

The voyaging Venuses: Brazilian travesti, transformista and drag queen artists in the German Travestieshow (1960-today)

In January 1981, *Lampião da Esquina* published a striking cover titled “*Brasil: campeão mundial de travestis*” [Brazil, World Champion of Travestis], featuring eleven travesti artists styled as a football team. The image blended Brazil’s global icons: football and the sensuality of Brazilian women, cisgender and transgender alike. Since the 1960s, Brazilian travestis had sought opportunities in Western Europe, driven by political repression and social challenges under Brazil’s military dictatorship (1964-1985). By the late 1970s, Paris became a major hub for travestis, with venues like Carrousel de Paris and Madame Arthur (Foerster, 2012). However, market saturation and mass deportations followed (Vale, 2013). This research explores an overlooked destination: Germany. Despite cultural and linguistic barriers, Germany offered opportunities for Brazilian travestis, including higher earnings in Deutsche Marks and Euros, and notable performance venues. Its fascination with dark-skinned performers allowed artists to stand out. Motivations to emigrate varied: some fled Brazil’s political repression and economic stagnation during the dictatorship, while others sought artistic growth and new audiences. Germany’s relatively open environment became an important space for their careers.

Objective

- To analyse the role of racial and national stereotypes—alongside those of gender and sexuality—in the career-building processes, life-stories and migration projects of these artists.

Conceptual Framework

- Processes of *sexotization* (Schaeper et al 2020)
- Intersection and co-production of *social markers of difference* like race, class, gender, sexuality and nationality (Crenshaw, 1989; Brah, 1996; El-Tayeb 1999; Maia 2014; González, 2020).
- The fostering of *temporalities, anticipations, transcestrality* and *futurizations* (Halberstam, 2005; Bryant & Knight, 2019; Carvalho, 2021, Barbosa, 2022; Iazzetti, 2023, Gatto, 2024).

Methodology

- Documentary research: advertisements, photographs, videos, and media clippings from Brazilian and German newspapers available at Brazil’s *Hemeroteca Digital* da Biblioteca Nacional, Facebook pages like *Cabaret Chez Nous Berlin* and *Travestie Erinnerungen*, YouTube, and personal collections. (To access videos, images, articles and other materials related to this research check the QR Code below)
- Biographic interviews with three artists.
- Semi-structured interviews with friends and stage partners of the deceased artists, and people involved in preserving these cultural memories.

The first chapter, *Eine Reise um die Welt*, examines the life of Ivaná/Yvana (1933–1991), born to a Portuguese family in Northern France. Trained in classical dance, Yvan Monteiro Damião began performing in Parisian cabarets in the late 1940s. In 1953, Yvan was hired by the Brazilian theatre producer Walter Pinto (1913–1994) and moved to Brazil, adopting the stage name Ivaná. Between 1953 and 1963, Ivaná starred in numerous plays and revues, performed nationwide, and took part in films. Yvan was also a skilled fashion designer who trained in Paris under Robert Pigué (1898–1953) Amid Brazil’s political turmoil, Yvan returned to Europe, settling in West Berlin. By the late 1960s, Ivaná became Yvana at Chez Nous, where they dazzled audiences with performances like *Eine Reise um die Welt*, featuring self-designed costumes, and worked as creative director and choreographer. During their later years, alcoholism and injuries hampered their professional pursuits, and Yvan committed suicide on the 31st of March 1991.

The second chapter, *Die Schwarze Venus aus Rio de Janeiro*, highlights Mylena de Souza (1945–1986–1990), a dark-skinned transgender woman from Rio de Janeiro. Abandoned as a child, Mylena grew up in the streets of Estácio, cared for by sex workers. In 1965, Mylena won a Rio beauty pageant, competing alongside cisgender women, marking her entry into the entertainment scenes of Rio and São Paulo. Her beauty and performances, including striptease and singing acts, garnered media attention. In 1967, she was invited on a European tour, but plans fell through. Sometime later, she suffered police brutality for wearing women’s clothing at a supermarket in Rio. In January 1970, Mylena fled to West Berlin and joined Chez Nous, where she was promoted as *Die Schwarze Venus aus Rio de Janeiro*. German audiences were captivated by her performance of striptease, singing, and impersonation of Black divas. The later years of Mylena were marked by hardship despite her success. Sources suggest that she passed away between 1986 and 1990, most likely because of alcohol abuse.

The third chapter, *Mit Hand und Fuß*, traces the life of Andrea Brown (b. 1949), born Andrea Santos, a transgender performer who began her career in São Paulo in the late 1960s. In the 1970s she performed at venues like Nostro Mondo, Michel, and Medieval, the latter attracting Brazil’s elite. While at Medieval, she joined Ballet Stagium, becoming one of its first transgender students. During the 1970s, Ms. Brown witnessed the arrest and disappearance of several colleagues. In 1980, she immigrated to Munich, shortly after the Oktoberfest Bombing. Explaining her decision to leave Brazil, she said she wanted to do it “Mit Hand und Fuß, alles in seiner Richtigkeit” [With hand and foot, everything done properly]. She embraced the German fascination with Brazilian culture and bodies, enjoying what she called the “fever for brown-skinned people” in the late-1970s–1980s to build a prosperous career as freelancer. Between 2001 and 2008, she worked at Chez Nous. In 2018, Ms Brown retired after a 47-year career in Brazil and Germany, and live comfortably in her flat in Ottobereun.

The fourth chapter, *Lampenschirm heißt auf Brasilianisch*, details the career of Abajur, the drag persona of Sergio Adriano do Nascimento (b. 1970), a versatile actor, performer, writer, painter, producer, makeup artist, and costume designer. Sergio’s artistic talents emerged during childhood, helping in school plays. In the late 1980s, he joined a theatre group in Campina Grande, debuting in the comedy *Machos*, that ran for a decade. His tall stature and Black power haircut earned him the nickname Abajur (lamp shade), which became his drag name. Parallel to theatre, Abajur also performed in street advertisements, becoming well-known in Paraíba. In the late 1990s, Sergio moved to São Paulo, where he won drag contests, performed at clubs, and also worked as a decorator and costume designer. In 2005, Sergio relocated to Düsseldorf to join his husband. There, Abajur became a fixture in the city’s drag scene, winning competitions and performing at venues. During one show, a host remarked that “*Lampenschirm heißt auf Brasilianisch Abajur!*” [Lamp shade means Abajur in Brazilian Portuguese!]. Sergio currently lives in Düsseldorf and works as a makeup artist, actor, director, and costume designer in theatres across North Rhine-Westphalia.

The fifth chapter, *Die Nummer Eins*, details the career of Marcia Pantera (b. 1969), a pioneer of Brazilian drag art. Former volleyball player Carlos Márcio José da Silva created Marcia Pantera in the late 1980s, becoming famous for inventing the *bate-cabelo* [hair-whip] technique, involving rapid wig movements to electronic beats. In the 1990s, Marcia gained prominence as a muse for designer Alexandre Herchcovitch (b. 1971). In the 2000s Marcia struggled with personal losses and drug addiction. With support from loved ones and the resilience of the drag persona, Marcia overcame these struggles in 2009, and since then took part in films and TV. Marcia Pantera made her German debut at the Straßenfest in Cologne in June 2017, where the hosts introduced her with great fanfare: “Sie ist die absolute Nr. Eins der Drag Queen in Brasilien” [She is the absolute number one drag queen in Brazil]. Her long-held dream to audition at Hamburg’s Pulverfaß became reality, earning her immediate acceptance and applause. Marcia Pantera, who lives in São Paulo, often travels to Germany for performances.

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