

Africa in Lisbon: rituals, therapies and policies

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Possessed by Brazilian spirits in Portugal—Afro-Brazilian cults in Lisbon

From being an emigration country, Portugal became, in the last decades, a country of immigration, especially with Africans from the former Portuguese colonies and Brazilians. With these populations came their religions, rituals, spirits, and therapeutic practises.

The Afro-Brazilian religions that entered Portugal in the last 20 years are becoming more and more popular. The temples are full of Portuguese followers who, after going through the initiation processes, become important in the organisation of the religious community and, with time, may themselves become priests. Where most of them were previously believers in the Catholic church, their turn to the Afro-Brazilian cults most of the time does not keep them from sustaining their regular church going practices. As such, many prefer *Umbanda*, closer to the Catholic matrix, while others turn to *Candomblé* and to African performances, rather new to them.

During cult sessions, people become *Iemanjás* or *pretos-velhos*, singing and talking with a Brazilian accent. Possession allows for the expression of emotions and performances that people complain are not allowed in the catholic church.

Drawing on field work conducted in Lisbon, in temples and with followers of these cults, this talk will explore some of the aspects of this new “Portuguese” syncretism, the way these cults incorporating possession appeal to the Portuguese, and the hermeneutical process of influences coming from Brazil to Portugal and returning back to their roots again. Furthermore, in this talk I will analyse how religious practices do not strictly belong to the realm of the sacred and the esoteric; on the contrary, they have to be considered as “novel modes of production that interact with globalization,” in which symbolic, political and economic issues are interrelated. Spaces where migrants gather are places for continuous negotiation of individuals and collective identities and for permanent processes of cultural interpenetrations and reconfigurations.

Short Abstract:

Portuguese feel the appeal of the recently arrived Afro-Brazilian religions and become followers of such cults. One of the aspects they find most appealing is the possibility of experiencing possession, and incorporating some of the Brazilian spirits during the cult sessions. Nevertheless, many of these new followers continue to go to the Catholic church services, and incorporate the afro-Brazilian practices within a wider context

allowing them to turn to both catholic and afro-Brazilian cults for help in life-crisis situations.

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She has been an invited Professor at Brown University other times (2001-2002;2006) , and also at the Université d’Aix-en-Provence, France (2005). She has carried out field work in Guinea-Bissau on funerary rituals and religion among the Pepel, and on issues of transnational religion among migrants from Guinea-Bissau in Lisbon. She is currently working both with African and Brazilian migrants and Afro-Brazilian religions in Portugal. Two of her recent publications deal directly with such issues:

SARAIVA, Clara 2007 “African and Brazilian Altars in Lisbon: Some Considerations on the reconfigurations of the Portuguese Religious Field”, NARO, N.; Sansi-Roca, R.; Treece, D. (eds.) *Cultures of the Lusophone Black Atlantic*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan.

SARAIVA, Clara 2008 “Transnational Migrants and Transnational Spirits: An African religion in Lisbon”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Special issue ed. Grillo, R.; Mazzucato, V. 34 (2) March 2008.