

The Kussanga Trials. Cannibalism and French Colonial Rule in Southern Senegal (1926-1928)

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyse a series of anthropophagy trials that took place between 1926 and 1928 in the Lower Casamance region of Senegal. It is one of the most extensive prosecutions in Senegal's colonial history, with more than 180 people arrested and 23 separate trials held. The trials took place at a crucial time for the establishment of colonial rule, shortly after the systematization of the colonial chieftaincy in the region. Through archival and oral sources, we will demonstrate that the trials were not only a tool used against the local religious authorities by the French administration and provincial, canton and village chiefs, but were also part of a more complex process involving other sectors of the population that took advantage of the trials to settle local rivalries.

KEYWORDS

Senegal; Casamance; Colonialism; Chieftaincy; Cannibalism.



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This article aims to analyse a series of anthropophagy trials that took place between 1926 and 1928 in the Senegalese region of Lower Casamance. This analysis will be carried out using archival and oral sources, establishing a dialogue between colonial and local narratives about what happened in these trials, who was involved in them, and the impact they had on the implementation of the colonial system in the region. Our objective is to demonstrate the complexity of a judicial process that was not unidirectional (French administration vs. local authorities) but, rather, multidirectional, involving various sectors of the local population.

The trials, known as the *kussanga* trials, marked a critical milestone in the history of the colonization of Lower Casamance and cannot be separated from their context: colonial Senegal in French West Africa. These trials occurred at a time of political change when the colonial administration shifted from the so-called policy of *assimilation* to the policy of *association*, characterized by the explicit desire to expand the presence and prerogatives of traditional chiefs within the colony's local government structures outside the four communes (Saint-Louis, Rufisque, Dakar and Gorée).¹ In the colony of Senegal, the administration tried to convert the traditional chiefs into provincial, canton or village chiefs, a process that was very difficult to implement in Lower Casamance.² In this area, the majority of chiefs appointed during the 1920s were new to the role, and their status rarely reflected prior traditional authority within the communities they administered. The colonial state sought to use the *kussanga* trials, and the role that chiefs played in them, to gain a foothold in a conflictive region that was difficult to govern, while some opportunistic members of local societies sought to exploit the trials to settle local disputes. In this paper, we will explore this complexity by providing concrete examples.

Power and authority in lower Casamance: the problem of chieftaincies

The Lower Casamance is the southwestern region of Senegal located between Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. The region is mostly inhabited by the Diola, although there are also other communities or ethnic groups. From the socio-political point of view, the distinctive feature of all these societies was their decentralization. In the Lower Casamance there were no large states that brought together large sections of the population. Leadership and authority were related to the traditional religion, called *awasena*. This religion is based on a complex system of spirit shrines called *uciin* (sing.

1. Alice L. CONKLIN, "Democracy Rediscovered: Civilization through Association in French West Africa (1914–1930)", *Cahiers d'études africains*, 37/145 (1997), pp. 59–84, <https://doi.org/10.3406/cea.1997.1988>; Eric GARCIA-MORAL, "Blaise Diagne: French parliamentarian from Senegal", in Josep M. FRADERA, José María PORTILLO and Teresa SEGURA-GARCIA (eds.), *Unexpected Voices in Imperial Parliaments*, London, Bloomsbury, 2021, pp. 231–261.

2. François ZUCARELLI, "De la chefferie traditionnelle au canton: évolution du canton colonial au Sénégal, 1855–1960", *Cahiers d'études africains*, 50 (1973), pp. 213–238, <https://doi.org/10.3406/cea.1973.2710>; Christian ROCHE, *Histoire de la Casamance. Conquête et résistance: 1850–1920*, Paris, Karthala, 1985; Philippe MÉGUELLE, *Chefferie coloniale et égalitarisme diola: les difficultés de la politique indigène de la France en Basse-Casamance (Sénégal), 1828–1923*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2013; Séverine AWENENGO DALBERTO, "Les Joola, la Casamance et l'état (1890–2004): L'Identisation joola au Sénégal", unpublished PhD thesis, Université de Paris, 2005; Eric GARCIA-MORAL, "Dinámicas del poder local en un contexto colonial. El caso de los jefes de la Baja Casamance durante la colonización francesa (1851–1948)", unpublished PhD thesis, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, 2021.

báacin), which in colonial times began to be called ‘fetishes’.³ The shrines regulate all activities of general interest to the communities, which led the anthropologist Jordi Tomàs to define them as shrines-ministries.⁴ There are shrines that deal with issues such as fertility (of the earth and of women), rain, hunting, fishing, or agriculture. Others deal with health issues, births, deaths, or marriages. Some have judicial or punitive functions. Some altars represent specific groups, families, lineages, neighbourhoods, or a combination of all of them. The latter type are, first and foremost, to do with male and female initiations.⁵ In short, the shrines act as places of political and social decision-making that also affect economic and territorial affairs.

Each shrine has one or several associated families, but only one of their number is in charge, and exercises the functions of a priest. This person, whom the French called a *féticheur*, is called an *alemba* (pl. *kulemba*) and is responsible for performing libations and conducting rituals. This office is subject to numerous restrictions and prohibitions and enjoys limited authority: each priest is surrounded by adjuncts and specific leaders who form a council known as *huhaane*. Finally, below the *huhaane* there are a number of people with specific responsibilities related to the proper functioning of the shrine. Each village has dozens of shrines, which means that virtually all families have representatives at some shrine in the area, linking them to the corresponding political and religious responsibilities.⁶ The system of priests and councils ensures a distribution of religious authority whereby one person cannot amass too much authority.⁷

On the other hand, in the region there is an authority called *oeyi* (a kind of supreme priest), who is linked to a powerful shrine that is shared by several villages. The French identified these *oeyi* as the main leaders of the Diola, giving them the label of king. They have various social functions that are codified in a strict set of rights, duties, and prohibitions. The position is, in principle, spiritual and symbolic, which means that the *oeyi* or Diola king does not enjoy the politico-military authority of other African chiefs. In fact, the socio-political prerogatives usually assigned to him are subject to the control of a council and not to his personal decisions.⁸ This is important because the French did not find any obvious leaders with sufficient authority upon whom they could implement the structures of local administration – namely, the chieftaincies.



3. North of the river, the term *enáati* (pl. *sináati*) is also used to refer to these shrines, see Peter MARK, *A Cultural, Economic and Religious History of the Basse Casamance since 1500*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1985.

4. Jordi TOMÀS, “La identitat ètnica entre els joola d’Oussouye (Húluf, Bubahum áai)”, unpublished PhD thesis, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2005.

5. Robert M. BAUM, *Shrines of the Slave Trade: Diola Religion and Society in Precolonial Senegambia*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 43.

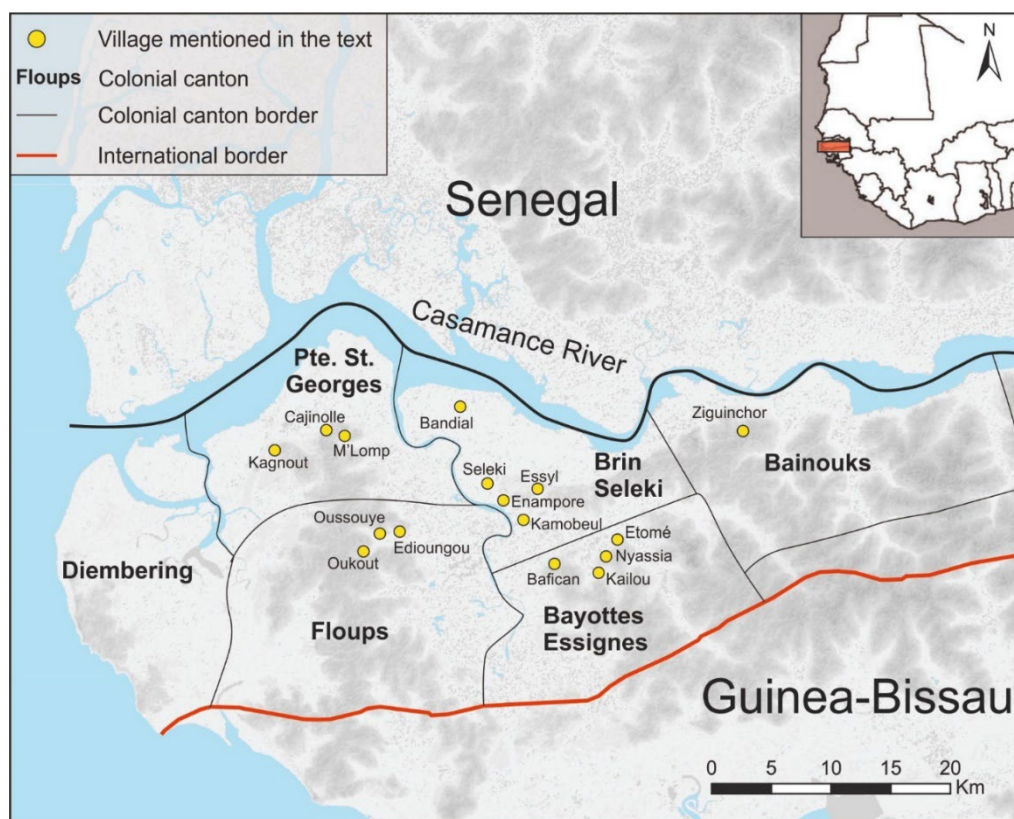
6. TOMÀS, “La identitat”, pp. 262-263, 272-73.

7. Robert M. BAUM, *West Africa’s Women of God: Alinsitoué and the Diola Prophetic Tradition*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2016, p. 36.

8. Jordi TOMÀS, “¿Un rey sagrado en el siglo XXI? La realeza joola de Oussouye revisitada”, *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos*, 16/17 (2009), pp. 71–87, <https://doi.org/10.4000/cea.185>; Jean-Baptiste MANGA, “Une monarchie dans un État postcolonial: anthropologie de la royauté à Oussouye (Casamance/Sénégal)”, unpublished PhD thesis, Paris, EHESS, 2015.

Despite this, from the second half of the nineteenth century on, the French nevertheless began to appoint chiefs in the region through the *chefferie* (chieftainship) system. There were three types of chiefs, each subordinate to the next. The provincial chief supervised various cantons. The canton chief supervised various villages. And the village chief supervised his village and obeyed the orders of the canton chiefs. The provincial and canton chiefs were the ones who were in direct contact with the European administrators. The chieftainship system, however, took a long time to be implemented, and it was not until 1922 that the creation of cantons and the appointment of chiefs on the southern shore in Lower Casamance was systematized. These efforts culminated two years later in the creation of the cantons on the north bank, although the administrative configuration of the region never ceased changing. In early 1924, Lower Casamance was divided into six provinces and 26 cantons.⁹ On the southern bank of the river, where the kussanga trials were held, there was one province (Oussouye) and nine cantons (Diembering-Kabrousse, Floups, Elinkin, Pointe Saint-Georges, Brin-Seleki, Bayottes, Essignes, Mandjaque, Bainouks and Adeane). The trials were held in cantons with a Diola majority – these being the most difficult to rule according to the administration: Floups, Pointe Saint-Georges, Bayottes, Essignes and Brin-Seleki.

Image 1. The south bank in the Lower Casamance.



A map of the Lower Casamance region south of the Casamance River between Senegal and Guinea-Bissau. The map indicates colonial cantons (closest to the river from west (left) to east (right): Diembering, Pte. St. Georges, Brin Seleki, and Bainouks; and furthest south from the river, from left to right: Floups, and Bayottes Essignes), and villages in these cantons (from left to right: Carabane in Diembering; Kagnout, Cajinolle, and M'Lomp in Pte. St. Georges; Bandial, Seleki, Enampore, Kamobeul, and Essyl in Brin Seleki; Ziguinchor in Bainouks; Oukout, Oussouye, and Ediougou in Floups; and Bafican, Kailou, Nyassia, and Etomé in Bayottes Essignes).

9. GARCIA-MORAL, "Dinámicas", p. 236.

From 1922 onwards, the chiefs, especially at the provincial and canton levels, were required to be more involved in the administration of the territory through the collection of taxes, military recruitments, and the organization of forced labour. However, they soon surpassed these simple categories, even embracing police functions. And so it was that in 1924, following the discovery of the unearthed corpse of a child in Seleki, the administration asked Benjamin Diatta, chief of the Province of Oussouye, to investigate the culprits: an alleged secret organization of anthropophagists known as *kussanga*. This investigation led to the arrest of 186 people and 23 trials, resulting in sentences of up to ten years' imprisonment and a twenty-year residence ban. In one of the trials, all prisoners were sentenced to death. The kussanga trials were thus the first major event in which the chiefs of the southern shore in Lower Casamance were active in the administrative sphere.

Robert Baum, in his research on some of these trials, noted that they were used by the chiefs as a means to increase their power at the expense of that of the traditional authorities linked to the *awasena* religion.¹⁰ In this article, we will expand and provide nuance to Baum's research by providing new data and case studies.

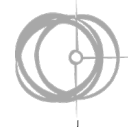
Methodology

The research presented in this article combines written sources, which provide us with the colonial view of the events, and oral history, which provides us with the local view. This combination allows us to compare and contrast multiple versions of the same event, but also to obtain valuable information about the people involved in the trials and their influence in their respective villages.

The written sources used in this research are the trial proceedings, political reports from the colony of Senegal or French West Africa, correspondence from the colonial administration, mission diaries, and baptismal registers, which were consulted in the Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer, the Archives Nationales du Sénégal, the Archives Générales de la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit, and the Archive de la Mission d'Oussouye.

The oral history has been gathered through interviews with informants from the villages affected by the trials, with various dignitaries and relatives of those involved. We do not, however, have any eyewitnesses to the events, all such people now being deceased, but we do have testimonies from their children or grandchildren. In total, 21 villages were affected by the trials. We collected information in nine of them, located in the cantons of Floups, Brin-Seleki and Bayottes, resulting in 28 interviews with approximately 26 informants (two group interviews were counted as a single informant). In these interviews, information was collected concerning the families of those involved, their position of authority in the religious sphere of the village, disputes with other families, the impact of the trials on local history, and how these trials were remembered in the various villages.

10. Robert M. BAUM, "Crimes of the Dream World: French Trials of Diola Witches in Colonial Senegal", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 37/2 (2004), pp. 201-228, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4129007>.



The trial proceedings of Oukout

The most emblematic case is that of the village of Oukout, where two separate trials took place in the neighbourhood of Madiop. Although it is not the first trial that appears in the records, its defendants were the first to be arrested, in October 1926. Moreover, Oukout is the village where the memory of the trials is most vivid because of the repercussions it had on local history, and its relationship to colonization and Christian evangelization. We take this trial as a starting point because it served to lay the foundations for the subsequent judicial procedures in the rest of the villages. First, we present the case as it appears in the archives; we later challenge this with the information obtained from oral sources.

The first Oukout case: Diabone

The first Oukout trial was held on 4 December 1926, shortly after the first arrests were made in October. The prosecution was led by the head of the province, Benjamin Diatta, a Christian, who was accompanied by two people: Diabone, a 15-year-old teenager who accused several people of being kussanga, and Houmilore, Diabone's father. The record of the trial explains that the young Diabone had become seriously ill in October. Believing he was going to die, he confessed to his father that he had eaten human flesh, accusing an individual named Sidiambione of having initiated him as a kussanga. Houmilore, furious, went to the traditional assemblies, to the *féticheurs*, and dignitaries of the village, and accused Sidiambione. Sidiambione would have recognized that Houmilore's accusations were well founded and offered him an ox to settle the matter. However, the event reached the ears of Diatta, who had been investigating the kussanga since 1924, and who got Diabone to confess to having feasted on a corpse in January 1926 in a forest near Oussouye. Diabone gave the names of the men and women who attended the feast: 14 people besides himself. In his statement, he says that Sidiambione forced him five times to eat human flesh and then proclaimed Diabone to be a kussanga. Allegedly, Sidiambione threatened him with death if he told anyone what had happened. Later in January 1926, a meeting of anthropophagists, led by a certain Moussa, held a cannibal feast followed by an orgy with a leprous woman, in which Diabone was forced to participate.¹¹

During the trial, the 14 defendants confessed to being kussanga. Of the seven women involved, six were the wives of sect members and admitted to cooking human flesh and participating in the sexual acts that followed. All of the men also acknowledged their involvement in the January 1926 feast, at which they devoured the corpse of the uncle of one of the defendants. They each accused the others of taking part in the feast, and Moussa admitted to being the leader of the group. They were all sentenced to ten years' imprisonment and a twenty-year residence ban. A year later, the *Chambre d'Homologation* upheld the sentence for the alleged leaders and reduced that of the rest.¹²

11. ARCHIVES NATIONALES DU SÉNÉGAL (ANS), "Justice, tribunal du cercle de Ziguinchor, audience et jugements, 1913-1929", n. 7, 47, 4-12-1926.

12. Ibidem.

The second Oukout case: the Assassination of Assimbadiat

The second trial involving the village of Oukout was held on 12 January 1927. Six more people were tried, accused not only of being kussanga, but also of murdering a man named Assimbadiat, who was supposed to act as Diatta's confidant in order to expose the kussanga of Oukout. This time, the witness list was considerably longer. In addition to Diatta himself, 22 other witnesses participated in the trial, including a group of *tirailleurs* (riflemen) and some Christians, as well as sons and wives of the accused.

The case revolved around a sacred object called *Guilambadje*, a vessel that the kussanga had allegedly stolen from an important shrine in the village. This object had magical properties that guaranteed the impunity of the kussanga. Diatta understood that, in order to dissolve the anthropophagous group, he had to find the object. A former *tirailleur* who had put Diatta on the trail of Assimbadiat, eventually confessed to being a member of the kussanga of Oukout and to knowing where the object was. Assimbadiat was himself released after providing the names of other members of the sect.

From that moment on, the events are recorded as follows: on 9 November 1926, some former Oukout *tirailleurs* organized an anti-kussanga meeting. They went to Assimbadiat's house prior to him returning home from Diatta's interrogation. There they found his wife who, after being beaten, confessed that Assimbadiat knew the whereabouts of the *Guilambadje*. Assimbadiat arrived home and, dismayed, managed to calm the *tirailleurs* with vague promises but also told his wife that his death was approaching. His wife went to call for help and, upon returning home, found Assimbadiat's corpse, with a dagger by his side. It looked like a suicide. However, a neighbour went to Diatta and testified that he had seen six men enter Assimbadiat's house and murder him, although he did not identify them. Diatta used this testimony to claim that Assimbadiat was going to reveal the whereabouts of the object, resulting in the kussanga killing him to silence him. At the trial, both the *tirailleurs* involved and the Christians made sure to distance themselves from the kussanga, condemning their actions and claiming that all they wanted was for the kussanga to return the stolen object.

All the defendants, unlike in the first trial, pleaded not guilty. None admitted to the murder, and none admitted to belonging to the kussanga. However, because of the three wounds on Assimbadiat's body, the noises and screams heard by witnesses, and the time of death, as well as the defendants' weak alibis, his death was judged not a suicide but a murder. Consequently, the six defendants were sentenced to death, making it the only kussanga trial to be settled this way.¹³

The French Administration's objective

After these two trials, the administration thanked Diatta for his investigations and for uncovering the cases. By January 1927, 155 people had been arrested. According to the administration, the arrest of the members of the sect served to enhance French authority and increase its prestige in the region. In February, the kussanga affair reached the northern shore of Lower Casamance, when several people from the village of Affiniam were arrested on charges of anthropophagy. (We have not found these trials

13. ANS, "Justice, tribunal du cercle de Ziguinchor, audience et jugements, 1913-1929", n. 1, 51, 12-1-1927.



in the records.) The administration's interest in the matter can be seen in Governor Carde's asking, in March of that year, for a special report on the kussanga, as they came to the forefront of administrative concerns.¹⁴

This concern was explicit from the very first trial recorded in the proceedings of 4 December 1926. This pertained to a case in the village of Ediougou, near Oukout. In fact, the Ediougou case is presented in the proceedings as a reaction to the arrests of the 14 kussangas of Oukout. At the end of October, shortly after these arrests, the unearthed body of a baby was found on the road between Oussouye and Ediougou. Diatta launched his investigation and accused one Djijamahil of belonging to the kussanga. At the trial, the only accusing witnesses were Diatta himself and Aniélé, village chief of Ediougou and father of the deceased baby. Djijamahil confessed to having dug up the chief's son and eating parts of his body, and admitted to being a kussanga. He stated that he had exhumed the body to show everyone that the kussangas were not afraid of the white men or Diatta.¹⁵

Thus, from the record of the first trial, the the case of the kussanga demonstrated a power struggle against the colonial administration and against the chieftainship. This trial, together with the two Oukout trials, paved the way for what came later, where Diatta and other canton and village chiefs were always the most important witnesses. In fact, the kussanga trials were the first time the chieftainship south of the river had closer and more utilitarian contact with the administration. Hence, the administration made no attempt to conceal its intention to use these trials as a tool to expand its grip over the region – an administrative objective previously noted by Baum, and which is undeniable. However, in the following sections we will try to answer several questions concerning the local setting in which the events took place. Did all the chiefs act with this same goal in mind? How did the local communities use these trials? Oral history allows us to nuance the process of the kussanga trials and to point out their complexities.

Confronting narratives: oral history and the trials

Using oral sources, we can recover local memories of these trials and challenge the oral narrative with colonial documents. In this way, we are able to obtain information regarding the identity of those affected, which helps us to highlight the complexity of the trials, and the ways in which they were used beyond the administrative sphere.

Oukout and the manipulation of trials

Oral history sheds new light on the cases in Oukout. According to oral sources, in the first case, Diabone was not ill, but had fallen from a tree while collecting palm wine and, at first, said that his fall must be the result of witchcraft. This probably reached the ears of Diatta, who turned this witchcraft-related event into something related to cannibalism. This confusion had already been noticed by Baum, who

14. ANS, "Le Gouverneur Général de l'Afrique Occidentale Française à Monsieur le Lieutenant-Gouverneur du Sénégal, Actes d'anthropophagie en Casamance", 25-3-1927.

15. ANS, "Justice, tribunal du cercle de Ziguinchor, audience et jugements, 1913-1929", n. 6, 43, 4-12-1926.

distinguished the *kussaye* (witches, who travelled in the world of dreams and devoured people's souls, causing their death) from the *kussanga* (cannibals –a secret association of *kussaye* who, after the death of their victims, ate their corpses).¹⁶ Given that colonial justice could not judge witchcraft but could judge anthropophagy, Diatta and the chiefs who collaborated with him decided to take advantage of the confusion.

All informants agree that Diabone was tortured, beaten, and forced to identify the alleged cannibals. He not only accused people from Oukout but also people from other villages. It was his confession, extracted under torture, that triggered all subsequent trials and arrests. Later, the 14 detainees, according to informants, were also tortured for confessions. Indeed, during the trial they all confessed to having eaten human flesh. In this case, moreover, we see that all the detainees belonged to the same family, originally from the village of Calobone, and were part of a lineage that had been persecuted in earlier times known as Koonjaen (they were the original inhabitants of the area, conquered and defeated by the Diola at the end of the seventeenth century).¹⁷

Diabone returned to the village and lived in Oukout until his death many years later. Informants who knew him emphasize that he was not a pariah: people understood that he had been forced to do what he did. The extent of his torture-related injuries meant he always needed the aid of a walking stick, and he was never able to have children, which is seen as a spiritual punishment for the false accusations of 1926.¹⁸

The second case is even more complex and is remembered in Oukout as a flagrant manipulation by Diatta and the French administration. The key witnesses were divided into three groups: *ex-tirailleurs*, Christians, and two defendants from the first trial who made direct accusations against the defendants in the Assimbadiat case. In reality, what is remembered in the village is that Assimbadiat was taken prisoner by Diatta, who tortured Assimbadiat, as he had Diabone, to try to get him to talk. There are informants who claim that Assimbadiat escaped from Diatta's detention, returned to Oukout and, pressurized under the threat of torture to inform on his neighbours, decided to commit suicide. This account of suicide was dismissed at the trial on the grounds of the vagueness of the testimonies of Assimbadiat's wife and brother, who only mentioned that he had hinted to them in dreams that his death might soon occur.¹⁹

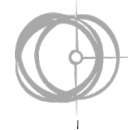
According to one informant, Assimbadiat even contacted his relatives, and the words attributed to him by oral history are: 'I don't want to be tortured to give more names.' Thus, the Assimbadiat case appears an even greater manipulation by Diatta than the Diabone case since the defendants here were not only accused of cannibalism but also of murder and were sentenced to death. In fact, one of the witnesses, who was Assimbadiat's cousin, confessed years later, in a sort of traditional trial held in the village, that he had been forced through torture to say that his cousin's death had been a murder.

16. BAUM, "Crimes".

17. BAUM, *Shrines*, chs. 3 and 4.

18. ANS, "Justice: tribunal du cercle de Ziguinchor, audience et jugements, 1913-1929", n. 7, 47, 4-12-1926; interview with Sibeboul Assine, Oukout, 27-2-2018; group interview, Oukout, 28-2-2018; interview with Tombone Assine, Oukout, 6-3-2018; interview with Joachim Alayun Diatta, Oukout, 7-3-2018; BAUM, "Crimes".

19. ANS, "Justice: tribunal du cercle de Ziguinchor, audience et jugements, 1913-1929", n. 1, 51, 12-1-1927.



Djiteben, the son of the village chief, was a notable witness. His contribution was brief and innocuous, and he did not accuse anyone of Assimbadiat's murder, nor did he provide anything that could lead one to believe that it was a murder. His impartiality, however, cost his family the chieftainship. The consensus among informants is that various Christians in the village were behind the Assimbadiat case, as evidenced by the Christian witnesses who participated in the trial. In Oukout, the kussanga trials marked a turning point in the religious landscape of the village. The fear of being accused of belonging to the kussanga led several inhabitants to join the Catholic religion, which they saw as having prevailed during the trials. In 1928 there were at least 18 baptisms in the village, with more than ten in the following year.²⁰

Catholicism was Diatta's religion and that of those who promoted the trial, a religion that had just demonstrated unprecedented power under the colonial apparatus. In Oukout, it was even said that if you did not go to church, you would be accused of having killed Assimbadiat. A new era began in the Oukout chieftainship: the post passed from the family that had held it since its creation into the hands of Damase Muna, a Christian friend of Diatta's whose brother is identified by some informants as the main instigator of the Assimbadiat case. Thus, Djiteben's part in the trial led, directly or indirectly, to the replacement of his family at the head of the chieftainship – at least until the 1940s, when Djiteben himself became chief to replace Damase.²¹ Moreover, according to Baum, the defendants in the Assimbadiat trial, as in the Diabone trial, also belonged to a Koonjaen family, whose religious influence was seen as a symbol of resistance against French rule.²²

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In the case of Edioungou, described as a reaction to the Oukout arrests, the Christian religion also held sway. Edioungou was the village with the most converts to Catholicism in the canton of Floups and, therefore, it would not be strange for the relationship between Diatta and Aniélé to have gone beyond the merely administrative, since Diatta was the most recognized Christian in the region. Catholic or not, Aniélé must have had frequent contact with Diatta and, by extension, with the missionaries, who found his village to be one of the places that was most welcoming to the new religion. When the defendant stated that he feared neither the administration nor Diatta, it was equivalent to saying that he did not fear Catholicism. That this happened in the village with the largest number of converts also speaks of the religious struggle that was present in these early trials. The Christian community of that time participated in the trials, and the missionaries were among the main agents in denouncing the acts of the kussanga.²³

20. ARCHIVE DE LA MISSION D'OUSSOUYE [AMO], "Baptêmes de 1928-1933".

21. ANS, "Justice: tribunal du cercle de Ziguinchor, audience et jugements, 1913-1929", n. 1, 51, 12-1-1927; ANS, "Courrier Confidentiel, Administrateur Supérieur Casamance à Commandant du cercle de Bignona", 16-2-1927; interview with Sibeboel Assine; group Interview; Interviews with Tombone Assine, Oukout, 6-3-2018 and 15-3-2018; interview with Joachim Alayun Diatta.

22. BAUM, "Crimes", p. 219.

23. AMO, "Baptêmes de 1928-1933"; ARCHIVES GÉNÉRALES DE LA CONGRÉGATION DU SAINT-ESPRIT [AGCSE], "Journaux de Communauté de Casamance"; ANS, "Justice: tribunal du cercle de Ziguinchor, audience et jugements, 1913-1929", n. 6, 43, 4-12-1926.

Accusing chiefs

In the Province of Oussouye, Diatta's accusations were supported by other chiefs. The most important among them were Paul Djiboudié Sambou, chief of the Pointe Saint-Georges canton, and Bakoual, chief of the Floups canton. The former was a Catholic, and both could speak French. They were joined by other village chiefs, such as Aniélé of Edioungou. At Pointe Saint-Georges, the village chiefs of Cajinolle did as Sambou and named all the cannibals they knew, likewise in Mlomp-Haer, Mlomp-Etebamaye, and Mlomp-Djicomol. According to Baum, only the villages of Samatite and Eloudia were spared from the kussanga trials, this being because their village chiefs refused to draw up lists of suspects. In the Pointe Saint-Georges cases, in which 68 people were prosecuted, only three were acquitted of the charges. All the defendants were men, many of whom were rich in cattle and rice fields and controlled important traditional shrines. Hence, the accusing canton and village chiefs hoped to diminish the influence of their rivals and force a redistribution of their wealth.²⁴

In the Brin-Seleki canton there were several trials in which the chiefs acted as accusers. On 1 April 1927, a man named Djivehalan, of the village of Enampore, was tried for the attempted murder of a child for the purpose of eating him. In this case, it was not Diatta who acted as a witness, but Diagnil, canton chief of Brin-Seleki at the time of the events, which occurred during the 1925 male circumcision celebration. This episode is not remembered in Enampore, so we were unable to discover new information about those involved. However, Enampore did have a far more important trial in 1928, which we will discuss below.²⁵

The next case was held on 7 April and involved the village of Seleki and, specifically, the Bakene district. Three men (Djibolimagne, Amboulat, and Alakil) were prosecuted for anthropophagy and accused of being seen digging up a child's corpse in 1924. According to the accusation, the defendants allegedly confessed before Diatta and Akoute, village chief in Seleki, that they had committed cannibalistic acts, but denied that they had dug up the child two years earlier. In addition to Diatta, the trial witnesses include Tété Sagna, replacement for Diagnil as chief of the Brin-Seleki canton, and Bakoual, chief of the Floups canton. In this case, the accusation was based on Diatta's testimony: he claimed to have taken the defendants to his house, where they allegedly confessed in front of Bakoual and Diagnil to having eaten human flesh. In fact, according to Diatta, all three acknowledged these acts on multiple occasions. But here, unlike in Oukout, the torture and pressure during interrogation seem evident from the defendants' own testimonies. Djibolimagne, for example, said that he was afraid during the interrogation and that it was not true that he had eaten his own father or that he had dug up the child's body; he said the two witnesses who claimed to have seen him were lying. Amboulat also denied any connection with the kussanga and said he had never tasted human flesh. When they replied that he himself had acknowledged it in front of Diatta, Amboulat admitted it, but excused himself by explaining that he was frightened and did not even know what he was saying. Finally, Alakil also said he was afraid of



24. BAUM, "Crimes", 220-225.

25. ANS, "Justice: tribunal du cercle de Ziguinchor, audience et jugements, 1913-1929", n. 3, 69, 1-4-1927.

Diatta at the point when he confessed. The three defendants were, therefore, subjected to interrogations in which they were forced to admit to something they had not done.²⁶

Diatta's house became the place where most of the kussanga confessions were made and, if we take into account the oral testimonies that speak of torture, and the written testimonies of these defendants, we can conclude that the provincial chief regularly resorted to physical and other torture during the whole process of the kussanga trials. In fact, Teté Diedhiou, an interpreter for the French administration at the time, explained to Baum that the chiefs had used torture to extract confessions, and that they also went so far as to take food and water away from the detainees for days, forcing them to drink salted water.²⁷

The informants from Seleki have been unable to shed much light on the accused, although they recalled that there were accusations of witchcraft and that these were unfounded and *politically* motivated. Nevertheless, we know that Djibolimagne was a very influential, traditional healer who treated sick people. And we know from the proceedings that Amboulat was the son of Guitabarene, who, according to oral sources, was the first village chief of Seleki. Both were therefore influential people in the village: a traditional authority, possibly responsible for a shrine, and the son of a chief. In this case, the three defendants were sentenced to twenty years' imprisonment and twenty years' prohibition of residence, although later the chamber of homologation reduced the sentence the last one to ten years.²⁸

In the same canton, Nigagnodo, the village chief of Essyl, was the main accuser in the trial on 3 December 1927 of two men from his village whom he accused of having eaten a corpse in 1922, having overheard them talking about it. Nigagnodo collaborated with the administration, and a year later his son Abuab was continuing to actively collaborate with the colonial administration.

In this case, the chieftaincy family itself used the trials to expand its power vis-à-vis its rivals. Likewise, in this trial we again see how one of the defendants confessed to the crimes, then asked the court for forgiveness, and was later behind many accusations made against people in surrounding villages. Abuab, having become a chief, also acted as accuser in the trial held on 17 April 1928, along with the village chief of Kamobeul.²⁹

Another village chief who acted as a main accuser was Attindin (Tendeng), chief of Bandial, who accused a man of having murdered his son, and who stated that since the kussanga had been sent to prison, the dead had remained in the cemetery.³⁰ Finally, on 6 April 1928, eight men from Seleki were prosecuted. The village was divided into five *quartiers* (districts), each with its own chief, and of the five witnesses who testified, three were village chiefs: Moussa, Akoute, and Bassene Coulaby (Coulobé). The latter

26. ANS, "Justice: tribunal du cercle de Ziguinchor, audience et jugements, 1913-1929", n. 5, 77, 7-4-1927.

27. BAUM, "Crimes", p. 228.

28. ANS, "Justice: tribunal du cercle de Ziguinchor, audience et jugements, 1913-1929", n. 5, 77, 7-4-1927; interview with Assambouyan Sambou, Seleki, 22-2-2018; interview with Etienne Bassène, Seleki, 12-2-2018; interview with Gaston Tendeng, Seleki, 7-2-2018; group interview with Djitendeng Tendeng, Seleki, 7-2-2018.

29. ANS, "Justice: tribunal du cercle de Ziguinchor, audience et jugements, 1913-1929", n. 8, 17-4-1928.

30. ANS, "Justice: tribunal du cercle de Ziguinchor, audience et jugements, 1913-1929", n. 23, 173, 9-12-1927; interview with Michel Tendeng, Bandial, 16-2-2018.

said that his son had died of poisoning in 1923 and that he later surprised the defendants in the cemetery, implying that they were going to dig up his son. None of the defendants confessed, declaring that it was a scheme against them instigated by the three chiefs. Senobo, one of the accused, went so far as to say that the accusations were motivated by the chiefs' jealousy of him as a rich man with many rice fields. They were sentenced to between seven or three years in prison but were later released by the *Chambre d'Homologation*.³¹

In 1928, the trials extended to other cantons beyond Floups, Pointe Saint-Georges, and Brin-Seleki. Fearing that anthropophagy had spread, Diatta initiated an investigation, supported by the head of the Bayottes canton and his village chiefs. On 22 February, a trial was held in which three people from three different villages were tried: a woman from Nyassia, a young man from Etomé, and an old man from Kassoulou. Assane Sagna, the canton chief, accused these three individuals of attempting to poison a child to eat its corpse, and of committing anthropophagous acts in the past. However, at the time of the trial Assane retracted his accusations and said that they had been misinterpreted: there were no cannibals among the Bayottes, though there were witches, and the three had not eaten human flesh, but souls. They were *kussaye*, not *kussanga*. At the trial, Assane appeared as a former canton chief, and insisted that he had identified for Diatta the *sorciers* (witches) of his canton, but not the cannibals, who, according to him, did not exist. The canton chief who replaced him, Baobaye Sambou, aged only 26, was the one who pointed out one of the accused as responsible for the baby's death, although he said he did not know if he had gone on to eat the corpse. Later, other witnesses gave assurances that the baby died of natural causes and insisted that some of the accused were *sorciers* but not cannibals. The defendants themselves denied belonging to the *kussanga*, and even denied being witches. In the end, Assane's and Baobaye's feeble accusations, which failed to definitively identify anyone, led to a favourable verdict for the three defendants, who were acquitted and, after over a year in prison, were released.³²

This trial is the only one in which all the defendants were declared innocent and is the one where the confusion between witchcraft and cannibalism is clearer and explicit. Assane's shift from outright accusation to nuanced accusation was not sudden. By the time of the trial, Assane had been replaced and, therefore, his relationship with the administration had already suffered a serious setback: he was no longer a chief and, moreover, he was facing trial for failing to fulfil his duties as chief in a robbery and murder case. In fact, Assane was sentenced in May to three years in prison. This directly affected his change in Assane's attitude and willingness to collaborate with Diatta. When the leadership was taken away from him, Assane changed his testimony.³³

The next trial, which was held on the same day as the Bayottes trial, concerned six villages in the canton of Essignes: Bafican, Dialan, Dioher, Etafoune, Bakonoum, and Kéleane. Sixteen people were accused of being part of a group that organized macabre feasts in the forests. Sarlot, the Essignes chief, oversaw naming the alleged cannibals. He was also the village chief of Bafican, and he followed the suggestions of the village chiefs, and named 12 of the accused. Two village chiefs who had accused

31. ANS, "Justice: tribunal du cercle de Ziguinchor, audience et jugements, 1913-1929", n. 7, 6-4-1928.

32. ANS, "Justice: tribunal du cercle de Ziguinchor, audience et jugements, 1913-1929", n. 2, 22-4-1928.

33. ANS, "Justice: tribunal du cercle de Ziguinchor, audience et jugements, 1913-1929", n. 9, 16-4-1928; interviews with Edmund Sagna, Kailou, 20-2-2018 and 23-2-2018.



two men withdrew their accusations. In addition to Sarlot and the village chiefs, another testimony for the accusation was provided by Adiebarane, the former chief of the canton, and his son Adiouma. So, again, the chieftainship acted in this case as the main accuser.³⁴

Accused chiefs

The kussanga trials were clearly, an opportunity to settle local disputes. In most cases, they were exploited by provincial, canton and, village chiefs, although members of the local villages also made use of them against. These cases are, however, harder to trace in the archives, since the proceedings do not provide essential information on some of the accused who were village chiefs or members of their families.

The first case we have identified occurred in the village of Kamobeul. On 8 April 1927, nine people were put on trial. Most of them pleaded not guilty, except those who had testified at Diatta's house. Two of them were found not guilty, but the rest were sentenced to ten years' imprisonment and twenty years' prohibition of residence, although later the chamber of homologation annulled the sentences and replaced them with fines of 1,000 francs. Based on oral history, at least three of the defendants were relatives of Djiba Tendeng, the first village chief of Kamobeul. In addition to these three, another defendant is described in the proceedings as the son of *Djibeh*, which could be an alternative transcription of the village chief's name. According to our informants, Djiba remained in the chieftainship right up until the day when accusations of witchcraft led to his replacement by the administrative authorities. The accusations against Djiba and his family members can be seen as a political strategy by people who were unhappy with him being in the chieftainship. In fact, in contrast to the usual scenario, Djiba was not replaced by a member of his family, but by a man named Ayimorian, whose chieftainship is remembered as disastrous, and who was later replaced by a descendant of Djiba himself, thus returning the chieftainship to its *legitimate* leaders.³⁵

The struggle for the Kamobeul chieftainship became evident a year after the trial. On 17 April 1928, a trial was held of 11 people, 9 from Essyl and 2 from Kamobeul. All the defendants denied the accusations, but what is interesting here is who the main witnesses were. In addition to alleged eyewitnesses, and the parents of children who had allegedly been poisoned and then eaten by the kussanga, Aniapou, village chief of Kamobeul, and Aboua (Abuab), village chief of Essyl, both testified. Collaborating closely, they both directly accused the alleged cannibals, claiming that not a single corpse could rest in peace while they were free. In this case, one of the two accused from Kamobeul is someone named Djibou. In the records, Djibou is described as a *cultivator*. But following the clues from the oral tradition, the *Djibou* of the trial was none other than Djiba Tendeng, the village chief of Kamobeul. Thus, we can corroborate that Djiba was accused of anthropophagy and arrested, spending almost two years in prison until his trial. During that time, the man whom tradition remembers by

34. ANS, "Justice: tribunal du cercle de Ziguinchor, audience et jugements, 1913-1929", n. 3, 22-2-1928; "Procès-Verbal de réunion du Conseil des Notables du Cercle de Ziguinchor", 18-4-1924.

35. ANS, "Justice: tribunal du cercle de Ziguinchor, audience et jugements, 1913-1929", n. 6, 81, 8-4-1927; interview with Victor Bassene, Kamobeul, 21-2-2018; interview with Elisabeth Eyolé Sagna, Kamobeul, 12-3-2018.

the name of Ayimorian filled his position. This chief, who corresponds to the Aniapou of the trial, is remembered as a bad chief, as someone who frequented the company of white men and the *tirailleurs*, and as someone who broke with tradition. At the trial, Djiba says that he has been accused because of the jealousy of his neighbours, to which Aniapou himself replies that he is a young, civilized village chief, and that he has no reason to be envious of Djiba. The reference here to Aniapou being *civilized* suggests he had close ties to the French, who used that term. Thus, in the eyes of the population, Aniapou had turned away from tradition and was a bad chief – and he would eventually be replaced by popular demand.

Aniapou became chief after the arrest of Djiba, whom he himself accused. Again, we find evidence that the kussanga trials were used for political purposes, in this case to remove from the village those who had influence in society. The statements of the rest of the defendants make it clear that they all believed that the accusers, primarily Aniapou and Aboua, had conspired against them to win a purely local rivalry. One of the accused went so far as to say that: “*on est en train de tromper les blancs en leur racontant des histoires pour nous faire condamner*”. Another explained that the accusations were the result of old hatreds in the village, made by those who wanted to put them in prison so that they would be unable to return home. In summary, thanks to this trial, and the complementary data from oral history, in Essyl and Kamobeul we see not only that the chiefs acted as accusers, but that the trials were used to take the chieftainship away from the legitimate chief, attacking him as well as several members of his family.³⁶

A similar case occurred in the nearby village of Enampore, where five men were arrested in October 1926 and tried on 2 April 1928. Various testimonies accused them of poisoning people when they needed to eat corpses or when someone had been bothering them. They declared that they saw the accused men transporting a corpse, and one of the witnesses even claimed that he had seen the accused men twice devouring a corpse in 1925.

In Enampore, when the French introduced the village chieftainship, it went to a wealthy man named Ahoufa Manga. According to oral tradition, Ahoufa later handed over the chieftainship to a member of the *oeyi*'s family. The proceedings of the trial, together with the oral history, indicate that this hand-over may not have been as peaceful or voluntary as the oral tradition recalls. In this particular case, the witness who most vehemently accuses the detainees is a 25-year-old man named Mandiali. According to oral history, Mandiali was a member of the royal family, but in 1928, he was a young man with little influence. His accusations fell on people living in Ahoufa's *quartier*. Specifically, Mandiali accused Diahi, Ahoufa's son, of being a kussanga. Mandiali ended up as village chief of Enampore but, years later, was replaced by popular demand by a man from Ahoufa's family. The problems between the two families are still remembered today and, according to Ahoufa's descendants, the king of Enampore himself was behind the accusations.³⁷

36. ANS, “Justice: tribunal du cercle de Ziguinchor, audience et jugements, 1913-1929”, n. 8, 17-4-1928; interview with Elisabeth Eyolé Sagna.

37. ANS, “Justice: tribunal du cercle de Ziguinchor, audience et jugements, 1913-1929”, n. 6, 2-4-1928; interview with Gabriel Manga, Enampore, 16-2-2018; interview with Ansoumana Manga, Enampore, 16-2-2018; interview with Moussa Manga, Enampore, 24-2-2018; interview with Charles Bacoya Manga, Enampore, 13-3-2018.



Therefore, in Kamobeul and Enampore, as well as in Seleki, the sons of the first village chiefs (also the chief in Kamobeul) were accused by people who then took over the chieftainship after the arrests. These cases are, though, exceptions and have a lot to do with the Diola concept of power, whereby the population does not crave positions of authority since these are believed to bring more problems than benefits. This is the case with the position of the *oe yi*, for example. This view was transferred to the figure of the village chiefs, who often did not wish to occupy this position, as it was too heavy a burden. Nevertheless, local rivalries played an important role in the trials, at the same time in favour of the chiefs and against them and their families

The role of the féticheurs

Although there were defendants who enjoyed some authority in the religious sphere of their villages, there were also traditional authorities who used the trials to their advantage. The French saw the *féticheurs* (shrine priests) as the leaders of the Diola and they were one of the groups which Baum said the accusations of anthropophagy were focused on. At Pointe Saint-Georges, many of the accused were members of families who controlled important shrines. In Kagnout, the future *oe yi* was prosecuted and, in Cajinolle and Mlomp, so too were those responsible for important shrines. In Mlomp-Haer, the main accuser was the village chief, Massulo, who was the son of Guitaba, the *féticheur* to whom the cannibals had allegedly confessed their crimes. However, in Etebamaye, alongside the village chief, there was a *féticheur* who testified against the accused. In fact, four of the seven trials of the Pointe Saint-Georges canton saw *féticheurs* acting as witnesses. In one of the trials, even the *oe yi* of Djicomol participated as a witness. This man, however, had been facing controversy since he had accepted the role of village chief, an act that was not well regarded by the village elders. In the trial of the village of Kagnout, the only four testimonies recorded are from *féticheurs*. Thus, in the Pointe Saint-Georges trials, it is clear that not only did the village and canton chiefs use the accusations of cannibalism to make themselves stronger, but that the traditional authorities also used them to channel their rivalries.

The clearest case of this, however, was on 28 June 1928. On that day, Sembou, the man responsible for male circumcision in Mlomp-Djicomol, was put on trial for anthropophagy. The principal witness against him was Serondéfou, the *oe yi* and village chief, who used the trial to try to get rid of his most powerful rival in the village. At this trial a *féticheur* named Assoyayin was questioned; he refused to incriminate the accused, and even said that he feared that those who had designated the defendant as kussanga were chiefs interested in confusing the white men. In this case, the defendant was not convicted, but the rivalry between Serondéfou and Sembou is evidenced and explained by Sembou's testimony denying all the accusations:

*Que Serondefou m'accuse il n'y a rien d'étonnant, car je suis le Grand Circonciseur de la région et c'est à mon fétiche que l'on apporte les porcs sacrifiés. Je suis donc le seul à partager entre les personnes qui me conviennent la chair de ce porc. Le roi des féticheurs a dû être vexé un jour que je ne lui avais pas donné un morceau suffisant [...]. C'est lui qui m'a causé cette réputation mais je ne me suis jamais rendu coupable d'anthropophagie.*³⁸

38. ANS, "Justice: tribunal du cercle de Ziguinchor, audience et jugements, 1913-1929", n. 14, 15, 7-11-1927; n. 16, 17, 18, 8-11-1927; n. 19, 20, 9-11-1927; n. 11, 57, 28-6-1928; n. 12, 59, 29-6-1928; BAUM, "Crimes".

A similar case occurred a day later when a man from Cajinolle was put on trial. He denied the accusations and claimed that his brother had accused him because he envied his wealth. In this trial, where Diatta and Sambou participated as witnesses, the latter admitted that the *féticheurs* of his canton had been encouraged to speak out in return for protection from the white men. This was tantamount to saying that these men could gain political and personal advantage from collaborating with the French.³⁹

Besides in the Pointe Saint-Georges trials, *féticheurs* also acted as accusers in two other trials outside this canton. In total, *féticheurs* acted as accusers in at least seven kussanga trials.

The colonial and local use of the kussanga trials

In 2004, Baum addressed the kussanga trials to “examine the complex interplay of European and African ideas about witchcraft, cannibalism, and the particular difficulties of implementing a system of justice in the Casamance region of Senegal”. He emphasized the confusion between *kussaye* and *kussanga*, pointing out that the Diola testimonies spoke of crimes that occurred in the dream world, and not in the real world. That is, what the administrators treated as charges of cannibalism were accusations of witchcraft: a witch devouring the soul of a sleeping victim – something which also occurred in, for example, Central Africa.⁴⁰

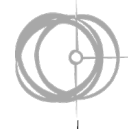
On the other hand, Baum noted that the administration, Diatta, and the canton chiefs alike saw the trials as an opportunity to undermine the Diola religious leaders – those responsible for the shrines. In his analysis, most of accusers of alleged kussanga belonged to three groups: canton and village chiefs, friends of these chiefs, and veterans of the First World War: “Together they formed the core of the pro-French element in the region” and made conscious efforts to extend their influence and weaken the opposition. Thus, Baum argued that there was a clear pattern of politically motivated accusations, and that many of the defendants were members of families that controlled “the major spirit shrines of the townships”. Many of those accused by the village chiefs were also wealthy men with “lots of cattle and rice” who controlled important shrines, whose influence the chiefs wanted to diminish. His conclusion was that “[f]or the French, the kussanga trials demonstrated the coercive power of the state in an area of continual resistance. For local Diola officials, this was an occasion when they could remove their opponents”.⁴¹

Baum’s conclusions focused on his research in the villages of the Pointe Saint-Georges canton, where we have not conducted interviews. We can therefore only provide nuance to explain the behaviour of chiefs accusing those in charge of shrines by mentioning that there were a significant number of *féticheurs* in this locality who also made accusations. In the case of Oukout, we can, though, provide more detail. Baum referred to both trials, but he did not conduct interviews in the villages and the information he obtained was indirect, through informants from his study area. As noted

39. ANS, “Justice: tribunal du cercle de Ziguinchor, audience et jugements, 1913-1929”, n. 12, 59, 29-6-1928.

40. Sokhieng AU, “Cutting the Flesh: Surgery, Autopsy and Cannibalism in the Belgian Congo”, *Medical History*, 61/2 (2017), pp. 295-312, <https://doi.org/10.1017/mdh.2017.5>.

41. BAUM, “Crimes”.



above, the Oukout trials established the pattern of accusations by the chiefs, although we cannot generalize from this case. In Oukout there were certainly chiefs who acted as prosecution witnesses, but the village himself chief did not participate in the trials. However, the person who did participate was Djiteben, the son of the village chief, who did not accuse anyone in the trial and whose neutrality ended up costing his family the chieftainship. The former *tirailleurs*' participation in the second trial was limited to presenting themselves as opponents of the kussanga, but none of them directly testified to having witnessed the alleged assassination of Assimbadiat.

We have found no reference to *tirailleurs* acting as prosecution witnesses in trials from any other village. While Baum comments that First World War veterans were one of the three most important groups in the prosecutions, he cites the participation of no veterans in any trial besides that in Oukout. Consequently, this generalization needs to be treated with caution. Also, in Oukout, the most influential group in the accusations was not veterans, but Christians.

As noted, the trials in Oukout had an immediate impact on the religious landscape of the village. Not only were Christians acting as accusers, but conversions and baptisms increased in the years that followed, and a Christian village chief was appointed to replace the family that had held the chieftainship up to that point. At that time, Oukout and Edioungou were the two main centres of conversion to Christianity in the canton of the Floups. It is not by chance, then, that the first trials took place in these two villages. The Pères du Saint-Esprit had been active in Casamance since the end of the nineteenth century. The Oussouye area remained refractory to evangelization, and their installation there, in a location close to the administrative building where Diatta worked, coincided with the beginning of the kussanga trials in 1927. Diatta was, according to one of the missionaries, an admirable indigenous chief, and an exemplary Christian. For the missionaries, it was the right time to expand their influence in the region.⁴²

Missionaries played a key role in linking *awasena* religious leaders to cannibalism. In an article entitled "Mes chers anthropophages", Père Jacquin cited several cases of witchcraft and murder, made a link between male circumcision and cannibalistic practices, and explained that Diabone, the main accuser in the first Oukout trial, was a catechist at the mission who was forced to eat human flesh and have sex with an old leprous woman.⁴³ The French administration promoted these ideas to present the Lower Casamance as a savage region and to justify the difficulties they faced in trying to implement administrative structures in the region. Repercussions followed in the metropolis's media.

In 1931, *Les Annales Coloniales* devoted an article to the Casamance region under the title "Au pays des sorciers".⁴⁴ In 1934, the newspaper *Le Matin* sent reporter Jean Perrigault to Casamance to make enquiries about the kussanga; a series of articles followed, between 18 and 20 November, with headlines such as "Vers le pays des koussangas mangeurs de morts" and "Fêtes et cérémonies barbares". In 1938, the same

42. AGCSE, "Journaux de Communauté de Casamance"; "Annales Religieuses de la Casamance. Père Jacquin, "Anthropophagie en Casamance", 1927; Joseph-Roger DE BENOIST, *Histoire de l'Église catholique au Sénégal. Du milieu du XV^e siècle à l'aube du troisième millénaire*, Paris, Karthala, 2008.

43. ANS, Les Missions Catholiques, n, 13, 17, Père Jacquin, "Mes chers anthropophages", pp. 259-261.

44. M. R. VALTAUD, "Au pays des sorciers. La Casamance", *Les Annales coloniales: revue mensuelle illustrée*, 1 (Jan. 1931).

newspaper sent another reporter to the region, publishing reports between 17 and 23 August headlined “Chez les sorciers et mangeurs d’hommes”, in which the Diola religion was continuously referenced alongside words such as “*necrophages*” and “*anthropophages*”.⁴⁵

This was part of a colonial strategy that also occurred elsewhere: for example, there was a very similar case in German East Africa in 1908, where the administration, which was not firmly established, needed to set an example through its sentencing and in order to demonstrate its legitimacy at a time of resistance to occupation.⁴⁶ As Beth A. Conklin puts it: “[N]egative representation of native people as cannibals served as tools of domination, providing moral legitimacy for government officials, entrepreneurs, missionaries and others who promoted self-serving images of savage natives to justify their subjugation”.⁴⁷

As elsewhere in Africa, the kussanga trials were taken advantage of by the administration and the chiefs at a time when they needed to consolidate their power in the region.⁴⁸ However, there were also some chiefs (or direct relatives) who were accused of cannibalism. And whilst in many cases the accused were from families linked to important shrines, there were also *féticheurs* who acted as accusers. The context varied in each village, but the dynamics were similar. In all of them, trials were used to settle local disputes over political influence within communities. Attacks on rivals, which once would have taken the form of accusations of witchcraft, became accusations of anthropophagy. However, these accusations were not only brought by provincial, canton, or village chiefs, but involved a wider sector of the population, including converts to Christianity as well as important leaders of traditional shrines. As Celeste Muñoz pointed out in the case of Equatorial Guinea, the accusations of anthropophagy were an endogenous and exogenous political weapon that showed, on the one hand, the struggle against the survival of local religious beliefs and their material culture, and, on the other, a catalyst for internal social tensions.⁴⁹

Apart from the Oukout case, villagers do not remember the kussanga trials, or, if they do, it is only tangentially. No informant has identified any of the defendants in the trials as kussanga. In most cases, even the relatives of the accused did not know that such accusations had been made against their relatives. In some cases, such as that of Djiba of Kamobeul, what is remembered is that he was accused of witchcraft, not anthropophagy. And that is the vague idea that remains: there were trials of people



45. Jean PERRIGAULT, “Chez les derniers rois féticheurs”, *Le Matin*, Paris, 18-11-1934, 19-11-1934, 20-11-1934; Marcel HOMET, “Chez les sorciers et les mangeurs d’hommes”, *Le Matin*, 17-8-1938, 19-8-1938, 21-8-1938, 23-8-1938.

46. David D. KIM, “Scandals of Translation: Cannibalism and the Limits of Colonial Authority in the Trial of Iringa (1908)”, *German Studies Review*, 34/1 (2011), pp. 125-142.

47. Beth A. CONKLIN, “Consuming Images: Representations of Cannibalism on the Amazon Frontier”, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 70/2 (1997), pp. 68-78, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3317507>.

48. William ARENS, *The Man-eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1979; Peter HULME, *Colonial Encounters. Europe and the native Caribbean, 1492-1797*, London and New York, Methuen, 1986; Francis BARKER, Peter HULME and Margaret IVERSEN (eds.), *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

49. Celeste MUÑOZ, “La ley contra la costumbre. Segregación, asimilación jurídica y castigo en la Guinea española bajo el franquismo (1936-1959)”, unpublished PhD thesis, Universitat de Barcelona, 2020.

accused of witchcraft. The confusion between *kussaye* and *kussanga* noted by Baum is most evident and explicit in the Bayottes canton trial.

In conclusion, the kussanga trials had an immediate impact on the villages concerned. Both chiefs and local communities participated in the trials, where the identities of witnesses and defendants varied depending on the locality and the particular interests at play there. The trials were part of a complex process in which the colonial administration sought to establish its structures in a region that was complicated to govern, while local communities were adapting to the challenges of the new colonial context. Therefore, the trials were a response to a multiplicity of objectives by different sectors of the population and were not only a tool of the colonial state against the local religious authorities.

After the trials, while village chieftaincies remained the subject of more or less frequent internal rivalries, canton chieftaincies became directly associated with foreigners and the administration stopped looking for *féticheurs* to appoint as canton chiefs. Throughout the 1930s, most of the canton chieftaincies in the southern bank of the river were occupied by Catholic Diola who had a close relationship with the missionaries. Hence, the kussanga trials initiated a pattern in the canton chieftaincies that shifted the focus from *tradition* to a more utilitarian use of the chieftaincies: Catholic chiefs could read and speak French and understood the inner workings of the colonial administration. They were therefore more useful than the so-called traditional authorities. Gradually, these chiefs moved away from the population and closer to the French administration. In contrast, the Catholic village chiefs were an exception in the following decades and did not last long in office. The canton chiefs, on the other hand, remained for many years the main interlocutors of the administration in the region.⁵⁰

50. Eric GARCIA-MORAL, “*Féticheurs*, católicos y musulmanes. Religión y administración colonial en la consolidación de la jefatura de cantón en la Baja Casamance, Senegal (1922-1938)”, *Illes i Imperis*, 25 (2023), pp. 137-162.