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Radio as an empowering environment: how does radio broadcasting in Mali represent women’s “web of relations”?

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ABSTRACT

Does radio programming by Studio Tamani in Mali create an empowering environment for women’s voices? Contributing to existing theoretical discussions on radio and women’s empowerment, this article examines the need to discuss women’s empowerment not from the perspective of women as individuals, but from the perspective of “webs of relations”, thus allowing intersubjectivity and evolving relationships with others to be considered. “Webs of relations” refers to the broader societal, institutional, and structural inequalities and injustices that women face in their everyday lives and which shape women’s agency and decision-making power. To achieve this aim, the article draws on two rounds of focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted in 2019–2020 and content analyses of a series of women-related radio programmes broadcast in Mali by Studio Tamani, the radio studio created by the Swiss-based media organisation Fondation Hironnelle. It suggests that the plurivocality of Malian women, as a diverse and heterogenous group, must be reflected in radio debates on women’s issues in order to reflect the “web of relations” that delimit women’s empowerment.

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Introduction

This article analyses the extent to which radio can provide an empowering environment for women in Mali. Living in a country which ranks 184 of 189 on the Gender Inequality Index (UNDR 2019), radio is an essential source of information for women faced with structural inequalities. Mali is amongst the top 5 in terms of child marriage (UNICEF 2018) with a 61% child marriage rate. Sixty-six per cent of women have no education (men—53%) and 28% of women are literate (men—47%) (Demographic and Health Surveys 2018). Gender inequality in primary education is reducing as campaigns are encouraging enrolment amongst girls but this has not extended to secondary education. Violence against women is rife and Mali has the highest female genital mutilation rate worldwide affecting 89% of women aged 15–49 (Demographic and Health Surveys 2018). Women do not have the same legal status as men in the traditional and customary courts. Despite attempts to amend it, the Family Code supports polygamy, widespread male dominance, domestic violence, and resistance to women’s work outside the home. Although

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important stakeholders in all the aspects of daily life, women, in many cases, are disempowered, and require more information about their rights, and a greater voice in society.

Radio is particularly suited to reaching women and other marginalised and isolated communities in conflict/post-conflict settings. Contributing to existing theoretical discussions on radio and women's empowerment, this article examines radio's relation to women's empowerment in Mali from the perspective of women's "webs of relations" (Hania Sholkamy 2010; Naila Kabeer 1999). "Webs of relations" refers to the broader societal, institutional, and structural inequalities and injustices that women face in their everyday lives and which shape women's agency and decision-making power. Focusing on "web of relations", we examine how radio can create an empowering environment by representing women's intersubjectivity and evolving relationships with others, rather than as individuals.

The article draws on two rounds of focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted in 2019–2020 and content analyses of a series of women-related radio programmes broadcast in Mali by Studio Tamani, a radio studio created and run by the Swiss-based media organisation Fondation Hironnelle. It investigates the extent to which Studio Tamani portrays women in relation to other individuals and to other groups or roles. It determines the cultural and structure values or webs which determine the status of women in the broadcasts and also assesses how these constraints are represented and perceived by Studio Tamani's listeners.

Radio and women's multiple identities

Building on previous research which determined radio to be a "knowledge resource" capable of promoting female empowerment (Emma Heywood 2020), this article examines the extent to which radio can create an empowering environment. An empowering environment, for women, reflects their multiple identities and relationships and enables them to speak, exist, decide, work, own, and be safe (Sholkamy 2010, 257). The concept of "webs of relations" has been used to discuss women's empowerment referring to the broader societal, institutional, and, therefore, structural inequalities and injustices that women face in their everyday lives (Kabeer 1999; Sholkamy 2010). Such "webs" suggest that the question of women's liberation and empowerment cannot be understood in terms of individual enrichment, but in terms of their intersubjectivity and relationship to others. Indeed, as Andrea Cornwall states (2005, 5), it is more useful to explore women's "multiple social identities and identifications" because examining women as individuals fails to take into account the influence of social structures and relationships on women's lives (Anne Huis, Anne Huis, et al. 2020).

In previous sections of this project, when assessing radio's impact in Niger (Heywood 2020), empowerment—a broadly defined term (Andrea Cornwall and Deborah Eade 2010; Kabeer 1999)—was considered on two levels with women gaining individual agency to make first- and second-order choices (Emma Heywood and Maria Tomlinson 2019). The former was on macro level, for example, whether to engage in politics and the second focused on "everyday decisions which do not affect the overall outcome of women's life" (Kabeer 1999, 437). But this project illustrated how radio could shape the understanding, behaviour and attitudes of audiences with regard to women's empowerment from the

viewpoint of individual women's trajectories and the manner in which they could increase their agency leading to self-improvement; the multiplicity of relationships that constrain women and reinforce cultural values must now be considered. Women cannot be empowered just as individuals and, rather than discussing woman as a unitary construct and focusing on male-female relationships (a widespread critique of development studies discourse), "relationality" pursues ideas that women are constantly evolving and affected by the relationships they form (Dina Ligaga 2020, 68). Using a "relational" approach when discussing women's representation on radio can challenge development approaches where empowerment discourse is informed as an individualised process of independence (Carole Biewener and Bacqué Marie-Helene 2015). The concept of "relations" and "relationality" has long been embedded in West African feminism and African philosophy more generally. According to Azille Coetzee (2018), relationality is at the core of African philosophy and the work of feminist thinkers (see Oyèronké Oyèwùmí 1997, 2016). Coetzee theorises the intersubjectivity of "the African communal subject" where "the self is open-ended and vulnerable, rather than clearly delineated, closed off, fixed and autonomous" and therefore "continuously forged in dialogue with others" (2018, 5). From a methodological perspective, this challenges the domination of Western epistemologies and, from a gender perspective, highlights that women's liberation in Africa is also "bound up in the wider struggle by African people to free themselves from poverty and ideological domination in both intra- and international spheres" (Achola Pala 2005, 209).

The concept of "relational webs" extends empowerment to the collective; it is only through "power *with*", or collective action, that transformational change can be triggered (Gita Sen 1997; Naila Kabeer 1994; Srilatha Batliwala 1993). Focusing on collectivity and intersubjectivity also highlights the structural inequalities in societal structures—some people are made more vulnerable, and intersubjective, than others. Intersectional approaches to gender are fundamental to understand this vulnerability. However, whilst intersectionality can promote "understandings of how gender is also constituted by class, race, ethnicity and informed by normative notions of sexuality, it cannot fully account for the diversity of women's experiences" (Tanja Bastia, Tim Jacoby and Uma Kothari 2014) instead producing what Ifa Amadiume (2000, 1) termed a "laundry-list approach to women's issues". By employing a lens of "relationality" to understand the portrayal and reception of radio broadcasting about women's empowerment, we can clarify the extent to which Studio Tamani's women-related broadcasting reflects complexities of women's experiences and struggles for equality in Mali and can contribute to creating "an empowering environment" for women's voices.

An environment must therefore be created where women's rights to speak, to exist, to decide, to work, to own, to be safe can be confirmed but also enabled (Sholkamy 2010, 257). Enabling women to generate an income will not trigger gender equality. Women's empowerment cannot be reduced to a simplistic cause-and-effect process, or an end in itself, whereby resources are allocated and women as a homogenous group become empowered in a measurable way, because empowerment cannot be bestowed on others. Hence the need for the empowering environment; rather than just giving access to resources, women need to be given control over them and also be included in the decision-making about them (Eileen Kuttub 2014). Yet this environment is itself beset with power inequalities and obstacles which cannot be overcome simultaneously, and may come from the least expected quarters, for example, from female in-laws and other

women. Indeed, women's relationships with other women may in themselves be exploitative and hierarchical (Cornwall 2005, 4) highlighting that men are not the sole keepers of dominance. As Catherine Obianuju Acholonu states (1995, 28)

Those who present the notion that the African woman is suppressed and oppressed or is placed in an inferior position to men, have failed to realise that in many cases women are part and parcel of, if not the power behind, the scattered instances of male dominance.

Collective action against these inequalities is therefore needed whilst still recognising contexts and the need to negotiate. In other words, women have to use the tools they need, which are suitable for their context, and acknowledge their own difficulties; there is no one-size-fits-all.

However, empowerment and the associated choices can trigger disempowering situations. According to Kabeer (1999), status may be antithetical to empowerment as women face a trade-off between independent choices leading to greater autonomy and the consequences of those choices within society. In this study, for example, divorce, for many women, was considered an empowering choice, liberating wives from possible domestic violence and subjugation but it was acknowledged that it would simultaneously put women in a position where their change in status within the family and community would be negatively perceived and even unaccepted. Similarly, status attributed to older women in families, as we discuss later regarding mothers- and sisters-in-law, can prove disempowering to younger women. It is therefore important to consider the very real extent to which social norms and women's relations with family and communities can condition empowerment.

It is here that radio can play an important part as an "enabling factor" (Jo Rowlands 1997). It can help women navigate the many obstacles discussed above by broadcasting information about women's rights, raising awareness with examples and role models which are free from negative stereotypes or stereotypical representations of women being "poor, powerless and pregnant" (Everjoice Win 2007). But more importantly, such information should impact not only on women by triggering their critical consciousness but on all of society thus shaping and influencing power relations between actors.

Radio's socio-cultural and technological characteristics lend themselves to women's empowerment. They are cheap, portable (David Hendry 2000) and hardwearing and programmes are widely accessed by mobile phone enabling important awareness-raising broadcasts to reach listeners via various platforms (Bartholomew Sullivan 2011; Goretti Linda Nassanga, Linzo Manyozo and Claudia Lopes 2013; Heather Gilberts and Mary Myers 2012; Wallace Chuma 2013). Radio's extensive reach (Edward Pease and EveretteDennis 1994) enables urban and remote communities to be informed, enabling those with low literacy levels to be reached, because of its orality. On a socio-cultural level, radio is considered a secondary medium (Carole Fleming 2002; Jody Berland 1990; Hugh Chignell 2009) enabling women to listen to it when occupied doing other chores. Its intimate nature, triggered by listeners being able to listen alone (Martin Shingler and Cindy Wieringa 1998), allows women to receive sensitive or taboo information (for example, on domestic violence, rape, divorce, family planning, or family spacing) alone rather than in a mixed environment with family members which would be the case with television for example. Women-related programmes can be broadcast when women can listen to them and also in national languages increasing their accessibility

(Heywood 2020). Radio also has democratising features (Chignell 2009; John Hartley 2000) enabling women to contribute to programmes through phone-ins, talk shows and debates. They can give feedback further promoting radio as an ideal medium, metaphorically encompassing the concept be they physical or geographical communities of interests (Bruce Girard 2007; Birgitte Jallof 2011; Linzo Manyozo 2012). Women can therefore become members of a community despite isolation and distance.

In addition to the abovementioned “intimacy”, radio can promote social community gatherings or collectives through listening associations (Peter Mhagama 2015). Listening associations act as support networks, allowing listeners to gain and share information and participate in public life. They are “small listening and discussion groups that meet regularly to receive a special radio program, which the members then discuss” (Rogers et al. 1997 cited in Manyozo 2012, 29). Women can gain additional information from women-only listening associations that they might not otherwise have received. They discuss a topic or gain information from visiting NGOs or experts and take what they have learned and continue their discussions with the other members of their households. Thus, radio promotes “collective solidarity in the public arena as well as individual assertiveness in the private” (Kabeer 1999, 457). This contributes to community building which in turn contributes to democratising societies and strengthening the public sphere (Diana Agosta 2001).

Radio remains a main source of information in Mali and is increasingly accessed by mobile phones. In recent decades, women have become increasingly associated with radio as a tool for women’s empowerment. As Mamadou Diawara showed over 25 years ago a “clear feminization of the artist’s profession among the *griots*”, or storytellers or praise singers, as women in Mali increasingly occupied these roles becoming broadcasters of information (Mamadou Diawara 1997, 44). The importance of oral narratives amongst women in “refining and reaffirming the feminist vision for (West) African women” has been stressed (Naomi Nkealah 2016, 72) highlighting how radio, as an oral and aural medium, lends itself to such practices. Mali’s radio is also characterised by the culture of listening groups mentioned above, which are linked to local or community radios and are mixed or single sex. “*Griins*” or “tea groups” (Julien Bondez 2013) encourage listeners to come together and participate in public life, although *griins* are mostly formed by men who gather to listen and discuss radio programmes whilst drinking tea.

In Mali, there is the state radio (ORTM), and 170 private radio stations, 121 of which are volunteer-run community radios (MINUSMA 2019). Most community radios belong to the *Union des Radios et Télévisions Libres du Mali* (Union of Free Radios and Televisions of Mali—URTEL). Although Mali is 108th on the World Press Freedom Index (RSF 2020), radio is widely trusted and meets a range of interests through community, religious, and confessional radios. There are also international radios such as RFI, BBC Africa, Deutsche Welle and VOA. Media development organisations such as Fondation Hironnelle, this research project’s partner, broadcast information and awareness campaigns via radio. In 2013, Fondation Hironnelle created Studio Tamani which broadcasts daily factual information in the form of news, debates, and magazines. According to the FGDs in this study, Studio Tamani is widely trusted and perceived as independent. The Studio broadcasts programmes to the nation from the capital, Bamako, by satellite to a network of 70 community and commercial radio partners, who, in turn, use their own FM networks to broadcast

to their communities. This Studio was chosen as a case study as the research team was commissioned to conduct a separate impact assessment by Fondation Hirondelle.

In 2018–2019, Studio Tamani broadcasted a series of women-related programmes. Rather than being purely radio programmes, the series included televised *portraits* (short individual testimonies) which were re-broadcast with sound-only as radio magazines, *films documentaires*, and *motion designs* (short animated educational videos narrated by a woman in French). Nine themes were covered: political representation of women; girls' education; female genital mutilation; women's financial independence; domestic violence; inheritance and women; climate change; women and migration to gold mines; and women and conflict prevention. The radio programme contents and their reception among focus groups of men and women listeners in Mali are discussed below. The discussion investigates the extent to which radio, represented by Studio Tamani, can act as an empowering environment for women in Mali. Radio broadcasting must consider empowerment contextually and holistically alongside cultural values and structural inequalities. Women's situation must not be extracted from this context or the constraints imposed on them through the relationships they have with other actors. It is this relational, negotiated empowerment, which emerged throughout this investigation.

Method

The project used a three-stage mixed method approach. The first stage was a baseline assessment conducted in April 2019 comprising 20 focus groups, each with 5 participants, selected from predetermined categories: married women, unmarried women, and men, to ensure representativeness. In total, there were eight focus groups of married female listeners, eight groups of non-married female listeners, and four groups of male listeners. These were allocated equally to rural and urban locations in and around Mali's capital, and in Ségou (safety restrictions prevented travel beyond these areas) at partner radio stations of Studio Tamani. The hour-long discussions were conducted in French by the same facilitators with national language translators where necessary. FGDs were anonymised and audio-recorded for analysis and adhered to ethical procedures. Because of time limitations, three of the chosen topics in Studio Tamani's series of broadcasts, listed above, were selected for discussion: climate change, inheritance, and domestic violence. All groups were asked the same sets of questions with similar probes and examined perceptions of these topics and their effects on women's empowerment in Mali. The responses were transcribed and coded using the software Nvivo according to negative or positive terms for women, stereotypes, perceptions of gender roles, and awareness of the three topics, and according to understandings of women's empowerment. Both quantitative and qualitative data were produced.

The second stage comprised content analyses which complemented the qualitative data from the FGDs by providing rigorous quantitative data in equal measure (Jessica Noske-Turner 2015). The analyses focused on the women-related series of programmes, listed above, broadcast by Studio Tamani between September 2018 and January 2020. They were produced as part of an EU-funded "Women's Rights" series in partnership with IMRAP (Malian Institute for Peace Research-Action). However, this study focuses on the radio output. FGDs revealed that listeners did not view Studio Tamani's televised programming because they were unaware of them, they were broadcast at the "wrong time",

or through lack of means to view them. The radio output was in the form of “*Grand Dialogues*” and “*Magazines*”. The former are 45-minute debate programmes with up to four invited guest experts and a presenter, who discuss a specific topic. The *Magazines* are 3-minute portraits of individuals in the form of testimonies or interviews on a given topic. They are broadcast over the course of a week and feature individuals who are experts on the topic or implicated individuals (e.g. survivors of domestic violence). In all, over 9 hours were analysed. The broadcasts were also coded in NVivo using the same categories of analysis employed for the focus groups listed above.

The third stage occurred following the content analysis in early 2020 with repeat FGDs with the same participants in the same locations. Information from the content analysis shaped the questions for these FGDs. Participants were questioned on the broadcasts, their opinions on them generally and their styles and contents. They were probed to determine whether certain information or styles had been absorbed. The responses were transcribed, coded and the information was compared with responses from the first round.

Listeners were questioned on their understanding of “empowerment”, a term that was consistently explained by women participants as meaning “independence” in alignment with the French “*autonomisation*”, the root of which is “autonomous” as opposed to the connotation of power in English (Biewener et al. 2015). Yet the independence they spoke of, and which was also raised by male respondents, signified financial independence from men, never their children. Rather than presenting individualistic views of autonomy, independence to them represented, and would be achieved through, the ability to no longer be financially reliant on others, mainly husbands, and to be able to make decisions for themselves and their children. Empowerment therefore went beyond individual enrichment and reflected the “web of relations” that constitute the social and economic lives in which women live and act (Kabeer 1999; Sholkamy 2010). Women are not easily removed from relational ties to husbands, extended families, cultural values, traditions, structural inequalities and social constraints, and these should be central to discussions and assessments of empowerment. This article addresses the following research questions in relation to Studio Tamani’s approach to women’s issues:

1. How does Studio Tamani portray women in their women-orientated broadcasting?
2. What are the cultural or structural values or “webs” which determine those status of women in the broadcasts?
3. How do listeners of Studio Tamani perceive and receive portrayals of women’s web of relations?

How does studio Tamani portray women and their webs of relations?

The FGDs reveal that perceptions of women’s empowerment are closely aligned with the language and discourse of developmental approaches to women’s empowerment, where “woman” is perceived as a unitary construct and the focus is on male–female relationships. Nonetheless, women’s “web of relations” are shown to play an important role in supporting *and* preventing empowerment at the same time. How, then, does Studio Tamani’s broadcasting create empowering environments in ways that help women to navigate these “web of relations”? The programmes discussed here—long-form *Grands Dialogues*

and short-form *Magazines*—frame women in association with the different social networks they belong to and the corresponding range of social values, including but not limited to marriage, polygamy, divorce, authorities, family and children, traditions, customs and religious practices, generational and gendered hierarchies, education and upbringing, and finance.

Grands dialogues

In these debates, women spoke more frequently than men in five of the nine broadcasts on women's topics under analysis (see Table 1). Generally, the percentage of dialogue spoken by women increases proportionally with the number of women guests. Similarly, where there are fewer women invited, their voices remain marginalised. This suggests that the presenter is, mostly, ensuring an equal distribution of time for each guest. In this respect, an empowering environment for women's broadcasting is connected to the number of women's voices heard on radio. Therefore, unsurprisingly, the first step to creating an empowering environment on radio is to increase the number of women included in the *Grand Dialogue*.

The content analysis of these broadcasts revealed that the subject of the "*Grands Dialogues*" determines how women are portrayed on radio. Different subjects produce stronger connotations of women's empowerment through development discourses of "*autonomisation*".

Others were more attuned to the idea of women within a "web of relations", where their empowerment is conditioned by wider networks of community and structural inequalities in institutions and the economy. For example, on 20.12.18, the *Grand Dialogue* represented girl's education as a matter of national development, on one hand, and a matter of individual choice (in terms of parents, student and teacher behaviour), on the other. Similarly, on 13.09.18, the *Grand Dialogue* on women's political representation in the government focused on aspirations to integrate more women into political institutions which echo development debates on women in politics and human rights discourse,

Table 1. Dialogue spoken by men and women during Studio Tamani's Women-themed Grands Dialogues (including presenters) (%).

Date	Subject	Men	Women	Number of men	Number of women
13.9.18	The Representation of Women in the Current Government	17%	83%	1	3
20.12.18	Education of girl: what are the challenges in Mali?	22%	78%	1	4
06.02.19	FGM: where are we with the practice in Diola?	31%	69%	2	3
08.03.19	Women's economic independence	63%	33%	3	2
02.08.19	What causes domestic violence?	38%	62%	2	1
08.10.19	Inheritance in Mali: women are "victims of injustice"	56%	44%	2	3
02.12.19	Climate change in Mali: what are the impacts on women?	61%	39%	3	2
16.01.20	Gold mining linked to rural migration: reasons and impact on women?	49%	51%	3	2
04.02.20	Conflict management and prevention: what role do women play?	82%	18%	3	1

It's really an opportunity for them [women] to use these spaces so that [...] their rights on paper, which are actually human rights, can protect them and really mean that their lives, and their integrity, are not violated. (Djingare Maina Maiga, women's rights specialist)

Other debates presented “web of relations” in ways that focused on their interpersonal relationships. For example, the *Grand Dialogue* on domestic violence (02.08.19) was dominated by one of the two guests, Oumou Diarra, or Diéma, a well-known radio broadcaster in Mali. She advocated women taking an active role in their marriages and relationships to avoid domestic violence and she self-identified as a “*traditionaliste*” rather than an “*intellectuelle*”. The debate did not include a perspective advocating the protection of women from violence as a health, legal, or political issue. 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. The issue of domestic violence was therefore represented in narrow terms of stereotypes of interpersonal disputes, rather as a political and socio-economic issue.

Other debates, such as that on Female Genital Mutilation (06.02.19) managed to present a range of women's voices that balanced expert opinion with the inter-personal dynamics that determine women's everyday lives. This is because of the range of perspectives presented by more than one woman in the discussion (three women to two men). Overall, the *Grands Dialogues* on women's issues employ a mixture of approaches to create an empowering environment for women, drawing on development discourse and producing debates that hinge on women's “web of relations”. When the *Grand Dialogues* include voices of women as experts, this supports a discourse through which deductive and inductive norms emerge. At the same time, commentaries in the *Grand Dialogues* make it clear how women *should* behave and the extent to which they do indeed adhere to social norms at an interpersonal level. Women are frequently judged for not upholding the image of the “good” wife responsible for maintaining a family's harmony, while the men are presented as the respected heads of families.

Magazines

The *Magazines* reinforce the web of relations approach to women's empowerment by broadcasting a range of perspectives on a single topic. Supporting findings on the positive perception and impact of “*temoignages*”, or testimonies, in radio broadcasting (Heywood 2020) these brief testimonials present diverse women and perspectives on particular issues and resolve the major drawback of using the *Grand Dialogues* for the discussion of women's issues: they allow women to speak uninterrupted on a particular issue. In cases of violence, victimisation and injustice—such as in the series on domestic violence and inheritance—the *Magazines* offer a space for listeners to hear directly from women who are survivors of injustice. In the case of girls and education in Mali (8.2018--9.2018), the *Magazines* broadcast testimonies from girls and women themselves on their experiences of schooling and leaving school allowing a lay audience to identify with the topic. These are helpful additions to the *Grands Dialogues* which tend to privilege the opinions of experts (men and women) over the voices of those directly concerned.

However, because they are interviewed alone, the women in these testimonials appear removed from their wider “web of relations” and can therefore appear isolated or as

unique individuals, rather than members of a network. Some of the limitations of the *Magazine* format is the decontextualized nature of the testimonies. For example, in the series on climate change (12.2019–1.2020) the focus on women's experiences lacked follow-up information regarding calls for action or examples of practical solutions. In her interview, Aminata Doucoure describes her NGO's work which gives farming advice and assistance to women in the wake of climate change. She appeals directly to the media to work with NGOs on this message and warns listeners against deforestation. At the same time, the *Magazines* illustrated how women are doubly victimised by climate change—as primary agricultural workers on small plots of land and as primary managers of domestic resources—but did not interview women who have found solutions or are adapting to new techniques or skills. As three-minute segments broadcast over several days, they risk remaining fragmented, decontextualised and, therefore, not heard as a single series.

Listeners' perceptions of women and men on radio, and their approaches to women's empowerment in Mali

Listener opinions of men and women presenters and speakers on Malian radio generally reveal how listeners relate to radio broadcasts in gendered ways. While none of the participants stated they only listen to programming by their own gender, women (unmarried and married) expressed an interest in programming led by and for women. For example, married women in one FGD expressed an appreciation for Radio Baroni,¹ which broadcasts talk radio programmes for women discussing women's issues. Radio, for all FGD respondents, is a means for raising awareness. Women trusted the voices of women journalists, presenters, or experts talking on women's issues (RMW3).² Male respondents described how women on radio tackle difficult and taboo subjects and yet are reluctant to debate men on political subjects (UM1). Listeners of all genders are aware of women's voices on radio and note that women are important in raising awareness of women's issues. In this respect, radio acts as an extension to women's existing web of relations in their real lives. If women's "web of relations" involves an ongoing dialogue and renegotiation of diverse and competing obligations and responsibilities within family units, communities, and support networks, then the FGDs have shown that women on radio can play a role in this web.

Connections linking empowerment to the wider web of relations in their lives, rather than access to individual enrichment, emerged across all groups during the discussions. Women respondents (both unmarried and married) all consistently included many other people when discussing a particular issue. This illustrates the extent to which everyday activities conducted by the women listeners is for, with, or dependent on others. In contrasting responses by married and unmarried women, the FGDs demonstrated a reduction in relational web post-marriage. Once married and having become mothers "[women] suffer because they are the mothers of children" (UUMW1). This also reflects the definition of "empowerment" discussed by the groups. Empowerment for women signifies "independence" but not from children, independence would empower women to take care of their families. The younger, unmarried women refer to the broadest range of people when talking about women-related topics and also mention the broadest inter-generational range including grandparents, parents and siblings. It was clear that boys—siblings or not—are encouraged within society to adopt a disempowering attitude

towards women from an early age, “they want us to be like our mothers—submissive, obedient women”, and as a result “boys do nothing” (UUMW1).

Some groups of unmarried women remained aspirational in their professional goals for the future. Highlighting class differences in women’s web of relations, some unmarried women (UUMW1) discussed examples of independent women as role models and the domestic help needed to achieve this status. These discussions around women’s social reproduction reinforce that “African women have multiple identities [...] enmeshed in one individual” (Molara Ogundipe-Leslie 1994, 251), and the need for such complexities to be reflected in radio broadcasting. Furthermore, by discussing not only a broad range of women but also their own relations with them, both unmarried and married women discussed negative examples of other women. They talked about the negative role of mothers- and sisters-in-law in their lives and power they exert to make life-changing decisions without their consent, for example, taking their son’s house from his widow on his death, casting them out following divorce, or treating them as slaves once newly-married. This demonstrates that “woman” as a unitary construct fails to take account of women’s interests as members of generations, families of economic groups [...] women’s relationships with other women may in themselves be exploitative and hierarchical’ (Cornwall 2005, 4).

The men FGDs show that patriarchal relationships restrict women’s ability to become socially empowered, even if they have access to additional income. Male respondents shared the definition of empowerment as financial enrichment. However, the patriarchal authority of men as heads of households remained strong amongst these listeners: “He’s the one who has brought her to the family to manage at least his family. But she remains behind the man because he’s the decision maker” (UM2). Nonetheless, changes in culture and the economy mean that men are now encouraging women to find ways of earning money,

Now, it’s acceptable for men to let women see to their business, they earn money. It’s the financial situation. Before, women would stay at home with nothing to do. Things are tougher now, so women have to go out to make ends meet. (UM2)

Other male respondents recognised that the means of achieving financial empowerment differ from place to place, creating different avenues of empowerment between women in rural areas and women in urban areas with access to education:

Women should be given land in the village so they can work. By working, they become independent [...] In towns – he mentioned educated women – women have gone to school. Those women have their qualifications so in terms of employment, they must be given jobs just like men. (RM2)

In other words, women’s financial empowerment does not equate with socio-cultural empowerment.

In addition to the financial understandings of “*autonomisation*”, as engrained in development discourse, unmarried women discussed empowerment in terms of personal freedoms and the possibility of establishing healthy future relationships. They suggested that empowerment refers to women being able to make their own decisions (“*liberté*”) and not being restrained by a future husband: “Free in every way, whether it’s in marriage, in work. Or even just in the street!” (RUMW5). No one expressed the possibility of not

getting married, but many were hopeful that they could negotiate the terms of their freedom with their future husbands before they marry. Women FGDs reveal entanglements in the overall understanding of women's empowerment, which overlap with Studio Tamani's broadcasting. On one hand, empowerment corresponds to traditions within development studies which has moved away from individualistic concepts of independence, whilst on the other, they still imply notions of individual enrichment and agency linked to the French term "*autonomisation*". While women have the opportunity to increase their earnings, the primary beneficiaries of women's empowerment are deemed to be the woman's family and children. Studio Tamani has therefore encouraged further debate about the nature and anxieties connected to women's empowerment. Women's empowerment as a financial benefit to the family and collective networks of support are stressed over individualist conceptions, which might threaten the familial order of the woman's role in the household and family.

Men's attitudes and behaviour toward women were described by women as being a barrier to their empowerment. Married women were pessimistic about the possibility of reducing the levels of domestic violence in Mali until men change their attitudes (UMW1). They stated that domestic violence is a subject which is discussed on radio, but they noted that women struggle to fight against domestic violence because of social taboos surrounding divorce:

You can tell the mayor, associations, the police, the justice system all about the violence you've experienced, but if you do so, your husband's parents will say this wife brought her husband to court, you should divorce her. This is wrong. (RMW2)

In other words, by its nature, domestic violence is not an issue that can be solved by women alone. It is associated with the attitudes of society at large, by perpetrators and by the institutions that police and mitigate domestic disputes. Nonetheless, developmental approaches to financial empowerment and decision-making appear in the language and content of the discussions relating to the lives of women. As the discussions develop over time, the "web of relations" that affect women's lives become clearer—their implication in patriarchal structures, the difficulty of negotiating structural inequalities—demonstrating that women's empowerment in Mali cannot be reduced to a matter of individual choice or agency.

Concluding thoughts on studio Tamani as an "empowering environment"

This article analysed the need to discuss women's empowerment, not from the perspective of women as individuals, but from the perspectives of "webs of relations" (Kabeer 1999; Sholkamy 2010) and relationality, fundamental to West African philosophy and feminism (Coetzee 2018; Oyěwùmí 1997, 2016). It also contributes to existing theoretical discussions on radio and women empowerment by demonstrating how radio, a main source of information for many in conflict and post-conflict areas and particularly women can represent the complexities of women's lives in such a manner as to help women navigate the many obstacles they face by broadcasting information about women's rights, raising awareness with examples and role models, free from negative stereotypes or stereotypical representations. Whilst research has focused on understandings of empowerment (Andrea Cornwall 2016; Michael Kevane 2014; Srilatha Batliwala 1994)

and the use of radio in development (Jallov 2011; Manyozo 2012), this article investigated how Studio Tamani, a radio studio in Mali, portrays women in relation to other individuals and to other groups or roles. It also determined the cultural and structural values or webs which shape women's status in the broadcasts, and also assessed how these constraints are represented and perceived by Studio Tamani's listeners.

The radio programmes under analysis here focused on women's issues and portray women in a wide range of relations including with in-laws, siblings, widows, husbands, men, family and children. As such, the content of the discussion rarely portrayed women as individuals; they are always associated with others often in secondary positions, for example in relation to in-laws and husbands, upholding social norms. A recurring theme in many of Studio Tamani's broadcasting reflected on patriarchal anxieties in reaction to empowerment discourse. For example, debates on girls' education demonstrate how gendered dynamics surface at an early age with power dynamics emerging in schools where empowering girls incurs the threat of disempowering boys. These social norms are challenged in some of the "*Magazines*" and "*Grand Dialogues*" analysed here, namely the women in politics series which encourages girls not to take a back seat in class. While the empowerment of women is mostly agreed to be laudable by the guests interviewed in the broadcasts analysed here, tensions remain regarding the form and nature of this empowerment. In the "*Grand Dialogue*" on women and conflict prevention (04.02.20), the discussion revealed a tension between the need of unifying women in traditional roles, giving them stereotypical secondary roles of social reproduction, such as cooking, which risks excluding them from more dominant positions. In other words, Studio Tamani's broadcasting reveals the mutual desire for women's empowerment, among men and women, but little consensus as to what "empowerment" means.

The programmes refer to women in association with both other people and with other groups or roles (women and children, women as mothers, women as providers, and so on), thus representing the complex webs of socio-economic pressures affecting women's lives. Marriage, for example, which is portrayed as natural and expected part of life, is presented as comprising layers of interacting individuals including the man—the head of the household, the "good" wife who obeys and respects, in-laws and mothers who educate, and children. These attitudes were upheld by the FGDs and are driven by strong social values which are at risk of being undermined by new influences associated with equality from the West, and adopted by the younger generation. This demonstrates, as Oyěwùmí (1997) states, that woman cannot be considered in isolation or as unitary constructs.

The programme content also widely associates women with other women (other married women, mothers, sisters, professional women, working women, educated women, widows) undermining the assumed man/woman binary within patriarchal societies. However, this is only partially reflected in the structure of the programming itself. As Table 1 shows, only when more women are included in the programming can the diversity of women's web of relations become part of radio broadcasting on women's issues. Through its form, more than its content, the *Grands Dialogues* demonstrated limitations to the debate format. If Malian women are not included in debates, or a guest does not come to discuss the topic of women's empowerment in goodwill, can radio truly be an empowering environment? *Magazines* can create an empowering environment by giving voice to disenfranchised women directly, thus allowing other women in similar situations to identify with them. The *Magazines* show a variety of opinions when considered as a whole, but only loyal

listeners will hear the entire series, calling into question the “plurivocal” effect of these testimonies—in other words, that “Malian women” are not a homogenous unit but speak in many voices. Indeed, a common theme throughout the “*Grands Dialogues*” is the insistence on “sensibilisation”, or awareness raising, of “women”. In order to tackle the marginalisation of women and girls, “sensibilisation” involves a call to action via radio on the behalf of the listener, and therefore assumes agency on behalf of the listener—but if the listener does not have access to the full series of programming on an issue, can they be expected to act? Can women be expected to act as a homogenous, unified group, unaffected by intersecting systems of oppression and societal obligations? The radio formats of the *Grand Dialogue* and *Magazine* can only reflect this diverse network and “web of relations” that forms the lives of women if they give space to diverse voices among women themselves.

It is apparent that Studio Tamani’s output is both gendered (given the focus on women-related topics) but also *gendering* through its very content and shaping (Carol Bacchi and Joan Eveline 2010). In other words, discussing these topics is a first step to taking advantage of radio as an ideal medium for creating an empowering environment. In broadcasting these series, and continuing its programming on women’s issues, Studio Tamani is normalising debate on women’s issues. Yet, the way in which the topic is defined and presented risks marginalising women from this empowering environment. Whilst diverse opinions among men and women must be included in the debate, the “plurivocality” of Malian women, in terms of their experience, expertise, and perspectives, must also be considered. In doing so, this will nuance the individualised and/or homogenised perspectives of woman portrayed in development contexts, particularly with regard to their empowerment. For future radio output, a clearer definition of the problem being solved is required to examine how women and men are viewed in this space, and most importantly what the factors are that create gender inequality and imbalances in power relations. Radio’s role as an enabler, as well as an empowerer, can then be refined.

Notes

1. This station is named after collective discussions among several people and is an alternative name for *grin*, discussed above (Julien Bondez 2013).
2. See Appendix A for FGD codes.

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Appendix A

Codes	Married Women (MW)	Unmarried Women (UMW)	Men (M)
Urban	UMW1	UUMW1	UM1
	UMW2	UUMW2	UM2
	UMW3	UUMW3	
	UMW4	UUMW4	
Rural	RMW1	RUMW1	RM1
	RMW2	RUMW2	RM2
	RMW3	RUMW3	
	RMW4	RUMW4	