

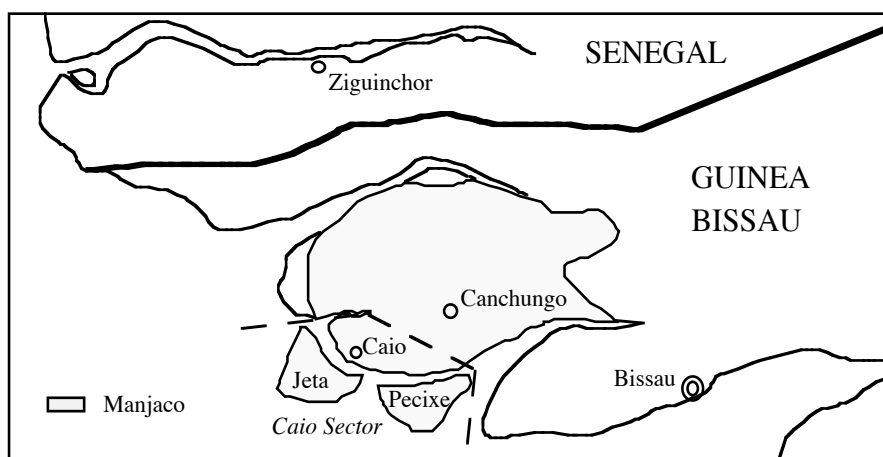
22. Village women as town prostitutes: cultural factors relevant to prostitution and HIV epidemiology in Guinea-Bissau

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Introduction

Prostitutes are one of the most frequently cited groups at risk for AIDS in Africa and elsewhere. Working in major population centers and at busy crossroads, and generally highly infected with the HIV virus, they are often held responsible, at least partly, for the propagation of HIV infection. Numerous publications describe their reported sexual behavior and offer statistics relevant to HIV epidemiology. Studies of prostitutes abound, but are generally city-based, and women are selected solely because they practice prostitution. Ethnic background, geographical origin, family situation, and personal circumstances are usually mentioned briefly, if at all. Sometimes the only common denominator for these women is that they work as prostitutes, and that term itself refers to a wide range of practices.

Map 1: *The Caio Sector*



In this village-based study, the proverbial horse and cart are inverted. The women are considered first and foremost as members of their families, village, and culture, and only secondarily as having

opted for prostitution as a means to earn cash. Most women born in the study area remain there, following a more or less traditional way of life. Yet, for various reasons, some leave to work as prostitutes in Bissau, Ziguinchor and other population centers of Guinea-Bissau and Casamance, sometimes venturing as far as Banjul.

This study is especially relevant for three reasons. First, the women involved practice a particular type of prostitution, one that is traditional, is based in or near residential neighborhoods of cities, and serves working-class clients, as opposed to the more modern elitist type of prostitution which targets wealthier clients of hotels, bars and night clubs. Second, the women from this village and its two neighboring islands account for up to a third of the prostitutes working in Ziguinchor, and probably over half of those working in Bissau. Third, this small section of Manjako territory is virtually the only one which produces prostitutes; the rest of the Manjako region, though of similar language, general culture, history, and economic activities, furnishes few if any prostitutes.

Various surveys have shown that a significantly high proportion of prostitutes working in Bissau and in Ziguinchor come from Caio Sector on the coast of northwest Guinea Bissau. Records at the Ziguinchor STD clinic, where prostitutes report for regular check-ups, showed, in 1990, that, out of over 300 of them, about 40 percent were of Guinea Bissau origin.¹ Of these Guinea-Bissau women, over 80 percent were of the Manjako ethnic group (who make up less than one-tenth of the total population of Guinea Bissau), and, of these, the large majority came from Caio Sector, which includes the village of Caio and the neighboring islands of Jeta and Pecixe.² Furthermore, though information on prostitutes in Bissau is spotty and inconclusive, it tends to show that the majority of women working in the traditional core prostitute area of Bissau are Manjako from Caio Sector. Antonio Carreira was explicit: "Single [Manjako] women sought out the important urban areas [...] where they devoted themselves to prostitution. [...] Young Manjako girls from the central region [...] rarely entered prostitution and did so only in isolated cases. Those of the islands (Pecixe or Jeta [Caio Sector]) practiced it in an almost collective way" (Carreira 1960: 781).

Since prostitutes in Ziguinchor showed a high rate of HIV-2, reported to reach 38 percent,³ and since so many of them came from Caio, the Medical Research Council (London) initiated a research project there in order to investigate HIV in this isolated, rural community. The resulting two-year study (1989-1991) revealed an infection rate among the general adult population of approximately

¹ Dominique Ricard, personal communication, and records from the Ziguinchor STD's clinic (Centre MST). Thanks to Senegal's National AIDS Program, Prof. Souleymane Mboup, Dr. Diop and Francisco Manga for making those records available. See Kanki *et al.* (1992).

² Dominique Ricard, personal communication, and records from the Ziguinchor STD's clinic.

³ Thirty-six percent, according to Kanki *et al.* (1992).

8.5 percent, almost exclusively HIV-2 (Wilkins *et al.* 1993), a rate comparable to that found in the capital city, Bissau. (Poulsen *et al.* 1989)

The project was then extended for two more years in order to study the types of risk behavior that could account for the high rate of HIV-2 in this rural area, and, in particular, to investigate the possible role of prostitution. Most of the findings presented here stem from fieldwork carried out during this second phase of the MRC project (1991-1993).

Research on this subject was guided by two questions. First, what circumstances push some women to leave the village to work as prostitutes, while most do not? Second, why does Caio Sector export prostitutes, while other Manjako areas do not? The answer to these questions can only be found by investigating social, cultural, and historical factors which influence women in their choice to enter prostitution, such as marital customs, kinship, residence groups, ricefield inheritance, age-sets, religious beliefs, and emigration. The present paper deals primarily with the first question, immediate factors in an individual woman's life which lead her to work as a prostitute. Sociological reasons which may account for the predominance of women from Caio Sector among prostitutes in Bissau and Ziguinchor will only be briefly outlined here, since they will be treated in a forthcoming article which explores more completely the cultural institutions which distinguish Caio Sector from the rest of Manjako territory.

The Manjako, whose language belongs to the West Atlantic group,¹ inhabit Guinea-Bissau's northwestern Cacheu Region, characterized by lowlands rimmed by tidal inlets and mangroves, dotted with ricefields and palm groves. The main diet is rice supplemented by fish. Cashews and palm oil are cash crops. A significant proportion of men seek work abroad, mainly in Senegal, France, and Portugal.

The approximately 8,000 inhabitants of Caio proper live in a series of twelve wards which stretch out over eight kilometers. Though the three most populous wards form a sort of town which serves as the administrative center of Caio Sector, most of the inhabitants maintain a traditional village lifestyle. Traditional beliefs in earth spirits and ancestor cults are very strong; conversion to Catholicism and Islam has been negligible.

Over 220 Caio women who were working or had worked as prostitutes were interviewed discretely and privately, in the Manjako language, in Bissau, Ziguinchor, or Caio. Besides these interviews carried out with known prostitutes, a history of prostitution was uncovered for another twenty women during a village marriage survey, when they volunteered the information. We also had access to the records of 80 women from Caio who had attended the Ziguinchor STD clinic; half of these women were also interviewed.

Several village-wide surveys were also undertaken, including an annual census, marriage surveys, and genealogies, resulting in an

¹ For an interesting account of the Manjako in the Canchungo area, see Gable (1990). The Manjako language has been studied by J.-L. Doneux (1975).

enormous amount of background information on Caio residents, including prostitutes and their families. At the same time, anthropological research was carried out to understand the cultural traditions and social organization of the village.

The work

The type of prostitution Caio women practice can be described as discreet, non-exhibitionist, traditional, and popular. The woman sits quietly in front of the room where she works, typically in a residential area, and waits for a client to approach her. The sex-for-money exchange takes approximately fifteen minutes. On a slow night the woman may go to a nearby working-class bar to attract clients and bring them back to her room. In 1992, the price the women in Bissau charged each client was 7,000-15,000 pesos, the equivalent, at that time, of around 5 - 10 French francs (US \$1-\$2). In Ziguinchor, the average price was 500 CFA (before the devaluation). Younger women tend to charge more than older ones. For Bissau, it is safe to suggest an overall average of 5-10 clients per prostitute each night she works. Women under 35 years of age reported 10-20 clients per night, women between 35 and 50 years of age reported 5-12, and women over 50 reported around 5. Our observation showed that the women tended to report their maximum rather than their average number of clients.

Not much is known about the clients of these women. The exchange is very brief, and takes place in silence and in darkness. The women themselves, let alone casual observers, cannot judge the ethnic group (the lingua franca, Portuguese Kriol, is used for the few words spoken), nor the age, nor the social characteristics of their clients. Possible reasons for the seeking of prostitutes, and especially for the relatively low age of clients (20s) include: postpartum abstinence, gender imbalance in Bissau, and the late age of marriage for men.

Of the approximately 200 women for whom we have the information, about one-third reported having worked in Bissau but not Ziguinchor, one-third in Ziguinchor but not Bissau, and one-third in both Ziguinchor and Bissau. The oldest women are less likely to have worked in Ziguinchor. An equally large number (76) have worked in Canchungo, the crossroads for the Caio-Bissau-Ziguinchor triangle, but just seven have worked only in Canchungo. Fifteen women have worked in Bafata, in eastern Guinea-Bissau (on the truckers' route from Dakar to Conakry), and five each reported having worked in Banjul and Dakar. Women from the island of Pecixe tend to work only in Bissau, though we found three young women from Pecixe in Banjul. I should point out that the women do not work as prostitutes in their home village.

Almost half of the women reported having worked for five years or less; they have since returned to the village to marry and have children. One quarter worked for six to ten years, and one quarter for over ten years, including 15 who have reportedly worked for over 20. As one would expect, the older the woman, the longer she has worked

in prostitution. Also as one would expect, retired prostitutes have worked for shorter periods than the active ones. The length of time spent in prostitution is sometimes but not always linked to the reason why the woman left to work in the first place.

A woman is free to choose where she works, the days and hours she works, and which and how many clients she receives. She may work a few nights per week, or a few months of the year, according to financial need and her own inclinations. Once she has paid the rent, either for a room in a brothel rented nightly, or a room in a residential house rented by the month, she keeps all her profits, and decides herself how to spend her earnings.

The women who work as prostitutes are not at all marginalized, and, except for their evening job, lead 'normal' lives. During the day they are indistinguishable from their neighbors, washing clothes and cooking for their children. At night, if the room in which a woman lives also serves as workplace at night, a bed is set up in a section of the verandah, or in a part of the room closed off by hanging up a blanket. It is also common for children to live and eat meals with the prostitute mother or aunt during the day, but sleep at the home of a friend or relative who lives nearby while the prostitute receives clients.

Women from Caio who work as town prostitutes form a very cohesive group, considering themselves 'colleagues' on the model of age-sets. They are in constant communication with each other, no matter where they are. When one is ill, others help her with housework and children. They let each other use their rooms during absences. They attend one another's funerals and religious ceremonies.

The women

Several generalizations can be made about Manjako women from Caio Sector who work as prostitutes. First, the average age of practicing prostitutes is approximately 41 years. There are very few women under 25 years of age who practice prostitution, and there are several who are still practicing at 60. It is fairly easy to estimate the ages of prostitutes from Caio Sector thanks to the age set system found there. A new age-set is formed approximately every four years, and individuals remain in the same age set for life. Thus it is possible to chart out, by dating births using historical events and extrapolation, the approximate ages of members of the different age sets. For this paper, I have used the median year of birth of a woman's age set to determine her approximate age.

Prostitutes from Caio are older than women practicing other styles of prostitution in bars and nightclubs of Bissau and Ziguinchor, and are also older than prostitutes in neighboring countries. The following table and graph shows the distribution by age group of active prostitutes participating in studies in four different localities.

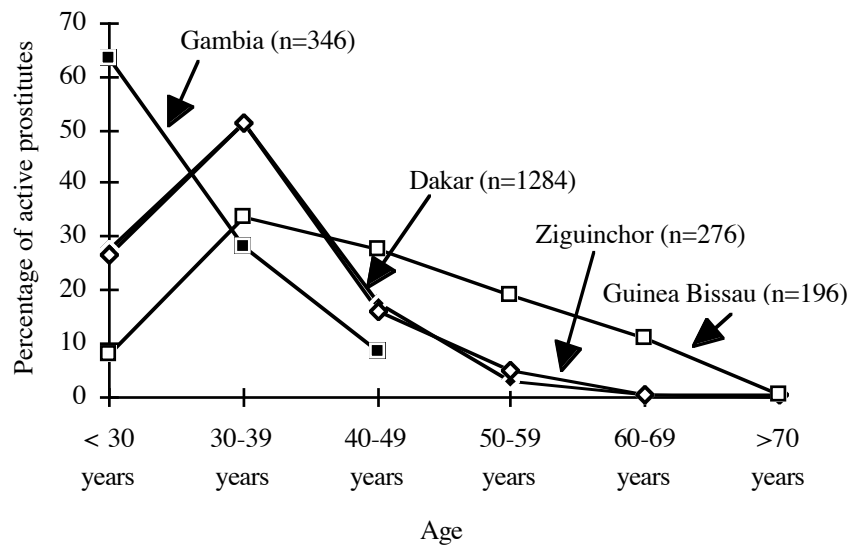
Dakar and Ziguinchor show almost identical curves (Kanki *et al.* 1992). Gambia shows a very young age for most of the women: 63.3 percent are under 30 years of age (Pepin *et al.* 1991). In Guinea-Bissau, in contrast, there are more older prostitutes than very young

Table 1: *Number and percentage of active prostitutes in some West African areas*

	Dakar (n=1284)		Ziguinchor (n=276)		Gambia (n=346)		Guinea Bissau (n=196)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
< 30 years	352	27.4	74	26.8	219	63.3	16	8.2
30-39 years	660	51.4	141	51.1	98	28.3	66	33.7
40-49 years	227	17.7	45	16.3	29	8.4*	54	27.5
50-59 years	40	3.1	14	5.0	0	0	37	18.9
60-69 years	5	0.4	1	0.4	0	0	22	11.2
>70 years	0	0	1	0.4	0	0	1	0.5
Total	1284	100	276	100	346	100	196	100

* In the data from The Gambia, the age category was 40-70 years.

Graph 1: *Percentage of active prostitutes in some West African areas*



ones (but it should be recalled that the sample of Guinea-Bissau prostitutes includes only those from the Caio Sector, and is thus not representative of all active prostitutes working in Bissau).

The women come from all social backgrounds, from both so-called noble and commoner clans. They can be priestesses, or sisters,

mothers, daughters, wives or widows of important men. Only a very few of the youngest women have had any schooling, and that was limited to a few years of primary school. However, it should also be noted that the level of literacy in Guinea Bissau is generally extremely low, so in this trait prostitutes do not differ from the rest of the society.

Prostitution 'runs in the family'. Almost half the interviewed prostitutes have at least one close relative who works or has worked as a prostitute. Sister- or mother-daughter teams are common. The father's daughter, or paternal half-sister, is the most common relative cited, probably because in this virilocal society daughters of the same father grow up together and are quite close; daughters of the same mother but different fathers would most likely grow up in different compounds. In one extreme case, five daughters of the same man have all worked as prostitutes.

Almost all have been married and/or have had children. Many of the women working in Bissau have the children of other family members besides their own living with them. They look after the children in their care, feed and clothe them, and buy medicine for them when they are ill.

The women usually maintain strong ties with their extended families in Caio. If their parents are still living, or if they have ricefields of their own, they usually return to the village for planting and harvesting. They often send home sums of money. They return to Caio for family funerals and weddings and participate in family decision-making and ceremonies. They do not neglect their deceased parents, taking care to perform the required rituals; they consult diviners and make offerings to earth spirits for their and their children's welfare. When sick, they return to Caio to seek traditional treatment. They also return to the village for important age-set activities, priest initiations, and other special events.

There is a Manjako term used to designate prostitutes, *na-tuk-ufuc*, which can be translated as 'one who runs with the wind'. Young women who practice prostitution are also locally referred to in Portuguese Kriol as *nomadas* because they usually move around a lot, and a common euphemism for saying that a girl is working in prostitution is to say that she is *em praça*, or 'in the plaza'. The negative connotations usually attached to the word 'prostitute' are not found in the local village context, where working as a prostitute is not seen as immoral. Village men often seek out women who are working in town as prostitutes to take them back home and marry them. When women who have worked as prostitutes return to Caio either for short visits or to remarry and remain, they are not stigmatized. Prostitutes' children suffer no social disadvantage; they have no trouble being accepted by peers or finding marriage partners.

However, becoming a *nomada* is considered shameful in cases in which the woman has left her father's or her husband's house illicitly without making the proper arrangements for repayment of bride service (discussed below), or if she has broken all ties with her family. Several of the younger women who fled in this way said their families did not know where they were. This type of behavior is very much

disapproved of, but more, it would seem, for the clandestine nature of the flight from home than for the practice of prostitution. The few women who refused to be interviewed had almost all fled in this manner and had not yet negotiated arrangements with their husbands or fathers.

Becoming a prostitute

Most of the women interviewed gave a marriage-related problem as their reason for leaving to work as a prostitute. Therefore, a brief look at traditional marriage customs in Caio is called for. A father may select a husband for his daughter, or a man his future wife, often when the girl is still very young. If both families are in agreement, the accord is finalized by libations and offerings of palm wine. From then on, the man is referred to as the girl's husband. Over a period of several years, he performs bride service; that is, he works for his father-in-law several days per year in the ricefields or at other tasks. When the girl reaches marriageable age (at least 18 or 19 years), the wedding ceremony may be held, and the bride moves into her husband's house.

An informal type of marriage also exists, in which the woman simply moves into the man's house. In this case, the husband and wife are usually of the same age-set, and have fallen in love during age-set initiation. If the girl's father accepts the union, the young man is accepted as her husband.

The Manjako words for 'husband' (*ayin*) and 'wife' (*aar*) are used regardless of whether bride service has been performed. Still, a woman's freedom to walk out of her marriage depends on whether or not her husband has performed bride service. If a woman wishes to divorce a husband who has performed bride service, she must reimburse him monetarily, or live with him long enough to bear him a child. She is often obliged to pay even if she has borne him children, especially if she intends to remarry. Sometimes divorce occurs before the actual marriage. If a girl refuses to marry the husband chosen by her father and who has performed bride service for her, she may pay off the man even before the marriage is consummated, and thus free herself to marry a man of her own choosing. Furthermore, if a husband who has performed bride service dies, his wife is 'inherited' by his successor, usually a brother or a maternal nephew. If a woman does not wish to marry her deceased husband's successor, she must reimburse him as she would her husband.

The reason most often cited for working as a prostitute was to earn the money to reimburse bride service, whether before or after the official wedding took place, or after the husband's death to reimburse his successor. Reasons for refusing to marry or stay married to a husband are numerous and varied. A very common one is that the girl has fallen in love with a young man her own age during age-set initiation; the girl pays off her official husband in order to marry her lover. In other cases, it is simply a question of incompatibility, which is

understandable given the often considerable age difference between husband and wife, and the fact that the girl may have no say in who her father chooses for her. Other women complained of mistreatment, of problems with co-wives, or of the husband's long absence, especially if he has migrated to France or Portugal. A few unique problems involved incest, sibling rivalry, or the husband's arrest.

About one quarter of the women said they originally left to work as prostitutes because their fathers did not arrange a marriage for them. In this case, the young woman is more or less free to decide her own fate, to take a lover, or to become a 'nomad'. Furthermore, some women choose to work as prostitutes simply as an alternative to marriage.

Most of the remaining reasons given involve economic need, though the need may be due to any of several factors. If the woman's husband dies and she is not inherited by his maternal kinsman, if her husband emigrates to France or Portugal and does not send support, or if her husband is too old to work or is incapacitated, she may be left to fend for herself and her children.

Finally, a few women said they left to work as prostitutes either because they were unable to conceive, or because their children died at a young age. Since this is considered a sign that the barren marriage was doomed to fail, due to some sort of spiritual retaliation, the woman is not required to pay back bride service.

Remaining a prostitute

No correlation was found between a particular marriage history and the length of time spent in prostitution. Many women first leave to work as prostitutes to earn the money to reimburse bride service, and once the required amount of money is earned and repaid, they return to the village to marry men of their own choosing and live normal married lives. Many women, however, choose to remain in town to continue to work as prostitutes even after bride service has been paid.

During many of the interviews, active prostitutes were asked whether they liked being a prostitute or whether they would like to return to Caio. Over half said that working as a prostitute was a good life and that they would not return to Caio, whereas a large minority said they would like to return to Caio if they could. Just as many older as younger women said it's 'the good life'. Reasons the women gave for wanting to stay *em praça* include earning money to buy clothes and live well, earning money to send home to the family, the difficulty of working in ricefields, a hearty dislike for marriage, and the opportunity to experience new places and meet new people. A few gave negative reasons for staying: fear of the earth spirits in Caio; fear of her husband or her father; fear of poverty for her children. On the other hand, other women gave reasons for wanting to leave the *praça*, which include: the desire to marry her sweetheart; the desire to live near her family; frequent illness and fatigue; lack of security in the *praça*; and too meagre earnings.

Women's accounts

Almost one hundred life histories were collected from women who were working or had worked as prostitutes. From these accounts, it is difficult to define a typical prostitute profile, since the circumstances which incite women to work as prostitutes vary greatly. Indeed, it is difficult to find two stories that are alike. The problem may be an arranged husband, or the lack of one. Some women practice because they want to, some because they have to (or so they say). Presented here are five accounts (translated from Manjako) in which women explain in their own words why they left the village to work in prostitution. These samples illustrate the diversity in the women's backgrounds, and the complexity of the factors involved.

1. (34 years old): "My husband worked for my father and carried out the wedding ceremony. Then I started causing trouble, and at night I hid from him because I didn't want to sleep with him. After a few days I ran away to Bissau, where I stayed for two years. Then my husband died, and his brother was supposed to inherit me. I refused categorically. My husband's brother called on my father and demanded that I pay him 2,000,000 pesos (1,200 French francs or US\$250), because his brother had spent a lot on me. My father told me to go live in the house of my second husband, but I absolutely refused. I agreed to pay him the money, and that's what led me to this kind of life. I worked in Ziguinchor and in Bissau for three years to earn the money and I paid it in full. Now I won't leave this kind of life, because thanks to this life I've been able to do many things. I'd like to stay here forever, because this way I can help my mother out [by sending her money], because she is old and can't work very much. And besides that, I wouldn't be able to go back home to live, because I wouldn't have anyone to give me the things I need in my life".

2. (54 years old): "It's very difficult to explain what led me to enter this kind of life. When my husband started to work for my father, I was only a child. When I grew up and was old enough to get married, my husband performed the wedding ceremony. I lived with him until we had a child, and then my husband went to France. I had many girlfriends who were working as prostitutes in Bissau, and after my husband had been away in France for a long time, I joined them there. When my husband returned from France, he called on my father [...], and my father sent for me in Bissau. When I arrived in Caio, my father asked me what had happened, and I answered him that I didn't like my husband, and that that's why I'd gone to the *praça*. [...] My husband said that if I didn't like him any more, I should pay him his due (*direito*): 1 pig, 400,000 pesos (250 French francs or US\$50), and a bottle of cane alcohol. And that was the end of the conversation. I returned to Bissau to continue working there so that I could pay off my husband. The next year I paid him what I owed him. My situation here is not constant. I'm always going to Bissau, Caio, Ziguinchor, and Dakar. I don't go to Caio every year, sometimes I just send money to my father. Now I can't leave this kind of life. It's thanks to this kind of life that I have come to know many things about life and about human beings".

3. (34 years old): "The situation here is difficult for me. I once had a husband, who spent a lot for my father, and for me, too. But my husband went to France [before the wedding ceremony], and stayed there a long time without sending me a single letter, so I went to Bissau. I can't say it's his fault, because at that time he hadn't yet performed the wedding ceremony, so I wasn't yet living in his house.

When my husband returned from France, I had already entered this kind of life. When I heard that my husband was in Caio, I thought that my father would tell me that I would have to get married that year. Then I got foolish and asked my girlfriend's advice. She told me I should run away to Bafata, and, with the little intelligence that I had, I decided to go to Bafata until my husband returned to France. Then I returned to Bissau. The next year, my husband came back to Caio, but he was sick, and he soon died. His younger brother wanted to inherit me. When I refused, he called my father to the spirit shrine to ask that his brother be paid his due (*direito*). He told my father that I had to pay 400,000 pesos (250 French francs, or US\$50), 1 pig, 2 liters of cane alcohol, and 2 bottles of brandy. Then my father sent me a letter explaining it all. I sent him a reply telling him to tell my husband's brother to wait one year and by then I would pay him, God willing. By working *em praça*, I earned the money and took it to my father, who then paid off my husband's brother. I never did live in my husband's house. I am a nomad; I go from place to place to earn my living. Since I entered this life, I've never spent more than 2 months in Caio, because I usually just send my father money, as well as clothes, shoes, etc; my mother died a long time ago. Now I have no one in Caio except my father".

4. (42 years old): "I had a husband who worked for my father. When he went to France, he sent money for his family to perform the wedding ceremony [in his absence], and they did. I went to live in my husband's house and stayed there for 2 years. Then my husband wrote [from France] saying he didn't want me. I decided to go to Bissau to live the good life (*a bela vida*). God helped me to have two daughters, but they have different fathers. My husband is still in France. While I was *em praça*, another man [from Caio] came to ask me to marry him, and I decided to leave the *praça* to go live with him in Caio. My [first] husband hasn't demanded any payment, since he's the one who didn't want me".

5. (50 years old): "Since I was born, I've never had a husband who worked for my father. When I grew to be an adult, I fell in love with A..., and we had a daughter. Since the love was soon over, I decided to go to live in the *praça*. While I was there, L... came to ask me to marry him, and to this day we are still together. I didn't stay long in the *praça*, because it was a kind of life I didn't like; I only went there because I had no other way to earn a living. [...] Since I moved in with L..., I've never gone back to Bissau to follow that kind of life".

Due to reasons which will not be developed here, it is probably safe to say that the women generally gave true accounts. Nevertheless, they likely often neglected to mention other hidden reasons, the importance of which was only discovered during an additional few months' fieldwork in Caio in 1996. If a young woman refuses to marry the husband chosen by her father, her father may enlist the local earth spirits to punish her if she returns to Caio or marries any other man. It is thus a sort of spiritual coercion which forces a young woman to submit to her father's will or to leave her home permanently, and, in the latter case, prostitution is a viable option.

The accounts show that bride service is an important but not a deciding factor. Though repayment of bride service is often cited by prostitutes as their reason for leaving, it is also true that most women in Caio who divorce repay bride service without working as prostitutes; it is possible to earn the money by other means, such as selling palm oil, cashew wine, or kola nuts, or other family members may contribute to the repayment. Furthermore, many women become prostitutes though

they do not pay back bride service, or remain in prostitution long after bride service has been repaid.

Finally, like bride service, economic need is an important but not a deciding factor. Though many women said that they left to work as prostitutes because of financial need on the death or emigration of their husband, the majority of widows or women abandoned by their emigrant husbands do not resort to prostitution; most are taken in and/or aided by relatives.

Why prostitutes come from Caio

The accounts given by the women explain the circumstances which incited them to enter prostitution, and in many cases, to remain there. On a different, sociological level, other factors may help to explain why Caio Sector supplies such a large proportion of the region's prostitutes, as opposed to the rest of the Manjako region, or indeed, the rest of the Guinea Bissau. Various cultural and historical features which may or may not be found in other parts of Manjako land combine in Caio, Jeta, and Pecixe to form a particular constellation which seems to accommodate, facilitate, and sometimes even encourage, prostitution. Since these factors are too complex to be described here in detail, they will only be briefly outlined.

First, the custom of some sort of bride service is or was common among the Manjako, as well as among other related ethnic groups, though the modalities vary. In other Manjako areas, bride service died out long ago. I was told that among the Mancanhe, bride service is performed for a woman, but if she doesn't wish to marry the man, a sister or other female relative marries him in her place. In other areas, if a girl refuses to marry the husband chosen for her, it is her father or entire family who must reimburse him for his labor. It is perhaps only in Caio that the girl herself is responsible for the payment if she refuses the marriage, a situation which may lead her to work as a prostitute.

Second, while the rest of Manjako territory has shifted to a patrilineal system, kinship among the Manjako of Caio Sector is based on matrilineal clans. Though a form of patrilineal inheritance also exists, titles, ritual functions, and, in general, the control of ricefields pass through the maternal line. The successor to a residential headman will be his sister's son. Thus, whether or not a woman has an official husband will not hurt her offspring's chances to matrilineal succession or inheritance of wealth. This system of succession and inheritance ensures that the children of prostitutes are neither socially nor economically disadvantaged, and that women, including prostitutes, maintain their importance in decision-making and family functions.

Third, the age-set system found in Caio Sector is not present in any other Manjako area except Calequise. Every four years or so, the group of 15- to 19-year-old youths and 12- to 16-year-old girls begin a series of traditional rites and activities through which they form an age-set (*uran*). After approximately four years, this age-set is promoted, and the cycle starts over again for a new age-set. Engaging

in sexual relations is not condoned among 'colleagues' of the same age-set during this initiation period, but girls and boys often fall in love with each other. If the girl is not already betrothed, and if her family approves, the couple can marry. But if the girl already has a 'husband' who is performing bride service for her, a contest of wills ensues between father and daughter. If neither gives in, the girl may resort to prostitution to repay her husband's bride service in order to marry her lover. In short, the four-year initiation period characteristic of this age-set system, during which young people spend much time in close proximity, may encourage couples to form, which in turn leads daughters to contest their fathers' choice of a husband, and thus to her becoming a prostitute.

Fourth, religious beliefs play an important role in a woman's decision to enter and/or to remain in prostitution. As I mentioned earlier, the earth spirits of Caio are called upon by men to punish disobedient daughters. The spirits may also express their displeasure with a woman's behavior by causing infant death. Undercurrents of threats and retaliation involving witchcraft, the ancestors, earth spirits, and other invisible entities flow freely in Caio. If a woman is accused of witchcraft, or is threatened with death if she remains in Caio, she may be forced to flee for her life, and prostitution is a viable option. Though all Manjako share basic beliefs in earth spirits, ancestors, etc, the spirits' 'personalities' vary, as well as the modes of interpreting them. I was told that during the last grand circumcision ritual in Calequisse, which takes place every 25 years or so, the spirits issued a new law forbidding prostitution among its women, on pain of death. (Eric Gable, personal communication). This is all the more interesting in that Calequisse shares many features of the Manjako of Caio, and yet prostitutes from Calequisse are unheard-of.

Fifth, the Manjako land have long shown a history of out-migration. From the first arrival of foreign colonialists, the Manjako have sought to profit from new economic opportunities, and very early on were known for working in the service trades and as cooks and deck hands on ships. Male emigration is rampant, especially to population centers such as Bissau, Dakar, Lisbon, the port cities of France, and more recently, Paris.¹ A husband's continual absence, especially if he sends neither letters nor money, is bound to affect the durability of a marriage. Coincidentally, as the cash economy grew, Manjako women also began to seek paying jobs as maids and laundry-women, and, some, as prostitutes.

Furthermore, emigration has resulted in a lack of local manpower, which in turn has led to the deterioration of the dikes which protect the ricefields from sea water. Actually, the problem originated during the war for independence (late 1960s-early 1970s), but it has been aggravated by emigration. The number of arable rice paddies has in some areas been halved and continues to decline, and locally grown

¹ For an account of Manjako out-migration see Amadou Moustapha Diop (1981, 1996).

rice no longer suffices to feed the village. Local inhabitants, especially women, must therefore look elsewhere for a means to feed their families. And in Caio Sector, especially, opportunities for earning cash are very limited.

Finally, besides long-term emigration, the Manjako are very mobile. Men and women are constantly traveling, making short trips to various destinations for various reasons, including family visits, funerals, commerce, religious ceremonies, medical treatment, and school. When the 1993 census was taken, almost 20 percent of Caio residents were listed as being away from home. A survey of 200 individuals of all ages in twenty households showed 725 total trips per year, or 3.6 trips per person, lasting from a few days to several weeks. The major destination was Bissau (44 percent), followed, in order, by Canchungo, other villages in Caio Sector, Casamance (which usually means Ziguinchor), other places in Guinea Bissau, the Gambia, and Dakar. The fact that more trips were made to Bissau than to near-by villages is perhaps important for HIV epidemiology.

Thus, Caio, within the Manjako territory as a whole, has a unique combination of cultural traits and historical factors, including bride service, matrilineal succession, age-set system, religious beliefs, a history of out-migration and high mobility. Though it cannot be said that this particular combination determines prostitute behavior, it has at least allowed the phenomenon to develop and thrive.

Conclusions — or caveats?

I would like to conclude with the following remarks. First, it is unwise to treat prostitutes as a more or less homogenous sub-culture. Rather, women of different social and cultural backgrounds engage in this economic activity in one of its many forms and for various reasons. A case in point, is the type of prostitution traditionally practiced by Manjako women from Caio Sector, and described in this paper. However, a second, more modern, 'elite' type of prostitution also exists in Bissau, in which women actively search for clients in downtown bars, discotheques, and hotels. They seek men of a certain financial status, including government workers, businessmen, and foreigners, and proceed for 'work' to a hotel room or other place of the client's choosing. The women are much younger, sometimes in their teens, are of various ethnic groups (rarely Manjako), seem to be economically better off (wear nice clothes and make-up), and have fewer clients but charge them more, up to 50,000 to 100,000 pesos (30-60 French francs, or US\$6-\$12). This type of prostitution is quite visible and usually attracts the attention of the foreign observer, while the more traditional, popular type found in residential neighborhoods may go unnoticed. Yet the differences between these two types of prostitution and their respective clienteles could be important for HIV epidemiology and AIDS intervention.

Second, even when women share a common cultural background, they may practice prostitution for different reasons and with different

causes. In the village of Caio, where the cultural fabric is more or less homogenous, in-depth research carried out on the lives of individual women pointed to at least a dozen 'typical profiles'.

Third, unless the entire life history of women who practice prostitution is considered, one may be tempted to draw erroneous conclusions. The present study originated because a high rate of HIV infection was found in a village which also has a high rate of HIV-infected prostitutes. The logical assumption would be that prostitutes bring the virus back to the village. But a closer look shows that retired prostitutes probably do not infect their husbands. And given the high rate of mobility in Caio, it seems likely that men who travel often to Bissau pick up the infection there, possibly from prostitutes. If this is indeed the case, areas adjacent to Caio with similar travel habits would probably show the same rate of HIV infection, with the significant exception of the returned prostitutes themselves.

This paper has sought to describe a particular kind of prostitution and to suggest a variety of cultural factors which may account for its practice. It is clear that there are no simple explanations for the high number of prostitutes from Caio Sector. Instead, different factors at different explanatory levels are in play, a combination of unique personal circumstances against a particular background of cultural traditions and historical processes.

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Margaret BUCKNER, *Village women as town prostitutes: cultural factors relevant to prostitution and HIV epidemiology in Guinea-Bissau*

Summary — This paper looks at women from an isolated rural community in northwestern Guinea Bissau who work as prostitutes in towns and cities of the region. After a description of the particular type of prostitution these women practice and characteristics they share, reasons for becoming and remaining prostitutes are examined, and illustrated by actual life histories. Finally, cultural and historical factors are outlined which may account for why this particular community supplies so many of the region's prostitutes.

Keywords: prostitution • HIV-2 • Guinea-Bissau • West Africa • *Manjako* • cultural factors • marriage • life histories.

Margaret BUCKNER, *Villageoises prostituées en ville : facteurs culturels ayant un rapport avec la prostitution et l'épidémiologie du VIH en Guinée Bissau*

Résumé — Cette étude s'intéresse à des femmes originaires d'une communauté rurale isolée du nord-ouest de la Guinée Bissau, qui travaillent comme prostituées dans les villes de la région. Après une description du type particulier de prostitution que pratiquent ces femmes et des caractéristiques qu'elles partagent, les raisons qui les ont poussées et maintenues comme prostituées sont examinées et illustrées par des histoires actuelles de vie. Enfin, on souligne des facteurs culturels et historiques qui expliquent pourquoi cette communauté particulière fournit autant de prostituées dans cette région.

Mots-clés : prostitution • VIH-2 • Guinée Bissau • Afrique de l'ouest • *Manjako* • facteurs culturels • mariage • histoires de vie.