Afro-Brazilian Women and Gendered Performance in the *teatro de revista* in the Long 1920s

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This article focuses on two Afro-Brazilian women, Rosa Negra and Déo Costa, who performed in the first Brazilian popular theatrical companies that consciously identified as Afro-descendant, the Companhia Negra de Revistas (1926-7) and the Ba-ta-clan Preta (1926-27).[1] It draws on press coverage and the reception of performances by these women, situating them within the wider context of representations of Afro-Brazilian female subjectivity on the popular stage in Brazil since the turn of the century and in relation to transnational Afro-descendant performers such as Josephine Baker and Florence Mills, who enjoyed considerable success in the US and abroad. In addition to press sources, this article analyses a small number of extant revue scripts, including song lyrics and stage directions, to illuminate the engagement of these theatrical companies, and their black female performers, with transnational performance trends and modernist aesthetics in the long 1920s. Furthermore, it seeks to illustrate the assertive cosmopolitanism strategically adopted by these women.

The Companhia Negra de Revistas, founded by the Afro-Brazilian performer and impresario De Chocolat (João Cândido Ferreira) and white Portuguese set designer Jaime Silva, clearly aimed to capitalize on the vogue for "black" performance in Paris, in particular. It was no coincidence, for example, that Josephine Baker's moniker, the "Ebony Venus," was reproduced in Brazil, with the female members of the Companhia Negra de Revistas being billed "ebony goddesses." By October 1926 the Companhia Negra de Revistas had split into two, with De Chocolat and Afro-Brazilian band leader Pixinguinha forming the Ba-ta-clan Preta. This company premiered at São Paulo's Santa Helena Theatre on 17 October 1926 with its Afro-Brazilian female star, Déo Costa, billed as the "Jambo Venus," in a reference to the

dark-skinned Brazilian fruit. This article explores how the racialized performance traditions that travelled to and fro across the Atlantic within circuits of transnational exchange, most notably between New York and Paris, were experienced and re-worked on the popular stages of Rio de Janeiro in the long 1920s by Afro-Brazilian female performers who participated in these two theatrical troupes. In particular, it addresses the following questions: How do we interpret the fact that these women felt obliged to position themselves in relation to a global or imported blackness? And how did they interpret and internalize the politics of their situation and self-presentation? Furthermore, what can these Brazilian examples contribute to discussions of the global political consequences of a transnationalized black performance culture in the inter-war period?

These women negotiated their own racialization not as visitors from another world, or even as 'exotics' within their own culture, but could only gain a voice by tapping into the trans-Atlantic exoticization of the black body. It is thus illuminating to situate them in relation to Afro-American performers in the US during the same period, namely Baker and Mills. Afro-Brazilian performers like Rosa Negra and Déo Costa strategically deployed both their gender and race by engaging with a transnational performance community and trans-Atlantic and inter-American circuits of cultural exchange and by performing a vernacular version of cosmopolitan blackness. This article will illustrate how, in addition to participating in and contributing to the performative celebration of modern, racialized womanhood, Rosa Negra and Déo Costa also put this new vision of black female subjectivity into practice in their everyday lives, defiantly challenging social, gender and class hierarchies, debating the issue of intellectual property in Costa's case and race relations in the case of Rosa Negra. [2]

Rosa Negra

Rosa Negra made her stage debut in the revue *Pirão de Areia* at the Teatro São José in Rio de Janeiro in April 1926 as part of the Companhia das Grandes Revistas.[3] She performed two numbers, "Baiana, n'aime tu?" (the title an example of the mock French incorporated into various Brazilian revue texts in the era) and "Ascendinices" (a reference to her black female counterpart, Ascendina Santos).[4] Her performances met with fulsome praise in the local press, as the following items attest: "tem uma novidade sensacional: a Rosa Negra e as *black-girls*" (Filho 7); "Não esqueçamos o colossal e

espontâneo sucesso de Rosa Negra e suas 'black-girls' que receberam uma grande ovação" (9 Apr. 1926) ("Palcos" 7). She was clearly marketed as one of the main attractions of the revue *Pirão de Areia*, with advertisements drawing attention to her and her "black girls" via the use of upper-case letters.[5] By stressing the sophistication and quality of the production—"a mais deslumbrante montage que já se fez no Brasil. A vitória da graça e do luxo. Na opinião unânime da imprensa" ("Theatro S. José" 8)—she acquired these qualities by association.[6]

The press presented Rosa Negra as a star who had been 'discovered' by Marques Porto, the writer of *Pirão de Areia*, in the Bar Cosmopolita, one of the many *chopps* or beer halls in Rio that hosted variety performance. Typically, a white male mediator played a crucial role in facilitating her show business career, it would seem. Hertzman, in relation to the music industry in Rio in this era, illustrates how an artist's success and visibility were always tied to the actions of white power brokers as well as skin color and audience taste (Hertzman 77). Gender equally presented a major hurdle, with few opportunities for female artists beyond singing or dancing in the early twentieth century (124)[7] and female contributions to Rio's music scene being erased (221).[8] Nevertheless, this article will argue that Rosa Negra, like Déo Costa, surmounted these obstacles, demonstrating an assertion of their individual autonomy that has been hitherto overlooked and attributed only to a handful of male Afro-Brazilian performers.[9]

Rosa Negra's black subjectivity was exoticized in advertisements for her performances. The *Correio da Manhã* newspaper announced on 1 April 1926, for example, "A novidade da sensação da Companhia das Grandes Revistas é a apresentação da 'chansonnière abissínia' Rosa Negra, com as suas 'black girls' e o Charleston Jazz-Band" ("Palcos" 6). This moniker, which combines French sophistication with the African exotic, was extensively used to describe her in the press.[10] For educated Brazilian readers, Abyssinia, the Ethiopian Empire and the supposed seat of the mythical Christian kingdom of Prester John, would have had more refined, exotic associations than, for example, West Africa. She is regularly aligned with transnational black performance, not least the *Revue Nègre*. In a reference to *Pirão de Areia*, the newspaper *O Paiz* wrote: "a *chansonnière* abissínia Rosa Negra imitará Josephina Backer [sic], cantando *couplets* parisienses" (25 Apr. 1926) ("Artes e Artistas" 8) and *A Manhã*, again referring to the Brazilian star as "a 'chansonnière' abissínia," stated that she would perform an "estilização do gênero Josephina

Backer [sic], a 'estrela negra,' criadora do 'Charleston' em Paris" (24 Apr. 1926) ("Nos Theatros" 5).

Rosa Negra continued to be marketed via such associations in the years to follow; when she performed at the Moulin Rouge in São Paulo in November 1929 and at the city's Piolin & Alcibiades circus in 1930 she was billed as the "Josephina Baker brasileira" ("Moulin Rouge" 6; "Circo Piolin & Alcibiades," 21 Jan. 1930, 6). Such parallels served to attenuate negative reactions to the revolutionary presence of groups of Afro-Brazilians on the *teatro de revista* stage, which was clearly still shocking and potentially problematic for elite audiences;[11] a review of the number "Ascendinices" by Rosa Negra and "oito Black-girls" in *Pirão de Areia*, by way of illustration, describes it as "o mais ruidoso sucesso da noite, pela novidade, por bizarro" (8 Apr. 1926) ("Palcos e Salões" 12). Her "bizarre" presence is most likely a reference to her racial identity, and is echoed by an item published in the *Jornal de Recife* on the occasion of the Companhia Negra de Revistas' performance at the Parque theatre in the state capital of Pernambuco, which refers to her as "a bizarra atriz denominada Rosa Negra" (9 Apr. 1927) ("Theatros e Cinemas" 3).[12]

When she joined the Companhia Negra de Revistas in 1926, Rosa Negra was afforded star status in the press, as the following review of the premiere of *Tudo Preto* illustrates: "A estrela Rosa Negra foi recebida com salva de palmas, manifestação que lhe foi preparada pelos admiradores que conquistou no teatro S. José, quando ali trabalhou recentemente. Foi a artista que mais agradou, embora o seu concurso não tivesse sido bem aproveitado" (1 Aug. 1926) ("Artes e Artistas," 8).[13] Press coverage once again drew on her associations with Parisian performance trends, as did some of the numbers she performed in this company's revues, such as "Mistinguett brasileira," analyzed in more detail below. Such transnational associations were combined with celebrations of her racial identity, often with poetic descriptions of her skin tone that added to the cultural capital of her star text; the

Figure 1: Rosa Negra performing in the revue *Pirão de Areia* ("Rosa Negra" 33)

Correio da Manhã, in a review of *Tudo Preto*, writes: "Rosa Negra, que é a mais desembaraçada das estrelas cor da noite sem lua, teve alguns papéis de agrado" ("Preto e Branco, no Rialto" 8), and the São Paulo newspaper *Correio Paulistano* published a photograph of Rosa Negra with a caption that combined alignment with the French transnational star, Mistinguett, with the less flattering and not uncommon description of her skin tone as "tar colored": "A estrela Rosa Negra, a 'Mistinguett' cor de pixe" (29 Sept. 1926) ("Theatros" 4). An item published in the *Jornal do Brasil* on 13 July 1926 alerted readers to her similarity to the black transnational star Florence Mills:

> ROSA NEGRA: Quem haverá que não conheça a "Rosa Negra"? É uma negrinha viva, elegante e faceira que inúmeras vezes se tem apresentado ao nosso público, ora cantando em cabarets, ora representando em teatros.
>
> Na cançoneta ela é inimitável. Em "Tudo Preto"... essa encantadora preta cantará "A Jaboticaba afrancesada," escrita pelos autores especialmente para ela, que, por certo lhe proporcionará fartos aplausos, por isso que canta impecavelmente. Em alguma "couplete" que sublinha com pronunciada intenção, ela faz lembrar Florence Mills, a deliciosa atriz negra que tanto sucesso está fazendo em Paris. ("Palcos e Salões" 14)[14]

Mills starred in several musicals and vaudeville theatrical productions between 1910 and 1927, including *Shuffle Along* (1921), *Dover Street to Dixie* (1923), and *The Blackbirds Revue* (1926). Born in Washington D.C. in 1895 and raised in Harlem, New York, Mills was a child performer in dramatic and musical theatre, and like Josephine Baker was one of only a few African-American women vaudeville performers to become an international success. As Zakiya R. Adair argues, Mills used the cultural economies of vaudeville to resist racial stereotypes and dominant constructions of race and gender and challenged racial and gender boundaries via offstage civic engagement (Adair 7-21). Adair explores how Mills manipulated stock plantation and colonial tropes to create her own unique performance style as an "ambiguous exotic."[15] As is the case with Rosa Negra and Déo Costa, there are no sound or visual recordings of Mills; Adair draws on newspaper editorials to piece together her stage acts. A major difference between the Harlem and the Rio de Janeiro performance contexts in the inter-war period was the presence and absence, respectively, of a black elite and intelligentsia. Mills' decision to perform in the theatre "meant subjecting herself to criticism from the black

elite, for whom the themes of dramatic and musical theater held political and social weight" (Adair 12).[16] Nevertheless, vaudeville offered African American female performers in particular "a social and cultural space that moved beyond African American political ideas of respectability and racial uplift. It was this space that allowed African American women performers to queer or challenge and subvert racial and gender identities" (Adair 12).

Such audacious autonomy and contestation has never been attributed to Afro-Brazilian performers in this period, much less lower-class black women like Rosa Negra and Déo Costa. Always deemed a triply marginalized group within *carioca* society, such women are barely visible in the historical record. It is therefore equally audacious to suggest that they were conversant with and able to strategically deploy the subversive tactics used by African American performers. Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that this was indeed the case, as examined in more detail below.

Items about Florence Mills and Josephine Baker featured in the Brazilian press in the mid to late 1920s. An item entitled "Florence Mills—A rival de Josephine Baker," for example, is accompanied by a large photograph of Mills dressed as a native North American in the newspaper *Correio da Manhã* on 7 November 1926. The caption reads: "Florence Mills, artista de revista, que está alcançando grande sucesso no London Pavilion, em Londres, na peça 'Blackbirds.' Em Paris, onde esteve, durante alguns meses, o seu êxito não foi menor" ("A rival de Josephine Baker" 12). When Baker first visited Brazil in 1929, her performances were widely announced and reviewed in the press. The *Correio da Manhã* writes of her performance at Rio's Teatro Cassino: "Josephine Baker, a Salomé negra, quis também exibir a sua arte selvagem—íamos escrevendo primitiva—e a sua plástica entontecedora nestas amenas plagas onde canta o sabiá" ("Josephine Baker estreou no Casino" 6). The reviewer adds that after the interval "Josephine voltou para fazer a segunda entrada, a das canções, e aí mostrou-se, francamente, melhor, na comicidade da expressão, na malícia dos olhos grandes e vivíssimos e no pontilhar brejeiro da malícia. A última apresentação constou dos bailados sugestivos e lúbricos da primeira vez" (6). An extensive interview with Baker, conducted by a certain Albertus de Carvalho in Buenos Aires, illustrated with various photographs, was published on the front page of the periodical *Beira-Mar* on 7 July 1929. The physical description of the star, intended to underline her unique physical attributes, nevertheless at times borders on the demeaning stereotypes of minstrelsy-inspired caricature: "a 'danseuse' exôtica que exibe um par de olhos maiores que duas bolas de bilhar, uma dentadura que são

duas barras de mármore de Carrara, um corpo que nos dá a impressão nítida de ser esculpido por mãos do mais célebre artista. A tonalidade da sua pele é de um negro amarelado, um negro de várias nuances" ("Josephine Baker vai ser mãe!" 1).

Both Mills and Baker are depicted in the Brazilian press as having an untamed physicality; an article on the Parisian entertainment world in the periodical *Vida Doméstica* in 1926 describes Baker as being "de carnes bronzeadas, com a flexuosidade das lianas, e os movimentos de uma serpente e cujas danças têm alguma coisa de cruamente animal," and Mills as follows: "com seu temperamento endiabrado, possui uma voz de 'jazz' e dá uma impressão de acrobata cantadora, cujos pensamentos se expressam com essa estranha nota sincopada que ela interpreta com doçura selvagem" ("Moda Negra" 105). The references to Baker's "voz de 'jazz,'" vocal acrobatics, "strange" syncopated sound and "wild sweetness" are clearly embedded in racial stereotypes and draw on transnational interpretations of both jazz music and black people's voices as untamed, primitive and unpredictable.

In contrast, Rosa Negra's voice was 'whitened' in the Brazilian press. The accompanying item to a photograph of her published in the *Correio Paulistano* on 29 September 1926, states: "Muito breve, isto é, na segunda quinzena de outubro, o público paulista terá oportunidade de ver, em carne e osso, a figura da criola, petulante, nas suas canções pátrias, pronunciando com absoluta clareza todas as palavras, a 'Rosa Negra' do Passeio Público" ("Theatros" 4). The underscoring of the "absoluta clareza" of her diction when singing calls to mind Jennifer Stoever's concepts of the "sonic color line" and the "listening ear" in her book *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening*, which explores how race and sound have been intrinsically imbricated in US culture.[17] As she writes, "[t]he sonic color line [...] articulates the socially constructed, historically contingent relationships *between* sight and sound, voice and the body—how each collapses into the other at various moments in time" (113). The Brazilian journalist is implicitly contrasting Rosa Negra's black physicality ("a figura da criola") with her 'whitened' voice. Clarity of voice, to borrow from Stoever, is clearly figured here as an "aural signifier for whiteness," in this case an honorary 'whiteness' that renders Rosa Negra as the purveyor of sounds acceptable to the white elite "listening ear," and also fit to represent the Brazilian nation in the form of "canções pátrias" (95).[18] In this respect, this Afro-Brazilian performer resembles the Afro-American singer Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, a former slave, whose vocal abilities stunned antebellum audiences in the northern USA

and who evidenced "the socially constructed mismatch between her white-sounding voice and her black-looking body" (114). Similarly, in a review of *Tudo Preto*, the *Jornal do Brasil* singles out Afro-Brazilian performer Dalva Espíndola's voice for praise: "Em cenário apropriado a vedetta Dalva Espinola [sic] faz com chiste uma baiana; sua voz é afinada e a dicção correta," and states that "Djanyra [sic] Aymoré, outra vedete, canta com voz clara e bonita, uma modinha" (1 Aug. 1926) ("Palcos e Salões" 11).

As I have discussed at length elsewhere, until the 1920s, black female subjectivity was performed in the *teatro de revista* by white women, often travelling European artists. Women like the Greek soprano Ana Menarezzi, the Spanish actress Pepa Ruiz, and Lia Binatti, who hailed from the south of Brazil and had Italian and German ancestry, took on the stock role of the *mulata* or *baiana*, and an important part of their performative mask, alongside costume, was the adoption of an apocryphal 'black speak,' a kind of aural blackface, that hinged on grammatical errors and comic misuse of learned turns of phrase (Shaw 119).[19] The references to the correct diction, clarity, and tunefulness of the voices of Rosa Negra, Dalva Espíndola, and Janira Aymoré clearly seek to counteract these engrained aural stereotypes and to 'whiten' their voices to ensure they are suitable for elite audiences. Such descriptions of their voices in the press also serve to counter the grimaces—what Stoever terms "the racialized 'caught in the act' vulgarity that a gaping mouth would imply" (100)—with which Afro-Brazilian performers, women included, were depicted elsewhere in the press, most strikingly in the advertisements released by the black theatrical companies themselves (see Figure 2). These clearly borrowed from US minstrelsy traditions, and one can assume that they were

Figure 2: An advertisement for the Companhia Negra de Revistas' revue *Preto e Branco* that clearly draws on the demeaning caricatures of US minstrelsy (*Correio da Manhã* 16).

adopted in Brazil to bring to mind wider transnational entertainment vogues, thus lending the homegrown performers credibility. Such images were generally at odds with the stage performances they promoted.

Brazil's black press also heralded Rosa Negra as the star of the Companhia Negra de Revistas, with the Afro-Brazilian periodical *O Clarim d'Alvorada* devoting an entire front page to a report on this innovative troupe, illustrated with photographs of its founder De Chocolat and stars, including Rosa Negra (22 August 1926) (1).[20] This headlining item also featured a poem dedicated to her entitled "Rosa Negra: Primeira estrela de Cia. Negra de Revista [sic] da América do Sul" by a certain J. Correia Leite. The poem pays tribute to her for representing fellow Afro-Brazilians, beginning with the lines "O vosso gesto nobre rememora/ Essa grandeza real da minha raça" (1), and alludes to an activism that goes beyond the popular stage ("É minha musa que somente implora/ Maior justiça para a vossa graça"), which I will consider in more detail below. The front page of the publication *Getulino: Orgão de Defesa dos Homens Pretos do Brasil*, on 13 May 1926, also featured an item praising the Afro-Brazilian troupe and singling out its female star, referring to the "grupo (de 'estrelas negras') nacional capitaneado pela figura esbelta e escuríssima (como a consciência de muitos) da senhorinha 'Rosa Negra'" (1).[21]

In her solo career as a variety performer, Rosa Negra continued to capitalize on her ethnicity, appearing, for example, in a show with the English title "Black and White" at the Circo Central Variedades circus on Botafogo Beach in Rio in 1927, and with the "nigerboys" from the São Caetano theatre to perform a "black-botton" [sic] in the "Maiores Abandonados" charity show at the Teatro Carlos Gomes (2 Feb.1928) ("Gazeta Theatral" 5).[22] To promote her involvement in a variety show at the Cinema Teatro Central in Rio the following month, she is billed as "a célebre estrela da Companhia Negra" ("Cinema Theatro Central" 6) and the fame and affection she had garnered are amply evidenced in press coverage, where she earns the title of "rainha da canção brasileira,"[23] and "verdadeira notabilidade do Brasil!" (28 Jan. 1930) ("Circo Piolin & Alcibiades" 6). She enjoys esteem and respectability, as evidenced by columnist Mário Nunes' review of her performance with the Companhia Margarida Max in the revue *Gato, Baeta e Carapicú*: "a Rosa Negra [...] conservou com elegante donaire, a linha de uma grande dama" (28 Jan. 1928) ("Palcos e Salões" 13). She went on to have a recording career, releasing on the Odeon label, for example, a duet with the most popular male singer of the era, Francisco Alves, in 1928, accompanied by the Casino de Copacabana's Orchestra Pan-Americana.[24] The newspaper *O*

Paiz announced the release of this carnival *marcha*, entitled "Que pequena levada," as a collaboration between Alves and "Rosa Negra, a artista de ônix, que tanto sucesso tem feito em nossas revistas, como boa discípula da escola da famosa Josephina Baker" ("Novidades em Discos Odeon" 12). Notably, her voice on the recording is described as being "de bastante discreção, boa dicção, apenas mal timbrada" (12), the choice of the word "discretion" alluding to both controlled emotion and a seemly, contained volume, "aural signifiers" for an honorary 'whiteness' and the antithesis of the raucous, grammatically flawed noise associated with the stereotypical *mulatas* of the *teatro de revista*. As Stoever argues, in the antebellum north "quiet" was a "sonic standard for whiteness," connected with "rationality and body discipline," whereas "noise" had "negative connotations of blackness" (95).

In addition to the poem dedicated to Rosa Negra published in the Afro-Brazilian periodical cited above, an interview with the star was published on the front page of the Rio de Janeiro weekly publication *A Rua: Semanário Ilustrado* on 6 December 1927, alongside a photograph of her ("Grande como Nabuco" 1) (see Figure 3). Never to my knowledge previously analyzed, this is a document of ground-breaking importance in that it attests to her pioneering role as a spokesperson for the rights of Afro-Brazilians, and women in particular. In this long interview, she discusses her views on "seu Antônio," clearly a reference to the then mayor of Rio, Antônio da Silva Prado Júnior, and his efforts to embellish the city. The interviewer makes a point of saying that she "[f]alou pouco, mas falou com destemor e acerto." A section of the item reads as follows:

> Meu filho, diz-nos a sorridente Rosa Negra, o que nós precisamos é de homens como "seu Antônio." No Brasil a maior ameaça é esse lamentável ensaio de separação de raças. Diminuída a imigração portuguesa, por motivos e razões diversos, nós todos, as mulheres de minha cor, começamos a sentir a formação de correntes agressivas, que nos pretendiam diminuir, porque não é de neve a nossa face e nem lembra o ouro velho o nosso cabelo negro e crespo. "Seu Antônio," integralmente claro, de nobre ascendência e sangue puro, concorre, ilustremente, para destruir um preconceito perigoso e enfraquecedor. ("Grande como Nabuco" 1)

What is most astounding in this interview is Rosa Negra's articulate denunciation of racial divisions and prejudice, and particularly her overtly gendered perspective. This humble Afro-Brazilian woman, whose credentials were simply those of a performer in low-brow local theatre, asserts the collec-


Rosa Negra, estrella da Companhia Jayme Silva, rival brasileira da rainha do "black- botton"

Figure 3: Photograph of Rosa Negra published on the front page of *A Rua: Semanário Ilustrado*, 6 December 1927, to accompany an interview with the star ("Grande como Nabuco" 1).

tive voice of marginalized black women, eloquently exposing what she sees as a national problem and demonstrating her awareness of local socio-economic realities and politics. She demonstrates an astute understanding of issues of intersectionality avant la lettre.

Her recognition of the existence of racism and her desire for racial equality represent an engagement with racial politics that chimes with Florence Mills' articulation in the US press of her larger political and cultural goals of racial equality for African Americans. Rosa Negra should thus be counted among the small number of Afro-descendant vaudeville performers who spoke out publicly about the racism that people of color encountered. In 1926, Mills wrote an editorial entitled "The Soul of the Negro," in which she recounted her own experiences of racism and contrasted America with England, arguing that the latter had moved beyond racism (Adair 12-13). Similarities can also be drawn between Mills and the Afro-Brazilian performer Déo Costa, particularly regarding their assertion of their self-worth and defiance of gender norms. When Mills' request for a salary increase was denied by its African American male producers, she chose to leave the successful production *Shuffle Along* and subsequently used the positive reviews and its commercial success to secure a higher salary and more fulfilling roles in trans-Atlantic productions (Adair 16 and 19). As examined below, Costa took equally decisive action when she was the victim of a similar professional slight at the hands of a male theatrical impresario.

Déo Costa

Déo Costa is billed as a "cançonetista" in press items advertising her appearance in *Tudo Preto*, and elsewhere as a "coupletista."[25] She was one of several female performers in the Companhia Negra de Revistas, and in the revue *Preto e Branco*, which premiered on 3 September 1926, she performed the number "Amor perfeito."[26] Dressed as a flower in an exotic garden, like

the accompanying chorus girls, the lyrics of the song overtly celebrated her black subjectivity and exoticized her body:

Em minhas pétalas aveludadas
Trago da noite o mágico negror
As mil quimeras sempre sonhadas
Num divino sonho... de amor
Vou destacando-me das outras flores
Pela severidade de minha cor
Simbolizando ideais amores
Sou um ridente e perfeito amor.[27]

Costa only earned leading-lady status, however, with her move to the splinter company, the Ba-ta-clan Preta, her incorporation into the new troupe being acknowledged in sectors of the press as a coup on De Chocolat's part. As *A Manhã* announced on 5 October 1926, "Hoje podemos tornar público a acquisição feita por De Chocolat, o organizador dessa nova troupe negra, dos artistas Déo Costa e Marques da Gama, que em 'Na Penumbra,' a revista de estreia, terão papéis de acordo com seus méritos" ("Nos Theatros" 8). Her star status was endorsed by the repeated references to her as the Jambo Venus in press coverage, for example, "Déo Costa, a 'Venus de Jambo,' é a primeira figura do elenco organizado pelo criador do teatro negro entre nós" (26 Oct. 1926) ("Nos Theatros" 6). The *Estado de São Paulo* newspaper published an advertisement for *Na Penumbra* on 11 November 1926 that featured a photograph of a scantily clad Costa in a risqué pose that directly associated her with the audacious Josephine Baker and the transnational vogue for black performance, foregrounding her racialized body and her star status ("Santa Helena" 16) (see Figure 4).

Furthermore, Costa's status was founded on her success as a show business impresario, not just a performer, as another edition of this newspaper attested: "A estreia será com a revista, em dois actos, intituldo 'Na Penumbra,' cujos principais papeis estão a cargo da aplaudida atriz e empresária, Déo Costa" (17 Oct. 1926) ("Nos Theatros" 6).[28] She went into partnership with De Chocolat, creating the Companhia Déo Costa e De Chocolat.[29] The company acquired prestige and cultural capital by performing in São Paulo at the prestigious Teatro Santa Helena—a journalist writing in the city's newspaper *A Gazeta* makes the point of underlining the suitability of this beautiful theatre in a city center square for the troupe in question, foregrounding its female stars: "Trata-se de um conjunto nacional que se apresenta à altura da categoria do lindo teatro da Praça da Sé. É composto de artistas de cor, dos

Figure 4: Déo Costa in an advertisement for the Ba-ta-clan Preta's premiere at the Santa Helena theatre in São Paulo. (*Estado de São Paulo* 16).

quais são primeiras figuras, como atrizes Déo Costa (estrela); Índia do Brasil (atriz cantora); Dalva Spíndola (atriz típica)" (11 Nov. 1926) ("Palcos e Telas" 4).[30]

Costa's agency in the creation of her star persona and her show business acumen should not be underestimated. She sought to use the press for her own advantage and enhancement, engaging in regular dialogue with journalists and treating them with overt respect; when she was about to leave Rio de Janeiro to perform with the Ba-ta-clan at the Santa Helena theatre in São Paulo, for example, the newspaper *A Manhã* reports that she sent them a "cartão de despedidas" (7 Nov. 1926) ("Nos Theatros" 6).[31] The press rewarded her cooperation by endorsing both her popular and critical acclaim, tacitly endowing her with refinement and social status as well as star dust, even after she severed ties with the Ba-ta-clan Preta. *A Manhã* announced the birthday of the "atriz Déo Costa, aplaudida pela crítica paulista e carioca," adding that "A estrela Déo Costa receberá por certo, no dia de hoje, o testemunho de amizade do seu vasto círculo de relações" (24 May 1927) ("Nos Theatros," 6). Her politeness and respect for social niceties were also foregrounded by the newspaper *O Jornal*, which acknowledged receipt of a letter of thanks from a "sr. [sic] Déo Costa" for the "alusões feitas ao seu trabalho" in the revue *Preto e Branco*, again evidencing her astute dealings with the press (7 Sept. 1926) ("Theatro e Música" 13). When Costa left the Ba-ta-clan Preta she also made a point of formally taking her leave of the São Paulo newspapers that had supported her.[32] She evidenced her understanding of the importance of the press and how it could be used to her advantage, particularly when remonstrating with De Chocolat over his decision to pass on her Jambo Venus moniker to her replacement in the Ba-ta-clan, Rosa do Norte.[33] *O Jornal* reprinted on 23 November 1926 an excerpt from the eloquently crafted letter she sent to a São Paulo newspaper, which begins with a bold assertion of her ownership of the stage name and a self-aggrandizing use of the third person:

> Déo Costa (a Venus de Jambo), desligando-se da Companhia Ba-Ta-Clan Preta, agradece as gentilezas recebidas do leal povo paulista, motivada, parte pela maneira fidalga e gentil com que fui acolhida pela por mim sempre respeitada assistência e, parte pela reclame feita em torno do meu nome, como facilmente se poderá verificar, achou a empresa de bom alvitre, publicar o seguinte aviso ao público. (Costa 12)

She goes on to cite the press release issued by De Chocolat:

> A retirada desta companhia—por sua livre e espontânea vontade, da sra. Déo Costa, em nada altera a orientação inicial. Já ontem foi substituída, com visível agrado do público, pela nova atriz Rosa do Norte, que, por esse motivo, herdou o cognome, aliás justificado pelo seu físico, da discutida "Venus de Jambo," que fora emprestado àquela artista negra unicamente para efeitos de reclamo teatral. (Costa 12)

Costa then gives full vent to her agency and her erudite voice, the use of the third person again lending her a self-importance that she paradoxically attenuates with the opening tongue-in-cheek description:

> Uma pobre artista "negra," que para conseguir um pouco de simpatia do público tem necessidade de tomar por "empréstimo" um cognome, ousa rogar ao fino, apreciado e boníssimo cronista alguns momentos de precioso tempo para exprimir o seguinte: Se é fato que o qualificativo de "estrela escultural" e o discutido título de "Venus de Jambo" a mim "emprestado" o foi somente para efeitos de "reclamo teatral," pode o meu padrinho e pai do título fazer dele o uso que bem lhe convier.
>
> Agora, à minha negra inteligência, se aflora um pensamento interessante: se amanhã, "por sua livre e espontânea vontade" a "herdeira" do cognome "Venus de Jambo" tiver necessidade de se retirar da companhia e que, para substituil-a [sic] de um momento para outro, não seja encontrada senão um artista [...] do carregador número "doze" da Estrada de Ferro Central do Brasil, o título a mim "emprestado" e a outra "herdado" será aplicado para "efeitos teatrais"? Eis, apreciadíssimo cronista, uma dúvida que bastante vontade tinha de ver aclarada e tal o fosse, se o distinto patrício quisesse fazer a gentileza de publicar as linhas da que sempre lhe foi simpática e admiradora. (Costa 12)

Here Costa ironically employs her racial identity ("minha negra inteligência") to fend off the all-too-common elite, white male response that women like

her have 'ideas above their station,' thus allowing herself to paradoxically assert her understanding of racial and gender politics in Brazil on a local and national scale. As Hertzman states, she made clear that her talents and artistic property had been "unjustly usurped as she was absorbed into a seemingly endless line of interchangeable black female bodies."[34] Her contestation of her rights and challenge to her status as an Afro-Brazilian woman are at odds with the dominant duality of approaches to black performers, particularly musicians, in Rio during this period, which either romanticizes their contribution or denies them any agency.[35] More significantly, they suggest that Costa was well aware and eager to make strategic use of the growing transnational presence of and respect for female Afro-descendant performers.

Such a defiant stance from an Afro-Brazilian, and a lower-class woman at that, could not fail to provoke the wrath of the male, white elite. The high-brow satirical periodical *O Sacy* reported on Costa's departure from the Companhia Negra de Revistas and her outspoken riposte, implicitly demeaning and ridiculing this "mulatinha" (the condescension inherent in the diminutive form of this racial identifier clearly intended to chime with and amuse the publication's privileged, white male readership): "A Companhia Negra do Santa Helena, atendendo a conselhos de vários amigos da casa, deixou ir embora a mulatinha Déo Costa, transferindo o título de "Venus de Jambo" a uma atriz da Companhia, das mais pretas da casa" ("Camarins e Camarotes" 10).[36]

Gender and Modernity in *Tudo Preto*

In the revues of the Companhia Negra de Revistas and the Ba-ta-clan Preta, Afro-Brazilian women performers, from the stars to the "black-girls" of the chorus, were principally given a voice through the lyrics of their songs and the physicality of their dancing bodies, which powerfully combined with their costumes and the set designs. In the opening number of *Tudo Preto,* "Coro do serviçais," all those on stage appear in "vestidos pretos, avental e adornos brancos, representando serviçais domésticos,"[37] and proceed to take a comic swipe at their previously subservient position to white women and to celebrate their new-found freedom in Rio's entertainment world:

Deixamos as patroas
Artistas boas
Vamos ser;
Cheias de alacridade
E com vontade

De vencer.
Seremos as estrelas
Chics e belas
A dominar.
Mostrando que a raça
Possui a graça
De encantar.

Dalva Espíndola, who was one of the second-ranking stars of both companies, performed a solo in the stock role of the *baiana* in *Tudo Preto* on a stage set of stylized shacks, which endorses the clichéd view of the coquettish, wily young Afro-Brazilian woman. She enters "desengonçada" and then sings:

Sou Baianinha faceira,
Toda dengosa e gentil,
Das mulheres a primeira
Nesta terra do Brasil.
Tenho um certo requebrado
E um quadril ondulante,
Que faz ficar apaixonado
Qualquer tipo elegante.[38]

Despite the nod to the conventions of the *teatro de revista* here, not least to fulfill audience expectations, this truly Afro-Brazilian *baiana*—as opposed to the countless white counterparts that had preceded her on Rio's popular stages and the mixed-race Aracy Cortes,[39] who became synonymous with the role in the 1920s—asserts her dignity, agency, and patriotic mission. In another musical number in *Tudo Preto*, "Mascottes de Madame," two unnamed women represent dolls that adorn the bedrooms of wealthy (therefore white) ladies and emerge from a box and sing: "Somos as mascottes de madames/ Mariquitas divinais/Somos os adornos das alcovas/ Bibelots originais." The refrain alludes to the legendary seductiveness of black female bodies: "O ornamento de um toucador/ Belo e extravagante/ Faz admirar/ O encanto dos casados/ E dos namorados/ Que pensam casar." These female voices, however, counter this time-worn performative straightjacket via their familiarity with *estrangeirismos*, demonstrated when they declare "Dizem que somos 'fetiche,'" and in the repeated refrain of "Baby, Baby, Baby." The incorporation of borrowings from and code switches into foreign languages in revue scripts from the 1920s, particularly French and English, was undoubtedly intended to add a touch of sophistication and assert Rio's status as a nexus in an inter-American and transatlantic performance circuit.[40]

Elsewhere *Tudo Preto* clearly engages with and alludes to transnational performance vogues, incorporating a solo performance by an Afro-American woman, Miss Mons Murray (sometimes also said to be a dancer from Barbados in the press, but in either case a representative of the exotic, black 'Other' for Brazilian audiences).[41] She adopts the persona of a "preta Africana" to perform a so-called "charabiá africano" (literally an "African hullabaloo"), described by one critic as "um número exôtico, curioso e divertido."[42] According to the stage directions: "Entra fazendo piruetas à moda dos pretos da África. Canta e dança os seguintes versos em música própria—um autêntico Batuque Africano, que no final estiliza, acrescendo-lhe um Fado que apenas dança." The ensuing lyrics seemed to have been invented for their rhythmic qualities and sonic associations with the 'dark continent,' their inherent exoticism only enhanced by their unintelligibility:

Ceù. Cèu. Heuè, madù, papa, heurê
Ceù. Cèu. Heuè, madù, papa, heurê
Où. Où, heuè . . madù, papa, heurê
Emim sôrô, sôrô, dara, dara
Tunhô, oiba borobà[43]

Rosa Negra and the chorus girls ("Rosa Negra e girls") performed the number "Pérolas Negras" in *Tudo Preto* in what must have been a visually striking scene, as the stage directions attest: "Cenário representando um escrínio encarnado, com um colar de Pérolas Negras. O complemento deste cenário é todo também de colares de Pérolas Negras." The chorus begins by singing lines that celebrate the beauty of black women yet acknowledge their subaltern social position (since they are black pearls that are worn by white ladies):

Somos as pérolas
Luxo e beleza
Das belas damas
Toda a riqueza

The persona Pérola, played by Rosa Negra, then continues to elevate their physical charms while demonstrating her eloquence and erudition:

Os poetas já disseram
Em formosa Poesia
Que nós somos o reflexo
Das lágrimas de Maria
Dizem que somos geradas
Com pranto, mágoas e dor

E por isso é mais sublime
Nosso esplendor![44]

Rosa Negra's performance of "Jaboticaba afrancesada" in *Tudo Preto* overtly aligned her with a star of the French capital's entertainment scene, the number's very title underscoring the vogue for absorbing transnational influences and combining them with the homegrown (in this case the literally homegrown dark-skinned, plum-like *jaboticaba* fruit). The stage directions describe her here as a "[t]ipo de cançonetista francesa numa luxuosa toilete ornada de plumas," and she breaks into song with the bold statement:

Sou a Mistinguette Brasileira
A cançonetista festejada;
Cheia de graça, eu sou brejeira:
Sou jaboticaba afrancesada
Com esta graça parisiense

The lyrics situate her ("sempre bela") within the poor Afro-Brazilian population of Rio ("Vou dos salões/ Até a Favela!/ Canto com graça/ Sou de alto lá!") and yet she playfully demonstrates her transnational savoir-faire, looking at a lady in the audience and announcing "'Pardon,' Madame!/ 'Je suis comme ça.'" She asserts her worth vis-à-vis her foreign counterparts, however, and honors her Brazilian identity in the following lines:

Com este pisar encantador
Com esta boquinha de encantar
Todo o meu gesto é sedutor
A minha elegância é sem par
Dizem que imito as estrangeiras
Não é assim (bis)
Tenho a graça das brasileiras
Tudo é natural em mim.

According to a review of the premiere of *Tudo Preto* in *O Paiz*, Rosa Negra performed this number with "acentuada ironia e tão bem se houve que esse número foi bisado" (8). The reference to her exaggeratedly tongue-in-cheek performance reminds us that in a live context Rosa Negra and her peers had the creative freedom to comically undercut even the seemingly most reactionary of stereotypes.

Tudo Preto's female performers continued to demonstrate their trans-Atlantic connections and awareness of performance trends, such as in the musical number entitled "Moda Parisiense" performed by two women and a man. The stage directions are as follows: "Duas mulheres trajando 'smo-

cking' [sic], juntamente com um cavalheiro rigorosamente vestido também com 'smocking' [sic]. Os três cantam juntos." The lyrics of this song engage overtly with Paris as a beacon of style and cosmopolitan innovation:

> Em Paris a grande moda
> Que acaba de surgir
> Obriga todas as damas
> O "smocking" [sic] vestir
> Seja castanha ou lourinha
> Seja preta ou mulata
> Todas andam de "smocking" [sic]
> Em colarinho e gravata[45]

They proceed to allude to the appeal of foreign, particularly Parisian, imports over homegrown cultural products, in an ironic dig at the popularity of visiting theatre companies such as the French Ba-ta-clan ("Se se criasse a moda aqui/ Zé Povo pensava em vaiar/ Mas como veio de Paris/Zé Povo diz pra se imitar").[46] Likewise, Rosa Negra and Dalva Espíndola appear alongside "black girls em trajos de banho todas" (see Figure 5) and proceed to sing about the ultra-modern pastime of sea bathing, explicitly adopting the identity of stylish, homegrown flappers with a taste for the athletic pursuits and leisure associated with the modern urban woman:

> Somos as banhistas delicadas
> Somos melindrosas festejadas
> O nosso porte é gentil
> Encantos mil
> Temos neste Brasil

The refrain that ensues ends with the lines:

> Nós somos as sereias
> Brincamos nas areias
> Nós somos as catitas
> Banhistas futuristas[47]

With their implicit celebration of the new-found hedonistic pursuits and freedom enjoyed by young black women who have swapped the aprons of domestic service for ultra-chic swimsuits, and whose physical beauty and elegance ("somos as catitas") are now celebrated, the lyrics of these songs assert the cosmopolitanism strategically adopted by these performers and the writers of the revues and songs they performed, one which clearly presumed the audiences' transnational awareness.

Figure 5: Chorus girls from the Companhia Negra de Revistas in what appears to be the musical number "As banhistas" starring Rosa Negra (probably on the extreme left). ("A Companhia Negra de Revistas" 36)

Conclusion

This article has examined the artistic careers of two little-known pioneering Afro-Brazilian women, Rosa Negra and Déo Costa, their marketing and reception in the press, and the voices such women were allowed to embody in the Companhia Negra de Revistas' first revue, *Tudo Preto*. Reflecting the importance of the port city of Rio as a nexus in transnational performance circuits in the 1920s, it has shown how such female performers, despite the considerable constraints of their triply marginalized status based on their gender, class, and racial identity, were not only able to act as vectors of transnational exchange, but also to strategically deploy for their own ends the platform they had now been given and voice their own critiques of Brazil's gender politics and race relations. These critiques centered on the treatment of black female performers as disposable, interchangeable entities in an entertainment business dominated by white men and in a society that discriminated against Afro-descendent Brazilians, not least women. Proto-feminists, both women of color attempted to resist oppression by vocalizing their lived experiences of intersectionality avant la lettre. Their performances serve as illustrations of how the transnational may lead to a re-visioning of national stereotypes, particularly regarding gendered racial and ethnic identities, not least those of the *mulata* and *baiana.* Via their enthusiastic embracing of modernist tropes and assertions of cosmopolitan connections in their star personae and performances, women like Rosa Negra and Déo Costa challenged dominant

representations of young black Brazilian women and the patriarchal, racist attitudes that underpinned them. Even more surprisingly, both women defiantly challenged social, gender, and class hierarchies, tackling head on the issue of intellectual property, in Costa's case, and race relations, in the case of Rosa Negra.

To return to the questions posed in the introduction to this article, rather than feeling obliged to position themselves in relation to an imported vision of black femininity, these women astutely capitalized on their audiences' fluency in transnational performance vogues and adopted key modernist tropes to nuance the traditional representations of Afro-Brazilian female subjectivity on Rio's popular stages. Their active engagement with the local press and forthright contestation of the racism and misogyny that underpinned the entertainment business and, more broadly, Brazilian society evidenced their awareness of how issues of gender and race were being addressed by their showbusiness peers across the Afro-descendant diaspora, not least in Harlem and Paris. Although their performances and off-stage declarations related race to Brazilian national identity as a whole, Rosa Negra and Déo Costa were clearly also situating themselves, for strategic benefit, within a trans-Atlantic and inter-American performance community. These forgotten examples of Afro-Brazilian female agency in the inter-war period shed important light on the global political consequences of the existence of a transnationalized black performance culture.

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Notes

[1] There have been no academic studies of either women's careers, save for a brief mention of Rosa Negra in Nepomuceno, Nirlene. "'Quem haverá que não conheça a Rosa Negra?': Presença e 'apagamento' de mulheres negras na indústria do divertimento da Capital Federal dos anos 1920" (*Mulheres e desigualdades* 27-45), and a couple of references to Costa in Marc Hertzman's *Making Samba: A New History of Race and Music in Brazil*. Hertzman refers to Costa as an example of the "fragmentary evidence of a much larger world of female creation" (246). The following archives were consulted during the research for this article: Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro; Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro; and the Centro de Documentação da Funarte (CEDOC), Rio de Janeiro.

[2] As I have argued elsewhere, members of Rio de Janeiro's performance community in the long 1920s drew on the omnipresent cultural and linguistic diversity in the city—introduced by visiting performers from abroad, foreign music and films—to engage in what has been termed an "ordinary," "everyday" or "lived" cosmopolitanism. See Shaw, *Tropical Travels*, pp. 92-93 and 99-109.

[3] The adoption of a racially premised stage name by Afro-Brazilian performers, or perhaps more tellingly their white promoters and managers, fitted into a long tradition in Brazilian popular performance, both on stage and screen, as discussed by Robert Stam in *Tropical Multiculturalism* (104). Rosa Negra's real name is only revealed in 1929, in the newspaper *O Jornal*, in an item about her performances in the city of Belém in the northern state of Pará, in the local "festas do Nazareth," where she is referred to as "a bailarina negra Maria Jesus do Nascimento (Rosa Negra), a Josephine Backer [sic] brasileira" (8 December 1929) (26).

[4] For more on the title as an example of the mock French see Shaw, *Tropical Travels*, pp. 107-109. Ascendina Santos had a brief but successful career on the popular stages of Rio, first coming to prominence with the Companhia Carioca de Burletas in a minor role in the revue *Ai, Zizinha!* staged at the Teatro Carlos Gomes in January 1926. For more details on Santos see Shaw, *Tropical Travels*, pp. 53-54.

[5] See, for example, the advertisement in *Correio da Manhã*, 14 April 1926: "Sucesso das mais lindas 'vedettes' que exibem toilettes ultra-chics—ROSA NEGRA e as BLACK GIRLS—O maior e mais homogêneo 'ensemble' de 'Girls'" ("Pirão de Areia" 6). The homogeneity of the chorus girls undoubtedly alludes to their skin tone, drawing on the presence of a large group of Afro-Brazilian women on stage to promote the revue's modern glamour and cosmopolitan cachet. This advertisement, like others, also points out that the costumes were made by the upscale São Paulo ladies fashion store, Au Palais Royale.

[6] Advertisement for the revue *Pirão de Areia*. It continues: "2 luxuosos e originais 'rideau' [sic] de H. Collombo. Lindos cenários de Jaime Silva, Collombo, Lazary e Luiz de Barros" ("Theatro S. José" 8).

[7] Hertzman recognizes the impact of the Companhia Negra de Revistas in terms of female agency in the popular theatre, however, and how innovative female singers were able to subsequently put their "stamp of ownership on performances" (Hertzman 125).

[8] Hertzman illustrates that, even into the 1950s "male property and power were constructed through reaffirmations that women, especially those with dark skin, were objects, not authors or composers" (221).

[9] For example, Eduardo das Neves and Benjamin de Oliveira. See, for example, Robert Stam in *Tropical Multiculturalism*, pp. 61-62; Hertzman, *Making Samba*, pp. 66-68 and 82-85; and Shaw, *Tropical Travels*, pp. 32-37.

[10] See, for example, the *Correio da Manhã*, 28 April 1926: "Rosa Negra, a apreciada 'chansonniére [sic] abissínia,' canta agora, em francês, uns couplets de muito espírito" (28 Apr. 1926) ("Telas e Palcos" 8). *O Paiz* repeatedly refers to her as the "chansonnière abissínia" (21 Mar., 1 Apr. and 25 Apr. 1926, respectively) ("Artes e Artistas" 13, 8 and 5). In 1928 the newspaper *A Manhã* calls her "essa exôtica artista" (1 Feb. 1928) ("Nos Theatros" 5). The latter review of her performance in the revue *Gato, Baeta e Carapicú* also overtly aligns her with clichéd representations of Afro-Brazilian and particularly *mulata* womanhood, stating that her performance of the number "Faceira do Estácio" was an "estupendo personagem feito sob medida para essa exôtica artista." Another review of this production in the same newspaper some two weeks later calls her "a irrequieta Rosa Negra," in contrast to the "conscienciosa Carmen Dora, a gentil Pepa Ruiz" and "a galante Rosita Rocha" (14 Feb. 1928) ("Nos Theatros" 6). It is worthy of note that Josephine Baker is described as having "olhos irrequietos [..] de uma louca que, simultaneamente, se expressam com carinho, ódio, alucinação, ternura, volúpia" ("Josephine Baker vai ser mãe!" 1).

[11] See, for example, the following excerpt from an item about the Companhia Negra de Revistas published in the elite periodical *Fon Fon!* on 7 August 1926: "uma companhia de negros autênticos, que haviam desertado do nosso serviço doméstico para o palco da Avenida. Orquestra preta, piadas pretas, 'black-girls' exibindo a sua negra nudez [...]. Era preciso realmente que o teatro tivesse descido de nível, entre nós, para que alguém se lembrasse de organizar uma companhia de negros instalando-a em pleno coração da cidade" (*Fon Fon!* 35).

[12] Another review of her performance in the revue *Café Torrado* in Recife is very positive: "Rosa Negra fez bem todos os seus números, chegando a ser 'ingênua' na 'Infantilidades' e cantando, com sentimento, a 'Rita'" ("Theatros e Cinemas," *A Província* 3).

[13] In the same vein, the *Correio Paulistano*'s review of *Tudo Preto* singled out for praise the "'Mistinguet' [sic] brasileira, onde Rosa Negra dá um gracioso desempenho" and "'As banhistas,' trabalho inteligente de Rosa Negra e um grupo de coristas" (23 Oct. 1926) ("Theatros" 8).

[14] Similarly, an item in the *Jornal do Brasil* publicizing the debut of the Companhia Negra de Revistas, makes explicit the parallels with 'black Paris' and the relative merits of its Afro-Brazilian female performers: "Como é notório, em Paris o teatro negro triunfou, tanto artística como financeiramente. Entre nós, a Companhia Negra de Revistas, a estrear por todo o corrente mês, num dos teatros da Avenida, pretende seguir as pegadas das suas congêners parisienses em tal sucesso, pois nada lhe falta para que isso acontecer, uma vez que conta com artistas do valor de Dalila [sic] Espínola [sic], Jandyra Aymoré e Rosa Negra, e cenógrafos como Jaime Silva" (8 July 1926) ("Palcos e Salões"11). Again, two days later, the same newspaper directly compares these three local women favorably with their US counterpart: "Para ofuscar o brilho da estrela negra Florença Mills, que tanto furor está fazendo em Paris, a nossa companhia de pretos dispõe de nada menos de três artistas cada qual mais interessante: Rosa Negra, Dalva Espíndola e Jandyra Aymoré" (10 July 1926) ("Palcos e Salões" 13).

[15] As Adair writes, Atlantic vaudeville performer Mills' "satirical performances of the ambiguous exotic de-stabilized fixed racial categories and highlighted the social construction of race. It is in this context that I read Mills as a part of, as opposed to a deviation from, African American artistic and cultural contributions towards political advancement" (21).

[16] The career opportunities open to poor black women in Rio and New York were strikingly similar. As Adair writes: "As a woman who was not from a wealthy or well-educated background, Mills did not have the same options for respectable success as black women from more privileged backgrounds. Without her musical talents, Mills would have most likely been a domestic day worker for wealthy white families. Mills' determination to make use of her performance talents led her to the theatre" (12).

[17] As Stoever writes, "[w]hile vision remains a powerfully defining element of race, scholars have yet to account for how other senses experience racialization and enact race feeling, both alone and in concert with sight" (4). Stoever continues:

> The sonic color line describes the process of racializing sound—how and why certain bodies are expected to produce, desire, and live amongst particular sounds—and its product, the hierarchical division sounded between "whiteness" and "blackness." The listening ear drives the sonic color line; it is a figure for how dominant listening practices accrue—and change—over time, as well as a descriptor for how the dominant culture exerts pressure on individual listening practices to conform to the sonic color line's norms. Through the listening ear's surveillance, discipline, and interpretation, certain associations between race and sound come to seem normal, natural, and "right" (7-8).

[18] Stoever notes how the white Swedish opera singer Jenny Lind was repeatedly described in the US press in the mid 1800s with adjectives such as "pure," "clear" and "brilliant," and how journalists' mediation of vocal performances shaped, albeit unevenly, the listening ear (97).

[19] "Like the other 'Othered' types, the *mulata/baiana* was clearly also intended to be laughed at for her supposed ignorance and lack of education, but equally mocked for her pretentiousness and desire to better her lot in life, all clearly consequences of her low social position, the legacy of colonialism and slavery. Throughout this popular theatrical tradition, this figure was associated with 'incorrect' speech characterized by replacing the letter *l* with the letter *r*, exaggerating the double *ss* at the end of words, and inappropriately using 'difficult' words and her own unwittingly comical neologisms for effect" (Shaw 119).

[20] This edition of the publication also features a note about the Ba-ta-clan Negra's [sic] recent debut in São Paulo at the Santa Helena theatre that references the company's "estrela" Déo Costa and

approvingly concludes: “Enviamos os nossos parabéns ao seu elenco para concorrer ao crescente evoluir do nosso progresso” (14 Nov. 1926) (*O Clarim d’Alvorada* 4).

[21] This item continues: “Não há dúvida que a pele azevichada está em moda... Em Paris a ‘Revue Negre’ fez furor,” deeming this Brazilian innovation as nothing more than a “novo francesismo, nova imitação das coisas de Paris por nós” (*Getulino: Orgão de Defesa* 1).

[22] At the same time, she was appearing alongside a performer called Carambola to represent the Pierrots da Caverna carnival society (3 Feb. 1928) (“Gazeta Theatral” 5).

[23] See, for example, an item about her appearance at the Democrata circus in Rio published in the *Jornal do Brasil* on 8 December 1927 (“Palcos e Salões” 12); and an advertisement for this variety show in the same newspaper on 18 December 1927 (45).

[24] Rosa Negra performed in the city of Salvador in December 1929, and the newspaper *O Paiz* announced: “Exibiu-se com sucesso, na capital, a atriz preta Rosa Negra” (“Cartas da Bahia” 10). She also became “uma das figuras mais aplaudidas da Companhia Mulata Brasileira,” formed at the end of 1930; a review of their debut production *Batuque, Cateretê e Maxixe* at São Paulo’s Casino Antártica theatre singles out Rosa Negra and Jacy Aymoré’s performance in the number “Jongo na fazenda,” which “é todas as noites bisado inúmeras vezes” (“Theatros-Apolo” 5).

[25] See, for example, the *Jornal do Brasil*, 13 August 1926, which announces the forthcoming performance at the Theatro Rialto as follows: “Além da representação da revista acima, haverá um grandioso ato variado em que tomam parte: PIXINGUINHA, um solo de flauta/ Déo Costa—cançonetista.” (“Theatro Rialto” 27). This term referred to the singers of *cançonetas* or light-hearted, witty and sometimes satirical short songs or ditties. The Exposição de Horticultura e Lacticínios held at the Palácio das Festas on the Avendida das Nações in Rio de Janeiro, featured in its programme of varied entertainment “as cançonetas da Graciosa Déo Costa, as danças bem marcadas de Catharine Darmour, e as árias de Valperga” (26 Oct. 1929) (“Exposição de Horticultura e Lacticínios,” *Jornal do Brasil* 9). She is described as a “Coupletista genuinamente nacional, de cujo sucesso diz bem a repetição obrigatória de suas cançonetas” (24 Oct. 1929) (4) and an “aplaudida coupletista” (25 Oct. 1929) (6).

[26] This revue was written by Wladimiro Di Roma, with music by Lyrio Panicali and set designs by Jaime Silva. Advertisements in the press emphasized the high production values and glamour of the costumes: “Luxo igual ao apresentado pelas melhores companhias do gênero-300 luxuosíssimas toilettes confeccionadas no atelier da Empresa—Aprimorada mise-en-scène de DE CHOCOLAT—Pela primeira vez na América do Sul, apresenta-se ao público CABELEIRAS EM FIO DE PRATA, criação admirável do celebrado cabeleireiro D’ Assis e exclusividade da Companhia Negra de Revistas” (“Rialto-Preto e Branco” 29).

[27] This verse is then followed by the following refrain: “Amor perfeito/ Tão petulante/ Gentil, ecorreito/ Sempre elegante/ Sou de encantar/ Sendo assim grácil/ Pois faço sonhar/ Venturas... mil.” This is a quote from the revue script consulted at the Arquivo Nacional in Rio de Janeiro.

[28] This item continues: “Com o concurso dessa interessante atriz e de outros elementos, como Dalva Espíndola, a ‘Ba-ta-clan Preta’ virá satisfazer com geral simpatia a ansiedade do público carioca” (17 Oct. 1926) (“Nos Theatros” 6).

[29] Their company owned the wardrobe of the Ba-ta-clan Preta, as proudly announced in an item in *O Jornal* on 12 November (2).

[30] Like the Companhia Negra de Revistas, the Ba-ta-clan Preta advertised itself by underscoring its high production values and originality. An announcement published in *A Manhã* on 17 October 1926 read: “Acaba de ser contratado para essa companhia o exímio professor de bailados Alexandre Montenegro, que ontem mesmo iniciou as marcações da peça em ensaios no Palace-Teatro. [...] De Chocolat, o estimado repentista, não tem poupado esforços para, como sempre, apresentar ao público carioca uma companhia sui-generis” (“Nos Theatros” 6).

[31] As Hertzman points out, Costa drew here on a long tradition of Afro-Brazilian performers, such as Benjamin de Oliveira and Eduardo das Neves at the turn of the century, who visited newspaper offices and provided journalists with press releases, letters, and interviews (6).

[32] The newspaper *O Jornal* reprinted an announcement published in the São Paulo newspaper *Folha da Manhã* stating that Costa had left the company and returned to Rio, but "veio trazer-nos suas despedidas" ("A 'Ba-ta-clan Preta' perdeu a sua 'estrela'" 3).

[33] The Jambo Venus stage name nevertheless remained firmly associated with Costa; an announcement for the *Dia das Crianças* benefit show held in October 1929 at the Democrata circus refers to the presence of "Déo Costa, aplaudido 'venus de jambo'" (9 Oct. 1929) ("Palcos e Salões" 16).

[34] In his book *Making Samba: A New History of Race and Music in Brazil*, Hertzman traces the emergence of Rio's first organizations that protected the rights of the city's theatre artists and musicians between 1915 and the 1930s (124). Organizations such as the SBAT (Sociedade Brasileira de Autores Teatrais), created in 1917, reflected the emergence of a growing entertainment class, but were dominated by white playwrights and theatre musicians (14). He states, "[w]hile some Afro-Brazilian artists thrived within them, the author's rights associations helped subsume Rio's black musicians within a broader, interracial entertainment sector. And though that larger group often depicted itself as inclusive and egalitarian, persistent internal hierarchies and stereotypes about authorship, creative genius, and race helped marginalize Afro-Brazilian entrepreneurs and composers. Meanwhile, easily consumable, one-dimensional caricatures of authentic, spiritual, emotive black musicians flourished" (9). In such organizations Afro-Brazilian theatre was associated with amateurism, and "the evasion of author's rights payments resonated with deep-rooted and long-lasting assumptions about blackness and authorship" (189).

[35] Hertzman adopts a different approach by paying close attention to agency but also illustrating rarely examined examples of mediation, competition, and contestation. He focuses, however, on male Afro-Brazilian performers (117).

[36] "Camarins e Camarotes" was a regular column that reported on the latest news from the theatre world. The item continues by poking fun at De Chocolat, the director of the Ba-ta-clan Preta, ridiculing him, like his female stars, by foregrounding the color of his skin, and again implicitly reinforcing his position at the bottom of the racial pecking order vis-à-vis this periodical's white elite readership. By addressing this successful performer and impresario with a familiar, colloquial form of address this item further reinforces his lowly social status and attendant lack of refinement: "Ora, 'seu' Chocolat, se aquela preta que substituiu a maninha mais moça da sra. Aracy Cortes pode ser 'Venus de Jambo,' você também poderá usar o título de 'Cupidinho de Marfim.' Sim, porque você, ao lado da nova 'Venus de Jambo,' até chega a ser cor de rosa..."—The publication commits a factual error here; Aracy Cortes's sister was, in fact, another member of the troupe, Dalva Espíndola—("Camarins e Camarotes" 10).

[37] The stage directions continue: "Os homens vestidos como cozinheiros trazendo cada um nas mãos utensílios de cozinha, panelas, frigideiras etc etc e as mulheres espanadores etc."

[38] The *baiana* continues: "E que candongas/ No calcanhar/ As 'mossorongas'/ A saltitar/ Eu sou bonitinha/ Como ninguém é/ Com a chinelinha/ Na ponta do pé./ Um belo pano da costa/ E a 'trunfa' enroscada/ Qual o moço que não gosta/ De uma camisa bordada?/ A Baiana tem certeza/ Certeza que é estimada/ Ela vale o quanto pesa/ Sem precisar ser pesada."

[39] Aracy Cortes, the daughter of a Spanish immigrant father and a mother of Afro-Brazilian descent, became the most well-known *baiana* of the popular theatre in Rio, having made her first appearance in 1921. As I argue elsewhere: "Her mixed-race looks meant that she did not require the blackface makeup used by some of her pale-skinned predecessors. Nonetheless, one can assume that it was the physical traces of her partial European origins that made her presence on stage in this role acceptable" (Shaw 120).

[40] For more details see Shaw, *Tropical Travels*, pp. 108-109.

[41] The inclusion of the child stars, the Trio Martins, in *Tudo Preto* further evidenced De Chocolat's conversance with the latest performance trends. Likewise, the Companhia Negra de Revistas featured a six-year-old Grande Otelo (Sebastião Bernardes de Souza Prata) when it performed in São Paulo in 1926, and he travelled to Rio de Janeiro the following year with Jaime Silva's re-formed Companhia Negra de Revistas. See Shaw, *Tropical Travels*, pp. 57-58.

[42] Review of *Tudo Preto* published in *Jornal do Brasil*, 1 August 1926, 11 ("Theatro Rialto" 31).

[43] The lyrics continue:

E mim sorô, sorô
Darà darà junhô
Oiba borobê
Emim sororê dadada
Tunhô oiba borobê
Emim sororo dadara
Tunhô abo borobê

Allez; Allez, O chum amaré
Allez, Allez, ochum, odè
Allez, Allez Ochum mare
Allez, Allez, odê
Abimimalo outilo tilo
Abimimalo ousora sera
Abi mi malo outilo tilo
Abimimalo outilo tilo.

[44] The number then ends: "Oh! senhores, senhoritas/ Belas figuras facetas/ Ao partirem não se esqueçam/ Que somos Pérolas pretas."

[45] The lyrics continue: "Chapéus a Mazzantini/ Bengalas à inglesa/ Eis a grande moda/ Da mulher francesa," followed by the refrain: "'Smocking!' 'Smocking!' [sic]/ É fumar. O inglês diz!/ 'Smocking!' 'Smocking!' [sic]/ É vestido em Paris."

[46] As I have argued elsewhere, such was this foreign company's impact and popularity that "[o]ne of the most common metonyms of modernity employed by revue writers in the 1920s was that of the Ba-ta-clan company itself. The impact and controversies caused by the performances of Madame Rasimi's troupe in Brazil in 1922 and 1923 led to its name entering the zeitgeist" (Shaw 106).

[47] The full refrain is as follows:

Vivemos sempre a cantar
Na praia a gritar
Oh! Oh!
A nadar
Desde o arrebol.
Saudando o sol
Sol! Sol!
Nós somos as sereias
Brincamos nas areias
Nós somos as catitas
Banhistas futuristas

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