

Fra

Gunvor Simonsen, "*Slave Stories: Gender, Representation, and the Court in the Danish West Indies, 1780s – 1820s*" (PhD. afhandling, februar, 2007) ss. 191-194 (noterne er udeladt her):

...When enslaved Africans and Afro-Caribbeans wanted to pursue and resolve conflicts in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, they could rely on the authority and knowledge of religious-judicial experts who could manipulate spiritual forces. Sometimes these practices would be named Obeah, but this was not always the case. Obeah was primarily used as adjective. It was linked to fetishes and amulets worn on the body or kept in the house for protection. When used for protection, it consisted of small sticks tied together with hair, nails, animal parts, and nuts, often wrapped in a cloth. Obeah could also refer to small bottles containing vegetal extract to be added to food and drink. Both men and women used Obeah, but only men were described as experts, as obeahmen, by slaves in the colonial courts. These experts charged their clients for their services and they were public figures known to the community of enslaved Africans and Afro-Caribbeans in St. Croix. Colonial judges were seldom interested in these spiritual-judicial practices and they only generated fragmented knowledge about them. As we saw in chapter 2, no slaves were charged according to the relevant articles against sorcery in the 1733 slave code in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. When the enslaved woman Felicity in 1782 attempted to argue that she had been exposed to shadow catching by another slave woman who built a miniature gallows "intended for her" the judge did not react.<sup>128</sup> Likewise, the judge did not prosecute the slave woman Aletta for her use of magic when she was discovered to possess two "obia things" provided to her by an African man in 1806. Aletta explained that she wore one of them to cure her from an illness, whereas slave witnesses explained that she had tried to get rid off the housekeeper by way of these objects. The judge did not really care. He concluded that the objects were "innocent" and went on to sentence Aletta for her participation in theft.<sup>129</sup> Despite their overt disinterest, however, colonial officers continued to note – here and there – that enslaved Africans and Afro-Caribbeans occupied themselves with magic. In 1808, a slave was brought to the police office by a manager who caught him performing "conjurations" and "harming some of the negroes". In 1811, the slave Jim was arrested for practicing "magic conjurations", and likewise, in 1822, the enslaved man June was noted as practicing "obia". Two poison trials from the 1780s show how enslaved Africans envisioned the links between supernatural expertise and earthly conflicts. In 1781, slave witnesses told the court about the "conjurations" performed by an obeahman for one of their colleagues, who was charged with poisoning a rum still. Their testimonies came very close to implicating themselves in the plot and they gave detailed descriptions of nightly visits to an obeahman that involved the exchange of money, a small "obia" bottle with a liquid that was later poured into the still, and ingredients for other supernatural practices, namely a dead bat in a brown teapot, a bottle of rum, a chicken egg and a candle. Whether fictitious or not, the story crafted by these slave witnesses suggest that they believed that conflicts could be solved, or rather acted out, by consulting supernatural experts.

193-194:

...This brief sketch, though based on fragmentary evidence, suggests some of the ways in which enslaved Africans in St. Croix may have mobilised memories and practices from their African homelands and moulded them to fit their West Indian present. Enslaved Africans and Afro-Caribbeans

attributed authority to experts that could manipulate spiritual power and they used these experts to pursue and resolve conflicts. It is possible to think about the spiritual-judicial practices as the procedural or institutional frames within which enslaved Africans and Afro-Caribbean defined crimes and interpreted illegitimate behaviour. Together with the nations they provided the social infrastructure, that is, the institutions, the personnel, as well as the metaphors, notions, and categories, within which enslaved Africans could remember judicial narratives and practices concerning marital conflicts from their homeland, mobilise them, and adjust them to their life in St. Croix.

