In the classic works on the Mediterranean as a ‘cultural complex’, Portugal, Spain and Italy are classified as Catholic countries, allowing for many comparative studies within this ‘Mediterranean enclave’ (Peristiany 1966). This idea dates from the sixties, however, and much has changed in Portugal since then. Following a period of minor change in the late sixties, the country turned to democracy after the 1974 revolution, bringing to an end almost fifty years of dictatorship under the Salazar regime. With the inauguration of the democratic process, Portugal embarked on a new phase of political and social freedom, including the freedoms of speech and association. Within two years the Portuguese elected a new President, a Prime Minister, and a parliament in which parties from a range of ideological backgrounds were represented. There were further changes in 1986, when Portugal joined the European Union. While it had previously attracted immigrants from the former colonies (many arriving as refugees from civil wars that began after independence, as in Mozambique and Angola), immigration in Portugal increased after its entry into the EU.

This trend continued to grow in the course of the late 80s and into the 90s, as the country became the locus of a multicultural and multiethnic society. A new variety has also emerged in terms of religion. Churches or religious groups in Portugal now include Jews, Islamic groups (mainly Sunnis and Ismailis), evangelical churches (such as the Church of the Nazarene), several Pentecostal and Neopentecostal churches (including the IURD, Assembly of God and Maná churches), African churches (such as

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1 With thanks to Philip J. Havik for text editing.
2 Several studies have been conducted on Portugal as a host-nation for migrants from other continents; see, for instance, Bastos and Bastos (1999), Vala (1999), Machado (2002), Padilla (2003), Pires (2003), Gusmão (2004), Quintino (2004), Barreto (2005), Malheiros (2005) and Bastos and Bastos (2006).
3 Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God).
as the Tokoist and Kimbanguist churches\textsuperscript{4}, and animistic practices brought by a range of African migrants (Pordeus Jr. 2000, 2009; Vilaça 2001; Mafra 2002; Bastos and Bastos 2006; Saraiva 2007, 2008).

Among these are the rapidly expanding Afro-Brazilian cults, which originated in Brazil. From a count of circa 40 terreiros\textsuperscript{5} in 2008, there are now over 50 spread all over the country (although there is a larger concentration in the Lisbon area).

These religions seem to have entered the country with the opening up of religious freedom in the late seventies. According to Pordeus Jr. (2000, 2009) one of the first mães de santo\textsuperscript{6} was a Portuguese immigrant in Rio de Janeiro, who became acquainted with such cults and was initiated there, bringing the religion with her when she returned home.\textsuperscript{7} She started a terreiro in Lisbon, and many of her first followers, filhos and filhas de santo, continued the expansion, some founding their own terreiros and making their practices known to the Portuguese public.

The Afro-Brazilian religions come out of a process of mingling (or bricolage) between the African religions brought to the Americas through the slave trade. Many see them as religions of cultural resistance, in the sense that by paying homage to African deities they helped Africans not to lose touch with their ancestral origins. Although there are many different variants of Afro-Brazilian religions in Brazil, I will focus here on two syncretic cosmologies that are more common in Portugal: Umbanda and Candomblé.

Possession and trance are extremely important and are seen as essential in both of these. In Candomblé the African deities descend upon their ‘horses’ to offer humans the blessing of their presence, dancing among them. These deities are part of the Candomblé pantheon and have a direct relation to nature, as each one is connected to the natural world.

In Umbanda, the entities that descend upon their horses are rather archetypes of Brazilian society like the preto velho (the old black slave), and the caboclo (the Amerindian). They come down to talk and interact with people, give consultations and help them to overcome ailments or other life crises such as problems with love, money or health.

\textsuperscript{4} Research on Kimbanguist and Tokoist churches in Portugal is currently being carried out by Ramón Sarró and Ruy Blanes; see Blanes (2009) and Sarró (2009).

\textsuperscript{5} In Umbanda and Candomblé, the word terreiro refers both to the physical space of the cult house, and to the community of followers.

\textsuperscript{6} Priestesses in the Afro-Brazilian religions (literally ‘mother of the saint’). A male priest is a pai de santo, ‘father of the saint’.

\textsuperscript{7} Pordeus Jr. (2000) refers to Mãe Virgínia de Albuquerque as the first woman to open a terreiro in the Lisbon area, but others with similar life stories also returned to Portugal and started expanding Umbanda cults, often related to White Table practices (Pordeus Jr. 2009).