

SPIRITIST MOVEMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY PUERTO RICO

One of the first findings from my field work is that in order to understand *Espiritismo* as it is practiced in Puerto Rico, it is necessary to consider the presence of several spiritist movements. I became aware that instead of writing about a single homogenous phenomenon called Puerto Rican *Espiritismo*, I should emphasize the complexity and diverse manifestations of this system. Through the interviews I found that the way in which mediums articulate their experiences depends deeply on the type of spiritist movement in which they have developed.

From my field work I could identify five major spiritist movements: 1) Indigenous *Espiritismo*, 2) Kardecian *Espiritismo*, 3) Trincadismo, 4) the Church Spiritist Movement and 5) the syncretism of *Espiritismo* with *Santería*. The purpose of this chapter is to describe each movement, emphasizing the major differences between them. Before presenting this analysis I will present a brief history of the introduction of Kardecian Spiritism in Puerto Rico. This history may help us to understand the presence of these different practices.

A Brief History of Espiritismo in Puerto Rico:
From its Introduction to 1930

All the major sources on the history of Espiritismo agree that it was introduced into Puerto Rico during the second half of the nineteenth century (Cruz-Monclova, 1952; Koss, 1977a; Rodríguez-Escudero, 1978; Yáñez, 1963). At that time, Puerto Rico was a colony of Spain and the official religion was Catholicism. The political environment was one of repression and a complete lack of civil rights. However, there were a good number of middle class Puerto Ricans who had the opportunity to go to Europe to study. In Europe these Puerto Ricans were deeply influenced by a philosophical system called Spiritism. This system was developed by a French educator and philosopher who wrote under the pseudonym of Allan Kardec (1804-1869).

The return of the Puerto Rican intellectuals from Europe also meant the introduction of the spiritist philosophy into Puerto Rico. These Puerto Ricans were interested in working for change and reforming the economic and political system of the Island. They found in Spiritism a philosophy which addressed the transformation of the individual as well as the community. Spiritism became for Puerto Rican liberals an ideal doctrine that would liberate the oppressed Puerto Rican

community from the dictatorial government of Spain.

Kardec's most significant books The Gospel According to Spiritism (1978a), The Book of the Spirits (1978b), and The Book of the Mediums (1977) gained great popularity within the Puerto Rican intellectual community. At first these books were brought to Puerto Rico clandestinely because the Spanish government was opposed to the introduction of the spiritist philosophy (Rodríguez-Escudero, 1978). Despite this, by 1873 Puerto Rican bookstores were selling Kardec's books (Cruz-Monclova, 1952) and the new movement was gaining acceptance by many Puerto Ricans.

In the beginning, spiritist groups had to be organized secretly because they were thought to be affiliated with revolutionary groups. **Espiritistas** were arrested and prosecuted by the government (Yáñez, 1963). Different magazines and newspapers published articles in which **Espiritismo** was described as an "abominable social cancer" and the cause of mental illness (Cruz-Monclova, 1952). In 1875 the Boletín Mercantil, a government newspaper, reported that **Espiritismo** was "invading the Island" (Cruz-Monclova, 1952, p. 643). Similarly, the Catholic Church published many articles condemning the practice of **Espiritismo**. In addition, **Espiritistas** were denied sacraments such as baptism, marriage, and last rites.

Despite all of this repression, the spiritist movement grew rapidly and spiritist centers were organized in different parts of the Island. The first one was "Luz del Progreso" (Light of Progress) founded in Mayagüez on 1888 (Yáñez, 1963). During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, spiritist centers promoted change in the areas of education, health care and social reform. Spiritist groups organized libraries and published a significant number of magazines and newspapers. At least 11 spiritist magazines were published in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Spiritist leaders considered the study of *Espiritismo* essential for the intellectual and moral growth of the Puerto Rican community. In 1873, a spiritist leader named Manuel Corchado y Juarbe presented a project to the Spanish Courts recommending the study of *Espiritismo* in the secondary schools (Rodríguez-Escudero, 1978).

Spiritist groups also worked to improve health care for the people by creating several hospitals throughout the Island. They were also involved in the task of working for social and political reforms. For example, in 1888, spiritist groups from Mayagüez sent delegates to the First International Congress of Spiritists in Barcelona with the purpose of condemning the abuse and repression of the Spanish government. Spiritist leaders such as Matienzo-Cintrón and

Emeterio Bacon were also prominent politicians who were committed to achieving freedom and justice for Puerto Rico.

In 1898, the United States invaded Puerto Rico, taking possession of the Island. This event happened six months after Spain conceded an autonomous government to the Island. Under the domination of the United States, Puerto Rico again became again an oppressed colony.

Espiritismo continued its growth as an important doctrine in Puerto Rico. In 1903, a group of **Espiritistas** founded the Spiritist Federation of Puerto Rico, an organization dedicated to the promulgation of **Espiritismo** and the cohesion of spiritist centers and societies. This organization began to hold annual conventions in which **Espiritistas** from many towns of Puerto Rico would meet to participate in conferences and to discuss the development of **Espiritismo** on the Island.

Rodríguez-Escudero (1978), a spiritist lawyer who wrote a book on the history of **Espiritismo** in Puerto Rico, commented that to a certain extent the history of the Federation is the history of **Espiritismo**. In his book he summarized all the major meetings sponsored by the Federation. However there is no information about what happened outside of these meetings related to the development of **Espiritismo**.

In 1905, the Spiritist Federation approved a committee for the purpose of organizing the spiritist centers on the Island (Rodríguez-Escudero, 1978). The recommendations developed by this committee were the following:

1. There should be conferences about moral or psychological themes.
2. Each center should be led by competent persons.
3. All or some of the centers should have night schools for the teaching of reading and writing.
4. Each center should have a spiritist library.
5. Each center should try to have a hospital for the health care of orphan children and old people.
6. Spiritist centers should become schools based on lay and rationalist principles.

As one can see the Spiritist Federation emphasized the academic education of the **Espiritistas** and the principle that **Espiritismo** should not be practiced as another religion.

In 1913, a dentist named Francisco Ponte became the president of the Federation. Ponte is considered to be the first Puerto Rican parapsychologist due to his empirical approach to psychical research (Alvarado, 1979). He performed several experiments with a medium who produced materializations. Ponte reported these experiments to the American Society for Psychical Research.

By 1923, Ponte wrote that there were at least 150

spiritist centers incorporated into the Federation. However by 1930, the Spiritist Federation began to experience an administrative crisis due to the lack of leadership and the indifference of spiritist centers toward paying the dues (Rodríguez-Escudero, 1978). The crisis of the Federation was also produced by disagreements between its leaders in relation to the conception of **Espiritismo** as a science or as a religion. For example, according to spiritist leaders such as Telesforo Andino (1937), **Espiritismo** should be conceived of as the religion of science. Andino believed that religion had a very positive function in the development of humankind. Contrarily, William Colón (1955) believed that to consider **Espiritismo** a religious doctrine was against its scientific character. For Colón, religion was the major enemy of humankind.

Espiritismo began to develop in Puerto Rico as a middle class movement led by the intellectuals and the academically-oriented Puerto Ricans. They were more interested in **Espiritismo** as a philosophical system which provides a framework for social and moral development. Some of them were attracted to **Espiritismo** because of its "scientific" orientation and emphasis on psychical research. These are the dimensions which are emphasized in Kardec's books.

However there was also another group of Puerto Ricans, generally from the lower class, who were attracted to Kardecian **Espiritismo** for different reasons. First, the world-view of **Espiritismo** is congruent with several elements of the Puerto Rican cultural ethos. The Puerto Rican community found that **Espiritismo** dealt with issues pertinent to their own lives such as the meaning and value of suffering with resignation. Kardec was continuously emphasizing in his books that in life there are tests (**pruebas**) that one has to suffer with resignation in order to achieve moral perfection. This idea was very appealing to the Puerto Rican who was under the oppressive government of Spain.

Another element that promoted the acceptance of **Espiritismo** in the lower-class Puerto Rican community was its Christian orientation. Kardec argued that there was no conflict between the Bible and the spiritist philosophy. Moreover he wrote a book about how the Bible supports the basic spiritist principles such as reincarnation and the communication with the spirits (The Gospel According to Spiritism).

At the time of the introduction of **Espiritismo** in Puerto Rico, the official religion was Catholicism. Because Kardec did not consider **Espiritismo** a religion, most Puerto Ricans did not experience any dissonance in being **Espiritistas** and

Catholics at the same time. They did not have to leave the Catholic Church in order to practice **Espiritismo**. On the contrary, they did not hesitate to introduce Catholic rituals into the practice of **Espiritismo**. The fact that the Catholic Church accepts that it is possible to communicate with guardian angels and saints provided for the legitimization of spiritist practices among Puerto Rican Catholics. Michtom (1975) in her analysis of the similarities and differences between Catholicism and **Espiritismo**, argued that had **Espiritismo** been radically opposed to Catholicism it would never have survived in Puerto Rico. She said that "Kardec's appeal was that he offered something new within a Catholic framework" (1975, p. 163).

Finally, one of the major factors that contributed to the popularity of **Espiritismo** in the lower-class was its emphasis both on the spirit world as an essential element of reality that is constantly interacting with the material world and on the need to sacrifice satisfaction in order to keep life focused on spiritual goals (Kurtz, 1985).

All of these factors may help us to explain why **Espiritismo** in Puerto Rico, instead of remaining principally a middle class movement, began also to be practiced by the underprivileged Puerto Rican community. The underprivileged group of Puerto Ricans was not very interested in **Espiritismo**

as a science or philosophy but in the practical nature of the Kardecian world-view and its consequences for the understanding of illness and healing.

At the time of the introduction of Kardecian **Espiritismo** there was already a rich folk healing tradition in Puerto Rico derived from the heritage of the Indians, the Afro-Americans and the Spaniards (Alegría, 1979). Folk healing practices such as **santiguos** and herbal medicine were used by poor people to resolve their everyday problems (Santiguos are the hand massages that are given for setting dislocated bones and curing various forms of intestinal diseases). The origin of these healing practices can be traced to the healing tradition of the Puerto Rican Indians called **Taínos**. Coll y Toste (1971), a famous Puerto Rican historian, wrote the following about the **Taíno** medicine man called **Bohíque**:

When his help was solicited to care for a patient, **el Bohíque** began by using the method of suggestion, praying to the spirits, as the spiritist mediums do today when trying to cure someone. One of the methods used for treatment was massage. It began with the shoulders and arms and continued down the body ending with the legs. The **Bohíque** would be rubbing hard and blowing out air (p. 89).

The **Taínos** were eradicated due to the abuses of the Spanish colonization, and African slaves were brought to Puerto Rico in the sixteenth century to work first in the

gold mines and then in agriculture. By the nineteenth century, the contribution of the African heritage to the development and cultural integration of the Puerto Rican society was evident and profound (Alegría, 1954; Picó, 1986). Alegría (1954) considers that at that time the "Puerto Rican society was a complex mosaic in which over a Hispanic foundation, there had been a fusion of Indian and African characteristics" (p. 1).

This process of cultural and ethnic integration also involved a syncretism of different folk healing practices which is still going on in contemporary Puerto Rico. A good number of Puerto Ricans, primarily from the lower-class, have syncretized **Espiritismo** with popular Catholicism, **curanderismo**, herbal medicine and other healing practices derived from the Indian and Black heritage. In this process, Kardecian Spiritism provided a framework for the relative integration of the Puerto Rican healing folklore. It gave unity to several folk healing practices by offering a meaningful and coherent world-view.

The product of this syncretism is what I call in this thesis Indigenous **Espiritismo**. I am using the term indigenous to describe this spiritist movement because in a major way it is a socio-cultural creation which integrates different healing and religious traditions which have evolved

in Puerto Rico for hundreds of years. It is in this sense that Indigenous **Espiritismo** is very much autochthonous to Puerto Rico, and not an European importation.

Two distinct spiritist movements emerge from this historical analysis: one which is mostly practiced by middle-class Puerto Ricans (Kardecian **Espiritismo**) and the other which is mostly practiced by lower and working-class Puerto Ricans (Indigenous **Espiritismo**). What follows is a description of how both kinds of spiritist movements are practiced in Puerto Rico.

The practice of Indigenous **Espiritismo** in Puerto Rico

Indigenous **Espiritismo** is the most popular spiritist movement in Puerto Rico. It is mostly practiced by those Puerto Ricans with limited economic resources and academic education. For this reason, the spiritist medium has been called "the psychiatrist of the poor" (Rogler and Hollingshead, 1961).

The most important event in the practice of Indigenous **Espiritismo** is the **reunión** or spiritist meeting. The spiritist meeting is usually held two times a week in a small structure called **centro** or temple. Most of the times the **centro** has a capacity to seat 20 to 25 persons.

Most of the Puerto Rican **centros** have a similar physical set-up. Usually there is a long table with a white table cloth which is occupied by the group leader (**Presidente**) and the experienced mediums. On the table there may be a goblet of water, flowers, cigars, statues of different Catholic saints, incense and other paraphernalia. Generally the room is adorned with pictures of Christ, the Virgin Mary and other religious personalities.

Usually the **reunión** begins with a reading from the book El Evangelio Según el Espiritismo (The Gospel According to Spiritism). Another book that is used in almost every spiritist meeting is the Collection of Selected Prayers, which contains prayers asking for the presence of spirit guides, the education of ignorant spirits, and for the health of the sick, among others. This period may also include the singing of religious hymns.

After this first stage, the mediums prepare for the working of **causas** that are affecting the visitors. The **causas** are the actions and influences of ignorant spirits upon an individual. This step requires that the mediums contact their spirit guides before they are able to **pasar** (or be possessed by) ignorant spirits. The reason for this is that the guides will protect the medium from the negative vibrations or **fluídos** of the ignorant spirit.

The working of the **causas** is a process which involves several dimensions. First, a medium identifies the particular problem of the individual classifying it in two major categories or kinds of **causas**: material or spiritual. When the **causa** is material it means that the individual's problem is not caused or influenced by the spirits. Most of the times the mediums will refer the person to a physician. They may also offer a treatment based on their knowledge of herbal treatment. However when the **causa** is identified as spiritual, the healing process is oriented toward educating or "giving light" to the spirit who is totally or in part responsible for the problem.

Second, when the **causa** is spiritual the role of the medium is to divine the symptoms that the person is experiencing which are produced by the ignorant spirit. After this has been done, the medium is prepared to **pasar** the spirit in order to create the opportunity for a dialogue between the spirit, the other mediums and the affected individual. The affected individual is known as the **encausado** (one that has a **causa**).

This dialogue has two major functions. First, as the spirit expresses its feelings against the **encausado**, one can become aware of why the spirit wants to harm him or her. Usually ignorant spirits are affecting the **encausado** because

they are trying to take revenge for something that the **encausado** did to them when they were alive in this life or a past one.

The second, but most important function of the dialogue, is to educate or give light (**dar la luz**) to the ignorant spirit so that it will not continue doing harm to the **encausado**. Morales-Dorta (1976) described this dimension of the spiritist healing as follows:

While the spirit is talking, the president, as well as other mediums at the table, pleads with the spirit to repent, to leave the tormented person alone. The spirit is told of the harm done and the suffering and pain that the spirit has inflicted on the tormented one. The spirit is told to do a self-examination and to realize that a spirit belongs to the world of the dead. The spirit is advised to recognize itself as a spirit, and that in so doing, his progress and development will be accelerated (p. 44).

At the same time this dialogue is being held, the mediums' spirit guides are also trying to convince the ignorant spirit to leave the **encausado** in peace and to come with them to a "spiritual school" in order to learn about God and the spiritual life.

If the ignorant spirit decides to follow the mediums' advice, then it means that the **causa** has been "lifted up" (**levantada**) and the spirit will not intervene negatively in the life of the individual anymore. However, when the **causa** is "too strong", the mediums have to talk with the spirit for

several times in different meetings so that it can be lifted up.

The mediums also involve the **encausado** in the working of the **causa** by asking him or her to perform a number of activities and rituals that are supposed to be effective in giving light to the spirit. For example a medium can prescribe rituals such as the lighting of candles and the reading of prayers.

Other major events of the **reunión** are the ritual activities called **despojos**. Although **despojos** are given throughout the whole meeting, they are particularly emphasized at the end of it. Harwood described the **despojos** as follows:

The **despojo** is performed by a medium who fumigates the person being exorcised with cigar smoke and then runs his or her hands along the back of the sufferer's head and neck and then down along the person's shoulders and arms. This stroking is called **pases**, (passes). The medium then takes hold of the client's hands, raises them above the client's head, and throws them down abruptly (1977, pp. 96-97).

Despojos are also given using other kinds of paraphernalia such as **agua de florida** (aromatic fragrance), water, aromatic plants, and **alcoholado**. The medium believes that ignorant spirits bring negative spiritual vibrations (**fluidos**) that affect the physical and mental health of the person. The purpose of the **despojo** is to substitute the bad

fluídos for good ones through the application of **pases**.

At the end of the **reunión**, participants are asked to **despojar** themselves to make sure that they do not leave with bad **fluídos**. The **reunión** is usually closed with a prayer from the Collection of Selected Prayers called "At the End of the Meeting".

What I have presented is a brief summary of what happens in a **reunión**. However each **centro** has a unique way of performing it. These are the components that seem to be essential in each **reunión**.

The Practice of Kardecian **Espiritismo**

The second spiritist movement that I will describe is what has been called by its followers "Scientific **Espiritismo**". It can be defined as the practice of Kardecian Spiritism in its purest form, with relatively minimal syncretism with folk healing or with religious doctrines. Most of the **Espiritistas** who practice "Scientific **Espiritismo**" have a middle class background, and are academically-oriented. I am using the term Kardecian **Espiritismo** rather than Scientific **Espiritismo** to describe this movement because other spiritist groups also consider

their practices to be "scientific".

Kardecian **Espiritistas** are primarily interested in following Kardec's conception of **Espiritismo** as a science and "philosophical system". Kardec (1978) defined **Espiritismo** as the science that studies the nature, origin and destiny of spirits, and its relations with the corporeal world. As a philosophical system, it emphasizes the moral consequences that derive from these relations.

According to Kardec, **Espiritismo** is scientific because it is based on facts that have been proven or can be proved. It is scientific because its object of study (the spirit world and mediumship) is susceptible to being analyzed and controlled, through the application of a rigorous and precise methodology. He argued that through the study of **Espiritismo** it is possible to know one's origin and destiny, getting answers to why and for what reason we are on Earth. One can achieve this knowledge without using supernatural explanations or dogmas, but one has to be guided by reason and logic. Kardec considered that in order to be scientific, **Espiritismo** should not be conceived of as a religion because religious knowledge is based on nonrational faith. In general Kardec proposed that the **Espiritistas** should study and do research about the origin, nature, and destiny of spirits, the relationship between the spirit and the material

world and the methods utilized for the communication between incarnated and disincarnated beings. In this sense, Kardec considered that mediumship becomes the ideal method for the study of **Espiritismo**.

As I wrote earlier, since the beginning of this century there was a spiritist organization in Puerto Rico called The Spiritist Federation that promoted the practice of Kardecian **Espiritismo**. However, affiliated with the Federation were a good number of **centros** that were practicing Indigenous **Espiritismo**. Consequently there were two major groups in the Federation: those **Espiritistas** who wanted to practice a pure Kardecian Spiritism and those who wanted to practice a more religious type of **Espiritismo** based on their folk healing traditions.

A gradual tension was created to the point that in 1977, a group of **Espiritistas** in disagreement with the "religious orientation" of the Federation and its administration decided to create a new organization called the **Consejo Espírita de Relaciones de Puerto Rico** best known as **Confederación Espiritista** (Spiritist Counsel of Relations of Puerto Rico, also known as Spiritist Confederation) which is affiliated to an international spiritist association. The Confederation began to publish a journal entitled **Puerto Rico Espírita** whose main purpose is to promote the development of Kardecian

Espiritismo in Puerto Rico. To my knowledge, the Federation has disappeared as an active spiritist organization.

Kardecian **Espiritismo** is practiced by several spiritist groups throughout the Island, but there are three of them which are widely known. They are the **Centro Lumen** (in Ponce), the **Centro Renacimiento** (Mayagüez) and the **Casa de las Almas** (Santurce). These centers were founded in the first years of 1900 and have continued their operations uninterruptedly to the present.

In my field work, I had the opportunity to do participant observation in six spiritist centers in different parts of the Island (rural as well as urban areas) which perceived themselves as practicing Kardecian **Espiritismo**. From these observations, I recognized that there are certain basic common principles which can be used to identify the practice of this spiritist movement in Puerto Rico. First, these groups emphasize the study of **Espiritismo** through the readings of spiritist books by European and South American authors. Although they recognize that Kardec's books are the most important formulation of **Espiritismo** as a philosophy and as a science, they argue that an **Espiritista** should read other spiritist books besides Kardec's because he did not have the last word. The leaders of these groups are usually knowledgeable about literature on **Espiritismo**,

parapsychology, magnetism and hypnotism.

These spiritist centers have a space for a small library which contains books on **Espiritismo** and related topics. One of these centers has an impressive library with more than 300 books on **Espiritismo**. Members of the group have access to these books. These centers also sell spiritist books to its members and clients.

Second, due to the heavy emphasis on the study of **Espiritismo**, these groups have particular days designated for presentations and classes on **Espiritismo**. Sometimes they have guest speakers who address a certain topic related to **Espiritismo**. Usually the group leaders have contacts with **Espiritistas** from South America and they are invited to present papers at annual spiritist conventions.

Two of these spiritist centers have organized courses on **Espiritismo** as a "science" and on the development of mediumship. One of the leaders of a spiritist center located in the Metropolitan Area of San Juan has developed a three month course which includes the following topics: an historical analysis of **Espiritismo** in Europe, Spiritualism, parapsychology, hypnotism, magnetism, yoga and meditation. The other spiritist centers have weekly classes which include themes such as what is a medium; the different kinds of mediums; and reincarnation.

The third major characteristic of this movement is the concern about not practicing **Espiritismo** as a religion. In this sense they also follow Kardec's advice that the true character of **Espiritismo** is that it is a science not a religion. They believe that characteristics of religion such as the reliance on dogmas, admission of the supernatural, acceptance of knowledge by faith, and the adoption of ritualistic cults are against the true principles of **Espiritismo**.

On the other hand it is important to point out that Kardec recognized the "religious" nature of **Espiritismo**:

In the philosophical sense **Espiritismo** is a religion because it is a doctrine that builds the bonds of fraternity and communion based on the laws of Nature. We declare that it is not a religion because there is one word to express two different ideas and this word is inseparable from cult. It reveals exclusively an idea of superficial and exterior practices (1975, p. 53).

Kardecian **Espiritistas** consider themselves to be practicing a secular and rational **Espiritismo**. This orientation is manifested in many ways. First, the centers are called schools and institutes, but not temples. The physical structure of these centers is similar to a classroom. There are no pictures of Catholic saints or Jesus but instead pictures of Allan Kardec and other famous spiritist leaders. Most of these centers do not have the

"white table" with the goblet of water which characterizes Indigenous **Espiritismo**. Besides there are no candles, incense, flowers, or any other paraphernalia associated with Indigenous **Espiritismo**.

The fifth characteristic of this spiritist practice is that the use of ritual objects, such as the ones discussed above, is considered to be a sign of ignorance and superstition. The leaders of these spiritist groups reject all practices based on ritual objects arguing that the use of these attract ignorant spirits because "evolved" spirits do not need to use these objects in order to express themselves. In addition, they argue that the use of these ritual objects makes the mediums dependent because in order to help others they have to use external resources. According to Kardecian **Espiritistas**, a medium who uses ritual objects in healing is ignorant and superstitious because those objects do not have any healing power. They argue that a "good" medium should learn to help others without using any kinds of objects.

The organization and development of the meetings in Kardecian **Espiritismo** is essentially different from the **reunión** of Indigenous **Espiritismo**. First, instead of reading prayers, the Kardecian **Espiritistas** use meditation, relaxation techniques, guided imagery and classical music in order to promote a state of concentration.

Second, the direct manifestation of good and ignorant spirits through a medium is not a central element in most Kardecian spiritist meetings. For example, some years ago one of these spiritist centers prohibited spirit manifestations through a medium. The leaders of this center argued that the manifestation of ignorant spirits was dangerous to the medium's health and that they could be educated without the need to be "incorporated" by a medium. (Kardecian **Espiritistas** use the word **incorporar** to refer to **pasar** the spirit). In addition they argued that the communication of good and evolved spirits is not necessary because everything is written in books. Instead of listening to spirits who may not be very evolved and educated, these leaders declared that one may learn more from a talk by a guest speaker. One of the center's leaders, who was not a member when this decision was made, told this researcher that the result of this decision was that most of the mediums abandoned the center.

Even though this particular center's position within Kardecian **Espiritismo** is a radical one, the tendency in most of these centers is to deemphasize the manifestation of spirits. Most of the time mediums are told to communicate with the spirits using their minds rather than being possessed.

Trincadistas: A recent group of **Espiritistas** in Puerto Rico

In the last years the Trincado's spiritist movement has become increasingly popular among Puerto Rican **Espiritistas** (Rodríguez-Escudero, 1978). Joaquín Trincado (1866-1935) was a philosopher and an electrical engineer of Spanish origin who established his residence in Argentina. Finding himself in disagreement with some of Kardec's ideas, he wrote many books in order to expand and "correct" the doctrine of **Espiritismo**. Trincado wrote 40 books on **Espiritismo** of which 14 have been published. Some of these books are: **Jesús Hombre y No Dios** (Jesus Man and Not God), **El Espiritismo Estudiado** (The Studied Spiritism), **Conócete a Ti Mismo** (Know Yourself), and **Buscando a Dios** (Searching God). Compared to Kardec's books they are very difficult to understand and they seem to be written for an intellectual minority.

The philosophy of Trincado is in essence very similar to Kardec's philosophy. Trincado condemned the blend of **Espiritismo** with religion, emphasizing the study of **Espiritismo** as a philosophy and science. He considered himself to be the reincarnation of Confucious, Moses and Seth. In 1911, he founded the **Escuela Magnético-Espiritual de la Comuna Universal** (Magnetic-Spiritual School of the Universal Commune) which is in charge of the study and

propagation of his spiritist philosophy.

Trincados's ideas have flourished in different towns in Puerto Rico particularly in Cabo Rojo where there are two **cátedras** (Trincado's name for the centers) with a great number of adepts, a radio program and a journal for spreading the principles of Trincadismo.

The orientation of these **cátedras** is very similar to the schools of Kardecian **Espiritismo**. The emphasis is on the study and knowledge of **Espiritismo** as a moral philosophy and scientific discipline. The manifestation of ignorant spirits receives little emphasis. **Trincadistas** emphasize that a medium should not know the identity of his or her spirit guides because this will make him or her too proud. They also consider their meetings as mostly a social activity in which people learn about the philosophy of **Espiritismo** in order to know more about themselves and to improve their moral lives.

The Church movement within **Espiritismo**

In my field work I identified five spiritist centers which practice a kind of **Espiritismo** that cannot be classified as Indigenous, Kardecian or **Trincadista**. These centers are similar to each other in terms of their social

organization, the performance of healing services, and the strong influence of the Catholic and Pentecostal Church in their world-view.

In order to explain to the reader why I believe that these spiritist centers represent another kind of **Espiritismo** I will describe a meeting that I attended at one of these centers. The first thing I noticed was a big sign in front of the center that says: **Iglesia Discípulos de San Pablo - Espiritistas Cristianos** (Church of Saint Paul's Disciples - Christian **Espiritistas**). It was very interesting because I had never seen the word "church" in the name of spiritist centers. The great majority of indigenous spiritist centers use the words **centro** or **templo** (temple) to identify their places for practicing **Espiritismo**, while Kardecian groups use the word **escuela** ("school"); they do not refer to them as "churches". Through my participant observation and interviews with members of this spiritist group, I realized why they refer to their organization as a church.

This spiritist church has a modern building in which 300 persons can be accommodated with ease. In addition it has several separate small rooms in which healing activities are held. The church also has a cafeteria in which visitors and members can have lunch during the recess time. Near the main building there is another huge structure in which Biblical

classes are given to the members. This spiritist church has also founded two other churches in other towns and the leader is building a new one.

According to the leaders, this spiritist church has around 300 regular members and 100 mediums. In the meeting that I attended, there were about 200 persons. In front of the room there was a statue of Christ on the cross and a beautiful painting of several angels in a blue sky. There was also an inscription that read: **Hacia Dios através de San Pablo** (Towards God through Saint Paul). Around 60 mediums were sitting on both sides of the altar.

The meeting began with an extensive spiritual message given by one of the leaders. She also read several biblical passages. The content of the message sounded to me Pentecostal and Evangelistic in nature. The woman emphasized the coming of Christ and she was constantly repeating the word "hallelujah". At times she seemed to be speaking in tongues. In her message, she warned the audience several times of the existence and reality of the Devil. Three or four times she interrupted her message in order to let the choir sing pentecostal hymns. She talked for more than an hour without mentioning the word **Espiritismo** nor any idea related to it.

The next stage was the **trabajo fenoménico** (phenomenal

work) in which ignorant spirits were **reprendidos** (rebuked). It is my experience that this expression is mostly used by Pentecostals but not in indigenous centers. As I wrote before, in Indigenous **Espiritismo** the ignorant spirit is instructed, enlightened or educated but not rebuked.

For the phenomenal work some members brought a table with a white cloth and put it on the podium. Six mediums sat at the table. A person from the public was called forward and he stood in front of the first medium. The medium went into a trance, getting "possessed" by an ignorant spirit who was causing problems to the person. The spirit was told to leave the person in peace. In a matter of two or three minutes the spirit was "lifted up". A similar procedure was used with the other five spirits who "possessed" the remaining mediums. The spirits were not asked about their identity or reasons for doing harm to the person. This stage lasted about 15 minutes. After this, the table was taken out of the room again, as if it did not belong there.

A recess of about half an hour was taken. The next part of the meeting involved the presentation of religious testimonies by several members. Then the audience was divided into several small groups. Each group went to a different room. Healing activities were performed by mediums who used mostly the rituals of "imposition of hands" or

"laying on of hands". Most of the mediums invoked the Holy Spirit in order to be prepared for healing the person.

I also did participant observation in other spiritist centers that follow a similar model for practicing **Espiritismo**. I identified several characteristics which make them different from the other movements. First, all of them have a regular membership of more than 100 persons. They also have a great number of mediums. In two of these centers, the leaders told me that they have more than 100 active mediums. However I found that what is considered to be a medium in their centers would not be identified as such in other spiritist centers. For example, in these spiritist churches, members do not necessarily have to **pasar** spirits or to have any other kind of communication with them in order to be considered mediums. A person can become a "medium" if he or she obtains a certain degree of knowledge about the Bible. In addition, members who have the capacity to be "possessed" by the Holy Spirit are considered to be mediums. In these spiritist churches the concept of mediumship has been expanded to include a variety of other manifestations.

Second, the influence of the Catholic and Pentecostal Church is manifested very strongly in these spiritist churches. This influence permeates all their major activities. They have very well organized Bible classes

every week. Moreover in these classes there are no references to Kardec's books or other spiritist books. In the library of one of these spiritist churches, the majority of the books were not on **Espiritismo**. They also publish a newsletter which does not mention the word **Espiritismo** in its pages. They describe their organization as a biblical and esoteric school.

In these spiritist churches, the Bible is used as the principal book of instruction instead of the Gospel According to **Espiritismo**. The members call their leaders "Reverends" instead of **Presidentes**. These spiritist churches offer baptism to their members which are held in rivers or beaches. Pentecostal and Catholic hymns are included as part of the meetings. In addition, they hold rosaries and religious processions on Good Friday. In their preaching, they stress the theme of religious conversion in order to be saved by God.

The working of **causas** is not emphasized or is not present at all in these spiritist churches. They give a central role to the spiritual teaching and instruction offered by the director and other mediums.

These spiritist churches are registered as independent churches in the State Department. Some of them have grown immensely in terms of economic power. For example, one of

these churches has a supermarket, a cafeteria, a medical dispensary and a hardware store. They have an extremely efficient organization with chapters in different towns of the Island.

It seems to me that the spiritist church movement has all the characteristics of a stable religious sect, in contrast to the other spiritist movements. To my knowledge there is only one study in all the literature on **Espiritismo** which describes the activities of one of these spiritist churches (Saavedra de Roca, 1969). Future studies on **Espiritismo** should investigate more deeply the organization and development of these spiritist churches.

The Syncretism of **Espiritismo** and **Santería**

The belief system of **Santería**

Santería is a syncretic cult, formed from elements of Catholicism and the **Yoruba** religion. This process of syncretism started more than 300 years ago when Blacks, primarily from Nigeria, were brought to the Caribbean area as slaves (Sánchez, 1978; Sandoval, 1979). They were forbidden to practice their religion and forced to follow Catholicism.

It seems that in order to preserve their cultural heritage, the **Yoruba** people identified their gods with Catholic saints. Usually these identifications were based upon the similarities that the African slaves believed existed between the mythology of the **Yoruba** god and the hagiography of the Catholic saint. For example, the **Yoruba** god named **Changó** was identified with Saint Barbara because in her images and lithographies there were objects that were considered by the **Yorubas** as **Changó's** belongings and symbols (González-Wipler, 1976). Saint Barbara always appears with a crown and **Changó** was a king. The Catholic saint has a sword and **Changó** was a warrior. In the back of the lithographies of Saint Barbara there is a castle burning and **Changó**, according to the myths, lived in a castle.

The belief system of **Santería** has been described in several studies (González-Wipler, 1976; Martínez and Wetli, 1982; Sandoval, 1977). According to **Santería** each individual has many **orichas** or saints who help and protect him or her from danger. The **oricha** is the product of the identification between the **Yoruba** god and the Catholic saint. Some of the most popular **orichas** within **Santería** are **Ochún** (**La Caridad del Cobre** or Our Lady of Charity), **Obatalá** (**La Virgen de las Mercedes** or Our Lady of Mercy), **Yemayá**, (**La Virgen de la Milagrosa** or Our Miraculous Lady), **Babalú-Ayé**

(**San Lázaro** or Saint Lazarus), and **Eleguá** (**San Antonio de Padua** or Saint Anthony of Padua).

It is important to do certain rituals and sacrifices to please the **orichas** because otherwise the **orichas** will not help the person. It is essential to pray, to light candles and to put food beside the statue of the **oricha**. Each **oricha** has particular preferences for foods and colors. It also has specific personality qualities. For instance, **Changó** is characterized by his masculine virility and terrible temper. He also enjoys dancing and drumming. When a person is "mounted" ("possessed") by **Changó**, he or she tends to show the characteristics of this **oricha**. **Santeros** believe that the **orichas** have not only virtues but human passions and desires.

To become a **Santero** one needs to be initiated in the cult. The **Santero's** initiation is a special ceremony in which the person is told the name of his or her **orichas**, and secondly the **oricha** makes the commitment to help that person on any occasion. The initiation requires a period in which the person learns about the rituals, ceremonies and doctrine of **Santería**.

The first step in the initiation process is the ritual known as **recibir los collares** (to receive the necklaces). The necklaces are made of alternating beads in the colors

peculiar to each **oricha**. They will protect the initiated against all types of evil. The necklaces are considered to be the material receptacles of the **orichas'** powers.

The final ceremony known as **hacer el santo** (to become a **Santero**) is very prolonged and complex. The process lasts about a year and costs from \$2,000 to \$5,000 dollars (Martínez and Wetli, 1982). Some of the features of this ceremony are animal sacrifices, dancing, wearing of white clothes, observing food taboos, and sexual abstinence. The **Santero** in charge of organizing this initiation will become the **padrino** (godfather) for the initiated.

The development of **Santería** in Puerto Rico and the United States

It was in Cuba that **Santería** developed as a strong religious movement due to the great quantity of Black slaves who were brought to the Island. **Santería** has been gaining popularity in different parts of the United States and Puerto Rico since the Socialist Revolution of 1959 when many Cubans left their country. This event facilitated the contact between Cuban **Santeros** and Puerto Rican **Espiritistas**, causing a new kind of syncretism between Indigenous **Espiritismo** and **Santería**.

In New York and other parts of the United States where

Puerto Ricans practice **Espiritismo** it is almost impossible to find a spiritist center which has not been influenced by **Santería**. This is reflected in the studies done by Garrison (1977a, 1977b), Harwood (1977), Ruíz (1976) and many others. A great majority of the spiritist mediums in the United States are also **Santeros**, using both healing systems in their practices. A **Santero** is considered to be more powerful than a medium because the former works with the saints while the latter works with the spirits of the dead. Consequently, spiritist mediums in the United States make an effort to have both powers in order to increase their effectiveness (Harwood, 1977).

In Puerto Rico **Santería** has been introduced mostly on the coasts. It was declared by a **Santero** (Roberto Bolufer) in 1979 that the number of Puerto Rican believers in **Santería** was about 100,000 (Cintrón, 1979). By that time there were 15 **babalaos** (higher priests in **Santería**) in different parts of the Island who belonged to the Yoruba sectarian church Disciples of Saint Francis.

It was impossible for me to find spiritist centers in Puerto Rico which were practicing **Santería**. It was also difficult to find spiritist mediums who are integrating **Santería** in their practices. Although in New York it is very difficult to find spiritist practices that are not

syncretized with **Santería**, the opposite seems to be true in Puerto Rico.

Some speculations can be made in order to explain this difference. First, the Indigenous **Espiritistas** who I interviewed do not consider being a **Santero** more powerful than being a medium. They do not see **Santería** as representing a higher stage of development as they do in New York (Harwood, 1977). On the contrary I found that the majority of Indigenous **Espiritistas** consider that **Santería** is very "material", referring to the idea that **Santeros** are very interested in money. They also believe that some of the **Santería's** rituals such as the animal sacrifices are too "primitive" and attract ignorant spirits. Therefore they do not feel attracted to adopting **Santería** in their practices. Besides, a significant number of Indigenous **Espiritistas** with whom I have talked related **Santería** to witchcraft practices. Mediums in Puerto Rico are very careful not to be identified by the community as **brujos** (sorcerers) because most of them are proud of practicing and doing only good to people.

It is my observation that **Santería** is mostly practiced in the Metropolitan Area and the coasts of Puerto Rico in which most of the Black Puerto Ricans live. The practice of **Santería** is not well known in towns in the center of the Island. **Espiritistas** from these towns do not seem to be

aware of **Santería**. I could not identify any **Santero** there. I am not implying that the only people who practice **Santería** in Puerto Rico are the Blacks. However it is my observation that its practice is predominant in areas of Puerto Rico in which there is a heavy concentration of Black Puerto Ricans such as Loíza Aldea and Guayama.

The cult of **Santería** in Puerto Rico is very young if one takes as its beginnings the immigration of Cubans to Puerto Rico in 1959. One may expect that as **Santería** becomes more popular among Puerto Ricans, the practice of Indigenous **Espiritismo** will become more syncretized with **Santería**.

After having discussed the four major spiritist movements in Puerto Rico, I hope the reader will understand my need to write not about **Espiritismo**, but about types of **Espiritismo**. My goal in using this approach is to portray a more complete picture of **Espiritismo** as it is manifested in contemporary Puerto Rico. These five spiritist movements can be seen as models of spiritist philosophy and practice which will influence the development of mediums. This overview provides a good background for the understanding of the process of becoming a medium in Puerto Rico.

In the next chapter I will present the life-stories of 16 mediums who are representative of some of the spiritist movements that I have described.