's subject' was. Men agreed that women were, and should be, the principal voices in discussions on taboo subjects related to sex and sexual health and on women-related themes generally: sexual health, contraception, childcare, family, etc. As a result, women access a voice via radio to act as leaders in public debate in ways that are respected by both women and men. Both unmarried and married women respondents confirmed, having listened to the broadcasts,

that women trust broadcasting in women's voices, as women are the best advocates for other women in regard to their victimisation and oppression: 'Women talk a lot on the radio. Especially about the difficulties they face. Violence against women and girls. Women discuss this a lot on the radio' (RUMW3Mb). Both radio studios recognised this by including women in their broadcasting on women-related themes.

All the respondents, men and women alike, agreed that men's voices are also important when broadcasting about women's empowerment, particularly if they support it. The inclusion of more men who have been involved in female empowerment may enable other men to identify with the broadcasts, underpinning the message that female empowerment does not just concern women. Male voices have an accepted space on radio programmes broadcast on general themes, and including them, as standard practice, in women-related programmes will not only raise the profile of these potentially taboo topics but also normalise them.

TÉMOIGNAGES: A RADIO TOOL TO PROMOTE MESSAGE RETENTION

Understanding the idea of the 'voice' of guests in the studio is not problematic, even with a discrepancy between those of women and men and their corresponding airtimes. Usually, these guests were clearly introduced, and it was made known whom or what they represented. However, to avoid relying on debates with potentially unrelatable guests talking on abstract issues even if they were useful in broadcasting a plurality of women among women, Studio Kalangou and Studio Tamani used *témoignages*, also widely known as exemplars or testimonies, as a stylistic feature. These proved effective as they were recalled by listeners during focus groups (see Heywood, 2020) and, by being remembered, reinforced the message being broadcast. *Témoignages* are a particularly useful radio tool and are short spoken statements or accounts widely used in the child marriage magazines and in the FGM magazines but also by other Fondation Hironnelle studios and are received by audiences as being clear and relatable. One respondent said:

All the approaches, all the styles. The main thing is that what is said is accessible to everyone. The questions are not so technical that we can't follow them. It's early marriage after all—we're talking about age, the damage it does, none of that is too technical. (RM1N)

They bring together broad but intimate publics linking expert urban women on the one hand and poor rural and invisible women on the other, thus making the connection between different groups of women (and men) geographically, culturally and educationally. *Témoignages* provide a case illustration to exemplify an underlying problem presented in general statements containing base-rate information (Brosius & Bathelt, 1994; Lefevre et al., 2012). In other words, they present individual experiences to clarify and exemplify societal problems. They are secondary in their information-conveying role, as they serve only to support general statements, but they provide episodic insights that contrast with the representative overview in the main information, be it news or debates. They can also explain information in general statements that may be difficult to comprehend. Listeners therefore do not have to systematically examine or research the main information because a clarifying example is provided in the *témoignages*. Their vividness is high and, as a result, can evoke a higher level of interest from the listener. However, listeners may go on to generalise information heard in *témoignages*, considering it to be typical of all people concerned by this issue. They then may assume that this information is applicable to all of society rather than just that one individual presenting their testimony (Brosius & Bathelt, 1994).

In contrast to the debates between high-level experts during the longer broadcasts, the *témoignages* allow a reversal of power by taking the voice and airtime from distance experts and instead giving it, via the mic, to non-expert lay women. In this case, the women are allowed to ‘speak back’ to both the radio and its experts and to the listener. Mare (2013: 31) refers to this term in relation to how listeners can use social media to ‘speak back’ to radio. It is a useful term here, as it describes the imagined two-way relationship of the listener with their radio. By making their lived experiences known via their testimony on this trusted medium, the speaker, who is also a listener, gains the confidence to talk as if to a best friend, allowing the intimacy to continue. The virtual listener-radio closeness is thus further reinforced, overcoming the geographic physical separation, and this feeling generated by mediated information is without necessarily noticing the existence of media (Lee, 2004).

The *témoignages* in this Studio Kalangou child marriage series recount the specific experiences of girls who have been married as children or have fought against it. These range from testimonies from a girl who wants to wait until 23 to marry, to the story of a child marriage dispute that was resolved easily, to the example of a teacher who intervenes and prevents

some marriages and then alerts the *chef de canton*, who is able to stop others. A clear illustration of female agency was given by ‘Nafissa’ (22 October 2018), who refused child marriage because she was aware of the associated risks and took action to remain at school:

I was not happy about the announcement of the marriage because I was still going to school. I always preferred school to avoid the consequences of early marriage like the problems that arise during childbirth. I informed my boyfriend who in turn went to my father [to say] that I don’t want to get married now.

This message was further reinforced by the testimony of her father, which extended the relevance of the series to male listeners. Enabling the father to have a voice is a clear example of how male support for female empowerment can be incorporated into radio broadcasts. The positive impact of these *témoignages* was noted during the second round of focus groups in Niger, when not only were they accurately and systematically recalled by many respondents, but so were the messages they contained. Listeners recalled many of the *témoignages* in the child marriage series and the messages they contained, such as laws against child marriage, information on legal documents, what to do, or to whom to turn if in a similar situation. They also spoke in detail about the consequences of child marriage, a marked shift from the more abstract information they provided during the first focus group discussions. Many of these improvements in awareness had been triggered by the broadcasts:

It was really the programmes that helped us understand the content. For early marriage, that meant that the damage this practice does to children since it can lead to early pregnancies, and there are children who drop out of school. So, the information has really got through. (UM1N)

I’ve learnt some new things because before, I didn’t have much information, but with the involvement of everyone, because in the programmes there are lots of people who intervene, not just one person, and everyone tells their own story, or their view according to the experiences they’ve had. [...] It’s become clearer—the consequences of early marriage and for the victims too. (RM2N)

Two such examples of audience recall, underpinning the role and relevance of radio as an information source, were the story of a young girl who

was married at a very early age and who suffered from incontinence after giving birth and the story of a girl who was forced to marry but told her teacher that she wanted to stay at school. Studio Kalangou's inclusive approach of widening the range of voices to include men's testimonies led to a broad appreciation among listeners that the subject had been approached both seriously and holistically and had targeted all sectors of the population. It also undermined the normative ideals to which men should strive. Thus, by disempowering men through the suggestion that they could relinquish some of their masculine obligations, they also become empowered. The prevailing discourse was one of education, motivation, and raising awareness. Once the facts had been presented, the overarching tone was not to attribute blame to the population but to provide clear information regarding child marriage and the law, to find and offer solutions by naming organisations and giving examples, to raise awareness about the situation and to focus on the need for dialogue. In other words, by stressing empowerment through education, the series encouraged the audience to listen rather than become antagonised or feel accused.

Studio Tamani used *témoignages* extensively in their broadcasts on domestic violence and FGM. They were used as stand-alone statements in magazines, inserted in debates and as part of the *films documentaires*. These first-person testimonies from survivors helped to raise awareness and reduce the stigma attached to domestic violence by adding that 'component of enjoyment involved in listening to other people's stories' (Milan, 2008: 31).

The programmes on these topics, particularly domestic violence, revealed forms of power beyond the above-mentioned hegemonic masculinities, which rely on common consent, and discussed male dominance achieved by force, coercion or domestic violence (Brzezinska, 2021; Groes-Green, 2009). As with child marriage and its consequences (fistulas, etc.), domestic violence within marriage and FGM are taboo topics in this society yet are simultaneously widely acknowledged. Problems culturally are resolved by elders in communities or by families which does not align with much of the information on radio on the law or appeals to turn to the authorities.

One documentary, for example, includes a powerful anonymous *témoignage* of a woman who fled an abusive and violent husband with the help of her brothers:

In Mali, it is the woman who is always blamed when there are problems in the couple. The man is never held responsible. I was ashamed. I was afraid to leave him because of the way others looked at me and the pressure of society. I had resigned myself to dying in this marriage if I had to. (30 October 2018)

Because this account is spoken by the woman herself rather than been relayed second-hand by a journalist, it allows the speaker's voice to be both expressed and heard directly without significant management of the content or intonation. The *témoignage* therefore helps listeners to identify with the speaker and hear an example of a successful and realistic exit strategy that they too could implement. However, 'go-to' information remains vague, with little direct information on the various services and associations to which victims could turn for support when faced with abusive situations. This increases the burden on women to be either problem solvers or to make the passive, empowering choice to remain silent, which in many cases will only lead to further disempowerment (1 August 2019).

The FGM series by Studio Tamani comprises six *magazines* each with *témoignages*, but none from survivors, which concurs with a statement from one advocacy campaigner on the *Grand Dialogue* that she would never be able to persuade victims to give their testimonies on this topic on radio. The testimonies are from former traditional cutters, or circumcisers, and from awareness campaigners, each of whom look back on a time when FGM was performed as an 'ancestral rite' as part of a large ceremony with just one cutter, with no medical knowledge and shared equipment. Girls would be cut at the age of 15 and married four months later. It was part of the marital process:

I remember that when we were young, we used to give out information about the dates of excision by beating the tom-tom. The parents would then send their children to the cutter. We would bring the girls together by organising a big ceremony for the excised. Once it was done, they would all stay together in a room where a woman elder would counsel them. [When I was excised], none of us had any problems. There were about twenty of us. In our beliefs, excision was said to reduce the sexual impulses of girls. It was also a way to control the virginity of girls before their marriage. It is a matter of honour for the parents. (Studio Tamani *Magazine*, 10 February 2019)

Studio Tamani used the frequent *témoignages* to highlight the consequences of FGM that were not necessarily known or fully understood:

We cannot talk about all the consequences of excision in one day. There are deaths, tetanus, difficulty urinating, hepatitis B, and AIDS because 20 girls can be cut with the same knife. So, if one of them is infected, the others can be contaminated. Some people tell me that I had a lot of money and that's why I gave up cutting. But this isn't true. It's because I have seen the consequences. Some girls have been cut twice, because the first one wasn't successful. And often the girls suffer, but they are ashamed to talk about it with their parents. They also face difficulties getting pregnant or giving birth. Some ancestral practices have to be abandoned. (*Grand Dialogue*, 4 January 2018)

The *témoignages* underline the significant differences between previous and current practices, with babies under 40 days old now being cut. Previously, there were few cutters; now, it is perceived as a good money-making opportunity ('today, a baby girl is cut after 2 or 3 days. It is no longer a tradition, it's become a business' (*Grand Dialogue*, 4 January 2018)), especially as there is no law against this practice in Mali.

The women campaigners in the testimonies use the opportunity of being on radio to reach out to men as decision-makers. They reveal their own challenges not only in gaining permission from their husbands to campaign but also in persuading them to pay the fuel for them to do so. The women had to work hard to make husbands understand the consequences of FGM for women. Then, they must raise awareness among other women's husbands:

I invite men to join us in this struggle. Even if it is practised less and less, our wish is that it will stop for good. The support of men would counterbalance the demands of some mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law who push for the practice. (*Grand Dialogue*, 9 February 2019)

We're aware that men are not very interested in this subject. That's why we target women first, asking them to pass the message on to their husbands. [...] I ask men to understand our approach. As the head of the family, they can influence women's thinking and keep them healthy. Women, on their side, should not agree to having their daughters cut just to imitate others. (*Grand Dialogue*, 13 February 2019)

Both of these examples highlight how campaigners recognise the importance of radio as an information tool by purposefully using the space afforded to them via the *magazines* and their *témoignages* to target men as

the head of the family. Few other sources of information have such a reach, especially as programmes are broadcast in multiple national languages. The testimonies underline the conception of empowerment within marriage and complementarity—in this case, it is a case of cooperation rather than competition—to eradicate FGM. They also foreground the role of women in perpetuating this harmful and dangerous practice, providing a clear example of Freire’s conscientization (1996), or the process of developing a critical awareness of one’s social reality through reflection and action. The campaigners advise women to not just copy what others are doing but to take action based on informed decisions, as this triggers the process of changing reality. Given that, as Freire says, we all acquire social myths that have a dominant tendency, and acquiring and internalising the awareness-raising information from these FGM campaigners would be a critical process of discovering and understanding real problems and needs.

ASYMMETRY WITHIN MARRIAGE AND PASSIVE EMPOWERMENT

Whilst the broadcasts appeared well received by the listeners and seemed to fulfil radio’s role as an information provider and knowledge resource (Heywood, 2020), context must always be considered; radio guests may support pre-existing attitudes, behaviours and levels of awareness, reinforcing cultural and societal norms rather than promoting an empowering environment. Certain misalignment emerges, for example, between the empowerment discourse of the audiences and that of experts in Studio Tamani’s debates. In one example on 2 August 2019, the debate on domestic violence supported distinct power relations in the family, with the man being portrayed as the central figure and women being subservient. It was not clear how women listeners acquired a voice in this debate or how their quest for empowerment was represented. Promoting the voice, not just the presence, of women on radio could mean giving a voice to invisible women throughout the country. In this case, the programme centred on a discussion, moderated by the male presenter, between Oumou Diarra, a well-known female radio broadcaster in Mali, and Moussa Traoré, a male spokesperson for village chiefs in Ségou, a large town 150 miles northeast of Bamako, Mali’s capital. Pursuing the idea that hegemony relies on common consent and is sustained and reinforced discursively (Brzezinska, 2021), Diarra advocated that women take an

active role in their marriages to avoid domestic violence and take marriage seriously before committing, seeking ways to improve their interpersonal relations, which included submitting to their husbands and the authority of their mothers-in-law. Moussa Traoré advocated a misogynist stance affirming that feminism is a Western import and that women can only reduce violence by obeying and submitting to their husbands. Neither voice provided a perspective advocating the protection of women from violence from a legal or health standpoint. While Diarra called on men to reduce violence, the main advice presented to women suffering from domestic violence was to submit to the patriarchal authority of the husband: 'It's the man who is the head of the family, you are in his house. He's the one who feeds you'. In other words, rather than supporting development concepts of women's empowerment or listeners' definition that empowerment means a lack of dependence on men, this 45-minute discussion legitimises men's dominant position in society and justifies the subordination of women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). If such debates target both men and women listeners, the narrative will serve not to empower women and definitely not disempower men or redress the balance. It reinforces rather than undermines the asymmetry within marriage that focus groups mentioned as being a fundamental cause of women's disempowerment and serves to underpin a hegemonic ideal of manhood. The debate did not address domestic violence and its emotional impact on women but diverted attention to women's own behaviour and responsibility, attributing blame to them.

RADIO AND THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

At very few points in the two studios' broadcasting did the various voices discuss divorce as an option, despite it seemingly being a possible way out of a violent marriage. Women respondents reported that divorce was a major source of fear and shame and a major barrier to women's empowerment. Both unmarried and married women were visibly alarmed by the thought of their marriage ending in divorce, suggesting that divorce was perceived as a problem rather than a solution for women in their empowerment. Many said they would prefer to suffer in silence rather than undergo social shame and resultant financial hardship. The taboo surrounding this topic extended beyond the married couple, and decisions on divorcing, even if raised following domestic violence, are made on an extended family level, highlighting not only women's disempowered

position in patriarchal communities but also that other women in the family (sisters-/mothers-in-law) perpetuate this disempowerment by upholding, rather than challenging, social conventions. Young unmarried respondents frequently recounted that families would pressurise their daughters to return to their abusive husbands rather than have the marriage fail: ‘Even if a woman decided to go to court to address her problems, her mother would not allow her to do so’ (RUMW3M).

The studios, like all other radio stations in Mali and Niger, therefore face an enormous challenge balancing taboo topics in their radio programmes, the voices who are spoken and heard, the styles used, and the very diverse audience to whom they broadcast and the range of cultures, religions and political positions they represent. This was raised by one respondent in Mali in relation to gender-based violence, which is a culturally sensitive issue in different parts of the country. He rang the studio questioning the manner in which a women guest had spoken about gender-based violence and how it could be poorly received in his region. He wanted the studio to consider how specific topics were covered to prevent listeners from being emotionally affected (RM2M).

Radio broadcasting on a national scale in Mali and Niger faces different responses across diverse and heterogeneous regions, especially on culturally and socially sensitive issues of child marriage, FGM and domestic violence. Nonetheless, radio is thought to be a powerful communicative tool (Gatua et al., 2010) for raising awareness, and as the men in an urban focus group stated (UM1Mb), many of these taboo topics have ignorance as their root cause.

CONCLUSION

By viewing empowerment through the lens of marriage, the chapter has been able to focus on various aspects: the definitions of empowerment among listeners whose opinions must not be sidelined, as they are the very target of empowerment campaigns; the voices used by radio for certain topics with the inevitable risk of stereotyping; hegemonic masculinities as a pattern of practice; and the use of testimonies as a tool to convey important awareness-raising information to listeners. Whilst the chapter focuses only on Studio Tamani, and they are not necessarily representative of all radio output in the two countries, the same challenges they encounter will be faced by radio generally. The concept of promoting women’s empowerment is complicated by the need to include so many perspectives in the

life cycle of an on-air empowerment campaign. This means considering funders whose end goal may differ from that of the studio production team (development versus cultural definitions of empowerment), the voices to be used and represented during broadcasts, and the styles to be used for maximum effect.

While hegemonic masculinities, based on gender inequality, prevail in the two countries, these remain normative. Many male respondents suggested that changes in mentalities leading to greater empowerment for women would in fact relieve them of the need to live up to society's expectations for men and of the potential for violence against women that results from frustrations and difficulties in meeting these expectations. These men on the lower levels of the dominant patriarchy stated that increased awareness via radio and broader acknowledgement and examples of accepted practices that empower women would be welcomed.

Women's voices on radio are preferred and trusted when disseminating women-related information, both as experts and as laypeople during testimonies. Respondents also agreed that men's voices should also be included in broadcasts on women's empowerment to encourage men to identify with the topic and their own involvement. While women should not only be given a voice on radio when it relates to women's issues, if radio is to be a tool for women's empowerment, the voices of women themselves must be prioritised. Diverse voices of women must also be included in general broadcasting to support women's empowerment. However, gender discrimination is more than a structural issue; within that structure, women face disempowering choices that can be deceptive to development practitioners who advocate 'choice' as the ultimate goal to empower women. Radio broadcasts should be designed such that women, to become empowered, are made to question perceptions and dominant social myths. However, centring women within empowerment campaigns can wrongly suggest to development practitioners and policymakers that changes triggering women's empowerment can only be achieved by women (Khader, 2018).

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