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Spiritism in Germany: A Resource of Integration for Brazilian Migrants?

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Abstract

This account of qualitative anthropological field research in Brazil and Germany explores the importance of translocal Spiritist/Kardecist networks as resources for Brazilian migrants in Germany. It focuses on aspects of integration with the host society and conflicts arising from divergent expectations and habits. It introduces the author's multi-sited investigation within the DFG-funded research project "Diversification of Mental Health: Therapeutic Spaces of Brazilian Spiritism" (implemented by Prof. Dr. Helene Basu 2015–2018) and elaborates on the approach of "translocal relations" as crucial for the theoretical discussion before introducing relevant literature reviews and original research data. Case studies confirm the supportive functions of Brazilian Spiritist centers in Germany for migrants but also illustrate that they serve integration only to a marginal degree. Brazilians use Spiritist centers as a resource for not having to integrate and instead staying among themselves. Being aware that this habit contradicts adaptation to new environments and serves critical political approaches, a small group of Brazilians and Germans establish contested integrative practices. In conclusion, this contribution discusses conflicts emerging from Brazilian migration to Germany in religious-spiritual contexts and illustrates that integration is a multi-directional task.

Keywords Brazil · Germany · Spiritism · Migration · Integration · Conflict

Introduction

Between 2015 and 2017, I conducted anthropological field research among Spiritist centers and clinics in Brazil and Germany. My investigation addressed questions on what attracts people to Spiritist forms of care and how far these would neglect, compete, interact, or cooperate with official (mental) healthcare systems. I also explored how practices would transform and adapt on a translocal, that is, transnational and/

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or transcultural, level. In this regard, I was interested in how Spiritist institutions function as spaces of care and integration for Brazilian migrants in Germany. It happened to be that some of my interlocutors in Brazil were connected to Spiritists in Germany by international Spiritist networks and family ties.

I followed these networks and was invited to conduct participant observation and qualitative interviews within a Spiritist center in a German city and its (trans)local relations between 2016 and 2017. I will call this locus of research the Spiritist Center of Studying Kardecism (SCSK). The name is fictional to protect my research partners, but it represents one of the about 20 Spiritist centers organized in the *Deutsche Spiritistische Vereinigung* (DSV, German Spiritist Association) that integrates and connects with Spiritists from Brazil. I was particularly interested in two aspects: (1) How would Spiritist centers in Germany support Brazilian migrants and (2) is there any interaction with Germans and how would that work regarding integration?

In October 2016, I had a long conversation with Claudia,[1] a chairperson of SCSK. She is 48 years old and has six children with her German husband. Claudia was born in rural Minas Gerais (Brazil) and grew up with Spiritism as a substitute for official healthcare resources. At the age of 15, she got in touch with Kardecism[2] and has engaged in charity and mediumship since then. After studying informatics and working for a company with ties to Germany in 1996, she moved to a German town where she already knew some people. At that time, she had already detached from Spiritism for a few years. In 1999, she married and would have preferred to move back to Brazil, but instead, she continued to live and work in Germany. After some time, she started to feel spiritually unwell and unhappy. It was when she heard about the Spiritist group SCSK. It was a small group, and she quickly felt accepted as a new member. However, after a few years, the group separated, and she wondered what to do. Together with a friend, they decided to continue, and she took over the responsibility in 2004, trying to sort out what people would need. Many Brazilians felt homesick and energetically exhausted, suffering from environmental coldness—climatically and emotionally: "Their souls need nurturing. So I said, what we need is *passe*, *evangelho*, and fraternal care. We need a space to let it all out and receive support – it helps so much!" (Interview Claudia 02 October 2016).[3]

Claudia states that since then, SCSK has become a very divergent space; some come for social support and turn to Spiritism, others already have been Spiritists and look for "soul food." She declares that many have experienced German institutions and inhabitants as hostile to immigrants, causing many problems on official and individual levels. Many are young Brazilian women in love with their German partners but suffering from cultural differences:

[1] All names are changed.

[2] Whereas Kardecists use the terms Spiritism and Kardecism synonymously, I treat Kardecism as one form of Spiritism and distinct, e.g., from the Brazilian religion Umbanda. However, when not indicated differently, I use the terms synonymously from here onward to apply to the usage of the terms by my interlocutors.

[3] *Passe* is an energetic treatment of a person's spiritual body, and *evangelho* is Kardec's doctrine to be studied. Fraternal care means to support others in this study and resolving problems in life.

They have spiritual needs they cannot resolve in local churches; here, they receive support, and many decide to stay and learn. Others are in despair but only stay for a few weeks. We offer support, and they take what they want. Some need a Brazilian environment – the act of charity as a community where you can develop in a group, unlike Germans that prefer to do everything independently. (ibid.)

Together with Claudia and other members of SCSK, in 2016, I also visited the *Psycho-Medizin-Kongress* in Bad Honnef (Germany) and the annual meeting of representants of Spiritist centers organized in DSV in Frankfurt/Main, where I participated in lectures and workshops in terms of observing participation. Elsewhere (Kurz 2018), I have outlined that related Spiritist practices at the margin of the twenty-first century have had an increasing impact not only on the Brazilian (mental) healthcare system but also abroad. Here, I will disclose some implications of Spiritist networks regarding their implementation in translocal frames, particularly migration contexts. I will direct my investigation toward the (re)implementation of Spiritist practice in Germany by Brazilian migrants and discuss the negotiation of Spiritist knowledge in the context of migration and appropriation with "locals." Investigating the integratory potential of Brazilian Spiritist centers in Germany implies exploring how related agencies and practices adapt to new environments: Who communicates and contests Spiritist approaches in which way? What are the conflicts that arise throughout the processes of local implementations? How do people relate to Spiritism in new contexts? How do they frame, implement, and transform Spiritist practices and knowledge within their networks? Exploring this network character, I will focus on their inherent translocal relations and how these shape local integratory dynamics.

Translocal Relations

Homi K. Bhabha's (1994) seminal contribution on the "location of culture" and related "third spaces" of negotiation between and within given communities and societies in postcolonial entanglements implies that practice and knowledge do not simply transfer from one place to another but interact, intersect, and intermingle with others. Accordingly, culture is an ongoing and continuous transformation of practices—a dynamic process of exchange, communication, negotiation, and appropriation.[4] New configurations of technologies, ideas, and practices inform interaction and agency, especially in new social contexts, such as, for example, in migratory processes. Apart from individual biographies and narratives people may share, their involvement in social and health-related networks deserves sustained investigation (cf. Hermann and Röttger-Rössler 2003). In this regard, Law (1994) discusses networks of ordering and organizing social relations, emphasizing the negotiation of agency loss and regain. His perspectives on change-oriented interaction stress the potential of individual actors to transform practices, meanings, and related structures.

[4] … and not, like many German critics of immigration believe, a fixed set of *Leitkultur*!

It is a fundamental observation that migrants often do not become "immigrants" assimilating to another "culture" but as "transmigrants" negotiate varieties of practice and knowledge (Schiller et al. 1995). Machleidt (2013) claims that, due to political restrictions and social practices of exclusion, expectations often remain unfulfilled, and many migrants all over the world, but particularly in Germany, seek relief in so-called parallel societies, providing social support, relief of afflicting experiences, and spaces for (re)orientation in a hostile environment. Networks of (self-) care (cf. Thiesbonenkamp-Maag 2014) mitigate experiences of isolation and discrimination and, therefore, minimize the danger of (mental) health problems in a state of being "betwixt and between" (Turner 1968). Notably, religious and spiritual practices create such third spaces between "here" and "there" that facilitate gradual detachment from the "old" and adaption to "new" contexts.

Acknowledging the multi-directionality of socio-cultural integration and adaptation, Vertovec and Cohen (2002) illustrate the diversity of causes, reasons, aims, experiences, and implementations in these dynamics. They thus provide the basis for a critical review of academic concepts in the social sciences, such as transnationality or transculturality, for they divide nations, cultures, or religions into strictly separate units and exclude the life-world experiences of many people in the world. Gottowik (2010), therefore, postulates a "translocal" perspective on the mobility of actors, ideas, commodities, and artifacts between spaces beyond national entities because many borders exist inside and outside the construct of the nation-state in political, religious, social, and economic terms. Where transnationalism focuses on deterritorialized social networks and (economic) exchanges, translocality takes an agency-oriented approach to individual experiences. At the same time, it is not limited to shared social relations of local histories, experiences, and relations but connects to broader geographical histories and processes (cf. Brickell and Datta 2011).

For the (trans)local study of religion, Bretfeld (2012: 423) suggests perceiving history as a continuous global interaction, flow, entanglement, and network. From this perspective, religion is not an ahistorical entity but a set of practices that permanently transform, relocate, and intersect. In his related discussion of the modalities of transnational transcendence, Csordas (2009) also highlights that modalities of religious intersubjectivity both transcend cultural boundaries and forge new ones. He perceives the "globalization of religion" as a multidirectional flow of practices and meanings with a particular network character (ibid.: 2ff).

Turning our focus back to the migratory context, it is evident that religious and spiritual practices of meaning-making, personal transformation, and coping with traumatic experiences foster well-being (cf. Westerink 2013). Medical anthropologists have investigated the global circulation of local healing practices (cf. Baer et al. 2013; Beaudevin & Pordié 2016), and the coexistence, interaction, and translation of religious-therapeutic approaches in different localities constitute an increasing area of research (cf. Kirmayer 2014; Sleeboom-Faulkner 2015), where so-called geographies of religious-spiritual healing practices manifest in therapeutic markets (cf. Barnes 2011; Klinkhammer and Tolksdorf 2015). Some researchers present divergent therapy models integrating spiritual agencies and (re)interpreting affliction in related terms (cf. Jenkins 2015). Moral dimensions (cf. Csordas 2014), concepts of personhood (cf. Itzhak 2015), and spiritual coping strategies with trauma

(cf. Csordas 2017; Wirtz 2018) intersect and sometimes complement, substitute, or oppose dominant cosmopolitan (bio)medicine and local customs, thus bearing conflict potential (cf. Huizer 1987; Unschuld 2004). It is valid for both local and translocal contexts and their global circulation (cf. Zanini et al. 2013; Bell et al. 2018) that emerge not only from migration but also from the globalized health-seeking behavior of patients who experience local public systems of care as insufficient (cf. Dilger et al. 2015; Penkala-Gawęcka and Rajtar 2016). Controversies manifest in health-related human rights agendas (cf. Jain and Orr 2016), community-based care (cf. Pols 2016), and "counter-clinics" that constitute spaces of well-being with alternative methods of treatment (cf. Davis 2018).

Translocal networks are significant health resources for migrants to negotiate opposing explanatory models and substitute access restrictions to official healthcare services due to their intersection with divergent knowledge systems and the capacity to create cooperative spaces of (self-)care (cf. Eichler 2008; Huschke 2013). Gruner-Domić (2005), regarding Latin American immigrants in Germany, and Stelzig-Willutzki (2012) for the particular case of Brazilian women, stress the importance of such networks for well-being, social support, and care—regardless of the heterogeneity of this social group. Stelzig-Willutzki observes a continuous identification with Brazil as the land of origin and, therefore, ongoing maintenance of translocal networks and relations.

However, not only do transmigrants seek support in religious-spiritual practices of their respective cultural origin, but also an increasing number of Germans apply to these spiritual sources of well-being (cf. Büssing et al. 2005). Whereas investigations on the implementation of spiritual practices as complementary and alternative medicines (CAM) in "Western" contexts often highlight conceptional intersections and fusions with New Age practices and dissolution from ethnic, religious, or nationally characterized clienteles (cf. Heelas 2011; Baer et al. 2013), the case of Brazilian Spiritism provides contradictory data regarding migration-related research: it displays a more diversified heterogeneity regarding the adaption and implementation of related (healing) practices. It is especially true for the Spiritist branch of *Umbanda*, which indicates opposing diasporic identity formation patterns in different European settings such as England (cf. Sterzi 2011) or Portugal (cf. Saraiva 2010a, b). They offer coping strategies for alienation, homesickness, identity loss, and depression in a homogeneous cultural and linguistic environment apart from spaces of transcultural communication, integration, and mutual support in times of critical emotional affliction and experiences. However, whereas various researchers have addressed facets of Brazilian transmigration to different countries and their respective strategies of interaction, adaption, and negotiation of "identity," they hardly focused on religious-spiritually health-related aspects (cf. Reis and Sales 1999; Glovsky 2003; de Réno Machado 2006; Fundação Alexandre de Gusmão 2007, 2009a, b; Zubaran 2008; Margolis 2009, 2013; Sachsida et al. 2009; Kummels 2010; Evans et al. 2011; Braga Martes 2011; Pedroso 2011; Torresan 2011).

Still, Messias (2002) acknowledges that in taking care of their health, Brazilian migrants often rely on a combination of personal and collective translocal resources. They move back and forth across informal and formal healthcare systems, crossing multiple national, cultural, and health system borders. Accordingly,

Brazilian migrants in Germany also implement Kardecist-Spiritist practices, but so far, research projects have focused on divergent Latin-American descents and/or distinct practices like Santeria, Vodou, and Candomblé (cf. Drotbohm 2005; Rossbach de Olmos 2011; Rauhut 2012; Huschke 2013; Bahia and Dantas 2018). Due to this research desideratum, I will introduce Kardecist Spiritism as another translocal health resource in migratory contexts.

Translocal Spiritism: Germany-Brazil

In the age of reason and progress, "religion" in Europe experienced rationalization processes, and the Christian model of the human being as a unity of body and soul altered (cf. Porter 1987: 16f). Spiritism and Spiritualism as transcultural phenomena reflected these dynamics. They integrated diverse cultural, philosophical, scientific, religious, and spiritual responses to socio-political challenges of enlightenment, industrialization, and technological progress (cf. Gutierrez 2015). As a consequence, "religious-spiritual" and "rational-scientific" approaches to (mental) health differentiated throughout the nineteenth century and would only "de-differentiate" as CAM by the end of the twentieth century (cf. Knoblauch 2009; Kirmayer 2014). In his historical overview of Spiritist movements, Sawicki (2016) argues that Germany was one of its breeding grounds due to pivotal philosophic and scientific impulses (ibid.: 11). In France, it has then been further developed and codified in terms of a Spiritist doctrine by the scholar Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail (1804–1869) with his pseudonym of Allan Kardec, that as Kardecism gained global relevance in the twentieth century (cf. Aubrée and Laplantine 2009).

According to his Spirits' Book (Kardec 1996), the human soul disconnects from the biological body upon death and remains in the spiritual realm until reincarnating in a new body for continuous moral development, correcting past life errors. Kardec combined persisting post-revolutionary hopes for social reforms and fashionable oriental concepts regarding human spirituality: he fused the wish of an individually, autonomously, and self-responsibly conducted life with postulations regarding social progress toward free will, equality, merit, justice, and tolerance for everybody devoid of class, gender, or race boundaries. In the second half of the nineteenth century, various Spiritist practices and discourses reached Latin America and, to a certain degree, mixed with local religions and philosophies (cf. Monroe 2015: 248). The fact, however, that Kardec codified his insights in a series of books reinforced his impact on the further development and global transmission of Spiritism. His doctrine applied to people's quest for a new spiritual practice that connects religious belief with scientific knowledge as a (mental) health resource in new, challenging environments.

The emergence of Spiritism in Brazil coincided with the professionalization and rationalization of medical institutions in demarcation to "traditional" and "faith" healing, persecuted as quack medicine (Luz 2014). Still, de Araújo Aureliano and Cardoso 2015: 284) argue that this ongoing dispute, at long last, stimulated the production of knowledge on both sides, and Hess (1991) values the capacity to negotiate between institutionalized medical science and folk religious

healing as an example of dialogue between non-Western "traditional" and Western "modern" approaches. He thus anticipates Bhabha's (1994) theoretical model of a third space of contest, interaction, and cooperation of healing practices. However, unfortunately, neither does he critically investigate notions of concepts such as "tradition" and "modernity," nor does he explore social implications and parameters for the emerging diversifying healthcare markets, such as availability, social change, personal networks, and individual decision-making of patients (cf. Giumbelli 2008; Schmidt 2017). Like Greenfield (2008), he interprets it as a typical Brazilian phenomenon, and Rocha (2017) correctly criticizes such a homogenization of an alleged "national culture." She postulates a differentiated perspective that implies dynamic processes of global hybridization and interrelation, especially since so many foreigners adapt to Spiritist healing practices (ibid.: 20). As a motivation to turn to Spiritism, Rocha (2017: 8) assumes disillusionment with biomedicine and the asymmetric relations between healers and patients. She stresses the empowerment of patients in their quest for the meaning of illness beyond the categories and frames of biomedical technologies. Prandi (2013) agrees when he argues that as an institution, Kardecism in Brazil simultaneously criticizes, substitutes, and complements official health resources by adding spiritual components. It substitutes failed public health programs and strategies, and provides spaces of agency and self-responsibility at the intersection of charity, care, and education (ibid.: 59ff).

Since the 1990s, Brazilian transmigratory communities established Spiritist centers in major German cities, most associated with the German Spiritist Association DSV. Through the Brazilian-dominated *Conselho Espírita International* (CEI, International Spiritist Council), it is linked to the *Federação Espírita do Brasil* (FEB, Brazilian Spiritist Federation) and the *Associação Medico-Espírita* (AME, Spiritist Medical Association). They regularly invite speakers from FEB and AME who "tour" Europe and promote spiritual aspects of health and well-being. One of the more prominent examples is the annual *Psycho-Medizin-Kongress* in Bad Honnef (Germany), which invites Brazilian Spiritists to share their knowledge with a wide range of "alternative" therapists and an interested public. Besides the fact that many participants cannot cognitively follow Spiritist arguments due to socio-cultural differences in concepts of self, person, and illness explanatory models, the immense participation fee contradicts the charitable approach of Spiritists in Brazil. It might mark an adaption to the German environment where specific clientele expect to pay a high price for sustained treatment that is not readily available to anyone. In contrast, DSV aspires to implant charity, solidarity, and fraternal care by providing and coordinating Spiritist practice in Germany. Their annual meeting in Frankfurt/Main took the form of a scientific congress with keynotes, presentations, lectures, workshops, and book tables. At first sight, the meeting seemed to serve the exchange between Brazilian communities in Germany, but one contested topic was the role of the German language in Spiritist centers: some argued that Spiritist centers should be a refuge for Brazilian immigrants and the maintenance of their cultural identity, whereas others saw them as a space of integration, exchange, and the elaboration of the Spiritist doctrine in Germany. The latter's central argument would be that Spiritism is not to be understood as a Brazilian cultural practice but as a universally valid

and scientifically elaborated way of life that has only been preserved in Brazil until it could be globally distributed again.

At SCSK, I also observed contradicting and contested positions regarding integrating Spiritism into German (self-)care systems that would eventually induce another separation of the group, initially established in the early 1990s to provide and promote Spiritist practice through charity, prayer, and studying Kardec's Spiritist doctrine. Fifty to sixty members regularly participate in lectures, study groups, and "fluid" treatment (*passe*), and around ten persons engage in a mediumship training course. Twenty percent are Germans, while the rest are of Brazilian descent. Once a week, a study group of ten to fifteen participants actively discusses Spiritist literature in the German language in a round-table manner: one after another, participants read aloud a paragraph and discuss how it would apply to their experiences. Unlike this, on another day, a Portuguese-speaking group more passively assembles to listen to lectures of SCSK volunteers or guests from other Spiritist centers in Brazil and Germany, discussing certain life aspects from a spiritual perspective. The aesthetic framing with meditative music, prayers, dimmed light, and performance of *passe* in both settings resembles many of my experiences in Brazil (cf. Kurz 2024). Still, it becomes apparent that the "German group," including Brazilians who have lived in Germany for many years, promotes more active discussions of the doctrine than the relatively passive "Brazilian group" does. Whereas the former discusses specific aspects of the literature, the latter prefers to relate general elements to their daily issues within a peer group of similar socio-cultural Brazilian descent. Apart from a few individuals who like to participate in both groups for integration, interaction, and communication, most members remain dedicated to only one of these groups. This dynamic is intensified by a shared practice of prejudice and mutual rejection in which some Brazilians assume that Germans cannot fully understand the Spiritist doctrine due to a lack of knowledge and empathetic skills. In contrast, some German members complain about the arrogance, organizational failures, and lack of alleged basic structures in implementing Spiritist practice and knowledge within the German context.

Contrary to the Spiritist ideology of solidarity and charity, this contest becomes most apparent when addressing mediumship training and practice. A relatively small group of Brazilian participants has engaged in weekly mediumship practices for years. Recently, the group has also accepted German participants, but discussions on language have evolved, which is why they have split into two groups, quarreling about "correct" approaches, such as if German spirits' messages should be transmitted in German or Portuguese language. Moreover, the Brazilian part of the group regularly celebrates birthday parties and other social events in "a Brazilian way," to which most German members are rarely invited. Apart from a few Brazilians who engage in both, the two groups seldom interact because German members**,** most of them not being partners of Brazilian members, come for spiritual engagement devoid of national or cultural denomination.

Michael, for example, is a 49-year-old German who has worked as a courier for eighteen years. He is unmarried, childless, and has few family ties in another German region. He appears to have few social contacts but has a strong will to compensate for it with altruistic behavior. He has participated in the Spiritist center for seven

years, ever since he suffered "blackouts" which had never been clinically diagnosed. He had contacts with Brazilians at that time, and since he mentioned once, during his blackouts, that he would feel the presence of somebody, one of them suggested that he might be a medium and took him to the center. His medical doctor concluded that he suffered from stress and dehydration, but by then, he was already attuned to the center and impressed by the "open-hearted attitude" of people who would accept him "like a brother." He soon felt that the Spiritist doctrine was something he was always convinced of but could not grasp. He wanted to participate in the mediumship training group immediately but had to accept that he was deemed unprepared and would have to study first. It would not work in linguistic terms either, as the studies were conducted in German but with mediumistic messages in Portuguese. Still, he felt that now he could develop spiritually and had finally "arrived home." He perceives the group as the extended family he never had and has felt entirely accepted for the first time in his life. He does not experience it as a form of healing, but it helps him to take better care of himself; he declares that he needs "soul food," a path to follow, and an aim. He started to learn how to perform *passe* three or four years ago, and for two years now, he has participated in the mediumship group. However, he does not perceive himself as a "classical medium" that listens to voices or sees spirits but as intuitive, empathetic:

The most beautiful thing is to help, to practice charity. And if it is not for a living person, I do it for the spiritual world. […] You feel this satisfaction, this happiness, and I sometimes cry with bliss. Knowledge is important, but without practice, it does not value anything. It is useless to accumulate knowledge your whole life if you cannot put it into practice. Nobody will ask me how many books I have read when I die, but what have I done? We had so many discussions over here about how to practice charity, but this is obsolete. You must do what you think is right and follow your gut. (Interview Michael 21 September 2016).

From this quote, it becomes apparent that Michael has embodied Spiritist knowledge, and his access and experience resemble the narratives of many Brazilian Spiritists. He does not perceive Spiritist practices as healing techniques but as a support of well-being, which he defines as a symbiosis of care and self-care. He acknowledges Brazil's importance in the development of Spiritism but does not hold it as a Brazilian socio-cultural practice: the fusion of ethnicities is the base for global Spiritist knowledge, and now, it is redistributed to the world. When this task is accomplished, Brazil will no longer hold any particular position (ibid.). He and other German members criticize Brazilian members for performing as something "better" or "more advanced" but at the same time not living what they are preaching—with a few exceptions.

Fabricia is from the city of São Paulo, 32 years old, and she studied industrial design in Brazil. Born into a Catholic family, ever since adolescence, she has developed an atheist and antireligious worldview. In 2009, at the age of 25, she entered Germany with a student visa to study the German language and culture. She never attended university classes but has instead tried to work in her profession. As her Brazilian academic graduation was not accepted in Germany, she started to feel exploited in low-wage internships, a fact that humiliated and frustrated her, and finally developed into a clinical depression. According to her, this was when she

began engaging with God again because she had been suffering so much and needed something to hold on to and to support her. In 2013, she met her future German husband, Paul, who has emotionally supported her and warrants her legal status in Germany. From 2014 on, she has frequented SCSK and actively participated in both the Brazilian and German lectures and study groups, convincing her husband to accompany her in the latter. To Fabricia, participation within SCSK has been crucial to getting back on track since she no longer knew how to deal with her situation as a skillful and ambitious young woman who, with her immigrant status, became marginalized in German society. Presently, it is essential to her to support others who are having comparable experiences, and she believes that SCSK provides possibilities to do so:

Since I have been here, I experienced inner reform. I have been working on my inner self by reading and lectures. I learned a lot, and I think that it helped me to initiate major changes. Back in the day, I was lofty and full of mistakes, but here, I have worked it out to be humble. I learned it with Spiritism. […] It was a relief to work on myself because I saw that the world would not change that easy – so I have to change my perspective on the world. (Interview Fabricia 28 September 2016).

Fabricia is convinced that the Spiritist practice and community helped her overcome her problems in finding coping strategies and new perspectives in life. She tells me about past periods of severe depression and suicidal tendencies, but I experience her as a woman who has been able to transgress disturbing experiences and develop agency in a hostile environment due to the spiritual support of fellow SCSK members. Now, she is an independent, self-employed graphic designer who enjoys interacting with the Brazilian and German groups at SCSK. She is shocked and sad when she learns that the group will split in 2017 and finally renounces herself from any Spiritist activities. Since then, she seems to engage more with oriental impressions of spirituality and mindfulness that she loves to share with others through social media.

Fabricias's example supports my perspective that cultural aspects of a peer group are of specific importance. Still, personal expectations, individual resources, and political contexts are central to the translocal distribution of models of healing and well-being. Both Fabricia and Michael refer to SCSK as a place of well-being under challenging situations, but their narratives differ regarding personal experiences. Fabricia suffers from a hostile political context regarding the integration of migrants and develops a clinical depression with suicidal tendencies. She declares that she could recover only through this support group and their reference to Brazilian solidarity practices—although Spiritism has not been her life orientation before. At the same time, participation in the German study group helps her to integrate into the new cultural context, which is why she is disappointed about its loss by separation. Over the years, she has learned to highly estimate SCSK as a transitional space where she could connect her Brazilian background to her life reality in Germany.

The different narratives of Fabricia and Michael reflect patterns of distinctive pathways to Spiritism in Brazil and Germany. My observations support the idea that Brazilian migrants experience the Spiritist center as a place of well-being where they can reflect on and handle their daily experiences in a foreign country within a "Brazilian environment." To a certain degree, the German members understand

that their Brazilian fellows have suffered from structural violence and seek relief in an environment that provides a protecting "nest" of Brazilian cultural belonging *and*, simultaneously, a more challenging mixed German-Brazilian integration environment. However, conflicts are emerging, starting with German and "progressive" Brazilian members of SCSK no longer agreeing on the Portuguese language used in mediumship practices and other contexts.

Being my first contact at SCSK, Adailton already mentioned these issues during our initial conversation in August 2016, taking a somewhat divergent perspective from chairperson Claudia. He is 41 and has lived in Germany for 23 years, studying, working, getting married and divorced, but still staying. He is thankful for how it went because "usually you come here and cannot work, and it is tough" (Interview Adailton 25 August 2016). However, he did not turn to Spiritism out of despair but because he already engaged with it in Brazil but wanted to get to know its roots:

Nobody knows that it started in Germany earlier than anywhere else, and in a scientific instead of a religious way. There have been investigations and experiments on a rather rational basis instead of being based on belief. Parapsychology started in Germany. I am interested in this topic, and I feel right here in Germany – unlike in Brazil, where it is always about religious ties and the heart instead of the brain. […] There are three columns: philosophy, religion, and science, but Brazil lacks this balance; it is highly religious, partly philosophical, and hardly scientific. Brazilians have lost the core of the doctrine in understanding it as a confession, and they bring that approach here. (ibid.)

Furthermore, he raises a migration-related problem:

There are many illegal migrants here, and when I spot that in our group, I am against it because these are exactly the cases where the government comes and sanctions us as being all the same. It affects us. Of course, we want to meet them in charity and help, but there are limits. We cannot have illegals in the group. (ibid.)

Upon my question if the Spiritist center should not be a resource for these individuals, Adailton answers:

Yes, but it is complicated. It starts with these wedding arrangements to get the passport. People must integrate, learn the language, apply to the laws and rules over here, and see if they can adapt, but many try to stay here somehow – and it is not easy. Of course, we will support people, but we must also clarify that support is limited because many abuse our charity. Imagine the perspective of German officials: we engage in Spiritism and support illegal immigrants, some even being elected as representatives of the association…we lose our legal status. Another issue is that we want to connect Brazilians with Germans to revive the German movement and facilitate integration and interaction, creating a *Verein* (legal association) according to local rules and traditions. It was a lot of paperwork and discussions with the CEI on organization, cooperation, lectures, translations, and materials to be shared…to apply to the international Spiritist approaches. (ibid.)

With all the attempts to follow this path, SCSK has reached a critical mass with different ideas and approaches, and the separation of a German and a Brazilian group with little communication and interaction has remained. Adailton wonders about the future once many Brazilians at SCSK have never spoken to their German partners about Spiriritism. He deems it ridiculous: "How about their kids? How do

they do it? They create more problems than they resolve. It is not about missionizing anybody, but it should be possible to create something common instead of divergent and separating."

To him, it is crucial to cleanse Spiritism from its Brazilian influences, but unfortunately, at SCSK, it mainly remains a refuge for Brazilians. It does not serve integration but quite the opposite, due to one-sided religious truth-claims, runs the danger of becoming a sect. Whereas Germans would foster integration and exchange without postulating anybody to speak perfect German or the like, Brazilians would be afraid, prefer to stay in their parallel society, lack understanding, and perceive themselves as Brazilians instead of Germans.

Ten months later, Adailton states:

Now you see how it goes: we will separate; the German group will leave SCSK because we realized again that it does not work out. I am sad and disappointed but also angry about this typical Brazilian attitude that displays cultural arrogance and egoism: think about yourself, your advantage, and this *jeitinho*[5] in small and bigger contexts: 'I don't care about others.' It is what happens here; they want to stay among themselves and do not progress. I am afraid I have to disagree with it. (Interview Adailton 15 June 2017).

He understands that upon arrival in Germany, without knowing the language, people want to stay among peers and find a home or a forum of exchange – like a culture club. Unfortunately, many would remain at that stage forever, and when criticizing it, they would feel insulted and develop hostile behavior just because one does not share their perspective "as a Brazilian." Further, when suggesting that SCSK should also offer support to Germans, they would neglect it because allegedly, "Germans do not have the kinds of psychological problems we have; Brazilians suffer over here, so we have to offer everything in Portuguese. It is so superficial and contradicts the message we want to share." (ibid.)

Conclusion

Spiritist approaches to (health)care may be more prominent in Brazil but are not restricted to national or cultural boundaries. They gained importance in twentieth-century Brazil but were rooted in European practices of the nineteenth century. Despite being ignored in European scientific discourse for over a century, they have never completely disappeared (cf. Sawicki 2016). In the twenty-first century, progressing Brazilian transmigration and translocally acting Spiritist networks promote their revitalization in Germany. However, this dynamic includes contests on political questions of identity and belonging. To summarize my findings according to the introductory questions, Spiritist centers in Germany support Brazilian migrants in manifold ways and may even foster integration in the host society, but the interaction with Germans also bears conflicts that may lead to mutual dismissal. It is

[5] *Jeitinho* describes an alleged typical Brazilian smartness and shortcuts to reach one's aims by bending the rules and acting out others.

due to ambivalent agencies that contest adapting practices to the new environment. Whereas for some Brazilians, Spiritist centers serve as a protected space of "Brazilness," others aim at integration with Germans and transporting practice and knowledge into the German context.

In general, cultural resources of religious and healing practices support the immigrants' integration into a new cultural system (cf. Eichler 2008; Huschke 2013; Thiesbonenkamp-Maag 2014). This is also partly true for Kardecism in Germany, but the discussion on cultural connotations reflects identity politics and their negotiation: approximately one-third of SCSK consists of German members or Brazilians with a long history as transmigrants in Germany. These postulate a "de-Brazilianization" of Spiritism because they experience practices at SCSK as too religiously connotated and not in line with their "scientific-philosophical" attitude. Apart from this discourse on the "rationality" of Spiritism and its importance for healthcare and well-being, they are quarreling on language and "socio-cultural" adaption in a way so common in German debates on "integration," just that here, it is not the host society refusing communication and cooperation. However, not all Brazilians refute adaptation; many who have lived in Germany for years and decades use translocal relations for integration, whereas others use them for segregation, sticking to alleged typical Brazilian values and customs. According to my observations, many of the latter are those who complain about German "coldness" and difficulties in adapting to German lifeworlds. It illustrates that integration is a multi-directional task and that translocal relations may support but not warrant smooth transformations from one space to another. In the case presented, religious contexts were thought of as serving integration but caused the separation of the group in 2017. Giving way to a new project, Adailton's objective is to utilize translocal Spiritist networks and increasingly adapt related knowledge and practice to the German context. The remaining group around Claudia, however, runs the risk of being trapped in cultural, social, and religious maladaptation and failed integration due to identity politics that elevate the "self" and dismiss the "other"—a habitus that unfortunately still frames translocal and cultural relations even in postmodern and -colonial times. Where religious and spiritual practice could bridge gaps—and many agencies try to do so, particularly in the Brazilian migratory context—institutionalization and lack of mutual tolerance contradict these efforts. The future will show how different approaches might be fruitful in divergent ways. In 2023, both groups still exist; one exclusively provides German-language content, and the other still promotes bilingual approaches but hardly attracts Germans anymore.

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