CRIMES OF THE DREAM WORLD: FRENCH TRIALS
OF DIOLA WITCHES IN COLONIAL SENEGAL

By Robert M. Baum

As European powers completed the colonization of the African continent, they faced the difficult task of creating an administrative and judicial structure to control the diverse population of their domains. Questions about the role of indigenous authorities and customary law in a colonial system confronted Europeans at the very moment when they were gaining their first extended glimpses into the working of African political systems. In West Africa, the French employed indigenous people as local officials of a highly centralized colonial administration while dividing precolonial polities into cercles and cantons. They often chose local officials more for their loyalty and their knowledge of the French language than for any claims to legitimate authority within formerly independent communities. Subject to the indigénat, the legal code that was applied only to Africans, local officials had little protection against arbitrary dismissal or other forms of discipline. Central to the establishment of such a system was the colonial authorities’ claim to have “a monopoly to dispense justice, not only to their own people, but also to those they have conquered.” French officials administered local courts with the advice of African dignitaries from an approved list. African systems of law were allowed continued jurisdiction only in those areas outside immediate French concern. Thus the vast majority of French West Africans were subjected to a judicial process organized according to French procedures; with French definitions of criminality, evidence, and, as it will be shown, of reality itself.

As the European powers extended their authority, many Africans turned to their religious systems for an explanation of the colonial conquest. Prophets who claimed to understand the spiritual causes of the loss of political autonomy advanced new religious doctrines and rituals as a way of self-purification and a


means to regain independence. When such prophetic messages led to armed revolts or evoked the specter of social unrest in the minds of colonial officials, these movements were suppressed and their leaders imprisoned or executed.3

More puzzling to colonial officials was another religious response: the dramatic increase in witchcraft accusations in the wake of the colonial conquest. From Senegal to South Africa, many African leaders blamed their defeat at the hands of the Europeans on the spiritual pollution generated by the practice of witchcraft. This was a major part of the teachings of Nongqawuse, the Xhosa woman whose visions led to the Xhosa Cattle Killings of the 1850s.4 It continued after the colonial conquest in such diverse places as Nyasaland, Rhodesia, and Senegal. European observers filled their writings with descriptions of the thousands of people who lost their lives through poison ordeals or other forms of witchcraft accusations as African communities sought to rid themselves of those who used supernatural means to harm other people in their midst.5 Since the vast majority of colonial administrators did not believe in witchcraft, their response was to outlaw witchcraft accusations and to punish those who made such accusations. African concepts of witchcraft were not seen as a response to the crisis of


conquest, but as a justification for the colonial presence and its "mission civilisatrice."^6

From the very beginnings of their presence on the African coast in the fifteenth century, Europeans had heard rumors that Africans engaged in cannibalism. This belief was strengthened by African claims that neighboring peoples—but never their own societies—practiced cannibalism. Despite investigations by such early ethnographers as Thomas Winterbottom, who concluded that "aside from occasional ritual cannibalism, there was not a single authentic account by a reliable witness," European faith in such stories remained unshaken.\(^7\) William Cohen described French colonial novels of the 1920s as preoccupied with images of black cannibalism.\(^8\) Evans-Pritchard noted that Europeans "have a morbid interest in cannibalism and tend to accept almost any tale told to them about it."\(^9\) When colonial officials heard about cannibalism accusations, they did not arrest the accuser as they did with witchcraft accusations. They utilized statutes outlawing cannibalism for those who joined in the grizzly repasts. Colonial officials regarded such laws as an obvious part of their mandate, the outlawing of a practice that was condemned by European and African alike. The distinctions between witchcraft and cannibalism, however, were far less obvious than colonial officials realized.

In this article, I shall 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. I will focus on a series of trials, beginning in 1926, in which local French administrators believed they were prosecuting members of a secret cannibal society, while many Diola thought that the French were prosecuting witches. French officials believed such cannibalism occurred in a tangible world of sensory experience; Diola testimony, however concerned crimes that occurred in the world of the spirit, in the world of dreams. In this essay, I demonstrate the difficulty of defining a crime, the consumption of human flesh, when there is no agreement between the partici-

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pants as to what constitutes reality. I examine the difficulty of conducting trials when radically different concepts of the world coexist, a phenomenon fairly common in the colonial judicial process. Through the examination of Diola ideas about cannibalism and witchcraft, the oral traditions surrounding the trials, and the court transcripts themselves, it become clear that in most of these cases, what the administrators heard as charges of cannibalism—the eating of human flesh—were in fact, accusations of witchcraft—a witch’s soul eating the soul of a sleeping victim. Most of the testimony concerned a world that French administrators believed did not exist.¹⁰

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The Diola are the major ethnic group of the lower Casamance region of southern Senegal. They are highly skilled wet rice farmers who continue to govern themselves through village councils in which all adults may participate. In the Department of Oussouye where most of the arrests took place, the overwhelming majority of people were followers of Diola (Awasena) religion; Christianity and Islam attracted few converts until after World War II.¹¹ Adherents of the Awasena tradition conceived of a supreme being, Emitai, who created a series of spirits linked to shrines (ukine); the spirits served as intermediaries between people and Emitai. Many Diola claim that dreams represent partial recollections of the soul’s journey into a spiritual world that is as real as the one experienced while one is awake.

Diola ideas of independence and opposition to authority inspired their resistance to French domination throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centu-

¹⁰ Field research has been conducted in Diola areas for a total of four years between 1974 and 2002. Although interviews have been conducted in other Diola communities as well, I focused on the southern Diola area known as Esulalu, which includes the townships of Kadjinol, Mlomp, Kagnout, Samatit, and Eloudia. Field research was conducted from 1974 to 1975 and in 1976 with the assistance of the Thomas Watson Foundation. Field research from 1977 to 1979 was conducted with the assistance of the Social Science Research Council and the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship Program. Subsequent field research was conducted with the assistance of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Philosophical Society, The Ohio State University, and Iowa State University.

ries. Dr. Maclaud, a French official in the Casamance, described the tenacity of Diola resistance in 1907.

The Diola pushes to an excess his love of independence; despite four centuries of contact with Europeans, he haughtily affirms his right to liberty. Even today, and the boundary delimitation commission encountered the rough experience, the Diola do not hesitate to attack those who risk themselves on their Diola territory.  

Because of the tenacity of Diola resistance and a French preoccupation with the peanut-growing areas of northern Senegal, the Diola were left relatively free of outside interference until the First World War.

The First World War demonstrated that the French had failed to establish adequate control over the Diola, particularly in those areas that had shown little interest in Islam. Many Diola sensed the weakness of the French position and seized the occasion to return to old practices of tax resistance. Military recruitment could only be carried out by force. After the war, the French appointed a series of canton and province chiefs to enforce colonial policies in the lower Casamance. Aware of the south shore Diolas' fear of the Mandinka and of Islam, but needing a literate local official, they turned to the mission-raised and mission-educated Benjamin Diatta. He was given authority over the subdivision of Oussouye with the power to appoint canton chiefs and village chiefs and to make arrests. In 1924, he named Paul Sambou canton chief of Pointe Saint-Georges and Bakawal Diatta as canton chief of Huluf. During this period, local authorities instituted a policy of open opposition to Diola religion, whose priests they blamed for inspiring resistance.

12 Maclaud, "La Basse Casamance et ses Habitants," Bulletin de la Société de la Science de Géographie Commerciale de Paris (1907), 197. See also Christian Roche, Conquête et Résistance des peuples de Casamance (Dakar, 1976), 186–88, 281–94. All translations of citations in French or Diola are by the author.


14 Ibid., 1924.

15 The following is one example among scores of descriptions of the influence of traditional priests: "Almost always, behind the nominal chief presented to the commandant de cercle exists another occult power—the boekine—powerful in the practice of sorcery; an absolute authority who decides all important issues concerning the community. His orders, whatever they are, are always executed...." Territoire de la Casamance, "Rapport sur la Situation Politique de la Casamance et Programme de Désarmement et de Mise en Main de la Population," Archives Nationales du Sénégal (ANS), 2D5–3 455.
By the 1920s, a French colonial court system had been extended into the Casamance. Africans unassimilated to "citizen" status were tried in special courts established by the lieutenant-governor of each colony. The lowest local court was the tribunal du premier degré, presided over by subdivision officials. The tribunal du deuxième degré heard more serious cases and was presided over by the commandant de cercle. This level of court was involved in the Kussanga trials. There was no jury in such courts; a panel of local officials decided on the guilt of an accused. Assisting the local administrators were two assesseurs indigènes, selected from a list approved by the lieutenant-governor. Each assessor was supposed to represent the ethnic groups involved in the case. "This list was drawn up in such a way that the adjudicants could be judged as often as possible by notables who share their customs."16 This policy reflected Governor Ponty's "politique de races," as well as a desire by French administrators to gain some insight into the often-bewildering diversity of African societies they encountered.

These courts provided few safeguards for the accused. Perhaps the greatest problem was the use of local administrators as presidents of the local courts. These officials studied law as a means of maintaining order rather than as a means of obtaining justice. They regularly participated in criminal investigations. This created a situation where the same individual served as judge, jury, and police, a dangerous combination for the accused. Furthermore, these officials often lacked a knowledge of local customs, indigenous knowledge, or African languages. P. Meunier described this lack of training:

French functionaries are ill-suited (inaptes) to settle disputes between natives because the mission of a judge presupposes a knowledge of the customs, the usages, and the more or less rudimentary law, and finally the language of the natives, which they do not always possess and of which, in any case, they never have more than a superficial knowledge.17

This lack of knowledge of local customs increased the likelihood of arbitrary judicial decisions. Without such understanding it would be difficult, even for a willing administrator, to hand down decisions in accord with precedents established within the society of the accused.

16 If there were no qualified people on the lieutenant-governor's list, the adjunct assessors would participate in the trial. Gouverneur Carde, "Arrêté de 22 mai, 1924," printed in Raymond Buell, The Native Problem in Africa, II (New York, 1928), 133–34.

Although believers in the French "mission civilisatrice" would argue that in matters as serious as the suppression of a cannibal society, local customs would have to yield to a "higher" law; they would probably agree that French ignorance of African languages forced administrators to "rely therefore, upon assessors and interpreters who know French only imperfectly and who in some cases are open to bribery and under control of local native leaders." In many cases, local assessors were canton or village chiefs whom Buell described as "thoroughly loyal to the French government. Instead of regarding themselves as the traditional head of a native group, they regard themselves as the agent of French authority." While appearing to the French as loyal servants, assessors and interpreters were not loath to advance their own interests. This has been well established for both British and French Africa and from a variety of sources. Local notables, chiefs, and interpreters controlled access to European officials. Few other rural Africans spoke French and few Europeans spoke African languages. In many instances, a small clique of African notables and court interpreters controlled all verbal exchanges between Africans and Europeans. They interpreted most court testimony given in African languages as well as the court's decisions. Political opponents or people with grievances against local officials could be denied access to the Europeans. Testimony could be selectively or inaccurately interpreted. When acting as witnesses, local notables' testimony carried greater weight, both because it often came in French and because it came from people who had "proven their service"

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19 Ibid., 994.


21 Missionaries were the major exception. They tried to learn African languages and, in some cases, served as advocates of African rights. Father Esvan, a Holy Ghost Father, was expelled from the Casamance during World War I after intervening against military conscription. The potential for such intervention was an important reason for affiliating with the missionaries. In many cases the missionaries failed to fulfill this hope, but their linguistic capabilities made it a possibility. Robert M. Baum, "The Emergence of a Diola Christianity," *Africa* 60, (1990), 370-98.
to the colonial government. While commandants de cercle and subdivision officials may have handed down judicial decisions, their linguistic incompetence allowed African notables to determine the body of evidence upon which colonial officialdom could act.

Other elements in the judicial process served to strengthen colonial authority and eroded the rights of the accused. Under the indigénat, prisoners could be held without trial and were denied access to lawyers (African lawyers, rare in colonial Senegal, were largely confined to Dakar and St. Louis). In the first-degree tribunal, an accused party had the right to prepare his own defense with the assistance of an interpreter selected by the court. In the second-degree tribunal, the accused had the right to a "defender chosen by him among his elders or among the notable indigenous inhabitants of his home, whose qualities will have been recognized by the court." In both cases, the court selected the critical intermediary between the defendant and the court. The accused had few choices of legal advisers or interpreters. In sharp contrast to French practice at home, Africans were tried without benefit of a penal code; local French officials had wide discretionary powers to set punishments, checked only by right of appeal to the Chambre de Homologation. Finally, the courts diverged sharply from local ideas of legal procedure and definitions of crimes. Furthermore, the colonial courts were established through the use of force and the threat of continued force.

Since their arrival in the Casamance, the French had heard stories of Diola cannibalism and witchcraft. Rumors circulated about the fate of Lieutenant Truche, killed at Seleki in 1886; about cannibalistic rites of warrior societies; and about cannibalism in the male circumcision rituals. The French could take little action against such allegations, however, since they did not witness any incidents nor were the stories of cannibalism about the home villages of informants. French officials found it difficult to make successful inquiries about cannibalism or about Diola religion, because they were known to be hostile to it. This was especially true near Oussouye where the priest-king (oeyi) had died in prison and his remains carried off to France by Dr. Maclaud in 1903. Unable to conduct sys-

22 "Arrêté du 22 mai, 1924," 136. In the court archives of Ziguinchor, one can see the frequency of local notable testimony for the prosecution. See ANS, Ziguinchor 60: Affaires Judiciaires (1) Tribunal de la Cercle de Ziguinchor.

23 "Arrêté du 22 mai, 1924," 139.

24 Buell, The Native Problem, I, 1011.

25 I have heard the story of the priest-king's skeleton being taken to the Musée de l'Homme, in Paris, since I started work in the Department of Oussouye, in 1974. The story has been recently confirmed by Charles Becker, H–West Africa, February 2004.
tematic inquiries, local adminstators sat on the verandahs of their residences; they heard the sound of drums and singing penetrating the stillness of the night; and their imaginations filled in what their inquiries had failed to yield. In their minds, rumors became realities, and they wrote letters and reports to friends and superiors about their work in a "savage" land. Until the 1920's, however, French intervention in Diola religion had been limited to a prohibition of poison ordeals in the searching out of witches, a phenomenon that had become increasingly common during the years immediately following the French occupation of the Casamance.26

In order to understand Diola ideas about cannibalism, it is necessary to examine their concepts of witchcraft. During the last quarter of the twentieth century, the period when most of the oral testimony on which I base this analysis was collected, most Diola elders conceived of witches as having been created by Emitait, who gave them special powers to "see" beyond the material world, to travel at night without their bodies, and to transform themselves into animals. They were given these powers in order to eat the souls of people whose appointed time to die had come. In many cases, this power corrupted people; their hunger for human flesh [actually the souls of witches wanting to eat the souls of other people] became a driving force in itself. The priest-king of Kadjinol compared this corrupting process to giving birth to a child. "You have a child; perhaps it will be evil." Emitait would punish those who abused the power given to them.27 Those witches, motivated by jealousy or lust, attacked their neighbors by bringing them diseases or by consuming their souls. They might have used "knives of the night" or other weapons visible only to people who had special eyes to see in the spiritual world.

When witches attacked, they carried off the victim's soul, leaving him or her like a husk of rice with no substance or strength to sustain life. Gradually the victim withered away. In some cases witchcraft accusations were made during the period of listlessness, before the victim died. Siopama Diedhiou described an attack by a witch who tied a rope around the victim's neck. Then he flew off like a bird carrying away the soul. "Perhaps you think it's the body of someone that you carry. No, you carry the soul. The body will not be able to be carried; it will

26 Maclaud, "Casamance," passim.

27 Interview with Siliungimagne Diatta, Kadjinol-Kandianka, 11/8/78. Interview with Boolai Senghor, Kadjinol-Sergerh, 7/2/78.
be too heavy. You carry the soul.”28 Witches attacked only at night. While their victims slept, witches could enter a house through cracks in the wall, seize the soul, and carry it back to the forest to consume. The soul, which was said to reside in the blood, contained the life force of the individual—without it a person would have no will to live.

Some elders also described a secret society of people who consumed human flesh and gained supernatural powers. Members of this society, the kussanga, were said to utilize the powers of witches (kusaye) to kill their victims and eat their souls. Then after the victims died, the kussanga were said to do what most witches did not; they ate the bodies.29

Diola elders described several differences between kussanga and ordinary witches. While witches were said to eat people, they ate only the soul. The kussanga, however, took this one step further. They ate the soul; then they waited until the victim died and ate the body. Djiremo Sambou claimed that the kussanga’s removal of bodies from the graveyard was not a mundane event: “One cannot see it.” While a disinterment was thought to occur, it too occurred only in the world of the spirit.30 Louis Vincent Thomas agreed that the kussanga’s activities were not confined to the temporal world. “They are capable ... of flying in space, of transforming themselves into animals, to assume terrifying forms, and to destroy by invisible and malevolent devices.” They used these powers to attack the soul and “to devour the most dignified parts of the human being: the liver, the seat of emotion, and the heart, symbol of life and courage.”31 Thomas viewed the kussanga as “a fraternal order of veterans,” but with a sinister purpose. “The kussanga were for a long time the free masons of the lower Casamance, a source of intrigues and plots; always present where needed, but never occupying a visible part in the group. To achieve this, each asaga submits to harsh physical and moral discipline, submitted to a hierarchy that alienates the personality, becoming a docile instrument of execution.”32 Ruling over an inter-village network of


29 Interviews with Sikakucele Diatta, Kadjinol-Kafone, 11/7/78 and 11/30/77; Siopama Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 6/26/78; Djiremo Sambou, Kadjinol-Ebankine, 10/19/78; Indrissa Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 10/20/78.

30 Interview with Djiremo Sambou, Kadjinol-Ebankine, 10/19/78. Interview with Siopama Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 6/26/78.

31 Thomas, Diola, 211.

32 Thomas, Mort, 361.
**kussanga** was a directory of seven individuals and a king. For a people like the Diola who actively opposed authoritarian leadership styles, the **kussanga** represented the inverse of ordinary society.33

While **kusaye** (ordinary witches) tended to operate more on their own, both **kusaye** and **kussanga** were said to hold meetings in isolated places. The witches were said to meet in the forest between Esulalu and Huluf, at a place called Djimoon. There they ate their meat and partied.34 “The **kusaye**, they would take their bodies and eat them in the forest ... Djimoon.” This is done at night. “They say that they kill people ... perhaps it is true.... We cannot know ... it occurs at night.”35 Two of Kadjinol’s elders claimed that only people with special “eyes” could “see” the witches at their meeting place.36 **Kussanga** were said to meet at a marshy place called Djirem, though it was often claimed as a meeting place for witches. **Kussanga** were said to come from as far away as Dakar and may have included Europeans, Wolof, and Serer. As a person approached Djirem, he may have found bottles of perfume, tables, chairs, cooking, or bowls—all symbols of European wealth and prestige. Recently, it has been said that the **kussanga** have automobiles in this marshy meeting place, but only those with “eyes” can see them.37

While accusations against witches were a common occurrence among the Diola, accusations against the **kussanga** were extremely rare. Witchcraft accusations continued into the period of my field research.38 To the best of my knowledge, accusations against **kussanga** have not been made since the trials of the


34 Interview with Siopama Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 8/10/78.

35 Interview with Antoine Houmandrissah Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 2/16/78. See also Group Discussion with Elizabeth Sambou and Dionsal Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 7/1/78.

36 Group Discussions with Elizabeth Sambou and Dionsal Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 7/1/78; Siopama Diedhiou and Berthe Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 8/10/78. Interview with Sika-kucele Diatta, Kadjinol-Kafone, 3/17/78.


38 A witch-finder was invited to the township of Mlomp as recently as 1979.
1920s, nor do they appear to have been made regularly before that time. Witchcraft accusations have a corrosive effect on community solidarity and harmony. Because witchcraft involves the nocturnal activities of the souls of apparently sleeping people, even a husband or wife may not know whether the other is a witch. When the waves of accusations begin, after several deaths in the same quarter or during a period of general troubles, spouses and neighbors can no longer rely on each other's support.39

Witchcraft accusations were based on four sources: dreams, spirit shrine–administered tests, tests by outsiders, and by confessions. People known as ahoonk were said to be able to detect witches by "seeing in the night," through dreams in which they witnessed the activities of witches. These people had the same power as witches, but they refused to take the lives of others. Their ability to "see" and to travel in the night, allowed them to warn relatives and neighbors, but it also made them vulnerable to attack: "If you have strength like them, they will want to seize you."40 The ahoonk would claim that he saw acts of witchcraft, the eating of people, or, if not wishing to expose his powers, that a friend told him of such acts.

The priests of certain spirit shrines administered tests in which a spirit seized the guilty witch from a group of suspects. Within the area known as Esulalu, where I conducted most of my field research, three shrines were most involved: Hutendookai, the boekine (spirit shrine) of the township council, which sometimes heard evidence and sometimes administered a poison ordeal;41 Gilaithe, a blacksmith shrine where all suspects drank consecrated palm wine; and Coeyi, the shrine of the priest-king, which also used consecrated palm wine.42 In each

39 Interview with Dionsal Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 10/19/78. Barry Hallen found that people he interviewed among the Yoruba of Nigeria also stressed the difficulty of knowing who was a witch. See Barry Hallen, "Witches as Superior Intellects: Challenging a Cross-Cultural Superstition," in George C. Bond and Diane M. Ciekawy, eds., Witchcraft Dialogues: Anthropological and Philosophical Exchanges (Athens, Ohio, 2001), 86–92.

40 Interview with Boolai Senghor, Kadjinol-Sergerh, 10/7/78. Elizabeth Sambou cites a case of two ahoonk who exposed witches, but who were driven to madness by the enraged witches. Interview with Elizabeth Sambou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 1/7/78. Interviews with Siopama Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 6/26/78; Terence Galandiou Diof Sambou, Kadjinol-Ebankine, 7/2/78.

41 Interview with Kapooeh Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 7/28/78. For a discussion of Hutendookai's role in neighboring Bandial, see Francis G. Snyder, "Legal Innovation and Social Disorganization in a Peasant Community: A Senegalese Village Police," Africa 48 (1976).

42 Group Discussion with Antoine Houmandrissah Diedhiou and Kuadadge Diatta, Kadjinol-Kafone, 2/16/78. Interview with Kapooeh Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 7/28/78.
case, group consumption of the wine would bring illness or even death to the guilty party. For example, a witch who denied it at the Gilaite shrine would be stricken with leprosy. These shrines, as well as others, were well known for their ability to protect people against witches, through blessings or special medicines.43

Occasionally, strangers from neighboring areas came into Diola areas to administer witchcraft tests. Their use of talii, a local poison, was banned by the French at the beginning of the twentieth century. Other tests involved mixing medicines in food or palm wine and giving it to all the suspects. Guilty parties fell ill or acted in such strange ways that they were readily identifiable. Oral testimony of past successes provided witch finders with the authority to perform the rituals.44

A final way of discovering witchcraft was through an act of confession. When people fell gravely ill or during a dangerous event, such as childbirth, they would confess any wrongdoing that could place them at risk. In the case of witchcraft, confessions were frequently based on dreams in which the person killed someone, usually a relative or a neighbor, or wished them harm. While psychologists would interpret this as repressed desires and antagonisms, many Diola saw this as real. "Dreams are more powerful than 'eyes'..... If you kill someone in a dream ... it is finished. He will not be cured."45 The act of confession allowed the process of ritual purification and sacrifice to begin and exposed and weakened the confessing witch's hidden power of destruction. Ritual purification also permitted the guilty party, shorn of his destructive power, to be reintegrated into the community.

While Diola concepts of witchcraft were held to be of critical importance, Diola recognized the possibility that accusations could arise out of personal vendettas or jealousy. These accusations were often described as "politique" with the strong implication of dishonest and self-serving motives.46 Because it was so difficult to know for certain who had committed crimes of the spirit world, Diola

43 They include Enac, Gilaite, Ehugna, and the Houle. Interviews with Kapooeh Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 7/28/78; Assinway Sambou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 2/2/78; Sooti Diatta, Samatit, 12/21/78.

44 Interviews with Assinway Sambou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 2/2/78; Dionsal Diedhiou and Elizabeth Sambou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 7/1/78; Siopama Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 3/28/78; Moolaye Bassin, Kadjinol-Ebankine, 3/21/78.

45 Interview with Boolai Senghor, Kadjinol-Sergerh, 7/10/78.

46 Interviews with Indrissa Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 10/10/78; Landing Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 12/27/78; Dadu Aowa Sambou, Kadjinol-Kagnao, 4/17/75.
were reluctant to impose severe penalties against witches. They left such punishments to the forces that inhabit the spirit world or to the supreme being, Emitai, who consigned those who had been witches in this life to an after-life as solitary phantoms.

In most cases I learned about, the Diola imposed no sanctions against a witch; though in some of the worst cases, the accused forfeited all his rice paddies. Usually punishment had two aspects: social ostracism and spiritual sanctions. People avoided suspected witches, thereby depriving them of political influence, the opportunity to earn money or rice through the sale of fish or palm wine, and social ties within their villages. Gradually, the uproar would die down and the accused would reenter the community. The second part of the punishment was left to Emitai and the spirit shrines. While alive, witches could be attacked by a host of maladies sent by the spirit shrines. Once dead, they received the Diola equivalent of hell fire and brimstone; they became phantoms destined to wander the forests, continually attacked by hyenas and mosquitos, until they were sufficiently punished and could be reincarnated.

In October 1926 a young Diola man named Diabone confessed that he had eaten human flesh and had been initiated into the secret society of the *kussanga*. This case began the series of *kussanga* trials that swept the south shore of the Casamance River. It was by far the prosecution's strongest case, not so much because of the number of witnesses, but because all the defendants confessed. Diabone claimed that he had been forced to eat human flesh on five different occasions. The first two times he ate meat, he claims that he did not know it was human flesh. After the second eating, he asked his provider, a man named Sidaimbone: "He told me that I had become a *kussanga* like him and that the meat I had eaten twice was human flesh and if I denounced him he would kill me by his own hand." On several occasions, Diabone was taken to participate in *kussanga* meetings where he ate human flesh and engaged in sexual relations with a leprous woman. In Diola communities, where lepers were expelled, this was an absolute abomination—equally as grave as the eating of human flesh. All his testimony was confirmed by the fourteen defendants, including Sidaimbone, who initiated him, and Angotch, the leper who had sex with him. She was the only woman accused of being a member of the *kussanga* society, in these proceedings. All

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47 Interview with Siopama Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 3/28/78.

48 Interviews with Siopama Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 4/19/78; Boolai Senghor, Kadjinol-Sergerh, 7/10/78; Kapooeh Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 10/26/78.

49 ANS, Ziguinchor, "Tribunal" 47, 1924–1926.
fourteen were convicted and sentenced to from five to twenty years of prison, a period of exile, and a substantial fine. Given the horror of the alleged crime, the punishment seems relatively light.\(^\text{50}\)

I did not conduct extensive interviews in Oukout, a township where these incidents were said to have taken place. Thus, I am forced to rely on the trial transcript and interviews about *kussanga* from the neighboring area of Esululu. Despite the strong evidence, there are several loose strands. One question is why Diabone ate the meat without inquiring about its type. Gifts of human flesh presented as animal meat were said to be a common means of recruiting *kussanga*.\(^\text{51}\)

Because of Diola fears of *kussanga*, they will not consume meat without knowing its source.\(^\text{52}\) A more grizzly problem was Diabone’s testimony that the consumed corpse was of a man who had been dead for several years. In a hot climate where burial does not involve embalming, there would not be any flesh to remove from a corpse so long interred. Other testimony about the *kussanga* suggests that bodies were disinterred and eaten with forty-eight hours, not several years. Another question involves the leniency of Oukout toward an admitted *kussanga* and the absence of any village-initiated punishments of the other thirteen.

The most puzzling problem is why the fourteen confessed. All accounts of the *kussanga*, including Diabone’s, stress the need for secrecy under penalty of death.\(^\text{53}\) Had they refused to confess, they would have had only three witnesses against them: Diabone, his father, and the province chief, Benjamin Diatta. Diabone’s testimony, by itself, would not have been enough to gain a conviction, but Benjamin’s confirmation after a “thorough” investigation gave it needed legitimacy.\(^\text{54}\)

\(^{\text{50}}\) Ibid.


\(^{\text{52}}\) One of the defendants from Mlomp-Kadjifolong, Marikoli described his refusal to eat strange meat: “I had a friend.... One day he brought home a piece of human flesh.... Because I was not at home, he hung the packet in my house and having met me in the village of Mlomp, he informed me. I did not touch that meat, which I then gave to one named Guimpètê, who confessed afterwards. When the *Kussanga* learned of this, they came to my home and, in my presence, they took my wife and killed her soul. Shortly, thereafter, she died.” Testimony of Marikoli in ANS Ziguinchor, “Tribunal,” 19, 1927.


\(^{\text{54}}\) Several informants suggested that Diabone was not a credible witness and that his illness had psychologically affected him: “It broke him in the mind.” He also contradicted himself. Inter-
entirely possible that he urged them to confess in order to avoid a more severe penalty, execution.

Other arrests of Diola *kussanga* were made in the months following the Oukout trial. Benjamin Diatta was encouraged to continue his investigation in order to eliminate *kussanga* from the lower Casamance. French officials believed that they had uncovered:

This large sect, called by the name of "Boussang" which had a presence in all of the principal villages of the cantons of Brin-Seleki, Floups, Pointe Saint-Georges, Essygnes, Bayottes, and even in Djougouttes on the right bank of the Casamance..... The discovery of this vast organization that spreads so much terror, whose character is absolutely secret, the arrest of its chiefs and its influential members, had the effect in all of the country of a great retreat that is not without [the effect of] increasing our authority and our prestige.

The French saw this as an opportunity to discredit traditional religious leaders and strengthen their own authority. It appears that Benjamin Diatta and his canton chiefs saw similar opportunities.

Shortly after the arrests at Oukout, Diatta summoned all the canton and village chiefs to Oussouye. "After a long palaver, he asked the chiefs to denounce the guilty ... each of them designated the eaters of the dead that he knew." Benjamin worked with local chiefs to prepare lists of *kussanga*: "He came and asked which people are witches (*kusaye*) at your place." Soldiers were sent to the homes of people whose names had been written down. The troops surrounded the house, seized the accused, bound them in rope, and took them off. However,
some people suggested that Diatta was willing to overlook some names on his list: "Some paid him. Benjamin let them go."59

Most of the people bringing accusations against alleged kussanga fell into three groups: canton or village chiefs, friends of these officials, and veterans of the First World War. Together they formed the core of the pro-French element in the region. In looking back on the trials, most informants suggest that this group made conscious efforts to extend their influence and weaken the opposition. "Each chief removed people. If his spirit did not like you, he removed you."60 "A chief did not like one; that is who is a witch (asaye)."61

Both of the canton chiefs most involved in the kussanga trials, Paul Djiboudjié Sambou and Bakuwal, were men of relatively low rank, but who spoke French. Named to their posts only two years earlier, they were anxious to extend and solidify their positions. Paul Djiboudjié was a carpenter in Dakar before being named canton chief in his home district. All the descriptions of him emphasize his height, his strength, and the ease with which he intimidated people: "They were afraid of him, like they were afraid of God."62 Paul was well known for insisting on drinking palm wine at all the traditional shrines, including the exclusively female fertility shrine of Ehugna. He also forced people in his canton to send their children to Christian catechism.63 He was eventually removed from office for incompetence, drunkenness, and corruption.64 Like Diatta, he provided lists of kussangas, but would remove the names of those who paid him "Satan’s money."65 Working closely with him were the village chiefs whom Paul appointed as his assistants.

The role of World War I veterans is clearest in the second kussanga trial at Oukout. The trial centered around the theft of a ritual vase called "Guilambadje, stolen some time before from the fetish ‘oufolol,’ and under the name Dyiguimeu,

59 Interviews with Antoine Houmandriessah Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 2/16/78; Gregoire Diatta, Mlomp-Kadjifolong, 3/9/78.
60 Interview with Moolaye Bassin, Kadjinol-Ebankine, 3/21/78.
61 Interview with Diremo Sambou, Kadjinol-Ebankine, 10/19/78.
62 Interview with Gregoire Diatta, Mlomp-Kadjifolong, 12/12/78.
63 Robert M. Baum, "The Emergence of a Diola Christianity," Africa 90 (1990), 386.
64 Calendrier Historique, 1929, Archives de Sous-Prefecture de Loudia-Ouloff.
65 Interview with Antoine Houmandriessah Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 10/18/78. Paul’s death at an early age, preceded by blindness, was often mentioned in elders’ accounts as punishment for his excesses as canton chief.
guarantees the immunity of all its adepts." This vase was said to be covered with human skin. Benjamin Diatta testified that a kussanga named Assine Badiat offered to reveal the location of the vase, but died before he was able to do so. In this case, Sikantobeh and his brother received a confession from their cousin that he was a guardian of the vase and a member of the kussanga. Sikantobeth and two other veterans of the First World War organized a group to search for the vase. "For a long time, we war veterans searched for Guilambadje. We had scoured all corners of the forest." They did not find it; nor was it ever located by the French.

While Diatta established a motive for the killing of Assine Badiat, the desire to silence a highly placed informer, neither he nor any other witness testified about the actual murder. They testified about their search for the vase and Assine Badiat's decision to reveal its location. While several witnesses asserted that Badiat was killed, they did not reveal the identities of the killers or how they did it. The only testimony about Assine's death was a description of a dream his brother had on the night of Assine's death. In the dream Assine asked his brother: "If you learn that I have died this night, take two cattle and a goat and sacrifice them to our family shrine, Hupila." All six defendants pleaded not guilty, but were convicted and sentenced to death for murder.

This second trial at Oukout was the first in which the events came to light through investigations by Benjamin Diatta and his allies, the village and canton chiefs and veterans, rather than through confessions or ritual accusations more closely associated with Diola traditions. Since the defendants refused to plead guilty or testify against themselves, Diatta was forced to gather evidence from those people who would. The limited testimony that he gathered bears little apparent relationship to the severity of the punishment. Furthermore, testimony focused on the use of the vase of Guilambadje at a spirit shrine (boekine) called Dyigemeu, located in the forest near Oussouye. This is an actual boekine, but it has nothing to do with kussanga. It is a family shrine associated with the Koonjaen, the indigenous inhabitants of the Oussouye area, conquered by people now


67 Ibid. This does not accord with my own experience of Diola potters or Diola ritual. I have never seen a vase made for ritual or ordinary activity that was made by a Diola potter.

68 Interview with Teté Diadihou, Ziguinchor, 8/5/78. Teté was a long-time interpreter for the French and also served as a local administrator. In this trial he served as the interpreter.

69 This was an essential part of a Diola elder's funeral. ANS Ziguinchor, "Tribunal," 51, 1927.
known as Diola in the late seventeenth century. Because of their spiritual status as "owners of the soil," they retained control of the office of the priest-king (oeyi), as well as the shrine controlled by the Manga family of the village of Kolobone. Its rituals were held at night because of Diola opposition to a strictly Koonjaen cult. Thus, this second trial appears to have been an attack on the Koonjaen, whose religious influence rests firmly on the side of tradition and resistance to French rule.70

This case marks the beginning of a clear pattern of politically motivated accusations. Central to this and subsequent trials was the desire to weaken the opponents of the French and to strengthen the power of the canton chiefs. In subsequent cases, many of the accused were members of the families who controlled the major spirit shrines of the townships. At Kagnout, arrests included the future priest-king of the community. At Kadjinol and Mlomp, members of the families that controlled important rain shrines (Cayinte), war shrines (Cabai), blacksmith shrines (Gilaite), as well as a son of a priest-king were among those arrested.71

This trial also began a pattern of introducing testimony from dreams as factual evidence, for the second-degree tribunals.

Most subsequent trials occurred in two cantons of the Lower Casamance, Brin-Seleki and Pointe Saint-Georges, in 1927 and 1928. I will focus my discussion on the trials in the latter canton, which corresponds to Esulalu, the area of my primary fieldwork. In these trials two French officials, André Morel and Emilien Darand, presided over the proceedings. Assisting the second-degree tribunal presidents as a Diola-French interpreter was a Muslim Wolof named Mamadou N’diaye. The local assessors, who were supposed to share a cultural tradition with the defendants, included a Muslim Serer named Goumba N’daw and a Christian of Bainounk or Diola origin (he is listed as both). No adherents of Diola religion were included. These same people presided over all the kussanga trials in the canton. Furthermore, the trials were short. Trials of thirteen defendants from Kadjinol and eight defendants from Mlomp-Haer were completed in one day. On the following day, Emilien Darand finished three trials involving thirty-five defendants. There was little time for a thorough examination of witnesses or

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70 See Baum, Shrines of the Slave Trade, Chaps. 3 and 4.
71 A majority of these priestly families are of Koonjaen origin. Interviews with Bernard Ellibah Sambou, Kagnout-Ebrouwaye, 10/13/78; Boolai Senghor, Kadjinol-Sergerh, 7/10/78; Indrissa Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 10/20/78; Antoine Houmandrissah Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 10/18/78.
defendants. In short, none of the judicial safeguards provided for in the "Arrêté du 22 mai, 1924" were utilized.\textsuperscript{72}

In November 1927, thirteen men from the township of Kadjinol were tried as \textit{kussanga}. They ranged in age from twenty-nine to sixty-six. The primary prosecution witnesses were Paul Djiboudjiè Sambou and the village chiefs of Kadjinol, who "designated the cannibals that they knew."\textsuperscript{73} Altogether, there were nine witnesses, including the various chiefs and the local catechist. All thirteen were convicted, but three of the cases were reversed on appeal. Evidence in the Kadjinol trials was primarily hearsay or irrelevant. Only two witnesses claimed to have seen the defendants disinter a corpse and they only testified about six of the accused. No one asked the witnesses what they were doing in the graveyard in the middle of the night nor was there any suggestion that the witnesses might have traveled there in their dreams. Paul Djiboudjiè Sambou's contribution to the trial was to talk about a man who was not on trial, but who had tried to enlist Paul in the \textit{kussanga}.

Some of the testimony was about confessions given by the accused to priests of the spirit shrines. Soomboutin's testimony against Sibékassick is the clearest example:

Sibékassick and I are about the same age. A long time ago, fifteen or twenty years ago, he fell from a palm tree that he was tapping for palm wine. He went and confessed to a chief fetisher who is now deceased, Guitaba, and declared that he believed he had fallen because he had eaten human flesh. Guitaba followed by making his confession public, as custom demands, to warn people to be careful around Sibékassick. I was fifteen or twenty then, but I never forgot Guitaba's declaration. Since then, I have heard nothing said about Sibékassick and I do not know if he continued to eat human flesh. It is probable that he did not stop, since whether one enters the \textit{kussanga} voluntarily or by force it costs one's life to leave it.\textsuperscript{74}

No mention was made of any activities by Sibékassick in the last fifteen or twenty years. Why would the case be brought to community attention and prosecuted? Why would testimony of a man who could not remember whether he was

\textsuperscript{72} Only Morel is remembered in Esulalu. In the recollections of the trials, he is usually referred to as Maubehl. He was nicknamed "Fire."

\textsuperscript{73} ANS Ziguinchor, "Tribunal," 14, 1927.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
fifteen or twenty at the time, about the public announcement of a confession that he did not witness, be admissible in a court of law? Fortunately for Sibékassick, the higher court, the Chambre d'Homologation, reversed Emilien Darand and ordered the defendant released.

Eight of the thirteen defendants admitted having eaten human flesh, but only one admitted being present for the eating of the cadaver for which they were charged. Two others admitted eating human flesh on several occasions, but insisted that they had confessed to traditional priests and abandoned it. The other five admitted eating human flesh only once, when they were still boys. Pendabeane's description of his one experience of "cannibalism" may help to explain the experience.

I am not exactly a kussanga. I admit having eaten human flesh, but I only ate it once and I was quite young then. I was about fifteen or sixteen. One day, my uncle, Ebousangou, called me into his house and gave me meat to eat. I was sure it was human flesh because I was very ill and thought I would die. That is why I told my father that my uncle had given me meat at his home. He [my father] took me to Bourondala, the late king of the Kadjinol fetishers, for me to confess. After that confession, I have never started it again.75

It is important to note that he recognized human flesh by virtue of the fact that he became violently ill, not by the taste of the meat. Given the fact that meat spoils rapidly in a tropical environment, he probably had a strong bout of food poisoning. This illness was what he believed to be a punishment for eating human flesh.

There appears to be a pattern of confessions about eating human flesh during adolescence. In most of the accounts, teenage boys were given the meat by their fathers or by their uncles, not by peers. This was the age when boys began to join the men in harvesting palm wine during the dry season and were initiated into some of the more restrictive cults of Diola religion. It was also the age when boys thought about having their own rice paddies and granaries and saving up rice and money to get married. Given the difficulties that boys had in securing this independence and the opposition of their elders, these accusations may represent dreams of vengeance in which they retaliate against authoritarian adults by humiliating them. They may also represent real fears of the powers of their elders.

75 Testimony of Pendabeane. The case against three men from Mlomp-Djibetene was quite similar. See the testimony of Mouldoutoume of Mlomp-Dijecomole, who testified to having eaten with a group of people near Samatit. Afterwards, he became violently ill. Thus he decided that he had eaten human flesh. ANS Ziguinchor, "Tribunal," 18, 1927.
In the case of Attehokat, witnesses described his unpopularity in the village and rumors about his activities as a witch.

Attehokat was not well liked in the village. I heard him say one day in the public meeting place of the village, two or three years ago, that he was so strong that he could cause the death of any person who displeased him. He did not say that he was a kussanga. About fifteen months ago, people in Kadjinol said that a war veteran named “Senegal” found a piece of rotten human flesh in his water jar. Senegal died a few months ago, probably poisoned. Public rumor identified Attehokat and Siloubadjenk as suspects.\(^{76}\)

The testimony against Attehokat fits a pattern of accusing marginal people of witchcraft that is not limited to Africa, but could well include witchcraft trials in seventeenth-century England or Massachusetts. Attehokat was unpopular and was said to be malevolent. Therefore, he was considered a kussanga. He was convicted and sentenced to ten years in prison.\(^{77}\)

In examining the cases of the Kadjinol defendants, it becomes clear that the notion of acceptable evidence was being stretched. Perhaps it was because of the defendants’ close association with the spirit shrines; perhaps it was because Emilien Darand believed that he was destroying cannibalism in Africa, but he accepted evidence that would not be allowed in a French court of law. A. D. J. McFarlane described the same process in English witchcraft trials.

Witchcraft, because of its secret and almost improvable nature, was considered a crime apart. For this reason, the normal rules of evidence and trial were modified. Suspicion alone was sufficient ground for accusations; it was proper to use children as witnesses; absence from the scene of the crime was no alibi; the victim’s character and events occurring many years before and not in the least related to the particular crime were relevant.\(^{78}\)

In the township of Mlomp, separate trials were held for the accused from each quarter. At Mlomp-Haer, the primary accuser was the village chief. He also happened to be the son of Guitaba, the Diola priest who had heard so many confessions of eating human flesh. The village chief of Haer, Massulo, accused

\(^{76}\) ANS Ziguinchor, “Tribunal,” 14, 1927.


eight men of "eating the dead" and was the only person to testify against them. He claimed that they had confessed to his deceased father, Guitaba. He also claimed that one of the accused had put human flesh in his palm wine. Finally, he said that he saw the accused group carrying a cadaver in the night. "Seeing in the night" usually refers to dreams. Furthermore, the cemetery is located at considerable distance from Haer, in order to keep women from viewing the rites of interment. Few people would wander near there in the night. Five of the defendants admitted having eaten human flesh, but four of them had done so only once, in adolescence. They confessed and did not start again. Adjimale admitted eating several cadavers, and named them but they were incidents that occurred sixteen years before. All of the accused were convicted except Bayli, who brought in the canton chief as a character witness.79

At Etebemaye, six people were arrested and tried as kussanga. Only the village chief and a Diola priest testified against them. Before the trials a meeting had been called for all of Mlomp to deliver its list of kussanga. Most of Etebemaye refused to attend. The village chief, who was a close friend of Paul Djiboudjié Sambou, and his compound attended and accused the people from the rest of the quarter.80 The village chief claimed that he had caught the defendants disinterring a cadaver in 1921. The traditional priest claimed that he or his father had taken their confessions. All of the defendants admitted eating human flesh a long time ago, but said they were no longer involved in it. One of the defendants, a man named Sissalia, had a long history of arrests, including one for striking the priest-king of Mlomp, who had shocked traditionalists by accepting a colonial post as village chief of Djicomo. Sissalia shocked the tribunal by admitting his membership in the kussanga:

As I have already said, I had a previous life. At that time, I lived in Bouketingo, in the Floup canton, and I was a kussanga until I died. But, since my reincarnation, since my new life, I have never eaten the dead. My cousin Ahawa accused me wrongfully of an act that I did not commit.

Sissalia's testimony infuriated Darand, who accused him of mocking the court.81 However, this was not mockery. Sissalia and other adherents of Diola religion accepted the idea of reincarnation. Sissalia was explaining that he could not possibly be a Kussanga precisely because he had been one in a previous life. Many Diola think that people who have sinned so grievously to become phantoms

80 Interview with Paponah Diatta, Mlomp-Etebemaye, 11/13/78.
(ahoelra) are reincarnated after a long period of punishment. Once reincarnated they are capable of violating accepted moral standards, but the vague remembrances of that past life prevent them from repeating the same act (being a kussanga) that made them phantoms after their previous death.\(^{82}\) Taken in a more skeptical light, Sissalia’s testimony may reveal what many of the confessions were: vague remembrances from dreams, fantasies, or, as Sissalia thought, from past lives. Despite their pleas of innocence, all six people were convicted. Seven months later their sentences were reversed by the Chambre d’Homologation.\(^{83}\)

The trials of ten men from Mlomp-Kadjifolong reveal several different aspects of the kussanga allegations. All ten were convicted despite the fact that prosecution witnesses only mentioned two of the defendants. All of the accused denied the specific charges of distinterring children’s corpses, though one man admitted eating adults and poisoning wells. The most complex part of this case involved a man named Marikoli. His cousin Souloubandial testified: “Marikoli is my cousin. One day, he told me, about a year ago, that I would become tired from trying to have children and watching them all die, because if I had others, he would kill them so that he would be able to inherit my rice paddies.”\(^{84}\) If Monica Wilson is correct in saying that “witch beliefs are the standardized nightmares of the group,” then this is Souloubandial’s nightmare.\(^{85}\) A witch, who was also a close relative, was plotting to deprive him of heirs and seize all his rice paddies. This conversation probably occurred in a dream. It is highly unlikely that someone who killed his cousin’s children would admit it to their father. In his account Souloubandial claims: “I did not respond at all to my cousin and I went to find our province chief, Benjamin Diatta, to whom I told the conversation. Benjamin, to whom I did not hide my anger and my desire to kill Marikoli, counselled me to remain calm. Marikoli bragged to everyone that he had done away with my children.”\(^{86}\) While it is highly unlikely that Souloubandial would not respond in such a situation, it is even stranger that he would hold his anger while he walked the 10 kilometers to Benjamin Diatta’s house at Oussouye. Ordinarily, Souloubandial would have taken his problems to the town council shrine of Hutendookai, where

\(^{82}\) For a discussion of Diola concepts of the after-life, see Baum, Shrines of the Slave Trade, Chap. 2.

\(^{83}\) ANS Ziguinchor, “Tribunal,” 16, 1927.

\(^{84}\) Ibid., 19, 1927.


\(^{86}\) ANS Ziguinchor, “Tribunal,” 16, 1927.
he would have formally accused his cousin of being a witch. It is clear from Souloubandial’s account that his conversation occurred in a dream and represented his fears about the causes of his tragic situation.

Another form of jealousy came up in one of the last trials, in June 1928. Emilien Darand had passed on his role as kussanga judge to a new commandant de cercle, Georges Emler. Serondéfou, the priest-king of Mlomp and village chief of Djicimole, accused a man named Sembou of having disinterred a cadaver twenty years earlier. The defendant’s response indicated that there were other forces at work:

That Serondéfou accused me is not surprising because I am the great circumciser of the region and it is my fetish where one kills all the sacrificial pigs. I am the only one who shares the pork with whomever I like. The king of the fetishers was angry one day when I did not give him as much meat as he wanted. He is the one who created this rumor, but I have never been involved in cannibalism. Georges Emler seemed to more of a skeptic than his predecessor. Sembou was acquitted.

Two townships, Samatit and Eloudia, managed to avoid any kussanga trials. Their village chiefs refused to draw up lists of suspects. They told Benjamin Diatta that they did not know the identities of the kussanga among them. Without their cooperation, Benjamin could not develop any cases. Given the absence of arrests in their communities, the people of Eloudia and Samatit seemingly were not bothered by kussanga activity.

Within the canton of Pointe Saint-Georges, 68 people were tried for being Kussanga. All but three of them were found guilty. During the first year of trials, only a man named Bayli, who had the support of Paul Sambou, escaped conviction. While many Diola think that the kussanga exist, many people believed that the French and their allies had not found real kussanga. They believed that the accusations were political rather than based on a genuine knowledge of the secret

87 In Diola religion, livestock were rarely killed outside ritual obligations. Thus, control of shrines where there were frequent sacrifices was highly desirable. ANS Ziguinchor, “Tribunal,” 11, 1928.

88 Interviews with Paponah Diatta, Mlomp-Etebemaye, 11/13/78; Sikarwen Diatta, Eloudia, 12/12/78; Kemeow Diedhiou, Eloudia, 10/26/78; Antoine Houmandrissah Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 2/16/78. Group Discussion with Wuuli Assin, Cyriaque Assin, and Neerikoon Assin, Samatit, 5/11/78.
society. "It was political scheming. You know that political scheming did not begin now."\(^9^9\)

Within the canton every one of the accused was male. While women were seen as important in the kussanga society, they were not seen as important by the village and canton chiefs. Women competed for political and religious power in a separate sphere from men, a sphere less directly involved with colonial authorities or village chiefs. Many of the accused were wealthy men with lots of cattle and rice who controlled important shrines. By accusing them of membership in the kussanga, the village chiefs hoped to lessen their influence and force the redistribution of their wealth. The old ways of doing this, witchcraft accusations, would not be heeded by the French whose support they hoped to gain. The French did not believe in witches and had outlawed witchcraft tests. However, the French did believe that Africans were cannibals and were ready to believe accusations made about a cannibal society. As Evans-Pritchard has stated: Europeans "have a morbid interest in cannibalism and tend to accept almost any tale told to them about it."\(^9^0\) Benjamin Diatta and the local chiefs knew their Europeans well and presented a form of witchcraft accusation as cannibalism.

Hundreds were arrested and convicted, and many died in prison. Those who returned from prison assumed positions of influence in their communities. In fact, the next priest-king of Kagnout was a convict, as were many of the important priests for rain, circumcision, and war shrines. These were not posts for known kussanga.

Most of the evidence introduced at the trials was hearsay. Witnesses claimed that they or their fathers had received the defendants' confessions, given at a boekine twenty years ago. Witnesses would testify that everyone regarded the accused as being a kussanga. Take the case of Pendabeane of Kadjinol, who was asked by the court why everyone took him for a kussanga. His reply was: "I am unaware of it. It is possible that everyone takes me for a kussanga, but that does not mean I am one."\(^9^1\) There were relatively few eyewitnesses and their testimony concerned activities of the night. To the extent that their testimony was given in

\(^9^9\) Interview with Andr\é Bankuul Senghor, Kadjinol-Hassouka, 1/5/78. See also: interviews with Eddi Senghor, Kadjinol-Sergerh, 3/5/78; Boolai Senghor, Kadjinol-Sergerh, 7/10/78; Antoine Houmandriissah Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 3/8/78; Siopama Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 3/28/78; Bernard Ellibah Sambou, Kagnout-Ebrouwaye, 10/13/78.


\(^9^1\) ANS Ziguinchor, "Tribunaux," 14, 1927.
good faith, it seemed to describe activities of the dream world. The carrying of corpses from distant cemeteries for washing in the village wells would have been a difficult task, given the depth of Diola wells. Saltwater marshes were closer to the cemetery and corpse washers would not have had to try to raise and lower corpses along a well shaft. Yet, these accounts fit into the stylized image of the kussanga as the inverse of Diola society and the opponents of the forces of the day. It forms a logical part of a nightmare of the kussanga.

The most troublesome type of evidence was the confession. Many people admitted having eaten human flesh, but only once when they were young. I would suggest that, in many cases, this was food poisoning. However, there were also confessions of specific actions, such as the dragging of a corpse through the forest. Some of these confessions were probably based on dreams. Other confessions reflected concepts of spiritual powers that the Diola associated with the "head" or "eyes." When Diola described people who could cause the death of anyone who displeased them or destroy a village by turning their back on it and chanting a spell, they were talking about powers that operate in the world of spirits. Indrissa Diedhiou described the central misunderstanding of the kussanga trials:

During the trials, the Europeans did not want to believe in witches who ate the body in the forest while it was still in the village. A boy gave a demonstration. He asked for a papaya and placed it on a table. He stepped back a ways and proceeded to eat it without touching it. Then he asked them to feel it. There was nothing under the skin. They opened it and there was nothing there.92

While there is no record of such testimony, it does reflect Diola concepts of the kussanga. Many Diola believe that the kussanga remove bodies from cemeteries and eat them, but those with ordinary vision cannot see them do it. In a parallel case among the Shona, British officials had similar problems with confessions:

In this case the self-confessed witches ... alleged that they had ridden their hyenas to the grave of their victim Chidava and had exhumed the body and eaten a part of it. The body was actually exhumed by the police and later subjected to a post-mortem, but no trace of any interference with the body was found.93

92 Field notes, summary of Interview with Indrissa Diedhiou, Kadjinol-Kafone, 10/20/78.
Confessions concerned actions taken in a world of dreams, of souls travelling in the night and consuming the spiritual bodies of people. Tété Diadhiou, a court interpreter in some of the trials, described the French mistake: "It was not flesh ... it was the soul.... it was the witchcraft that we transformed into cannibalism ... in witchcraft, it is the soul that one eats."\(^{94}\) The French were unaware of Diola concepts of the spiritual world. They took the confessions literally and punished people for crimes committed in a world that the French did not believe was real.

There was another problem with the confessions. A man from Seleki retracted his confession because: "I was wrong to state to Benjamin that I had done this, but I was afraid and I could not say that I was not present at the meals where they ate human flesh."\(^{95}\) In this retraction a defendant claimed that he was intimidated. Tété Diedhiou was more explicit. He claimed that local officials used physical torture to extract confessions. He also stated that local officials withheld food and drink from detainees for as long as three days and then forced them to "drink some salt."\(^{96}\)

In looking back at the many arrests, imprisonments, and deaths caused by the *kussanga* trials, people often say: "They broke this country." They deprived the community of many leaders and created bitter divisions between francophile factions and more traditional and resistant groups within the canton. Diola methods of confronting witches—through accusations, confessions, sacrifice, and reintegration—were at least temporarily replaced. The French and their assistants came into Diola communities, wrote down names, and arrested whomever they wished. Some of those convicted never returned. For 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. To other Diola, it demonstrated the vulnerability of their legal tradition in a colonial society. From then on, Diola law could be superceded by French law. Diola testimony about wrongdoings in the realm of the spirit were heard by the *commandant de cercle* as committed in the material realm. Crimes of the dream world had become crimes of the day.

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\(^{94}\) Interview with Tété Diadhiou, Ziguinchor, 7/7/78.

\(^{95}\) ANS Ziguinchor, "Tribunal," 15, 1927.

\(^{96}\) Interview with Tété Diadhiou, Ziguinchor, 7/7/78.
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