

# WHERE ARE YOUR PEOPLE'S INSTRUMENTS?

By Glicéria Tupinambá

(translation by Coletivo de Tradutores Berkeley-Brasil)<sup>1</sup>

My journey begins at the National Museum's Quinta da Boa Vista park, when I encountered the *taquaras*. The bamboo trees had already been there for a long time, since before the museum's opening. Prior to becoming the city of Rio de Janeiro, this territory was Tupinambá land.

My village's elders would tell stories about the *taquaras*. As a child I remember Alfredo Catroca (Alfredo José de Menezes, 1912-1994) saying that the *taquara*, or *taboca*, were vital for winning wars. He said that those with access to *taquara* were victorious at war. They could win any battle. They guaranteed that we would have our celebrations, among many other things. The *taquara* is, however, a plant that needs to be planted. She was a symbol of war because whoever stole the seedlings received, in addition to food sovereignty, weapons for war. The *taquara* was manufactured into very sharp objects for cutting. It was an advanced Indigenous technology.

When I arrive at the National Museum each day and walk by the *taquara* path, I'm reminded of Alfredo's words, but I also hear the *taquara*'s music as the wind passes through it. The *taquara* plays music for me. It thus also symbolizes the history of the Tupinambá flutes. The *taquara* reminds me of my search for those flutes, which were taken to Europe and distributed to museums. I searched for those flutes, and guess where I ended up finding them? On the *taquara* path to the National Museum! In European museums they were practically invisibilized and kept inert, out of circulation. They were not shown to us Indigenous Peoples.

In historical terms, we only have fragments through which to construct our identity, culture, and religion. But I also have the voices from my dreams. I get guidance from the *Encantados*, the spirits, with whom I listened to the sound of flutes for eight months. This cosmos guided me, telling me that the flutes existed, that the Tupinambá existed. I first heard the flutes calling to me in the United States. I was visiting the Penn Museum at

the invitation of anthropologist Daniela Alarcon. I was accompanied by the curator and the archivist of the collection. They directed me to a section of stored objects of Indigenous Peoples from Mato Grosso do Sul up to the Amazons. The opportunity to learn more about Indigenous artifacts is always valuable. So when they told me there was nothing of Tupinambá origin in the museum, I told them I would nonetheless like to see what they had of my kin. When they started opening the magical drawers, guess what appeared before our very eyes? Feathered art, art made of beads, of weaved textile, of cotton, of cotton seeds ... they had all of this in storage.

Suddenly, they opened a drawer with some flutes made out of bone. The bones were from various animals, ranging from chickens to jaguars. Amidst the flutes, I touched one that was made out of deer bone and had three holes in it. And at that very moment, as I touched the flute, a voice asked me, "Where are your people's instruments?" I replied: That's right! My people do have instruments. Where are they? That was the best question anyone asked me. Where are my people's instruments? I kept thinking about it as I continued my trip.

I head home to Serra do Padeiro in the state of Bahia. When I get to my house my son Ory asks me for a flute. "Mom, I want a flute, ok?" A flute! We were able to get a recorder from Porto Seguro, which a friend bought and gifted to us. When the recorder arrived, Ory said to me: "Mom, I'm going to play a *toré* for you!" Then, he sang and the tide came in. The tide came in, then it went out again. From afar, from very far, I spotted Iara. I laughed! He blew, he sang with the flute. It was incredible.

In June 2022, at the International Museum Conference in Rio de Janeiro, various museums came together to discuss their challenges, and how to improve their collections and their public engagement. At the conference I met Brisa Flow, an artist and researcher of Indigenous music. She appeared like the wind: she arrived, she spoke,

1. Derek Allen, Luiza Bastos Lages, Mônica Carvalho Gimenes, Gabriel Lesser, Ana Claudia Lopes, Isaac McQuinn, and Liam G. Seeley.

and she left. I looked for her the next day because I really wanted to chat about Tupinambá flutes. She told me that in order to recover my ancestral music, I would need to look for the instruments my ancestors used. Brisa recommended I look for my ancestral instruments because recorders sound different than flutes. While most people don't notice those differences, it matters a lot to those who play traditional songs. In order to recover those songs, I had to start by finding traditional flutes.

When I got home, Daniela Alarcon showed me Amy Bueno's 2018 article "Their Treasures are the Feathers of Birds': Tupinambá Featherwork and the Image of America." (Bueno 2018) The article had a story about the expropriation of a Tupinambá cloak, the 'Copenhagen' Cloak, that had been sold. In that story, I found an account of a ritual in which women emerged from their ocos wearing cloaks. There were six women in cloaks who danced and sang, playing flutes made out of the shin bones of their fallen enemies. Bones? Flutes? The Tupinambá flute called to me again! The flute asked me where my people's instruments were.

At that moment, I finally understood. I did the math. They were human bones. Bones that don't decompose over time. Bones that don't rot. So the instruments do exist, just like the rocks. They had to be somewhere. I began to call upon many people with access to various museums, in search of the bone flutes used by the Tupinambá. For, before, they had told me that there weren't any human-bone flutes in museums. The anthropologist Renata Velante, however, had found flutes belonging to the Maori people that were made of human bones. I thought that if Maori flutes were being kept there, the next ones to appear would be the flutes of my people! I didn't want to give up. The flutes began to play loudly in my ear, to make their buzzing sound. This went on for eight months, until I would travel again.

In Salvador, during the production of the exhibition — *Magnetizations, in the Healing of the World* (Cañizares Gallery, 2022) — I met with some important people in the field of Anthropology. Many of them have access to information that could perhaps help me in the search for the Tupinambá flutes. While they didn't have the exact information, they encouraged me to continue searching and wished me a good journey. I

boarded a plane for Copenhagen in September of 2022.

The first thing I told the curator of the Ethnographic Collection, Mille Gabriel, and the researcher who did the translation, Astrid Kieffer, was that I was in search of the flutes. This was even before arriving at the National Museum of Copenhagen, as I was leaving the airport toward the metro. "There is something, a sound, bursting my ears. I am in search of a flute, a Tupinambá flute that is made of the shin bone of a fallen enemy. And if it is made of human bone, it exists. And it is here"— I affirmed, in a string of madness. I had certainty that the flute was somewhere on that soil. She responded to me: "Be calm, it's okay! That flute really exists, and it is here! I won't be able to bring you to it, but I will show you a photo."

For me, an image says a lot. Images have a language, they are texts and they speak to me. I can resignify them. I live on Tupinambá land, where I grew up and where I experience life with the natural environment. Looking at an image facilitates understanding where in the land it might belong. On the day after my arrival to Copenhagen, before seeing the photo of the flute, a rainbow appeared in the sky. We were in a taxi heading to the museum and the rainbow was there, enveloping us.

The rainbow strongly marks the place of women to be able to play the flutes. Alfredo crafted and played taboca flutes. He played, applied the wax, and created all the perforations. And I would stay and watch, still just a child, because I wanted to learn how to make and play them. I wanted to play flute and he said: "You can't play flute! You can't learn to make the flute! You can't because you're a woman." But I wanted to play the flute. "How then can I learn?", I asked. "Will you teach me how to play flute?" And Alfredo offered me one condition: "You have to pass beneath the rainbow. When you pass under the rainbow, you will be able to play the flute." That's it? I would do it.

The rainbow is an Encantado. He is playful, he drinks water, he plays on top of houses, he throws sand, and we play with him. When we are children, we play with the rainbow. We run after him as he moves away and appears in the strength of the water. I used to play with the rainbow a lot. The children of our land had that contact, that connection with this Encantado that is the

rainbow. In the perspective of most people, this Encantado is associated with mourning. It's very common for people to say that the Encantado is someone who died and became enchanted. But that's not the case. You see him, you touch him, you try to catch the rainbow, and he plays with you. He is with you. But when children go to school, that magic ends. School will say that the rainbow is the reflection of the sun and the water, and that the particles reflect the colors. They go and disenchant the rainbow. They'll say that the rainbow doesn't exist and that he is an optical illusion. I think that's very cruel, a great perversion, because for us, Tupinambá, the rainbow is the Encantado. And the Encantado is. The *Caipora* is. Did someone die and become Caipora? No! The Caipora is. Did someone die to become a rainbow? No. The rainbow is. His role is to play with us. The role of the Caipora is to take care of the animals, to trick us, and if uncared for, she likes to steal a child to raise in the forest. We know the limit and place of each one. For each moment, for each place, we have an Encantado in action. The Encantado arises with the creation of the world. When a rainbow arose in Copenhagen he appeared in order to authorize me to see the flutes. It was, for me, permission, despite my having wanted to remain a woman. The rainbow is the Encantado that is everywhere, in the whole world. It is not exclusive to our land or to the Serra do Padeiro.

One day, when I got to the river to wash clothes, the rainbow arrived to drink water. When we look in the distance, we know where the rainbow is drinking water. When I hung the clothes to dry in the sun, the rainbow came to drink water and I was thinking: do I or do I not pass beneath him? And my decision was to collect the clothes, and to take the washbasin. I decided that I would be a woman! I wouldn't play the flute. I went home and the rainbow disappeared. I carry with me the mark of that decision to not pass under the rainbow. To be able to play the flute, I had to be a man, but I didn't want to transform myself. I am a woman. While in the car in Copenhagen, I remember this scene, and the rainbow stays with us during the whole trip. When I get out of the car and into the Museum's storage, the rainbow goes away. He was once again present in my encounter with the flute, even if it was through a photo of the flute. This made a lot of sense to me. In the photograph the curator showed me,

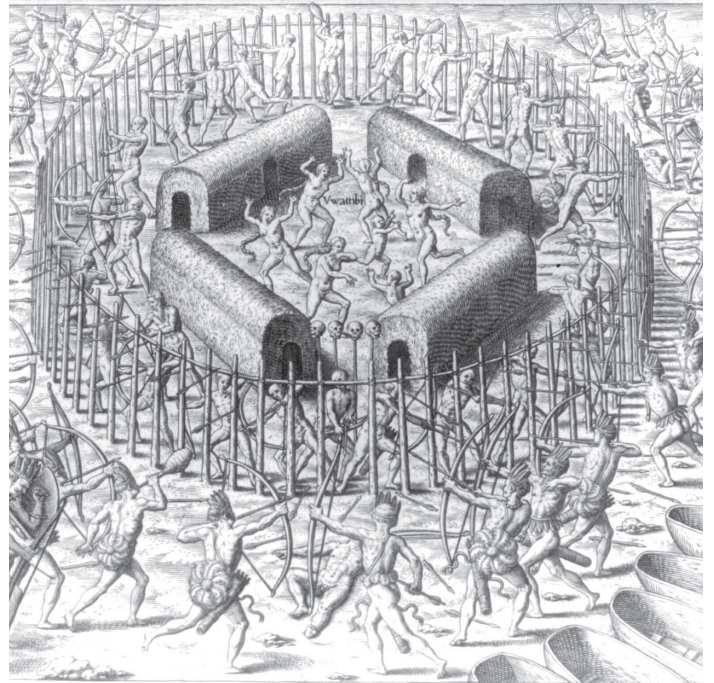
the flute is a bone pendant. I sent the photo to many of the people with whom I had been in conversation before this trip in order to show them that the flute really exists, and that what I had been hearing was not a void sound, but a call of an ancestor who needed to be found and who is inside the museum.

I was not only introduced to bone flutes; I was also introduced to the trumpets. There were five trumpets registered in the same catalog of the King's collection. The trumpets bring us to the warrior women. The catalog says that the trumpets were taken from the Amazon women, during a time in which the colonizers were in our Northeast region. They hadn't yet reached the Amazon. When the authors speak of these women, they highlight features of the Amazon women from the Greek context, rather than from an Indigenous one. Greece was the reference for their studies. Countering official narratives, I started to investigate the traces of the trumpets and of the flutes in these images. Where is there information about the Tupinambás? And where are these trumpets? Where do they show up in the images? How did they go unnoticed by scholars? I think about how these images that portray the time of invasion are engravings done on European soil, by people who never had access to the actual trumpets, which means that some of these drawings are probably inaccurate and not true to reality. When I saw some TV images about the war between the Tupinambá and the Tupiniquim, I noticed the sound. Rafael Freitas da Silva, in the book *Arariboia: The Indigenous Person Who Changed Brazilian History* (Freitas 2022), describes the trumpet as having a shell. The book is a biography of Arariboia and talks a bit about the war between the Tupiniquim and the Tupinambá, including the role of the French in this configuration. And there were the sounds of the trumpets.

On another recent trip, in May 2023, I flew to the Netherlands to identify Tupinambá objects at the Tropenmuseum, The Museum of the Tropics, and I personally encountered the trumpet. But before I arrived in Amsterdam, I went home to Serra do Padeiro. The Tupinambá snare drums, among other instruments, appear in some woodcuts from 1505. The snare drums, in these drawings, were being played with drumsticks. But history does not relate the snare drums to Indigenous culture: history connects percussion

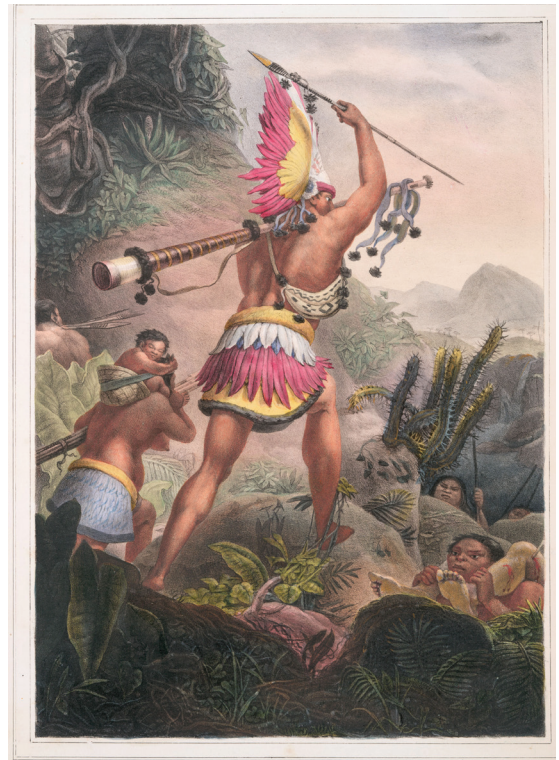
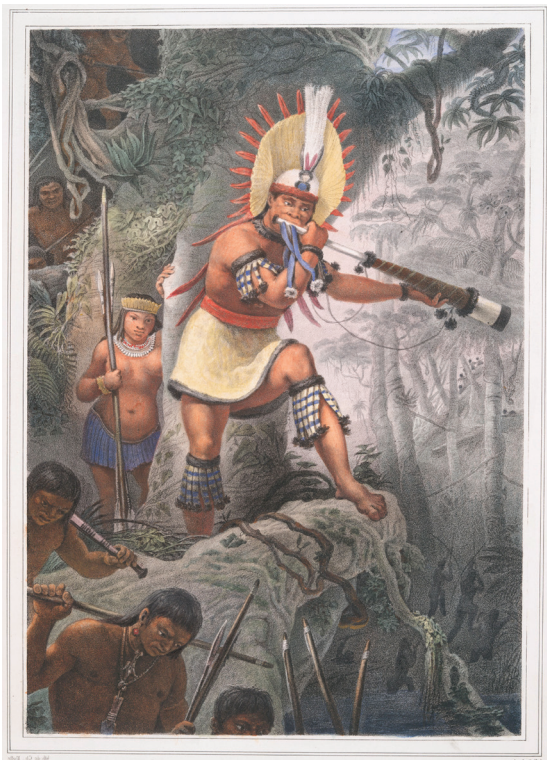


to African peoples. At home, I asked my dad and mom how the old instruments were made. They said they were made out of wood, that the flutes had two pieces that were separated and then connected perfectly, so that the sides looked like they had never been apart. Utter perfection. And when I stand in front of the flute, be it in Copenhagen or Amsterdam, I see the opening that my mom had spoken about. It was incredible to see that. The flutes were made just as my mom



had told me. The wood was jacarandá.

The jacarandá wood is perforated and has the following drawings: on top, the parrot and below, the jaguar. On the back, there is a carving of a man wearing a jaguar hood, eating an animal. We can see a paw, and the paintings surrounding the jaguar's eyes. This trumpet is well drawn and carved, full of details. A very delicate work. I find out that this trumpet is part of the Copenhagen collection. But there are six trumpets, because



it takes six to make a musical note, right? Six trumpets are played individually in the ritual described in Freitas da Silva's book. I search in the texts for the way the instruments work, their ritual functions. And the rainbow allowed me to find five of the six flutes, clues to elaborate on the narrative. I need to get to know the flutes to complete the story.

Another source is historic illustrations. It is through the images in the engravings that I find the Indigenous people. In the image, one of them is walking away and the other is playing the instrument. That instrument has the same perforation as the trumpet I saw in the photos in Copenhagen. The two images converse, saying that *that* is a Tupinambá instrument.

When were the Tupinambá instruments taken from Brazil? When and where did the expropriation take place? They appropriated our instruments, treating them as exotic, rare objects that will no longer exist and that need to be kept in the museum. But the museum labels don't say anything. There are five flutes in the Copenhagen museum and one flute in the Maurício de Nassau collection.

Nassau gave the King of Denmark (1609-1670) a gift in order to get a favor in an exchange of political interests. This history is told in Mariana Françaço's book *From Olinda to Holland* (Françaço 2014), which describes how the trumpets ended up in the Netherlands, amidst the distribution of the Cabinet of Curiosities. Many of these Indigenous objects were part of a distribution network within European kingdoms and were used to leverage political influence. The ancestral Indigenous objects were used as currency. This is how one of the six flutes leaves Copenhagen, becomes separated from the ensemble, and returns to Brazil.

The approach I have been establishing throughout this investigation involves a sensible listening, that I begin as one plays the flute. "Where are your people's instruments?" Yes, where are they? Where can we find them? What kind of care? How to care? How can we establish this relationship, in which we face the challenge of having even a minimal say in our own cultural heritage?

Tupi flute, Copenhagen, Nationalmuseet Etnografisk Samling, Ehb28, human bone, 18 cm. Photo: Amy J. Buono.



*Paludanus: Seis tipos de trombetas, todas diferentes. Six kinds of trumpets, all of them different from each other.*

*The third is made of dark wood and is used by Amazonian women who head to war, upon which is a demon, close to 4 lengths.*

*1710 Gottorp: An Indian Strike/10m of wood.*

*1775: A peculiar wooden machine, hollow like a trumpet in the center and tapering towards a pointed end, consisting of two parts joined with split reeds, upon a deformed idolatrous image ornamented with some ivory, a long yellowish cylinder emerges from its head, the cylinder being firmly held together with narrow linen cords, then joined together two widths of brown wood, from which it is pierced. Presumably the same is a fetish or Black idol.*

*Litt.: Zerries 1977, pp. 77-89.*

*EHb28 18 cm*

*F10jte, menneskeknogle Brasilien*

*1617Paludanus, no. 219-221 [pág. 46]: Dure fistulre ex Humanis Brachjis convechtis*

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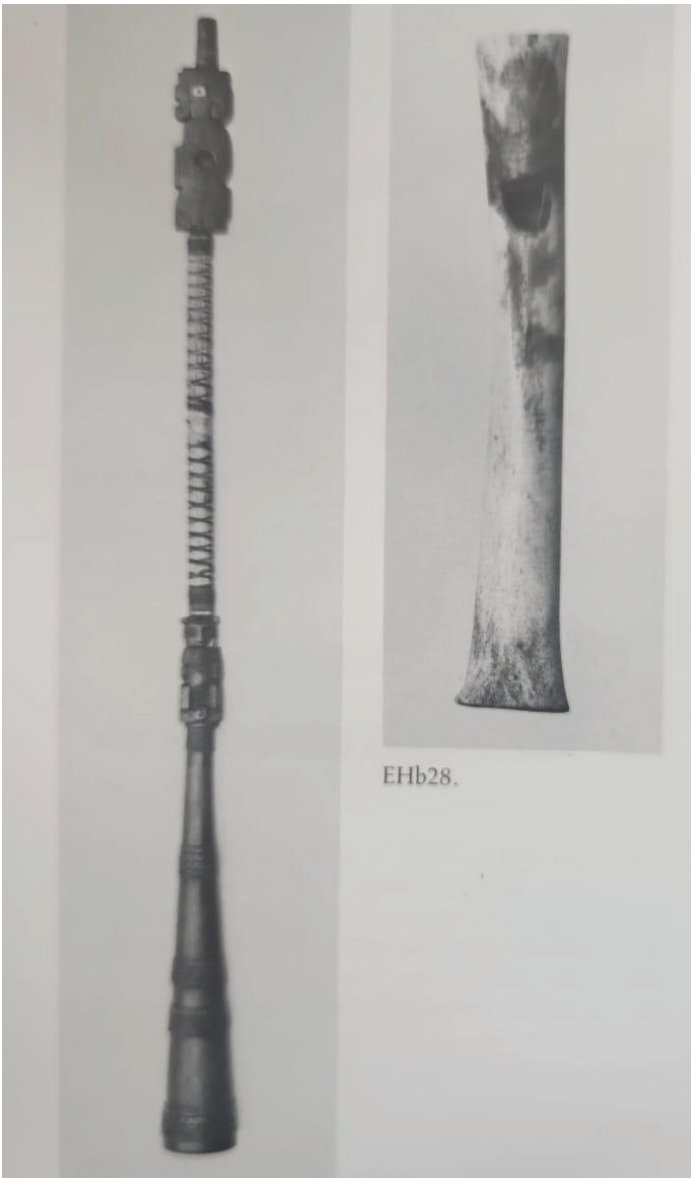
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### Musical Instruments

*Both the flute and the bottle gourd shaker are common in the tropical Americas. The flute is used in the profane as much as in ceremonial occasions. The bottle gourd shaker is mainly associated with the shaman. The trumpet is less common and many times carries a ritual significance.*

*19 EHb28.EGc18. EGc18 122cm*

*Sideblrest trompete,*

*árvore com udskaren jaguar Brasilien*

*1617 Paludano, n. 212-218, [pág. 46]: Tuber numero sex diferentes: ... Sexta Ligneá Amasoun oblonga cum diaboli effigice una Parta .*

*Wooden trumpet played laterally, with carved jaguar in Brazil, 1617*

