

EDITORIAL

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE TRAJECTORY OF SPIRITISM FROM FRANCE TO BRAZIL¹

UM PANORAMA HISTÓRICO DA TRAJETÓRIA DO ESPIRITISMO DA FRANÇA ATÉ O BRASIL

UN RESUMEN HISTÓRICO DE LA HISTORIA DEL ESPIRITISMO DESDE FRANCIA HASTA BRASIL

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It is with great satisfaction that we launch the editorial of the Dossier Spiritism in Perspectives, from the journal *INTERAÇÕES* from PUC Minas. We emphasize the importance of this *Dossier* due to the fact that Spiritism is a religion, which, although it rose in France in the second half of the 19th century, exactly 165 years ago, it was consolidated in Brazilian territory like nowhere else. Currently, Spiritism is the third largest religion in Brazil², but its set of ideas and beliefs goes far beyond its declared number of adherents. Therefore, it is a religion that marks the foundations of our culture.

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² It should be noted that, according to a 2022 Datafolha survey, 12% of Brazilians belong to a heterogeneous group classified as "nones" (religiously unaffiliated Brazilians). It is important to note that most of this group

To contextualize the reader, we made a brief text about the history of Spiritism, in order to situate the main events that marked the trajectory of this new religion from France to Brazil. We highlight: the emergence of the *turning table* phenomena still in the United States and its migration to Europe; the studies carried out by Allan Kardec from his contact with these phenomena; the organization and publication of that material that gave rise to its doctrinal body; the conflicts experienced in different social strata; its arrival in Brazil in the 19th century; its organization, development and reactions in society.

We hope that this dossier can become an important source of research for people who are dedicated to the study of Spiritism in the disciplines of Religious Studies and History of Religions.

1 THE RISE OF MODERN SPIRITUALISM

The 19th century brought profound changes in Western thought with the emergence and/or appreciation of concepts such as: evolution, scientism, rationalism and positivism. Most of our current institutions have their roots in this period.

In the intellectual milieu, prevailed the belief that conversion to modern ideas would exclude religiosity. There was an intense search for the laws of nature and society. Science and materialism were closely intertwined, perpetuating the belief in the unlimited moral, intellectual and technical development of humanity. They intended to implant a modern doctrine of life, destined to supplant all religious forms. In this way, science, reason and materialism were consolidated as the only agents capable of leading and guiding human thought and action. Rationality triumphed, marking the beginning of a redirection in the sense of seeking knowledge through the empirical observation of facts until the answers were obtained. It seemed that scientism had definitively consolidated itself, at least in the most intellectualized circles; it seemed that such a state would bring about the end of religiosity, but it did not. The idea of religion changed, but it was not denied. Damazio (1994) states that scientific and religious branches, almost always antagonistic, had to coexist due to the need of modern western man to understand and explain the world rationally and, also, to fill the void of existence itself with the belief in immortality. To a certain extent, the struggle was against superstition and not against faith, against the Church and not against religion.

According to Mircea Eliade (1996, p. 170) an exclusively rational man would be an

has religious beliefs such as the existence of God, as only 1/10 of them report not believing in God (Folha de São Paulo, 2022).

abstraction, since “the experience of the sacred constitutes an element in the structure of man’s consciousness, and not a phase of that consciousness”. The sacred would precede the world itself. As much as man tried to free himself from the mythological schemes of religion, he would end up creating an interpretative scheme of society, recreating the myths within the standards accepted by scientificity.

In this context, there was a wave of spiritualist interest in the Western world, with emphasis on mediumistic phenomena. This heterogeneous movement, which had in common the belief in the existence and survival of spirits after the death of the physical body, as well as in the possibility of their communication with the living, became known as “Modern Spiritualism”³ (BRAUDE, 1989; DOYLE, 1995; TRIMBLE, 1995; SILVA, 1997).

Traditionally, the phenomena observed in 1848, in Hydesville, in the United States, are considered to mark the rise of modern spiritualism, which would gain philosophical-doctrinal expression in France after a few years. Although the practice of invoking the dead, of trying to contact souls, is an immemorial aspect of human societies, in the second half of the 19th century a new influx, according to the principles of positive science, secularized philosophy, political and rational materialism, invaded this domain, previously exclusive to religion.

On a farm in Hydesville, New York, the Fox Methodist family, parents and their daughters Catherine and Margareth and Katie experienced a series of unusual events: objects moving spontaneously, knocks and blows on furniture and the walls, apparently without any kind of physical interference. The two girls concluded that the blows were not random and that it would even be possible to establish an “intelligible contact with the spirits” that produced the sounds, through a code that associated the number of blows with the letters of the alphabet (WEISBERG, 2004).

The news quickly spread across the region and across the country, transforming the Fox sisters into highly known figures. By the mid-1850s, it already had more than 10,000 followers (AUBRÉE; LAPLANTINE, 1990). Spiritualist newspapers multiplied from north to south of the United States, transforming religious manifestations into a social movement

³ For most historians of Spiritualism, the intellectual matrices and the spiritualist imaginary of the 19th century can be found in the 18th century and linked to the figures of Emmanuel Swedenborg and Kaspar Lavater. These two thinkers were part of a movement where representations of the Beyond gained an extreme humanization outside the space of Catholicism. The limits of beliefs and doctrines that transferred earthly affections to after death were expanded, presenting the possibilities of knowledge of existence after death as well as of communications between the two dimensions, overcoming the barrier of fears and uncertainties that surrounded moral destiny, in a sentimental and psychological revolution that marked the 19th century (SILVA, 1997).

that brought together various causes considered socially advanced at the time. Although the movement was decentralized, it was possible to find a considerable number of abolitionists, pacifists and defenders of women's rights among modern spiritualists (BRAUDE, 1989; SOUSA; PIMENTEL, 2021; COSTA, 2021).

The movement continued its propagation, arousing conversions and great opponents, arriving on the other side of the Atlantic, especially in France, from 1853 onwards. As a curiosity and parlor pastime, the first meetings around the spinning tables came about. These manifestations were the subject of numerous comments. Several intellectuals and researchers began to propose the feasibility of investigating the survival of the soul after death based on observations of spinning, dancing and talking tables (LACHAPELLE, 2012). Modern spiritualism was inserted into an intense debate about what could be understood as natural and supernatural (SHARP, 1999).

In the United States the spiritualist movement had hundreds of theorists, scholars and mediums, thousands of sympathizers and adherents. It quickly flourished, undergoing a curious integration with various branches of Protestantism through a strong educational focus and through various publications, centers and study groups (BRAUDE, 1996). Moore points out that the impact of spiritualism on North American culture was very great, "few cultural phenomena affected as many people or aroused as much interest as spiritualism did in the ten years before the Civil War in this period" (apud SHORTT, 1984, p. 340).

In the context of this spiritualist wave, there was the formation of a specific movement that became known as Spiritism.

2 THE RISE OF SPIRITISM IN FRANCE

Spiritism emerged from the work of a Frenchman, Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail (1804-1869), who was one of the first researchers to adopt and adapt methods used in the scientific environment to investigate the mediumistic phenomenon and build a theoretical body of a philosophical-scientific nature (PIMENTEL, 2014). With a traditional academic education, trained at Professor Pestalozzi's Institute of Education in Switzerland, Rivail was, for years, a teacher and director of Lyceum, as well as a writer of books on science, grammar, pedagogy, mathematics, etc. Concerned with pedagogical research, which placed reason over any form of dogmatic affirmation, whether religious or scientific, he defended the right of free examination in any matter, whether of faith or any other form of knowledge, fighting intolerance and religious dogmatism (KARDEC, 1890; WANTUIL; THIESEN, 1978;

NEGRÃO, 1987, SILVA, 2011).

A member of at least 13 scientific societies, from 1855 onwards, after several observations and experiences in mediumistic sessions in vogue at the time, he concluded for the spiritual and intelligent nature of the phenomena (PIMENTEL, 2014). He understood that the possibility of a direct investigation into the condition of the soul after death, the condition of spirits and the definitive proof of the immortality of the soul was open, and he began to systematically organize his studies on the matter. Rivail, who eventually assumed the pseudonym of Allan Kardec, elaborated the theoretical edifice of Spiritism based on mediumistic communications received by various mediums in different cities and countries (KARDEC, 1859; FERNANDES, 2004). He began to bring questions about various philosophical problems to the mediumistic meetings and to analyze the answers given by the *spirits*.

The existence of an invisible world, which was a religious or metaphysical speculation, would have become amenable to an empirical approach. One of the central characteristics of the approach that Kardec developed was the naturalization of the spiritual world. Spiritual manifestations would be the object of empirical investigation: they were observed and compared; its consequences were deduced; its causes were reassembled (KARDEC, 1890).

After verifying the quality of the material collected and its proportions, he decided to publish the results of his research. On April 18, 1857, after two years of investigations, Rivail published the first work based on his studies of mediumistic phenomena, *The Spirits' Book*. To name the set of narrative forms and organized reports, he coined the term *Spiritism* or *Spiritist Doctrine* precisely with the aim of differentiating the new doctrine from other spiritualist beliefs, defining it as “a science that deals with nature, origin and destiny of the Spirits, as well as their relations with the corporeal world” (KARDEC, 1859; 1860; DAMAZIO, 1994). The spiritual world would be as natural and governed by natural laws as the stars and microorganisms. Kardec said that mediums could be compared to microscopes or telescopes, in the sense of allowing the observation of a world that could not be seen with the naked eye (KARDEC, 1859).

For him (KARDEC, 1868), Spiritism would essentially be a philosophy with scientific bases and moral implications, not constituting a religion according to the usual conception of the word. Spiritists often refer to the *triple aspect* of Spiritism: science, philosophy and religion (CHIBENI, 2003). Among the basic spiritist principles, we can highlight: existence of God, immortality of the soul (adopting a dualistic conception of the human being), reincarnation, evolution, mediumship and acceptance of Christian ethics with an emphasis

on the practice of charity (KARDEC, 1857).

After the publication of *The Spirits' Book* came, successively, *The Mediums' Book* (1861); *The Gospel According to Spiritism* (1864); *Heaven and Hell or the Justice of God according to Spiritism* (1865); *Genesis, Miracles and Predictions* (1868). In addition to the books, Kardec published five more unpublished booklets promoting Spiritism, two other booklets with extracts taken from the *Revue Spirite* and a posthumous work.

In January 1858, the *Revue Spirite: Journal d'études psychologiques* was founded, the spiritualist periodical with the greatest circulation in France at the time (MONROE, 2008 apud SHORTT, 1984). From it came several articles that, remodeled, constituted a large part of his books (PIMENTEL, 2019). And, in April of the same year, he founded the *Société Parisienne des Études Spirites* (SPES), with the aim of bringing together those interested in the study of spiritism "as others gather to study phrenology, history or other sciences" (KARDEC, 1860, p. 100). This organization contributed to the expansion of the spiritist movement in France and in other countries, including Brazil (KARDEC, 1861, 1890; WANTUIL; THIESEN, 1978; CHIBENI, 2000; GIL, 2014).

In addition to publishing his works and works in the SPES, Kardec took several trips to the interior of France to disseminate the new doctrine and guide the process of creating new spiritist societies, in addition to maintaining a wide correspondence with spiritists from more than a thousand spiritist centers in the world, present in 268 cities, at least in 37 countries, in Europe and beyond (FERNANDES, 2004). This intense debate with these correspondents contributed positively to the process of elaboration and consolidation of Spiritism (GIL, 2014; PIMENTEL, 2014; PROJETO ALLAN KARDEC).

With the increase in the number of followers in France, opinions in the press and in religious, intellectual and scientific circles have diversified. Not only in France, but also in other parts of Europe and the United States, spiritist phenomena were the object of constant studies and statements by scientists and intellectuals: some admitting the reality of the phenomena, others delegitimizing them as voluntary or involuntary frauds by their protagonists, cause of mental disorders, crimes and suicide (ROCHA, 1896; PIMENTEL, 1919; SHORTT, 1983, 1984; BROWN, 1983; MACHADO, 1993; DAMAZIO, 1994; LE MALÉFAN, 1999; MONTEIRO, 2005; ALMEIDA, 2007; ALMEIDA ; GOMES 2021; GOMES, 2020).

For the Church, spiritist phenomenology, when not fraudulent, would be provoked by demons and, therefore, should be severely fought against. Sermons multiplied, and newspaper articles multiplied. In 1861, three hundred spiritist works were seized and burned

in a public square in Spain, in an episode that became known as the *Act of Faith of Barcelona*. In addition, the Catholic Church included in the Index, from 1864, several spiritist works (KARDEC, 1861a; 1861b. ALMEIDA, 2000). The lay press also frequently printed anecdotes and *comic strips* about the phenomenon of spinning tables (WANTUIL, 1958; ALMEIDA, 2000).

Spiritism definitely entered the list of concerns of the medical profession as they considered it capable of triggering and/or aggravating madness, leading to crime and suicide through mediumistic practices and their set of beliefs. There was a special concern with madness that would be transmitted more intensely to future generations, according to Morel's theory of degeneration⁴, so in vogue at the time. Associated with this were accusations of fraud/charlatanism and mysticism (LE MALÉFAN, 1999).

Allan Kardec established an intense debate with these different segments in order to refute the harmful character of Spiritism and combat the accusations of fraud/charlatanism and mysticism that involved spiritist practices. (KARDEC, 1861c, 1861d, 1862, 1862a, 1862b, 1862c, 1863, 1863a, 1863b, 1863c, 1863d, 1864, 1864a, 1865, 1865a, 1865b, 1866).

Kardec analyzed two hypotheses of quackery: sleight of hand tricks and clicking muscles. The first was reinforced by shows dedicated to reproducing, through magic tricks, and demonstrating that the sessions were the result of quackery (PAGE, 1853; LACHAPELLE, 2015). The second, defended by academic researchers in France and the United States, found physiological reasons for mediumistic beatings, such as the rotation of bones, joints and muscles (FLINT; LEE; COVENTRY, 1851).

Kardec recognized that many of the supposed mediumistic manifestations were caused by fraud, but he disagreed that all mediumistic manifestations were the result of this practice (KARDEC, 1861). He criticized those who came to this conclusion hastily, for not being able to find more adequate explanations for the phenomenon (KARDEC, 1857). For him, the possibility of fraud was greater among mediums who charged for the sessions, especially when they claimed that they would be able to produce mediumistic manifestations at their will, since the manifestation depended on the will of the communicant spirit

⁴ One of the most striking theories of the late 19th century is the Theory of Degeneration or Degeneracy by B. A. Morel (1809-1873), systematized in the 1857 Treatise on Degeneracy. It was based on the assumption that over the generations nervous people would generate neurotics, who would produce psychotics, who would generate idiots or imbeciles, until the extinction of the defective lineage. This theory had great repercussion among physicians and society in general. Morel considered that degeneration could come from intoxications (malaria, opium, alcohol, epidemics); from the social environment; of morbid temperament; of moral infirmities; of inheritance; doubly dangerous would be the combination of physical and mental injuries. Degeneracy was defined as a deviation from a perfect primitive type, a deviation that is hereditarily transmitted (DALGALARRONDO, 1995; ODA, 2001).

(KARDEC, 1861).

On the other hand, he found no reason to believe that thousands of mediums around the world, in public and family sessions, were committed to fraud (KARDEC, 1857). The simulation of mediumistic phenomena by conjurers would not be sufficient evidence that every phenomenon was false. For him, Spiritism would have much to contribute, as the in-depth study of the doctrine would offer the reader the necessary conditions to distinguish a legitimate manifestation from a fraudulent mediumship (KARDEC, 1866).

Kardec considered the mediumistic manifestations that generated transport of objects, knocks and answers to banal questions more prone to charlatanism than the so-called intelligent communications whose content was of great philosophical, scientific or moral depth (KARDEC, 1859). He also did not rule out the hypothesis that the movements of the tables could be explained by the action of a known or unknown physical force. Important physicists such as Michael Faraday and François Arago carried out experiments in sessions of spinning tables, reaching the conclusion that the movement of the tables was derived from barely perceptible muscular actions of the participants' hands around the table (PIMENTEL; ALBERTO; MOREIRA-ALMEIDA, 2016).

The idea that physical forces were among the causes of the phenomena was one of the first hypotheses raised by Kardec. However, for him, such a possibility was consistent to explain the spinning tables, but insufficient to offer answers to phenomena such as knocks that responded to intelligent signals (1861)⁵.

Kardec also admitted that a mediumistic activity could be caused by superstition, by credulity and that an alleged medium, in fact, could be a carrier of mental disorders. However, he stated that a mediumistic phenomenon could not be the result of illusion or hallucination when observed, at the same time, by countless people and unknown to each other (KARDEC, 1859). In addition, hallucination would not offer answers to intelligent phenomena, such as mediumistic writing, which often provided information unknown to the medium, confirmed later (KARDEC, 1861).

Allan Kardec dealt with the issue of madness and its relations with Spiritism at different times. It emphasized the biological basis of madness and the influence of the patient's cultural environment on the content of psychopathology, but added another

⁵ Although Kardec's argument was convincing for his readers to refute the hypothesis of physical causes for the nature of phenomena, Faraday's experiences opened space for researchers of the mind to investigate the possibility of illusion and hallucination of adherents of Modern Spiritualism. Thus, mediumship would be the consequence of a fixed idea existing in the medium that, driven by the belief in the existence of spirits, would end up moving the table unconsciously (CRABTREE, 1993).

source: obsessions, that is, “the persistent action that an evil spirit exerts on an individual” (KARDEC, 1860; 1868, p. 304). Kardec carried out a detailed study on the alterations of felt perception, proposing, as a hypothesis, three types: hallucination, imagination and apparitions or true visions (KARDEC, 1861c; 1861d).

In addition to refusing a pathogenic role for Spiritism, Kardec argues that the spiritist point of view would help in facing the difficulties of life, functioning as a buffer against stressful life events. To clearly demonstrate the purpose of life, by motivating the human being to improve more and more, Spiritism would prevent displeasure with life and melancholy, despite recognizing the existence of organic predispositions (KARDEC, 1862). Spiritism would also reduce cases of madness by preventing the abusive use of alcohol (KARDEC, 1865a).

3 THE ARRIVAL OF SPIRITISM IN BRAZIL

Spiritism arrived in Brazil in the second half of the 19th century, but its dissemination in the city of Rio de Janeiro was limited, being restricted to the French colony of the capital and some intellectuals. These French immigrants had economic, social and cultural prestige, consisting largely of professors, journalists and merchants. Among the introducers of Spiritism in Brazil, Casimir Lieutaud, Adolphe Hubert and Madame Collard stand out. The prominent social position of the new followers and the discretion with which they held their sessions meant that they did not arouse opposition (DAMAZIO, 1994).

In Bahia, Spiritism established itself in a more firm and organized way. It was there that the first known spiritist center was formed, the *Grupo Familiar do Espiritismo*, founded in 1865, under the direction of Luís Olímpio Telles de Menezes (1828-1893) (DAMAZIO, 1994; GIUMBELLI, 1997, 1997a, 1999, 2003, 2006). If it did not become popular at that time, there is no doubt that the new doctrine won sympathizers and practitioners to the point of suffering the first repressions by the Church.

Telles de Menezes, professor and journalist, was the one who translated the first spiritist book to be printed in the country and who founded in 1869 the first Brazilian spiritist periodical, called *O Echo d'Além Túmulo* (DAMAZIO, 1994; GIUMBELLI, 1999). A group of intellectual elites from Bahian society was organized around it. The nascent Spiritist movement in Bahia, due to the action of its members and the repression it caused, drew the attention of the rest of the country and helped to spread Spiritism, especially in the Court. Family study groups were formed aimed at apprehending the philosophical content of the

doctrine and, therefore, at the practice of charity, expressed in the form of assistance to the needy. Faced with the expansion of spiritist ideas, the Bahian Archbishop D. Manuel Joaquim da Silveira (1807-1875) wrote a Pastoral Letter in 1867, whose central themes were censorship and the need to combat Spiritism (MACHADO, 1997).

Back in Rio de Janeiro in the 1870s, spiritist ideas began to attract greater attention among the more intellectualized circles because their proposal assumed a teleological view of history, inseparable from the law of continuous progress. The spiritist doctrine defended the improvement of the individual and consequently of society in a continuous way (ISAIA, 2012). Associated with this, its French origin (linked to the representation of modernity) and the dissemination of the idea that Spiritism united several aspects - philosophical, scientific and moral - were the foundation for its progressive acceptability in the capital of the Court (ISAIA, 2008).

In 1873, a pioneering group of Spiritist studies was organized in Rio de Janeiro, the *Confucius Group*, which formed the basis on which the Brazilian Spiritist Federation (FEB) would rise a decade later. The group organized the translation of Kardec's works into Portuguese, contributing decisively to the expansion of the doctrine. It was the physician and politician Joaquim Travassos (1839-1915), general secretary of the Confucius Group, who translated from French into Portuguese the works of Kardec: *The Spirit's Book*, *The Mediums' Book*, *Heaven and Hell* and *The Gospel According to Spiritism*. According to Damazio (1994) these books have been republished innumerable times, contributing to the dissemination of Spiritism. However, it was in the Confucius Group that currents within the spiritist movement began to emerge, dividing and weakening it.

As it had happened in Europe, the Catholic Church began to intensify its criticism of Spiritism in this period, especially through the press. It was used the pages of the periodical *The Apostle*, where, in addition to the articles, it published two Catholic pastoral letters, distributed by the Bishop of Rio de Janeiro to the Brazilian Episcopate in 1881 and 1882 with accusations against Spiritism. Spiritism was considered a heresy or the result of a demonic action (GIUMBELLI, 1997).

In response to the circulation of these ideas in the Catholic press, to expand the dissemination of the new doctrine and contain dissensions, the photographer Augusto Elias da Silva (1840-1903) took the initiative of founding a spiritist periodical in Rio de Janeiro. In 1883, the *Reformador* was launched, published fortnightly (DAMAZIO, 1994; GIUMBELLI, 1997). Far from limiting his work to the religious sphere, *Reformer* (*Reformador*) published articles advocating social and political reforms considered

essential at the time, such as religious freedom and the abolition of slavery. Initially, the print run was very small, from 300 to 400 copies, and most were distributed free of charge. But, over time, the publication expanded, even being sent abroad, mainly to Portugal⁶.

Through the pages of the *Reformador*, the defense of the creation of a center formed by representatives of all spiritist groups began, aiming at the union to face the constant criticism. A small group got together and decided to found a society that could bring everyone together. On February 2, 1884, the first board of the Brazilian Spiritist Federation was elected and sworn in. Damazio (1994, p. 101-47) states that “the foundation of the FEB resulted from the awareness of several spiritists [...] of the need to combine efforts for the preservation of Spiritism in the country, weakened, internally, by doctrinal subdivisions, and attacked by the official church”.

Alongside this conflict, in the religious field, Spiritism also began to be the subject of debate among Brazilian doctors. They considered that, by introducing the idea of the existence of an extra material element (the spirit); Spiritism would, in fact, be a throwback to superstition. In this way, spiritist ideas would be unacceptable at a time of intellectual and scientific achievements. While the spiritist doctrine was considered by doctors⁷ as a setback in the evolution of human thought, spiritist practices were attributed to fraud/charlatanism or the manifestation of evident mental problems (ROCHA, 1896; PIMENTEL, 1919). Influenced by the proposal of the theory of degeneration and eugenics⁸, Spiritism would be a threat to the degeneration of the species added to the other dangers of the time: alcoholism, bad social and cultural conditions. Predisposed people, who continually sought spiritualistic sessions, were at serious risk of developing mental disorders with disastrous consequences. Once the disease is contracted, they could transmit the degenerate genetic load to future generations (degeneracy theory) or it would require great efforts from the scientific community to control the transmission of these genes (eugenic methods) (MARQUES, 1929).

The definition of Spiritism, as an important triggering agent of mental disorders, has

⁶ A demonstration of the dimensions reached by the *Reformador* can be seen in the *Annals of the National Library*, where it appears as one of the four periodicals that appeared in Rio de Janeiro between 1808 and 1890 and that still exists today. With the exception of the *Official Gazette*, *Reformador* is the only one whose publication has never been interrupted since its launch (SOUZA, 1982, 1984).

⁷ It should be noted that medical thinking was not homogeneous. Some doctors were against the association between Spiritism and madness and its dissemination as a symbol of the cultural backwardness of society.

⁸ Eugenics rose in a historical context of positivism, naturalism, materialism, organicism and evolutionism, defending the supremacy of genetic factors in determining human behavior. Its premises have acquired a lot of prestige, as they claim, among other factors, to be based on scientific demonstrations, even using bold statistical calculations. In a positivist environment, these were very seductive attributes. (CHALMERS, 1994).

spread beyond the medical field. These ideas also influenced the clergy and some intellectuals, who began to make constant references to the term “spiritist madness” in their criticism of the new doctrine (MACHADO, 1994; ISAIA, 2005, 2006). In the words of the writer Machado de Assis, for example, anyone could accept the spiritist principles, but madness would always be an inevitable consequence (MACHADO, 1994).

In addition to this discussion about the dangers of Spiritism for mental disorders, the medical profession was also concerned with the healing practices carried out in Spiritist centers. Called quackery and the illegal practice of medicine, they mobilized doctors and jurists in an attempt to repress such activities.

The doctors emphasized that spiritist practices should be framed in articles 156, 157 and 158 of the 1890 Penal Code. Such articles would guarantee the framing of prescription mediums as charlatans and their practices as an illegal exercise of Medicine:

Art. 157. Practicing Spiritism, magic and its spells, using talismans and fortune-telling, to awaken feelings of hate or love, inculcate healing of curable or incurable diseases, in short, to fascinate and subjugate public credulity. [...]

Paragraph 1: If, by influence, or as a result of any of these means, the patient is deprived or altered, temporarily or permanently, of the psychic faculties [...].

Art. 156. Practice medicine in any of its branches, dentistry or pharmacy; practice homeopathy, dosimetry, hypnotism or animal magnetism, without being authorized by laws and regulations. [...]

Art. 158. Administer or simply prescribe, as a curative means, for internal or external use, and in any prepared form, substance from any of the kingdoms of nature, thus performing or exercising the office of the so-called healer [...]. (1890 CRIMINAL CODE).

These articles of legislation were included under the heading “Crimes against public tranquility”, in the chapter “Crimes against public health”. The majority of “prescription mediums” could be classified in the three articles: individuals without professional qualifications (art.156), who proposed to cure through “Spiritism” (art.157) and prescribing homeopathic medications (art.158).

According to this taxonomy in the penal code, Spiritism would be a crime with public consequences, such as forgery of documents, fires and attacks against means of communication and transport, alteration of medicines and falsification of edibles. All these crimes directly affected the community. They were considered dangerous both for the damage they had already caused and for the possibility of causing them to others.

In addition to using the pages of *The Reformer*, the spiritists developed a series of strategies to deal with the accusations: they published books, wrote articles in spiritist journals, produced a thesis in medicine (which was disapproved), founded spiritist

psychiatric hospitals, denied being mediumship a form or cause of madness, in addition to fighting the association with crime and suicide (MACHADO, 1922; LEITE, 1931; LOBO, 1939; GÓES, 1939; FOREIS, 1939; FERREIRA, 1939, 1945, 1946, 1948; SOUZA; DEEITOS, 1980).

And in this domain of the public sphere, the spiritist movement sought to present its ideas and legitimize itself in Brazilian society. And as the doctrine was defined as a philosophical and scientific system with moral consequences, spiritists had to confront each other both in the scientific field and in the religious field, in this field of symbolic disputes (BOURDIEU, 1989).

With the criminalization of Spiritism, the spiritist movement, which was already a ‘danger’ for the eyes of the Catholic Church, a ‘phenomenon’ for the followers of science, in addition to a ‘subject’ for the newspapers, also became a ‘crime’ for the judiciary, a ‘disease’ for doctors and a ‘problem’ for the police.

This conflict and this game of forces lasted until the end of the first half of the 20th century. But, gradually, Spiritism, which despite having risen in France one hundred and sixty-five years ago and having spread among the urban middle class, expanded its ideas and practices in Brazil, increasing its number of adherents and sympathizers, consolidating in the Brazilian religious field. It is currently the third largest religious group in Brazil (IBGE, 2010), which is the country where this religion has spread the most. Nowadays, the fundamental principles of the spiritist doctrine, such as the survival of the soul after death, reincarnation, mediumship and the search for constant progress reach a much larger public than the declared number of followers⁹ (AUBRÉE; LAPLANTINE, 1990; SANTOS, 1997; STOLL, 2003). So much so that in a survey carried out by the Datafolha Institute (2007) it was possible to verify the following result: 44% of the Brazilian Catholic population said that they *totally believe* in reincarnation, 22% have doubts and 35% do not believe. In view of this, it can be concluded that the spiritist ideas that began to permeate the Brazilian social imagination took root in our society like nowhere else, characterizing itself as a genuinely Brazilian religion.

⁹ Stoll (2003) highlights that a factor that may have contributed to the dissemination and/or interest that Spiritism would have aroused in the population would be the importance that Spiritist literature assumed in Brazil. The wide literary production has been a hallmark of Spiritism since its inception. According to a survey by journalist João do Rio, around 1900, 96 spiritist newspapers and magazines circulated in the world. Of this total, 56 of them were edited throughout Europe and 19 only in Brazil.

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