



ANTHROPOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Podcast Transcript

Travelling Artefacts: Sanpula Surinam Drums

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ZAINABU JALLO: So, Alexander Burst, what insights can a Surinamese drum provide about its craftsmanship and the cultural legacy it holds?

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ALEXANDER BURST: To answer the question, a first approach is to look at the drum itself, which in Surinam, among other names, is called Sanpula or Sambula. It is stretched over a wooden frame on two sides with painted white boar peccary skin, and it's played with a mallet. The creator or creators must therefore be skilled in working with wood and leather. In addition, they must understand the meaning of symbols and know how to tune the drum for rituals.

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A glance at the inventory card shows that in the 1950s and 1960s, the manufacture of these drums was reserved for men. They owned the drum as an individual ceremonial possession and exclusively played them. So, we could say that the individual and cultural knowledge of their creators is inscribed in the drum.

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In terms of cultural legacy, it is also interesting to note that there are two similar drums preserved in the collection of the Museum der Kulturen in Basel. On their ways to the Museum, one was attributed to an Afro-Surinamese Maroon community. The other to an indigenous community, the Kalina on the Marowina River, the border between French Guayana and Surinam. In the past, depending on the perspective of researchers, the drums were described as originating in West Africa or even in Europe.



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Today, we could say that they are one example of the shared cultural practices of some Maroon-Kalina communities in Surinam, whose ideas and material forms of expression have developed dynamically through interactions in the same biodiverse environment during the last centuries.

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According to Kalina informants, in their mourning rituals, the Zambula drum plays an important role. During the first sequences of these rituals, men sing with their drums in one voice, while women later use rattles and sing their corresponding songs.