

“Die schwarze Venus aus Rio de Janeiro”: notes on race, nationality, class, gender, and sexuality in an artistic career between Brazil and Germany*

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1 INTRODUCTION

Then came Mylena, from Brazil [...] who has body measurements worthy of being contemplated and a story worthy of being listened. She came to Germany many years ago when she caused a scandal at home: when she was young, she had been elected Miss Rio de Janeiro. (LÜCKMEIER, 24th of Mar. 1980)¹

“Body measurements worthy of being contemplated” and “a story worthy of being listened to” are two expressions that caught my attention as I browsed into a box of newspaper clippings at the archive of the Schwules Museum Berlin in the Summer of 2019. They are part of a small note about the tour stop of a West-Berliner cabaret in Frankfurt am Main in 1980. The journalist mentions two of the cabaret’s many specialties: dance and striptease. Mylena, who was working with the cast in West Berlin at that time, reinforced the group touring in Frankfurt. Her bodily and biographic attributes certainly amazed the journalist and the audience. After all, she came from a faraway land, Brazil, to Germany many years ago. That same country where she caused a “scandal” by being elected Miss Rio de Janeiro. It is unclear in the excerpt that I use as an epigraph, but what was considered a “scandal” was the fact that Mylena was not cisgender.² Like the journalist and the public, I became interested in her art and life. More than just “worthy of being listened to”, her story, like the stories of many transgender people who lived through Brazil’s dictatorial regime and across borders, must be excavated: such

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an endeavour is in line with this dossier's exercise in re-thinking migration studies by reconsidering the multiple belongings people establish, uphold, and are occasionally denied across borders (SANTOS; PARDUE, 2023).

This article centres on the artistic trajectory and the biographic fragments of Mylena³ de Souza (1945 – c. 1990), a Brazilian black transgender performer who started her career in the night entertainment scene of the mid-1960s Rio de Janeiro. Facing the intensification of the dictatorial repression and searching for new professional prospects, she emigrated to West Berlin in the early 1970s, where she lived and worked until passing away in the late 1980s.

This text is the first effort to analyse a group of documentary sources from Brazil and Germany, in which journalists aroused curiosity, amazement, and desire about Mylena's life as a transgender person, her body and her work as an entertainer. Thus, based on discussions about processes of *belonging* (YUVAL-DAVIS, 2006) and *sexoticization* (SCHAPER et al., 2020), I address regimes of difference and inequality and possibilities of agency (BRAH, 2006), analysing how social markers of difference intersect in the professional itineraries and lives of transgender artists.

The documentary sources concerning Mylena's career evidence interdependencies between *axes of differentiation* of gender, sexuality, race, and nationality: such an intersectional approach allows for a better understanding of the ways in which her body – both in terms of ascriptions and agentic performance – played a role in her professional and personal life (CRENSHAW, 1989; BRAH, 1996; MCCLINTOCK, 2012). Several texts have described her on-stage presence, body, and complexion in a profusion of expressions like “mulata” [mulatto], “boneca” [doll], “escurinha” [darky], “que de homem só tem o nome de batismo” [whose only male thing is the christening name], “cor de chocolate” [chocolate-coloured], “boneca cor de jambo” [jambo-coloured doll], and “schwarze Venus aus Rio de Janeiro” [Black Venus from Rio de Janeiro], coined during her period in Germany. Following ethnographic approaches to *belonging* (SANTOS 2018; SCHÜTZE, 2017; SCHÜTZE; HAB, 2021), I argue that such terms, present in newspapers and advertisements, indicate processes of *belonging* she experienced in her life and artistic career (YUVAL-DAVIS, 2006). In this regard, I take *belonging* as a conceptual tool to reflect upon the forms through which Mylena may have navigated contexts of repression and exoticisation in her career. For Yuval-Davis (2006),

belonging can be an act of self-identification or identification by others, in a stable, contested, or transient way. Even in its most stable ‘primordial’ forms, however, belonging is always a dynamic process, not a reified fixity, which is only a naturalised construction of a particular hegemonic form of power relations (p. 199).

Yuval-Davis's analytical framework for research about belonging proposes a differentiation between three interrelated analytical levels. The first, *social location*, concerns the positionality of categories of differentiation in a particular grid of power relations, which are not constructed upon a single power axis of differentiation (p. 199). *Social locations* are also situational and depend on the historical and political context to be analysed (p. 201). The second level of analysis, on *identifications and emotional attachments*, takes identities as narratives that individuals create about themselves or that are forced upon them, that relate to others' perceptions about belonging to a grouping or collectivity (pp. 202-203). The last level of analysis, *ethical and political values*, distinguishes between those who can and those who cannot belong to a specific collective (pp. 203-204).

From this analytical perspective, I suggest that the aforementioned expressions placed her in a *social location* of exotic and erotic other. As the newspapers and advertisements demonstrate, Mylena's public image conjoined processes of exotic and erotic *identifications* that gave her singularity. As I will present further, such identifications also marginalised her, contrasting the *ethical and political values* of the contexts she lived. Furthermore, this conjunction of eroticism and exoticism resonates with what Schaper et al. (2020) conceptualised as *sexotic*:

With the term 'sexotic', we point to the intersection between processes of sexualisation and exoticisation. We thus foreground processes of exoticisation that build on alleged differences in the sexual drive, attitudes towards sexuality and sexual behavior, which construct them as the origin and determinant of the exotic quality. At the same time, we place special emphasis on processes of sexualisation that constructs the 'exotic' as sexually attractive, desirable and stimulating. This dimension of sexotization entails, for example, the sexual fetishization of a certain skin color or images of the beach as a space that facilitates passionate sex. The term *sexotic* thus serves to expose the sexual quality commonly associated with the exotic and the exotic quality associated with sex. (p. 115).

As the sources consulted demonstrate, Mylena was perceived and produced as someone whose image crossed gender identity, complexion, origin, and artistic performance, thus embodying the *sexotic*, both on and off-stage, in Brazil and West Germany. As Schaper et al. (2020) demonstrate: "The media does not only represent knowledge and power relations, but it also produces and reproduces, stabilizes and destabilizes both. The media is thus crucial in all practices of sexotization and its communication (p. 119)." Based on what Schaper et al. propose, I regard the documentary sources as producing and reproducing norms about gender, sexuality, race and nationality. Moreover, they also fostered desire and abjection towards her (JESUS, 2015).

The data consulted for this article was extracted from media clippings, advertisements, and other documentary sources from Brazil and Germany.⁴ I conducted documentary research between 2019 and 2022 at the Schwules Museum Archive in Berlin, the Brazilian Digital Newspaper Collection⁵ and the Facebook page Cabaret Chez Nous Berlin.⁶ I want to stress that the search for more information about Mylena's career in Brazil would not be possible without the help of Suzy Parker, Yeda Brown, Aloma Divina and Paulo Vitor Guedes de Souza.⁷ Additionally, I have resorted to information from three interviews conducted between February and April 2021 with artists that met Mylena or worked in places she previously worked.⁸ Several pieces of information are still missing, making this text an incomplete mosaic of fragments about her life and career. I have not found a specific mention of her date of birth, only about the year she was born. I have not found a register of the date she passed away nor her burial place, even though the interlocutors consulted have been unanimous about the cause.⁹ Another noteworthy aspect of the sources concerns the lack of Mylena's opinion about the facts of her own life. There is only one document in which a journalist quoted her indirectly, limited to a single sentence. Apart from something she said to one of the interlocutors, my only possibility of hearing her voice was, literally, through listening to a song she recorded for a disc in 1979.

This article is organised into five sections. The first will briefly contextualise travesti performances in Brazil during the 1950s and 1960s and present Mylena's first steps in the entertainment sector in Rio de Janeiro. The second part will discuss the centrality of Mylena's body. The third will discuss the violence she experienced in Brazil and how she escaped the dictatorial regime. The fourth will present her artistic career in West Germany, where she passed away in the second half of the 1980s. Finally, in the conclusion, I will analyse her trajectory and discuss her forms of belonging.

2 THE BIRTH OF VENUS

Pioneering and challenging *travesti* performances in revue theatre¹⁰ resulted, right in the 1950s, in a successful theatrical and commercial phenomenon, establishing new standards of luxury in Brazilian performing arts. In the Brazilian context of the 1950s and 1960s, the umbrella category *travesti* mixed gender identities observed since the XVI century, sexual orientation, and artistic performances of "female impersonation" or *transformismo* (KULLICK, 1998; GREEN, 2000; LAGATA/BALZER, 2004, 2005; BENEDETTI, 2005; LEITE JR., 2008; SIMPSON, 2013; GUIMARÃES, 2013; LION, 2015; SOLIVA, 2016; TREVISAN, 2018; JESUS, 2019; VARTABEDIAN, 2018; SOUZA, 2022).

One example of such success was Ivaná/Yvanna (1933-1991), the French-Portuguese *transformista* of Walter Pinto's flamboyant revues, who brought another pinch of glamour to the Brazilian revue scene (NUNES, 2015; LION, 2015, 2020). Due to intense censorship by the regime and the expansion of television,

revue theatre declined in the late 1960s (VENEZIANO, 2010a). The genre survived through the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s by embracing the format of the so-called “shows de travesti” [travesti-shows], in which many transgender and gender-non-conforming people performed sketches, singing and dancing acts.

A pioneer generation¹¹ of transgender artists emerged in this milieu during the first years of the Brazilian Cis-hetero-military Dictatorship¹² (1964-1985) and succeeded in establishing themselves in Brazil’s entertainment scene. Despite state and societal repression, violence and economic turmoil, this generation displayed new possibilities of existing otherwise (GREEN, 2000; COLAÇO, 2012; SOLIVA, 2016; VERAS, 2017; VARTABEDIAN, 2018; LOPES, 2018, DUARTE & LOPES, 2021; SOUZA, 2022; VIEIRA, 2023).

Mylena de Souza was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1945. According to Emerald, a septuagenarian Black transgender woman who worked with her in Rio in the 1960s, Mylena was abandoned by her mother in the streets of Estácio, a crowded neighbourhood in downtown Rio known for prostitution, where she grew up raised by sex workers. With help from a friend named Soares, Mylena started to perform in the city. Although I have no information on why Mylena’s mother abandoned her in downtown Rio, the fact that she grew up in the streets shows the gruesome reality of historical exclusion imposed upon transgender people in Brazil. Mylena, like many gender-non-conforming people abandoned at a young age, had little access to formal education and employment.

I have not found information on when she started performing or began her gender affirmation. However, between 1965 and 1966, she participated in the Miss Rio de Janeiro beauty pageant. Two German newspapers mentioned, years later, that she won. Nevertheless, her apparent victory was followed by a scandal after the judges “discovered” the winner was a transgender woman. Emerald recalls that her participation in the contest was a marketing strategy from the organisers to draw the public’s attention.

Despite the rampant transphobia, Mylena’s “scandalous” participation in the pageant may have increased her visibility in the artistic scene. Such success secured her a place in the cast of “Alô Bonecas” at the nightclub Stop in Rio de Janeiro in 1966, as one of the first sources I encountered about her suggests. After some cast members left the show, a note in O Jornal introduced her to the public. The journalist described Mylena as “a cunning mulata [mulatto] ‘boneca’ [doll], who sings and dances like no one else, possessing an authentic female bust”. A photo of Mylena wearing a white evening gown illustrated the note with the caption: “MILENE is the ‘travesti’ that has everything to become one of Stop’s main attractions. [She] is saving money to undertake the delicate procedure” (NEIMA, 25th of Sep. 1966).

Such a description of Mylena as a “cunning mulata doll” at the beginning of her career intertwines two specific *social locations* that would mark her artistic trajectory: the *mulata* and the *boneca*. *Mulata* locates her in the place of a sexualised feminine dark-skinned exoticized body, the symbol of samba and

object of lustful male desires, whereas *boneca* (doll), used as a synonym for *travesti*, highlights the supposed “artificiality” of her body in contrast with what understood as “real” women’s body (read cisgender body). Moreover, as this source described, since Mylena already “possessed” a pair of “authentic” “female” breasts, the “logical” step in the reporter’s mind was undertaking the “delicate procedure” (read gender affirmation surgery). It is noticeable that her *corpo-maravilha* (*marvel-body*) (LEITE JR., 2012), a body transformed by hormonal technologies, was taken as a matter of public interest, echoing the media harassment about the new medical technologies, strongly boasted in Brazil since the 1960s.¹³ Nevertheless, more than just the harassment, Mylena, like other people, became a public face for this phenomenon.

At that time in Brazil, what is today known as hormone replacement therapy (HRT) was experimental and its access was limited (VERAS, 2017). Transgender women had to resort to anti-conceptive drugs for their widespread availability and low cost, often without medical support. A story published on May 1967 on *A Luta Democrática* alarmed the readers that “the feminine hormone is causing great danger to homosexuals”, and its use even claimed one artist’s life. This story alerted that “in Rio and São Paulo there is a large number of homosexuals who, to beautify their bosoms, take hormones, often without medical supervision”. As an example of the “risks”, the story mentions three artists who used hormones to change their bodies. The first artist, Carmem Jones, besides “taking large amounts of hormones to have breasts”, was addicted to methamphetamine and “other drugs” and passed away in Uruguay. Despite having medical assistance, the second artist, Teatro Rival’s Jacqueline Dubois, decided to increase the hormone doses to augment her breasts more rapidly; this resulted in long-lasting health issues and ultimately led her to reduce the dosage. Her example is followed by a more successful one, Mylena’s (HORMÔNIO..., 30th of May 1967):

Milene is another travesti that exhibits himself [sic] at that same theatre, where, making use of the gorgeous bust, performs a striptease, by the way, one of a kind in Brazil. Milene informed our reporters that [she] has good health and despite taking hormones, [she] does it with medical assistance and “feels very woman”. Milene, although hired by the businessman Gomes Leal for that kind of show, also presents at Holiday nightclub and is being considered for travelling to exhibit herself abroad.¹⁴

Despite the sensationalistic tone, the journalist portrays Mylena’s example as somewhat successful. Thanks to the usage of hormones and medical assistance, she could perform a second-to-none striptease thanks to her “gorgeous bust”. Furthermore, she was under contract with a famous Theatre,

and other entrepreneurs were considering hiring her for a tour abroad. However, if the journalists acknowledged her artistic capability and body attributes, they mistrusted her affirmation of feminine identity.

Mylena, as the sources mentioned above suggest, destabilised the societal understanding of the cisgender female body. The conjunction of the exoticism and eroticism of the *mulatas* and the eroticism and exoticism of a transformed body granted her uniqueness. Her gender identity affirmation was in confrontation with the Brazilian sexual and gender norms strongly enforced by the dictatorial regime, especially considering “dangerous” new medical technologies. For the authoritarian Brazilian State, preserving the nation’s “moral values” was a cornerstone in the fight against communism (AFONSO ROCHA; MITIDIERI, 2019; AFONSO ROCHA, 2021). Therefore, in the eyes of the dictatorial regime, gender, and sexual dissidents, regardless of their political activity, personified an internal enemy that should be put under surveillance, scrutinized, censored, repressed, jailed, and exterminated.

3 THE “EGYPTIAN SITUATION”

Mylena was quite active in 1967 when she starred in several shows in Rio: “Bonecas em mini-saias” at Teatro Carlos Gomes, “Vem quente que eu estou fervendo” at Teatro Rival, “Coquetel de bonecas número um” and, at the request of her many admirers, “A Dança dos Sete Venus em Travesti” at the nightclub Drink (OLIVEIRA, 8th of Oct. 1967a). The sources have thoroughly reported her dancing, singing, and striptease abilities, highlighting, as usual, her physical attributes. During Teatro Rival’s show in September, O Jornal reported a situation termed “Egyptian”, in which a spectator was feeling deceived once he refused to believe that Mylena was not cisgender (NEIMA, 3rd of Sep. 1967).

An Egyptian situation occurred the other night at Teatro Rival, which, for more than four months, has been presenting the travesti “show” “Vem Quente que Estou Fervendo.” During the session, there is a “striptease” act in which a travesti makes the classic performance and appears with bare breasts, which are, by the way, pretty much developed. A spectator, who had not believed in the miracle, thought that he was being deceived, swearing that the travesti was really a woman disguised as man to impress. The incredulous man started to shout: “I want to see closely. I am like Saint Thomas”. After the show, he made sure he wanted to go to the travesti’s dressing room (apparently, the name of the travesti is Milene). He went there, shouting that he was Saint Thomas and saw... Milene is really a boy [sic] or hermaphrodite, I do not know. The Saint Thomas of Rival left the place very embarrassed after the fuss.¹⁵

Mylena's seductive and transformed body was defying the spectators' "certainties" regarding gender and sexuality, not only for its ambiguity but also for the fascination it caused. As the journalist narrates, the customer, nicknamed "Saint Thomas", felt deceived because her "pretty much developed" breasts resembled those of a cisgender woman. Like the catholic saint, the customer believed he had to see to believe and broke into the dressing room to "confirm" that Mylena was "a boy" [sic] or a "hermaphrodite" [sic]. The arousal of a heterosexual male desire towards Mylena's body was a matter of both conflict and humour in the newspapers.

Mylena's "chocolate-coloured" "sculptural" body and on-stage presence allured some "respectable couples" of Rio's high society, especially the husbands, to her show at the nightclub Drink (MENEZES, 10th of Sep. 1967). That same year, Mylena signed a contract with the London-based Brazilian entrepreneur Eduardo Casalli. Emerald commented that Casalli was impressed by Mylena's talent and promptly invited her for a tour in London and other European capitals. A Luta Democrática provided some details of the transaction (MACHADO, 30th of Sep. 1967a)

Great luck came to the "travesti" Milène, currently an attraction in the revue "Vem Quente que eu Estou Fervendo". The businessman and industrialist Eduardo Casalli have decided to sponsor Milène's tour in Europe, starting the preparation of work contracts in London's clubs and cabarets. Casalli already invested six million [Cruzeiros] in wardrobe and wigs and is bound to spend another fortune with Dr Ivo Pitanguí in charge of making two minor "repairs" in the travesti. [...] Regarding the contract with the travesti, he informs:

- I am sure Milène will be a gold mine in Europe. He [sic] is the only one capable of embarrassing the stars of Chez Madame Arthur and Nouvelle Eve. His [sic] mannequin bust size 44 and his [sic] female shape, plus his [sic] singing and samba dancing skills, will be a hit. Also, he [sic] is an excellent professional, does not drink, does not smoke, and does not gamble. He [sic] is already in a contract with me and is set to depart in November.¹⁶

As reported, Casalli's investment in Mylena was high, but the businessman was sure the profit margin would compensate. Certain expressions, such as "gold mine" and "capable of embarrassing the stars of Chez Madame Arthur and Nouvelle Eve", suggest that the entrepreneur was sure Mylena would provide very satisfying profits. She was physically and artistically gifted enough to be competitive at an international level. She was bound to artistically outperform the Parisian cabaret stars well-known for their access to up-to-date medical and aesthetic procedures. Another note for the gossip

section of *A Luta Democrática* even suggested Casalli would pay for Mylena's gender affirmation surgery in London. However, it soon clarified that the so-called "British procedure" would be an aesthetical surgery to remove a spot, "safeguarding" the "amusement of travesti" (RENATA, 1st of Oct. 1967). The spectacle of difference in which she was the central piece demanded this "ambiguity", even if there was little effort to comprehend it. In November of that same year, *Diário de Notícias* reported that she had suddenly abandoned her spot at the nightclub Drink (MACHADO, 28th of Nov. 1967b). Everything seemed prepared for her departure.

She may have ended up not touring in Europe under Casalli's contract since no sources describe her performing in London and other cities between November 1967 and March 1968. A note in *A Luta Democrática*, from the 29th of October 1967, reports that the police arrested her at a train station in Campos, a city in the state of Rio de Janeiro. She was detained and taken to a police precinct, where she was later released after an unnamed manager paid the bail (OLIVEIRA, 29th of Oct. 1967b). Being a transgender woman, her "crime" was to wear a miniskirt in a public place, an "offence" to "public decency". In other words, wearing a miniskirt was perceived as an affirmation of her feminine identity, which defied conservative gender norms regulating public spaces or, in Yuval-Davis' (2006) terms, the *ethical and political values* of dictatorial Brazil. For the dictatorial regime's censorship offices, Mylena was allowed to perform her femininity on-stage while dancing or acting, even if that meant "confusing" the male desire towards her. However, for the police, public affirmations of her identity off-stage had to be repressed. The note even mentions another previous detainment for allegedly hustling in São Paulo in the same year.

Arbitrary detentions of transgender people by police forces in Brazil at that time were observed in several capitals, as Simões (2021), who analysed this practice in Salvador, points out. The author argues that such detentions were a form of vigilance over gender norms by police authorities at the service of the dictatorship's Department of Censorship and Public Entertainment, a central institution in enforcing the regime's notions of morality. Under the argument of enforcing prostitution, racketeering, vagrancy and drug trafficking, police departments pre-emptively arrested anyone considered a "suspect" (especially sex and gender dissidents, sex workers and Black persons). In many cases, transgender detainees were beaten, raped, and forced to clean police precincts before being released (COLAÇO, 2012; TREVISAN, 2018; SIMÕES, 2021). Ideas of public decency, morality, and family protection were cornerstones in the national security doctrine that defined the regime's internal enemies. With the Institutional Act Number 5, on the 13th of December 1968, the dictatorial regime reduced Brazilians' already weakened individual freedoms, inaugurating its most violent and repressive phase.

4 THE TRAFFICKING OF *MULATAS*

Mylena, like other transgender people in Brazil, was targeted by the regime's moral discourse and suffered brutal repression. She returned to Rio's stages at the end of March 1968 in "A Máquina de Fazer Doido", a satire about the introduction of television in Brazil written by Stanislaw Ponte-Preta, performed at Carlos Machado's high-end nightclub Fred's (MACHADO, 31st of Mar. 1968). On April 1969, Mylena took part in the cast of the travesti variety show "Eles gostam de usar peruca" in the nightclub Casablanca, in Santos (BANDEIRA JR., 18th of Apr. 1969). In December that same year, she joined Teatro Rival's vaudeville "Alô, Alô, Bonecas" for striptease acts (ALÔ..., 13th of Dec. 1969; PINTO, 15th of Dec. 1969). Although this show ran until April 1970, there is little information on whether she performed the entire season.

Complimented by her talents on stage, Mylena's life off-stage was ever more challenging. Emerald mentioned another episode of police brutality Mylena survived in Rio de Janeiro. Police officers violently dragged her out of a supermarket, beaten and arrested her. Again, the "crime" she committed was affirming her gender identity in public.

[...] she was dragged out of a supermarket. Because she walked around as a woman, she used to live there in the sex-work area in Estacio. They named her Cereja [Cherry]. She had a ponytail; she was gorgeous. She had gorgeous breasts. Because of repression, police officers saw her dressed as a woman, took her by force out of the supermarket and beat her. And they took her to the Police Station. She spent three days in prison, cleaning a Police Station. In those days, my dear, it was like that. (Interview, 05.03.2021).¹⁷

In the eyes of the Brazilian dictatorial regime, her existence as a transgender person off-stage was an act of subversion. The violence towards a Black transgender person like Mylena was hardly an exception back then and remains a practice even after the end of the dictatorial regime in 1985. After suffering this aggression, Emerald recalled that Mylena swore she "would leave the country and never return". By 1970, she might have finally succeeded, as the following case shows.

At the beginning of 1970, Brazil's Federal Police uncovered a human trafficking ring from Rio to cities in West Germany (JAMBETES..., 3rd of Feb. 1970). The scheme, headlined as the "Trafficking of Mulatas", was allegedly headed by a West German citizen, nicknamed Fuchs, his daughter and her husband, and counted on the compliance of Brazilian and Italian businessmen and producers, and even a Brazilian vedette, who denounced the scheme (LENOCÍNIO..., 6th of Feb. 1970).

In early February, before Rio's Carnaval in 1970, twenty-four people were detained when boarding flights to Frankfurt am Main and Paris (GANG..., 4th of Feb. 1970). With promises of significant earnings in US dollars and West German marks, the group lured young dark-skinned cisgender women and *travestis* into joining the casts of nightclubs in West Berlin, Frankfurt, and other West-German cities under questionable and unfavourable contracts (CONTRATO..., 3rd of Feb. 1970). The West German public's interest in such exoticized and eroticized Brazilian bodies seemed to be as considerable as the profit margins from this venture (US\$ 95 MIL..., 7th of Feb. 1970).

More than embodying the conjunction of the exoticism and eroticism of the Black body, *mulatas* are considered symbols of Brazilian national identity, as observed by González (2020). According to González, society objectifies the *mulata* as an authentic, "export-type" product representing the country's image of a tropical sexual paradise. The *mulata* embodies ideas about the country (tropicality, lust, sexual readiness, Carnaval and samba), with an excellent profit margin, even for state-sponsored agencies, like the tourism branch of the Brazilian government in the 1970s (GILLIAM, 1998). In the entertainment business, the *mulata* is also discursively produced as a professional career, excellent for performing in shows. Organising performances of *mulatas* became a profitable activity for entrepreneurs, especially for audiences of wealthy European and US-American tourists. As Correa (1996), Gilliam (1998), Gilliam & Gilliam (1999), Giacomini (2006) and González (2020) point out, this professional aspect, despite the perspective of financial return and an artistic career, highlights the restricted social places for Black women in Brazil. On the one hand, the stories covering the "exodus of *Mulatas*" contained sensationalist details and a nationalistic tone that commodified them as exportation products (INSPETOR..., 6th of Feb. 1970). On the other, they somehow make evident the precarious working conditions, low salaries, and lack of opportunities in dictatorial Brazil, pushing many artists to such a scheme with the promise of earnings in US dollars or West German marks (ÊXODO..., 5th of Feb. 1970).

Fuchs, the head of the scheme, was released some days later due to the intervention of the West-German Embassy (MULATAS..., 7th of Feb. 1970). After charges were dropped by the Minister of Justice, Alfredo Buzaid, the "mulata hunter" returned to West Germany (LIBERTADO..., 12th of Feb. 1970; CAÇADOR..., 16th of Feb. 1970). Apart from the 24 people detained at Galeão International Airport in Rio, Interpol and the Brazilian diplomatic service contacted ten other people in West Germany who were allegedly trafficked under this scheme. Despite the revelations of the seemingly abusive working conditions, some decided to stay in Germany. According to O Globo, a *travesti* "known as Milène" was among the group that decided to stay (FEDERAIS..., 4th of Feb. 1970). Thus, to escape the risks of everyday life as a transgender Black person in Brazil, Mylena may have opted to leave the country under Fuchs' scheme. A note in Diário de Notícias, from the 16th of April 1971, brought fresh and overall more

positive information about Mylena's whereabouts: She was then performing at West Berlin's Chez Nous, a prestigious cabaret (MACHADO, 16th of Apr. 1971). Chez Nous was founded in 1958 on the western side of Berlin as a cocktail bar and soon became renowned for the quality of its shows. The building was small and opulently decorated with velvet curtains, classic furniture, ornaments, and chandeliers.¹⁸ The upscale ambience aimed to provide an experience of the "belle époque travesti". During the division of Berlin (1961-1989), Chez Nous managed to secure a privileged place in the city's vast entertainment sector. The cabaret became a hot spot by offering high-quality performances of comic sketches, impersonation, live singing, and striptease for international tourists visiting the political enclave of West Berlin, prominent West Berliners and West Germans, local and foreign movie stars, singers, and other celebrities. One of its great features was offering a "Weltprogramm" (World Programme) with artists from around the world.¹⁹

In a chronicle published in 1973 in Recife's *Diário de Pernambuco*, the journalist registered his not-so-positive impressions of West Berlin and its daily life. About the nightlife in the city, he seemed surprised to see a "said-to-be" Brazilian *mulato* (the author intentionally misgendered the performer) performing a striptease on the stage of a luxurious nightclub (ALBERTO, 10th of Nov. 1973). He most likely referred to Mylena, the sole Brazilian member of Chez Nous's cast at that period. It is noticeable the suspicion of the journalist about the nationality of the *mulata* striptease.²⁰ With the opportunity to continue working, Mylena most likely strived to settle in West Berlin. In a note in *O Globo*, another journalist reported, with irony, another happening in her life abroad (NAHAS, 6th of Oct. 1974).

Milene, the travesti that imitates Marina Montini, exported to Germany some time ago, dressed man clothes, covered the shaved eyebrows with dark glasses and presented himself [sic] before a judge to marry a German girl to obtain a residence visa in that country, in which his [sic] talent is very much appreciated. The maestro Carlos Eduardo Prates and his wife Haydée were testimonies of this sacrifice for the love of art!²¹

When described as someone "exported to Germany", the journalist barely recognised her agency in the migration, reducing her to the condition of a commodity (JESUS, 2015). Mylena experienced what Sayad (2006) elaborated as the *provisional condition* of migrants, which defines the immigrant as a subject in the country of migration by their capacity to work. Even with the appreciation of her talent by the West German public, the right to stay in that country depended not only on working regularly as a performer but also on marrying a German woman. If her professional activity depended on the femininity of her body, the right to stay in the country and therefore continue working required a gender

performance of masculinity to celebrate a civil union, a “sacrifice for the love of art,” in the words of the journalist. As the following sources will make clear, the facetious remarks about Mylena’s *social locations* and the *sexoticization* of her image were not limited to the Brazilian media.

5 THE SECRET STAR

According to an undated Chez Nous advertising booklet, Mylena worked at Chez Andrés in West Berlin for four years (CHEZ NOUS, n/d). Topaz explained that the same entrepreneurs administered both venues, and the artists usually performed in both places. A few years later, Chez Andrés and their cast seemed to have been absorbed by Chez Nous. Considering the news in Brazilian newspapers about her, it is possible that she worked in both places between 1971 and 1974 and finally joined Chez Nous’ cast in 1975.

The audience wildly applauded Mylena’s striptease acts, often mentioned as the climax of Chez Nous’ shows (SIE HABEN..., 7th of Feb. 1978). Her beauty and vast experience in Brazil gave her a prominent position among the cast. Nevertheless, as a 1978 booklet highlights: “Mylena can do more than just undress, she proves that in our playback show, in which she parodies the world stars Shirley Bassey and the unforgettable Josephine Baker”²² (CHEZ NOUS, 1978). The association with the Welsh singer Shirley Bassey and the USA-born performer Josephine Baker demonstrated Mylena’s artistic range regarding impersonation. Interestingly, the association with Baker, who became famous in France for her “exotic” dance, also situated Mylena as a *sexoticized* artist. A note in Berlin’s *Morgenpost*,²³ from the 1st of August 1977, registering the guests of a gala premiere, mentioned Mylena’s much applauded Carnival performance and impersonation acts (VIEL..., 1st of Aug. 1977). More than a talented striptease and impersonator, Mylena was also a singer, featuring in Chez Nous’ long-play disk “Herren als Damen” [Gentlemen as ladies] from 1979, performing Ary Barroso’s song “Bahia” in Portuguese. Adding a Brazilian touch to the cast, Mylena took part in Chez Nous’ Europe tours in 1978, 1980 and 1983. A note in the local newspaper *Traunsteiner Wochenblatt*, from the 30th of January 1978, highlights her “feminine voice,” alongside transphobic comments about her “unmistakable arms and calves” and a “small part, which is not yet female” (DIE HEEREN..., 30th of Oct. 1978).²⁴ I understand such performances of dancing, singing, impersonation, and striptease as *sexoticized encounters*, mediated by descriptions of her in the newspapers and advertisements. In such encounters, the European audience could grasp the erotic and exotic ambience of a faraway tropical place like Brazil, represented by a *sexoticized* dark-skinned transgender body amid the sexual experimentation context of the 1970s (SCHAPER et al., 2020).

The West German media was also very interested in the conjunction of Mylena’s body and biography since her presence on- and off-stage seemed to

question the *ethical and political values* of that time. Her participation, and possible victory, in a pageant in Rio de Janeiro in the mid-1960s, added another level of exoticism to her public persona, especially considering the striptease act. A journalist reporting Chez Nous' new show for the German newspaper Der Abend wrote:

The secret star of the new show is Mylena, whose bosom could envy many seasoned women. At the age of 34, she is the second youngest of the ensemble. She came to Germany many years ago when she caused a scandal at home: as a young, she had been elected Miss Rio de Janeiro (LÜCKMEIER, 23rd of Aug. 1979).²⁵

Mylena's body attributes were as mesmerizing as her biography, according to the note, singularizing her as one of the secret stars of the cast. On the 24th of March 1980, this time for Frankfurter Allgemeine, the same journalist reported Chez Nous' tour in the city, repeating the same information about her participation in a beauty pageant in Rio, which I use as the epigraph for this text (LÜCKMEIER, 24th of Mar. 1980). Again, body and biography are combined in a depiction that aims to arouse the spectators' curiosity. For Chez Nous' 25-year anniversary European tour, the following text accompanied the black and white picture displaying her breasts (image 1).

The black Venus from Rio de Janeiro offers every evening a skilful and, above all, elegant striptease on the floor, which makes many men's hearts beat faster.

The Neue Rhein Zeitung in Düsseldorf wrote about Mylena: Mylena dropped the covers

When Mylena undressed on the stage of the New Mass, the audience held their breath. Nevertheless, those who had expected attributes of male beauty at the strip in the travesti presentation felt misled: The "lady", who undressed at the show from cabaret "Chez Nous", presented bare breasts. No wonder some viewers were irritated and no longer knew their way around the genders. (CHEZ NOUS, 1983).²⁶

Image 1 – Photo of Mylena for Chez Nous' Programme of the 7th European Tour, 1983.



No information about the author, 1983.

On that tour, she performed a striptease act and an impersonation of Josephine Baker. According to the booklet, she took part in the cast until the 4th of June that year, being replaced by the US artist Duell for filming a television movie (unmentioned in the booklet). After shooting the film, she probably returned to Berlin to join the cast that performed in town during the cabaret's tours. Work in Chez Nous was intense and ran almost the entire year, as explained by Sapphire, another septuagenarian Black transgender woman and dancer who worked there in the 2000s. Until 1986, Mylena was part of the Berlin cast (CHEZ NOUS, 1984, 1985, 1986). The interlocutors I consulted were unsure about her date of

death and place of burial, which presumably happened between 1986 and 1990 in (West) Berlin.²⁷ Nonetheless, they suggested that Mylena passed away due to health complications caused by alcohol abuse.²⁸

Mylena was not the only “Black Venus” within Chez Nous’ cast. At least four other artists were advertised as such; two of them were Brazilian.²⁹ More than a title, “die schwarze Venus aus Rio de Janeiro” was a position among the international cast, which appealed to the public’s curiosity. This epithet uses Roman goddess Venus’s image to symbolise sexuality, attraction, and femininity. Moreover, it seems to draw inspiration not only from the well-known Venus of Milo or Botticelli’s “Birth of Venus” but also from Barthélemy Prieur’s³⁰ “Bather,” a bronze sculpture of a black Venus holding a mirror from the late 16th century. A representation of Black beauty to be contemplated from all sides, inspired by mannerist poems of the 16th century (BLACK..., c2023).

These late-renaissance ideas about the Black Venus collide with symbols of eroticism and exoticism, deeply rooted, as Pelucio (2010) and Leite Jr. (2012, 2014) assert, in the production of difference and hierarchy within European colonialism. It echoes the tragic story of Sartajie/Sarah Baartman (c.1789-1815), who was brought to Europe for human exhibition shows in the first half of the 19th century as the “Hottentot Venus”.³¹ In this sense, “Schwarze Venus” refers not only to Mylena’s complexion but also makes her foreignness to the West German context evident since it connects race, gender, and national origin in the process of othering (EL-TAYEB, 1999, 2011; HARITAWORN 2015). Last, when the “*schwarze Venus*” is qualified as “*aus Rio de Janeiro*” (from Rio de Janeiro), her origin, associated with tropicality, exoticism and sensuality, relates to the dark-skinned feminine body representing eroticism, sexual readiness, and docility. These elements combined produced her as a *sexoticized* subject in this artistic context.

As the “Black Venus from Rio de Janeiro,” Mylena’s *marvel-body* (LEITE JR., 2012) once again produced “uncertainties” about the sexual differences, which awakened desire among the spectators. Moreover, as the sources suggest, her body, especially her breasts, destabilised the societal norms about sexual and gender differences. Her bosom, described as an object of envy by other “seasoned” (cisgender) women, destabilized the social ideas and expectations about female bodies in conservative democratic West Germany, much like they did in conservative dictatorial Brazil. In her striptease performances, the spectators, after seeing her body, were said even to become “irritated” for “no longer” knowing “their way around the genders.” In her dancing performances, the European public could grasp the energy and joy of a Carnival parade in Rio with an “imported” *mulata*. With her voice, when singing in Portuguese, the audience in West Germany could enjoy the melody of foreign rhythms. As a product of overlapping layers of exoticism and eroticism, the epithet of “Black Venus from Rio de Janeiro” synthesised the public image of Mylena as an artist in West Germany and assigned her, for the last time, to a *social location* of eroticism and exoticism.

6 CONCLUSION

Research on Brazilian migrant women in Europe has highlighted the set of racial and national stereotypes that produce them as subjects in countries like Portugal, Spain, Italy, and France (PISCITELLI; ASSIS; OLIVAR, 2011). Among Brazilian women in Germany, stereotypes associated with eroticism and exoticism are present in personal and professional relations, defining limits and creating other possibilities of agency (LIDOLA, 2014, 2011). Studying narratives of Brazilian immigrants in Germany, Feijó (2015) observed the complex production of images of both countries that resorted to common and idealised visions and discourses that position them within German society. Investigating African-Brazilian religious groups in Germany and how culture is objectified, Bahia (2014) observed that “Brazilian bodies have a cultural representation for Germans, who exoticise Brazilians and expect them to use their bodies and senses artistically” (p. 330). In summary, these works demonstrate how nationality, gender, race, class, and body intertwine in the professional itineraries and lives of Brazilian immigrants in Germany. Mylena’s artistic career in Germany, as I demonstrated, was profoundly articulated with the public perception of her body.

The fact that Mylena started her career in a pageant, as a competitor or as part of a marketing strategy, and later in the night entertainment scene shows how Brazilian transgender people have been historically positioned in the labour market. In “Divine Divas” (2017), a documentary about the artistic and personal lives of some members of the first generation of travesti artists in Brazil, Divina Valéria pointed to the intimate relationship between being a singer and cabaret performer and the affirmation of her gender identity. I believe the entertainment sectors of Brazil and West Germany, in which Mylena navigated, had two contradictory senses concerning processes of *belonging*. As the documentary sources suggest, the entertainment sector assigned transgender artists like Mylena to a *social location* of *sexotic* others, whose artistic career and public image are mediated by contracts, entrepreneurs, the media and the audience acclamation. Nonetheless, despite the harassment of the spectators, the transphobic, facetious and ironic descriptions, the censorship and the risk of violence, they were also places where Mylena could affirm her gender identity. Like other transgender artists of her time, Mylena showed other possibilities of existence and carved a place in Brazilian and German societies.

Therefore, pursuing a glamorous career as a star in the entertainment sector was Mylena’s form of occupying a place in a society that responded with prejudice, violence and *sexoticization*. Soliva (2016) points out that it is “from the incorporation of values and senses, especially related to the notion of glamour, that people seen as outside the heterosexual [and I would add cisgender] norm find a place of agency”³² (p. 19). He observes that “Glamour allowed these people to penetrate the norm, endowing them with an ‘exhibition privilege’. In

other words, it constituted a form of visibility management, administrating the stigma associated with moral panics related to non-normative sexualities” (p. 224).³³ In Mylena’s case, glamour was a form of occupying a place as someone outside the cisgender, heterosexual, and racialized norm, as a form of *belonging*. Securing a place in the entertainment market allowed Mylena to be socially recognized, even if partially, and pursue her career in Brazil and abroad. Hence, I argue that for Mylena to conquer a place in Germany as a singular artist, she had to negotiate a set of symbols and stereotypes about her complexion, her body, her gender identity, and her country of origin. The place of *sexotic* to which the public, managers, journalists and authorities submitted Mylena not only put her in a specific *social location* within the scene but also gave her singularity, an *identification*.

Regardless of being in her home country Brazil or as an immigrant in West Germany, Mylena’s career, as narrated by the sources, was crossed by gender, sexuality, race, and nationality markers. Her body assumed a centrality in the media and advertisement narratives as the point at which the *social markers of difference* intersected, delineating her professional and artistic possibilities. The media and the advertisement explored the exoticism of her transgender body by describing her physical attributes as something abject and desirable (JESUS, 2015).

In this process of production of *difference* and *inequality*, present in the texts about her life and art, I wonder about Mylena’s agency. As Alaman & Passamani (2021) demonstrate, “differences, hierarchies and eventual inequalities do not disappear, but are strategically managed in terms of agency (p.14).” Following this proposition, examining forms of agency helps to complexify the scheme of power relations through which Mylena navigated. Understanding the crossings helps us reflect upon the social conditions that allowed a dark-skinned Brazilian transgender woman to emigrate to Europe to work as a performer in the 1970s. However, I also understand that this is hard to assert since none of the documentary sources registered her opinions and points of view about her own life. As seen, the sources described her in the third person, which means that the formulations of Mylena’s agency presented here are an interpretation limited by the empirical data from the sources.

Based on Yuval-Davis’ analytical framework, I argued that Mylena experienced several processes of *belonging* throughout her artistic life. First, the *social locations* the media and the entertainment market placed her, such as *mulata*, *boneca* and “Black Venus”, are positioned along several axes of situational power relations. Moreover, such markers represented opportunities and constraints for her to live and work as a citizen and immigrant and relate to the historical and political contexts of a conservative dictatorial regime and a conservative democratic government. Second, as the sources exacerbated, several *identifications* were imposed upon her. However, she also struggled to reaffirm and reappropriate some identifications, such as her gender identity or

her singularity as a *sexotic* artist. Finally, the *ethical and political values* of the contexts in which she lived have circumscribed her personal and professional possibilities and sometimes resulted in violence, exclusion, and sometimes opportunities.

I believe that the focus on *belonging* was also essential for discussions that arise from biographic fragments since it entangles what Pfaff-Czarnecka (2012) pointed out as a “reversal in the viewing perspective” that “follows the individual dispositions, aspirations and constraints over collective inclusions (p. 49)”. In this sense, Mylena’s incomplete trajectory can contribute to complexifying the understanding of the contexts she lived. As a Black Brazilian transgender woman who grew up on the streets, she survived a cis-hetero-military dictatorial regime and became a star. As a Black transgender Brazilian immigrant, she arrived in challenging conditions in a conservative democratic country where, albeit *sexoticized*, she could perform and live. The life and art of Mylena de Souza encapsulate a transnational queer history: it sheds light on the social context for Black transgender people in Brazil and West Germany in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Furthermore, it is a source of inspiration for fighting against transphobia, racism, and xenophobia.

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NOTES

¹ In the original: So kam denn auch Mylena aus Brasilien, nicht an der Main, die beträchtenswerte Maße und eine hörensweite Geschichte hat. Sie kam vor vielen Jahren nach Deutschland, als sie daheim einen Skandal verursachte: Als Junge war sie zur Miß Rio de Janeiro gewählt worden. (LÜCKMEIER, 24th of Mar. 1980)

² Cisgender refers to someone whose gender assigned at birth corresponds with the gender identity whereas transgender refers to someone whose gender assigned at birth does not correspond with the person’s gender identity (CAVA, 2016). For a critical genealogy of the term see Vergueiro (2018).

³ In Brazil, the artist was known as Milène, with minor variations. In Germany, she became Mylena, as the German sources shows. Mylena was, apparently, her last name. To honour that, I will use this name to refer to her throughout the text, except when reproducing written sources.

⁴ Passages and excerpts from sources in Portuguese and German were freely translated to English by the author. A substantial amount of the sources consulted were published with transphobic tropes. When reproducing them, I have signalled the misuse of masculine pronouns.

⁵ Available at: <http://bndigital.bn.gov.br/hemeroteca-digital/>

⁶ The page collects and publishes photographs and advertising material from Chez Nous and its artists, provided by former employees, artists, and fans. See: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063470201325>.

⁷ I am also particularly grateful to Paulo Vitor Guedes for sharing a documentary source from Mylena's early days in show business.

⁸ All the interlocutors' names are pseudonyms.

⁹ According to an article in *Der Abend* from the 23rd of August 1979, Mylena was 34 years old at that time. This information allowed me to infer her year of birth.

¹⁰ Revue Theatre, also known as Variety Theatre, is a genre of performative art that emerged in France, in the 18th century. The genre arrived in Imperial Brazil, in the beginning of the 19th century and became a beloved form of entertainment at the Empire's capital, Rio de Janeiro (VENEZIANO, 2010a).

¹¹ I follow Duarte and Lopes' (2021) remarks about how these group of artists in the 1960s have formed a first generation of travestis in Brazil due to their investment on assuming an identity beyond the Carnival, in which being *travesti* was commonly seen a transitory state. Duarte and Lopes rightly argue that this generation of artists "dared to make evident and externalize a 'non-adequacy' with the body and the gender image they had of themselves. At that context, they invested in processes of self-determination, through the appropriation of references of femininity (such as those of actresses from the revue theatre, radio singers, vedettes, beauty contest misses or Hollywoodian stars), clothes, accessories, hormone treatments and, later, surgical procedures." (p. 156)

¹² I follow Afonso Rocha & Mitidieri's (2019) and Afonso Rocha's (2021) critiques about the normative aspect in terms of gender and sexuality of the dictatorial regime and how central these norms were to the violent actions carried on by the Brazilian State against sex and gender non-conforming people.

¹³ Brazilian media was elated to report Coccinelle's (1931-2006) daily life after successfully undergoing a gender affirmation procedure in Georges Burou's clinic in Casablanca in 1958. The "Coccinelle effect" has produced neurotic anxiety in media to associate other people with the French vedette's life achievements (FOERSTER, 2012). Despite the exoticising tone of media reports about her, the "Coccinelle effect" helped other transgender people in Brazil to foresee a more tangible existence (SOLIVA, 2016).

¹⁴ In the original: Milene é outro [sic] travesti que se exhibe naquele teatro, onde aproveitando o belo busto, faz strip-tease, aliás único no Brasil. Milene informou à nossa reportagem que tem muita saúde e apesar de tomar hormônios, o faz com prescrição médica e "sente-se muito mulher". Milene, embora contratado [sic] pelo empresário Gomes Leal, para aquele gênero de espetáculo, também apresenta-se na boate Holiday e está sendo cogitada para viajar, a fim de exhibir-se no exterior."

¹⁵ In the original: Situação das mais egípcias aconteceu noite dessas no Teatro Rival, que vem apresentado há mais de quatro meses o "show" de travestis, "Vem Quente que Estou Fervendo". No decorrer da sessão, há um quadro (uma das atrações do espetáculo) de "strip-tease", onde um [sic] travesti faz a clássica encenação e surge de seios a mostra, super-desenvolvidos, por

sinal. Um espectador não acreditou no “milagre”, achou que estava sendo lesado, jurando que o [sic] travesti era, mulher mesmo, passando por homem para impressionar. O incrédulo começou a gritar: - “Quero ver de perto. Sou como São Tomé”. Após o espetáculo fez questão de ir ao camarim do [sic] travesti (parece que o [sic] artista se chama Milene). Foi, tornou a berrar que era São Tomé e viu... o [sic] Milene é mesmo rapaz [sic] ou hermafrodita [sic], sei lá. O São Tomé do Rival saiu muito sem graça com o vexame.

¹⁶ In the original: A sorte grande aconteceu para o [sic] “travesti” Milène, atualmente atração da revista “Vem Quente Que eu Estou Fervendo”. O empresário e industrial Eduardo Casalli resolveu patrocinar a ida de Milène à Europa, começando os contratos de trabalho nos cabarés e clubes de Londres. Casalli já investiu seis milhões em guarda-roupa e perucas e vai gastar mais uma fortuna com o dr. Ivo Pitangui, que será encarregado de fazer duas pequenas “lanternagens” no [sic] “travesti”. Casalli está, praticamente, morando em Londres, onde instala firma de importação-exportação. Sobre o contrato com o [sic] “travesti”, eles nos diz: - Tenho certeza de que Milène será uma mina de ouro na Europa. É o único [sic] capaz de encabular as estrelas do Chez Madame Arthur ou do Nouvelle Eve. O seu busto de manequim 44 e suas formas femininas, mais o seu jeito de cantar e sambar, será um estouro. Além do mais, é excelente profissional, não bebe, não fuma e não joga. Já está sob meu contrato, devendo embarcar em novembro.

¹⁷ In the original: [...] Porque uma vez ela foi posta para fora de um supermercado. Porque ela andava de mulher, e ela vivia aqui na zona, no Estácio. Tanto que o nome dela na época era Cereja. E ela já usava rabo de cavalo, era linda, um busto lindo. E por causa da repressão os policiais viram que ela tava vestida de mulher, tiraram ela a força de dentro do supermercado e deram muita surra nela. E levaram ela presa. Ela ficou três dias presa, limpando uma delegacia. Porque naquela época querido, era assim viu.

¹⁸ Markues Aviv (2021) sensible artistic and archival research provides an excellent overview of Chez Nous’ environment. See “We’re in this together” (2021). Available at: <http://wereinthistgether.de>

¹⁹ As explained by Topaz, a middle-aged white cisgender gay man who started working at Chez Nous in the early 1990s, the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), the German reunification (1990) and a reconfiguration of Berlin’s entertainment scene in the early 1990s impacted the venue. Years later, in 2008, after struggling with the lack of stimuli to preserve the venue as part of the city’s memory, the owners decided to close doors, ending with a 50-year celebration tour.

²⁰ In the original: A vida noturna de Berlim é muito intensa. Para que vocês tenham uma ideia, na parte ocidental funcionam nada menos que 4 mil clubes noturnos, cifra bem expressiva para uma cidade de dois milhões de habitantes. Comparei a um, de muito luxo, que tinha como principal atração o “strip-tease” de um mulato (travesti) que se dizia brasileiro. Nas emissoras de rádio, ouvi algumas músicas brasileiras, samba principalmente. A free translation: [...] Berlin’s nightlife is very intense. So that the readers can have an idea, there are 4 thousand nightclubs in the western part, an expressive figure for a two-million-inhabitant city. I visited one, very luxurious, which had as its main attraction a “striptease” by a mulato [sic] who was said to be Brazilian. On the radio, I heard some Brazilian songs, mainly samba.

²¹ In the original: Milene, o [sic] travesti que imita Marina Montini, exportado [sic] há algum tempo para a Alemanha, vestiu-se de homem, disfarçou as sobrancelhas depiladas com óculos escuros e apresentou-se diante de um juiz de paz, casando-se com uma alemãzinha, para conseguir visto de permanência naquele país, onde seu talento é assaz apreciado. O maestro Carlos Eduardo Prates e sua Haydeé foram testemunhas deste sacrifício de amor à arte!

²² In the original: Daß Mylena noch mehr kann als sich nur auszuziehen, beweist sie in unserer Playback-Show, in der sie die Weltstars Shirley Bassey und die unvergeßliche Josephine Baker parodiert.

²³ SCHWULES MUSEUM. VIEL Prominenz..., Morgenpost. Clipping, 1st of August 1977.

²⁴ In the original: Gelöste Stimmung macht sich am Schluß einer Striptease-Show von Mylana [sic] breit. Mylana [sic], angekündigt als ‚schwarze Venus‘, steht am Schluß nicht ganz ‚ohne‘ da. Mit durchaus weiblicher Stimme, aber doch unverkennbar maskulinen Waden und Armen, erklärt der junge Mann [sic], daß ein ‚winziges Teil‘ noch nicht ganz Frau ist.

²⁵ In the original: Der heimliche Star der neuen Show heißt Mylena, dessen Busen manche gestandene Frau mit Neid erfüllen könnte. Mit 34 Jahren ist sie die zweitjüngste des ensembles. Nach Deutschland kam sie vor vielen Jahren, als sie daheim einen Skandal verursachte: Als Junge war sie zur Miss Rio de Janeiro gewählt worden.

²⁶ In the original: “die schwarze Venus aus Rio de Janeiro, legt jeden Abend einen gekonnten und vor allem eleganten Striptease aufs Parkett, welcher manches Männer-herz höher schlagen läßt. Die Neue Rhein Zeitung in Düsseldorf schrieb über Mylena: Mylena ließ die Hüllen fallen Als Mylena auf der Bühne der Neuen Messe die Hüllen fallen ließ, hielt das Publikum den Atem an. Doch wer beim Strip in der Transvestiten- schau Attribute männlicher Schönheit erwartet hatte, fühlte sich gefoppt: Die „Dame“, die sich beim Auftritt des Cabarets „Chez nous“ auszog, präsentierte blanken Busen. Kein Wunder, wenn mancher Zuschauer irritiert war und sich mit den Geschlechtern nicht mehr auskannte.”

²⁷ Topaz recalled that when he joined the cast, Mylena was already deceased.

²⁸ Emerald and Topaz recalled Mylena passed Away due to alcohol abuse.

²⁹ The other Venuses were Mel Sugar, later known as Angie Stardust (“schwarze Venus aus Puerto Rico”, “schwarze Venus aus USA,” and “schwarze Perle”) and Marlow (“schwarze Venus aus San Francisco/USA”). On a leaflet from 1995, Elaine, another dark-skinned Brazilian transgender artist, became “die schwarze Venus aus Rio de Janeiro.” In 2007, Andrea Brown, a dark-skinned transgender artist and ballerina from the “exotisches Brasilien”, was occupying the place of “die schwarze Venus aus Rio de Janeiro,” even though she was born in São Paulo.

³⁰ The piece is displayed at the Liebieghaus Sculpture Collection in Frankfurt am Main, the authorship is attributed to the French sculptor Barthélemy Prieur (1536/1540-1611) who produced the statuette around 1600 while at service as court sculptor Henry IV of France (BLACK..., c2023). Apparently, another exemplar of this statuette is part of New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art collection of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts. About the authorship. the Met suggests that the piece is “probably Netherlandish” and was produced in the late 16th century or the early 17th century (BATHER..., c2023). The piece from Met’s collection, was previously displayed in Berlin’s Alte Museum, in the exhibition ““Von allen Seiten schön: Bronzen der Renaissance und des Barock,” between December 1995 and January 1996.

³¹ The epithet stems from a simplistic depiction of the Khoisan people’s language (Hottentot) and the erotic drive of European men directed to her body (Venus). The young lady from the Khoisan people was exhibited as an attraction in human zoo shows in London and Paris. Shows presented her as a specimen of an “early stage of humanity” from “Africa’s distant and savage territories,” and visitors could see and touch her genitals. She passed away in Paris at

25, after a short life of ordeal. However, her body was dissected to sustain French scientists' racist theories of white superiority and was exhibited at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris until 2002. That year, post-Apartheid South Africa managed to recover her body and bury her in the former Khoisan territory (Fausto-Sterling, 1995; Rago, 2008; Dias & Belizze, 2020).

³² In the original: Sugiro que foi a partir da incorporação de valores e sentidos, sobretudo relacionados à noção de glamour, que pessoas consideradas fora da norma heterossexual encontram um lugar de agência.

³³ In the original: O glamour permitiu que essas pessoas penetrassem na norma, dotando-as de um "privilégio de exibição". Ou seja: constituiu uma forma de gestão da visibilidade, agenciando o estigma associado aos pânicos morais relacionados às sexualidades não normativas.

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RESUMO

O presente artigo analisa fragmentos da vida e trajetória artística de Mylena de Souza (1945-data desconhecida), uma artista negra e transgênero que estrelou em revistas e boates cariocas na segunda metade da década de 1960. Escapando da violenta perseguição a pessoas dissidentes da cis-hétero-norma levada a cabo pela Ditadura Militar brasileira (1964-1985), Mylena emigrou para a República Federal da Alemanha no início da década de 1970. Após se estabelecer em Berlim Ocidental, Mylena integrou o elenco do prestigioso cabaré Chez Nous (1958-2008), onde trabalhou como cantora, dançarina e artista de strip-tease até seu falecimento na segunda metade da década de 1980. Com base em fontes documentais brasileiras e alemãs e entrevistas em profundidade, observo como Mylena navegou em meio a diferentes regimes de erotismo e exotismo que intersectam sexualidade, gênero, raça e nacionalidade no Brasil e na Alemanha Ocidental. Ademais, sustento que sua vida e carreira artística foram perpassadas por múltiplos processos de pertencimento (*belonging*) e sexotização (*sexoticization*) que nos informam sobre as condições de existência e possibilidades migração de pessoas dissidentes da cis-hétero-norma no Brasil e na Alemanha Ocidental.

Palavras-chave: Gênero e Sexualidade; Interseccionalidade; Migração; Raça e Racismo; Pertencimento

ABSTRACT

This article analyses fragments of the life and artistic trajectory of Mylena de Souza (1945-date unknown), a black and transgender artist who starred in magazines and nightclubs in Rio de Janeiro in the second half of the 1960s. Escaping the violent persecution of people dissenting from the cis-hetero-norm by Brazil's Military Dictatorship (1964-1985), Mylena emigrated to the Federal Republic of Germany in the early 1970s. After settling in West Berlin, Mylena joined the cast of the prestigious cabaret Chez Nous (1958-2008), where she worked as a singer, dancer, and stripteuse until her demise in the second half of the 1980s. Drawing on Brazilian and German documentary sources and in-depth interviews, I observe how Mylena navigated amidst different regimes of eroticism and exoticism that intersect sexuality, gender, race and nationality in Brazil and West Germany. Furthermore, I argue that her life and artistic career were permeated by multiple processes of belonging and exoticization that inform us about the conditions of existence and the possibilities for migration of people dissenting from the cis-hetero-norm in Brazil and West Germany.

Keywords: Gender and Sexuality; Intersectionality; Migration; Race and Racism; Belonging