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## **The City of Spirits. Spiritism, feminism and the secularization of urban spaces**

Mònica Balltondre and Andrea Graus<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

In September 1888, more than two thousand spiritists from around the world gathered for the first time at an International Spiritist Congress. Although Paris was the cradle of spiritism, Barcelona held that first international meeting. The meeting took place in the dance hall of a theatre that had been turned into a conference room, with spiritist mottos, garlands of flower and international flags hanging from the ceiling. The press was divided between those who reported the event as an intellectual conference and those who considered it a meeting of members of a sect. The local organizers were extremely pleased with the variety of social strata among those present, along with the presence of many women. Both the congress participants and audience illustrate the plural nature of the movement in Barcelona and, as we will argue, the degree to which it engaged the attention of the inhabitants of the city.

Along with spiritualism, spiritism (in Spanish: *espiritismo*) refers to the revival in the belief in spirits and the spread of mediumistic activities that took place across much of Europe and the United States, starting from around 1850. In the French and Spanish contexts, spiritism was linked to the influence of the French intellectual and pedagogue Allan Kardec (1804-1869). In the 1860s, Kardec transformed communication with spirits into a more or less well-defined school. This Kardecism was a set of alleged scientific principles which proved the eternal survival of the human spirit through reincarnation. Its moral code combined utopian socialism and eastern philosophical

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<sup>1</sup> We would like to thank Andreas Sommer, Ángel González de Pablo and Annette Mülberger for their valuable comments on an earlier draft. We are also grateful to the editors of this volume, Oliver Hochadel and Agustí Nieto-Galán for their helpful suggestions.

traditions with a new understanding of Christian values based on fraternity and love. Spiritism became highly popular in France, Spain, Italy and some Latin American countries such as Brazil.

Some spiritist practices, such as table-turning or automatic writing, were mostly carried out in a rural setting; but spiritism, as an organized movement, was primarily an urban phenomenon. As Lynn Sharp has pointed out, spiritism exemplified ‘a mentality that adapted traditional beliefs to a modern, secularizing age’ based in cities.<sup>2</sup> The movement resonated within the urban population to the extent that it could be labelled an ‘urban secular spirituality’. One of its most appealing aspects was that it presented itself as a scientific religion. Followers thought they were researching spiritual realities and they believed their corpus of natural, occult and moral ideas to be grounded on positivistic principles. According to Kardec, since spirits were considered natural entities, spirit communication through a medium was itself a natural phenomenon. Mediumistic accounts of séances could be used to legitimize and validate knowledge on life after death. In spiritist circles, séances had the status of empirical evidence. In Spain, as in France, constructing spiritism as a ‘scientific’ religious alternative to Roman Catholicism was crucial for the influence and spread of the movement.

There has been much historiographical research into spiritism in France; less on spiritism in Spain. Most work on Spanish spiritism either consists of general overviews or is by scholars who focus on the writing of spiritists.<sup>3</sup> For instance, much work concerns a woman from Barcelona who was a leader of the movement: Amalia Domingo Soler, but only as a spiritist author.<sup>4</sup> Two exceptions to this trend are the work of Gerard Horta and that of María Dolores Ramos, focused mainly on spiritism in Barcelona.<sup>5</sup> Both scholars situate the movement within its local context, contextualizing

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<sup>2</sup> Lynn L. Sharp, ‘Fighting for the Afterlife: Spiritists, Catholics, and Popular Religion in Nineteenth-Century France’, *The Journal of Religious History*, 23/3 (1999): 282-295, p. 295.

<sup>3</sup> For a very good general picture of the movement in Spain see: Lisa Abend, ‘Specters of the secular: Spiritism in nineteenth-century Spain’, *European History Quarterly*, 34/4 (2004): 507-534. To see the reaction of some Spanish physicians to spiritism: Ángel González de Pablo, ‘Sobre los inicios del espiritismo en España: La epidemia psíquica de las mesas giratorias de 1853 en la prensa médica’, *Asclepio*, 58/2 (2006): 63-96. For connections between spiritism and psychical research (called ‘metapsychics’ in Spain), see: Annette Mülberger and Mònica Balltandre, ‘Metapsychics in Spain: Acknowledging or questioning the marvellous?’, *History of the Human Sciences*, 25/2 (2012): 108-130.

<sup>4</sup> Among others, see: Alicia Cerezo Paredes, ‘“Cada espíritu es un libro”: Spiritualism in Turn-of-the-Century Spain’, *Decimonónica*, 10/1 (2013):1-16; Christine Arkinstall, *Spanish female writers and the Freethinking Press 1979-1926* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), pp. 23-59. Amelina Correa Ramón, ‘Librepensamiento y espiritismo en Amalia Domingo Soler, escritora sevillana del siglo XIX’, *Archivo Hispalense*, 83/254 (2000): 75-102.

<sup>5</sup> Gerard Horta, *De la mística a les barricades* (Barcelona: Proa, 2001) and *Cos i revolució. L'espiritisme català o les paradoxes de la modernitat* (Barcelona: Edicions de 1984, 2004). M<sup>a</sup> Dolores Ramos,

their ideas. Our approach here is an attempt to move further in this direction and analyse the movement directly as an urban social actor.

We understand the spiritist movement in Barcelona as a civil association that stands between the state and the family. Treating spiritism as a civil association means identifying it as part of civil society; considering that those involved in the movement contributed their knowledge and actions to the shaping of urban spaces.<sup>6</sup> If we were only to historicize the ideas and doctrines of spiritists, we would miss the local meaning of spiritism, which explains its contributions to and success within local contexts. Furthermore, we would miss the participation of spiritism in the social and political agenda of its spaces of influence.

Our goal is therefore to map spiritists within their urban landscape by looking at the associations they financed and the activities they organized, taking into account that those activities were directed at all the citizens of Barcelona, whether they were spiritists or not. Through their activities, spiritists helped to create a heterodox network of practices and knowledge; in this way, spiritism came to represent a secular alternative for the city of Barcelona.

Compared to the situation in other cities such as Paris or London, spiritists had a stronger political presence in Barcelona. That was not because they formed a political movement *per se*, but because the urban environment of Barcelona was highly politicized. The spiritist movement in Barcelona found its ultimate meaning and place in the polarized anticlerical battle in *fin-de-siècle* Spain.

### **The local geography of the movement**

Spiritism started as a clandestine movement in Spain, but its supporters were able to organize themselves quickly. Spiritism could be openly defended under the first republican Spanish government in 1873 and throughout the following period known as the Bourbon Restoration (1875-1931). In that parliamentary monarchy, conservative and liberal political parties alternated in government. By then, religion divided Spanish

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‘Heterodoxias religiosas, familias espiritistas y apóstolas laicas a finales del siglo XIX: Amalia Domingo Soler, Belén de Sárraga Hernández’, *Historia Social*, 53 (2005): 65-84 and ‘La república de las librepensadoras (1890-1914): laicismo, emancipismo, anticlericalismo’, *Ayer*, 60/4 (2005): 45-74. Horta offers a big picture of spiritist practices in Catalonia in relation to other heterodox groups, such as freethinkers, the Freemasons and anarchists. Although his work is one of the most complete on Catalan spiritism to date, his approach is more anthropological than historical. Ramos is interested in the feminine side of spiritism.

<sup>6</sup> For discussion of the use of ‘civil societies’ in the history of science see: Thomas H. Broman, ‘Some preliminary considerations on Science and Civil Society’, *Osiris*, 17 (2002):1-21.

society. Each government encountered difficulties satisfying both the Roman Catholic Church's requests and secular demands. Some liberal and republican politicians and intellectuals made efforts to secularize society, while those defending the Church's interests maintained that Roman Catholicism should continue to regulate civil society.<sup>7</sup> Fundamentalist Catholics defended the notion that family, authority and property were divine rights, not civil rights. In cities such as Barcelona, anticlericalism challenged the supremacy of the Church and its control over the social system and institutions. Within this anticlerical and mainly republican environment, spiritism found allies in collectives such as anarchists, the Freemasons and freethinkers.

In Catalonia, many spiritist federations came into existence in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Barcelona became one of the focal points of the movement, especially after a public auto-da-fé perpetrated against spiritism in 1861.<sup>8</sup> Spiritist activity in Barcelona was mostly concentrated in the outlying towns of Gràcia and Sants—both integrated into the city in 1897—and the part of the old town known today as the Raval. This last area was home to one of the most prominent and active spiritist centres: the 'Centro Barcelonés de Estudios Psicológicos' (Barcelona Centre of Psychological Studies). The Raval had been the first industrialized area of the city, and also embraced traditional manufacturing and artisans. Spiritism was also quite popular in the industrial towns surrounding Barcelona with a politically committed working class, such as Sabadell and Terrassa. Thus, in Catalonia, spiritism became most popular in industrial areas where social networks, working-class communities, and trades unions were already established.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike the scenario in Madrid, where military personnel and low ranks of the nobility were involved, the spiritist movement in Barcelona was led by white-collar workers, such as teachers, notaries and printers, along with the petit bourgeoisie of tradespeople and manufacturers. It also attracted followers from among the more skilled sectors of the working class.

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<sup>7</sup> William James Callahan, *Church, Politics, and Society in Spain, 1750-1874* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 248-278.

<sup>8</sup> In 1861, the Bishop of Barcelona Antonio Palau (1806-1862), confiscated more than 300 spiritist books and pamphlets that had been illegally imported by the French librarian Maurice Lachârté (1814-1900), living in exile in Barcelona for political reasons since 1856. The bishop considered the books harmful for Catholicism. On 9 October 1861, the spiritist works were burnt on the Ciutadella esplanade. See Florentino Barrera, *El Auto de fe de Barcelona* (Buenos Aires: Vida infinita, 1980); Horta, *Cos i revolució*, pp. 310-315.

<sup>9</sup> For a mapping of skilled and unskilled working class neighbourhoods, see José Luis Oyón, 'The split of a working-class city: urban space, immigration and anarchism in inter-war Barcelona, 1914-1936', *Urban History*, 36/01 (2009): 86-112.

## **Putting Barcelona on the spiritism map: the First International Spiritist Congress (1888)**

As we have already mentioned, Barcelona hosted the first international spiritist meeting. In this section, we describe that meeting in order to reconstruct the primary concerns of the local spiritist leaders at the time and discuss the consequences of the Congress for the movement. We also depict the audience and the public image of the meeting.

Since Barcelona was holding an International Exhibition in 1888, the city offered an excellent location to hold an event which many foreigners could attend and which would garner international attention. For the local organizers, it was a great opportunity to make spiritism visible in the city and eventually to turn Barcelona into a reference point for the international spiritist movement.<sup>10</sup> To maximize visibility, they planned conferences open to the public along with private working sessions.

The Congress took place between 8th and 11th September. With expectations running high, the local committee saw the meeting as an excellent occasion to promote the doctrine in ‘solemn’ terms.<sup>11</sup> They insisted that their doctrine and morals were based on scientific principles and that they were not an obscure group playing evil tricks or trying to communicate with spirits for fun. The organizers expected great men of science to attend, such as the astronomer and spiritist Camille Flammarion (1842-1925) and the chemist and psychical researcher William Crookes (1832-1919). Those men would surely have helped to popularize and lend credibility to spiritism, but they did not attend. Nevertheless, spiritist leaders from France and Italy, such as Kardec’s successor Pierre-Gaëtan Leymarie (1827-1901), joined the executive committee and gave talks during the Congress. Foreign spiritist delegates and adherents represented more than ten countries, from Cuba to Russia.<sup>12</sup> The prominent attendance of Latin American delegates led some conservative newspapers ironically to point out that spiritists finally had managed to communicate with inhabitants of the ‘other world’.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> ‘Acta de la sesión del congreso preparatorio’, *La Luz Del Porvenir*, 9/45 (1888):1-4, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Antonio Torres-Solanot in *Primer Congreso Internacional Espiritista. Representaciones, adhesiones, sesiones públicas, sesiones privadas, conclusiones, documentos, etc. Reseña completa* (Barcelona: Imprenta Daniel Cortezo y C<sup>a</sup>, 1888), p. 80.

<sup>12</sup> Those countries were France, Italy, Belgium, Russia, Rumania, the United States of America, Chile, Peru, Mexico, Argentina, Cuba, Venezuela and Puerto Rico. *Primer Congreso Internacional Espiritista*, pp. 65-71.

<sup>13</sup> *La dinastía*, 12 August 1888, 1.

The idea of celebrating a spiritist congress while an International Exhibition was taking place had been entertained by the ‘Centro Barcelonés’ for a long time. In 1875, its members tried to convince American spiritualists to incorporate a spiritist meeting into the International Exhibition in Philadelphia. According to the viscount Antonio Torres-Solanot (1840-1902), then president of the Spanish Spiritist Society, spiritism should be placed in the 10th category of the exhibition, which contained ‘*objects illustrating the efforts made to ameliorate the physical, intellectual, and moral condition of the human being*’.<sup>14</sup> His proposal illustrates the spiritists’ conviction that their ideas would help the social and moral progress of humanity. It also shows that, in comparison to spiritualism, spiritism was more concerned with transforming societies. The initiative did not succeed; either in Philadelphia or in Barcelona, where the Congress did take place during the 1888 Universal Exhibition but not *within* its programme.

The Barcelona spiritists had difficulty finding a place to hold the Congress; the city was full of events due to the Universal Exhibition. Finally, they managed to find a suitable venue in the Salón Eslava: one of the city’s quite large theatres. It held over 2,000 people and was located close to the grounds of the Universal Exhibition. Thus the spiritists certainly hoped to attract a large public.<sup>15</sup>

However, the theatre was a functioning dance hall and each afternoon, the organizers had to quickly transform it into a conference room. They wanted to make the place look solemn but also maintain enthusiasm for the event. Therefore, it was decided the decoration would include all kinds of spiritist propaganda. Placed on the main platform, Kardec’s bust was adorned with laurels. The flags of different countries and flower garlands hung from the ceiling (Figure 1). Spiritist mottos could be read on shields and wall hangings distributed all about the room, such as: ‘In immobile eternity, Spirits subsist, while material beings pass away’.<sup>16</sup> Public sessions started at 9pm and lasted until almost midnight. This schedule allowed the attendance of the working class; the audience the spiritists were most eager to reach.

### Figure 7.1: First International Spiritist Congress (1888)

As the historian John Warne Monroe has shown, after Kardec’s death and especially from the 1880s on, spiritism split into two currents: one that emphasized the

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<sup>14</sup> Torres-Solanot in *Primer Congreso Internacional Espiritista*, p. 51. Italics in the original.

<sup>15</sup> *Primer Congreso Internacional Espiritista*, p. 58

<sup>16</sup> *Primer Congreso Internacional Espiritista*, p. 60.

moral doctrine of spiritism, while the other highlighted its scientific character.<sup>17</sup> In France, the philosopher Léon Denis (1846-1927) represented the tendency that prioritized the moral side of spiritism, while the engineer Gabriel Delanne (1857-1926) was interested in promoting a positivist, scientific approach to spiritist phenomena.<sup>18</sup> Both Denis and Delanne attended the event in Barcelona, where the confrontation between the moral and the scientific aspects of spiritism was present. As a follower of Delanne's positivist approach, Torres-Solanot handed out Delanne's book *Le spiritisme devant la science* [Spiritism in the face of science] (1885) to the journalists covering the event. Yet the moral side of Kardec's doctrine was the more prominent at the Congress. General non-expert audiences, the speakers and their communications—mostly centred on the moral lessons offered by spiritism—and the room decor—brimming with consoling spiritist mottos—set the tone of the meetings. In a society where social injustice was a tangible reality, highlighting the moral and humanitarian aspects of spiritism worked better, as propaganda, than emphasizing its 'scientific' features. It is important to note that during the meetings there were no displays of spectacular phenomena or demonstrations of mediumship similar to the shows performed by stage mediums. It was not the aim of the Congress to stun the audience with séances. Speakers tried to convince the public of the benefits of the doctrine only through rhetoric and praise.

In terms of attendance, the meetings were a success. The theatre was packed every day, even exceeding the 2,000-person limit for the closing session.<sup>19</sup> The organizers were extremely pleased with the range of social classes represented by those who attended: from labourers to university professors and physicians. They interpreted this diversity as complementing the decoration of the room by emphasizing the social equality sought by spiritism.<sup>20</sup> While they described their achievement in terms of class egalitarianism, local newspapers highlighted the high attendance by women.

Historians generally agree that most followers of the spiritist and spiritualist movements were women, although almost all of the leaders were men.<sup>21</sup> Critics of

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<sup>17</sup> John Warne Monroe, *Laboratories of faith. Mesmerism, spiritism, and occultism in modern France*. (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2008), pp. 226-227.

<sup>18</sup> Sophie Lachapelle, *Investigating the supernatural: From spiritism and occultism to psychological research and metapsychics in France, 1853-1931* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), pp. 30-52.

<sup>19</sup> 'Noticias varias', *El Día*, 14 February 1888, 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Primer Congreso Internacional Espiritista*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>21</sup> A gender analysis of spiritualism and spiritism in Alex Owen, *The darkened room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in late Victorian England* (London: Virago, 1989); Janet Oppenheim, *The other world: Spiritualism and psychical research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

spiritism at the time took advantage of its predominance among women to question the rational character that Kardec claimed his doctrine had. From this point of view, women's involvement in spiritism was attributed to their penchant for the marvellous and for mysticism. Kardec himself regarded this tendency as an obstacle for his doctrine<sup>22</sup>. As we argue in the next section, not only did many women share the spiritist project to change society, but in Barcelona spiritism became a platform for women to express themselves. Accordingly, the predominance of women at the Congress should not be interpreted as a result of a feminine penchant for the marvellous. On the contrary, it should be explained by the alliance between spiritism and emerging feminism.

Apart from the praise and reviews of the event in spiritist journals, two general daily newspapers covered the event: *La Vanguardia*—liberal and bourgeois—and *La Publicidad*—republican, anticlerical and representative of the moderate Catalan left-wing.<sup>23</sup> In *La Vanguardia* the journalist kept his distance but reported the event with respect and treated it as an intellectual one.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile *La Publicidad* looked down on the spiritists with contempt. It denounced the Congress as ‘an act of propaganda of a comforting doctrine’, assuming that spiritism was a religious sect.<sup>25</sup> Yet *La Publicidad* did publish some spiritist diatribes against the Roman Catholic Church.

In conclusion, the Congress helped to put Barcelona on the spiritism map. At the national level, Barcelona was consolidated as the spiritist capital of Spain, confirming the ‘Centro Barcelonés de Estudios Psicológicos’ as the movement’s leading Spanish institution. Not surprisingly, most Spanish representatives at future international spiritist congresses would be linked to that centre. At the international level, the Congress contributed to strengthening the connections between Barcelona and Paris, and to encouraging an intercontinental collaborative network of spiritist propaganda with Latin

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1985); Nicole Edelman, *Voyantes, guérisseuses et visionnaires en France: 1785-1914* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995); Ann Braude, *Radical spirits. Spiritualism and woman's rights in nineteenth-century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Lynn L. Sharp, *Secular spirituality: reincarnation and spiritism in nineteenth-century France* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006) and Heather Wolfram, *The stepchildren of science. Psychological research and parapsychology in Germany, c. 1870-1939* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Monroe, *Laboratories of faith*, p. 120.

<sup>23</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 9 September 1888, 2; 10 September 1888, 1-2; 11 September 1888, 2-3; 21 September 1888, 1 and *La Publicidad*, 10 September 1888, 1.

<sup>24</sup> It was a policy of the newspaper to report scientific and philosophical news with an impartial tone. See Matiana González-Silva and Néstor Herrán, ‘Ideology, elitism and social commitment: Alternative images of science in two fin de siècle Barcelona newspapers’, *Centaurus*, 51 (2009): 97–115.

<sup>25</sup> *La Publicidad*, 10 September 1888, 1.

America.<sup>26</sup> French spiritists held a meeting the following year, at which they commemorated the Congress in Barcelona.

### **Public sites for women**

The first civil associations of women which formed around republican and left-wing parties are not well known in Spain. Until recently our historical understanding of early Spanish feminism was inaccurate because scholars applied Anglo-American interpretative frameworks to the Spanish context. As Mary Nash argues, Spanish historiography has tended to portray historical feminism from the perspective of liberal struggles based on the notions of individual political rights, equality and individual freedom; a framework that cannot be applied directly to Mediterranean Europe<sup>27</sup>. At first, feminism in Spain did not focus primarily on demands for women's suffrage or other political rights because the political context was not conducive to such an orientation.

Our research led us to identify, as other scholars do, the first women's civic associations in Catalonia as those that fought the domination of the male clergy.<sup>28</sup> That was the context that could bring together an important sector of women in Barcelona at the end of the nineteenth century. When Teresa Claramunt<sup>29</sup>, an anarchist, tried to form a women's workers association, she found no support among female workers.<sup>30</sup> It seems they were not prepared to organize themselves autonomously before 1900. Claramunt had to collaborate with an organization that was neither of women workers nor anarchist: the 'Sociedad Autónoma de Mujeres'. That society, which espoused feminism and anticlerical thought, was born in the bosom of the spiritist movement. It offered a social setting in which women of different political tendencies could come together; not workers but republicans and thinkers on the left. It attracted lower-middle-

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<sup>26</sup> By the beginning of the twentieth century, strong connections with Latin America can easily be seen by looking at some Barcelona-based spiritist journals. For instance, *Luz y Unión* managed a network of correspondents who reported from Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Cuba, El Salvador, Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The congress enhanced this existent intercontinental spiritist network.

<sup>27</sup> Mary Nash, 'Political culture, Catalan nationalism, and the Women's movement in early Twentieth-Century Spain, *Women's Studies International Forum*, 19/1-2 (1996):45-54, pp. 45-47.

<sup>28</sup> This connection has also been pointed out by Horta and Ramos (see footnote 5) and especially by Pere Sánchez Ferré, 'Els orígens del feminisme a Catalunya: 1870-1926', *L'Avenç*, 222 and 223 (1998): 8-13; 6-11.

<sup>29</sup> Teresa Claramunt (1862-1932) was a textile worker. The role that Spanish women played in the initial labour rights demands has scarcely been researched. After her death, she was buried in Amalia Domingo's niche in the civil graveyard at Montjuïc. See Maria Amalia Pradas Baena, *Teresa Claramunt, la virgen roja barcelonesa* (Barcelona: Virus, 2006), p. 93.

<sup>30</sup> Laura Vicenta Villanueva, 'Teresa Claramunt (1862-1931) propagandista i activista llibertària', *Arraona. Revista d'història*, 28 (2004):144-163, p.151.

class republican women who wanted to fight for women's educational rights as a way to combat the domination of the church over women.

In this section, we detail the sites of action of this women's league and its struggle for a more emancipated female citizenship in relation to the spiritist movement. From an urban perspective, we account for their very public presence in the city and the male boundaries they broke.

The spiritists were not more radical in defending egalitarianism and women's rights than the Freemasons or the freethinkers in their discourses; but it is a matter of fact that spiritist societies were more equal in terms of participation.<sup>31</sup> Séances and working groups were open to both men and women from the beginning of the movement, while it was a controversial issue in Freemasonry and not at all a common practice among trades unions.<sup>32</sup> Spiritism offered a space where not only did men and women work together for common goals, but also women could experiment with positions of authority and power that were denied them in society at large.<sup>33</sup> The empowerment that spiritism afforded Amalia Domingo, tangible in the history of her life, is a good example; as we will see below. Within the movement, women could acquire a collective sense of themselves as citizens, so they could become participants in the public sphere of the city.<sup>34</sup>

Spiritist groups could not completely escape from the reproduction of gendered roles. The 'Centro Barcelonés', for instance, had a female philanthropic group that supervised weekly donations of food and clothes to poor people. In the nineteenth century, this type of presiding over charitable acts was part of the role of upper class women. So the spiritists were reproducing that traditional image of the woman as a 'charitable' being; and female spiritists maintained this gendered class identity.

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<sup>31</sup> According to the spiritist doctrine, everybody could be reincarnated as a man or woman indistinctly. Perhaps that explains why male spiritists acted in more egalitarian ways than other freethinkers. See Nicole Edelman, 'Spiritisme et politique', *Revue d'histoire du XIXe siècle*, 28 (2004): 149-161, p. 152.

<sup>32</sup> Several papers discuss the participation of women in Freemason societies. For more on Hispanic contexts see: Pere Sánchez Ferré, 'Mujer, feminismo y masonería en la Cataluña urbana de la Restauración' in José Antonio Ferrer Benimeli (ed.), *Masonería, política y sociedad. Vol. 2* (Zaragoza: Centro de Estudios Históricos de la Masonería Española, 1989), pp. 929-945. María José Lacalzada de Mateo, 'La mitad femenina "para" la masonería y "en" masonería (1868-1936): balance y perspectivas', *Investigaciones históricas: Época moderna y contemporánea*, 23 (2003): 117-139.

<sup>33</sup> Marco Pasi, 'The modernity of occultism: reflections on some crucial aspects' in Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Joyce Pijenburg (eds.), *Hermes in the Academy: Ten Years' Study of Western Esotericism at the University of Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), pp. 59-74.

<sup>34</sup> See also this assumption in Pere Sánchez Ferré, *La masonería a Catalunya (1868-1947). Vol. 1* (Barcelona, 2008), p. 172.

### **The urban life of a female medium**

The case of Amalia Domingo (1835-1909) is highly illustrative of the engagement of some spiritist women with the doctrine. In fact, she was one of the local leaders of spiritism in Barcelona. She is also an example of one type of ‘mediumship’ bound to the political and propaganda enterprises of the movement and not to the production of spiritist phenomena.<sup>35</sup> She considered herself a medium as she could anticipate things, saw the *périsprit*, wrote under the inspiration of spirits and had private communications with them, but she never participated as a medium in a séance. She was not a medium of séances or one who could be used for spiritist demonstrations; instead, her communication was private. Yet, she used the products of that communication with the other world to publicize the moral principles of spiritism. Moreover, like other women in close contact with the spiritist milieu, she also fought for women’s rights. She supported the new feminism in Barcelona city, although she is hardly known for that.

Amalia Domingo was born in Seville, to an unknown father and her mother died when she was young.<sup>36</sup> Due to her bad eyesight and lack of family, neighbours suggested she marry or join a convent. Instead, she went to Madrid and tried to make a living writing poems and sewing. After two years of searching for spiritual solace in the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches—living off their alms partly—she came into contact with spiritism. One of the doctors who treated her partial blindness altruistically gave her a copy of *El criterio espiritista*, a spiritist journal which finally provided her with spiritual comfort and a platform from which to fight for her sociopolitical ideals. She began to read Kardec, to attend the meetings of the Spanish Spiritist Society and to write for different spiritist journals. The success of her writing in defence of spiritism allowed her to travel and she offered her an opportunity to settle in Gràcia (Barcelona). Lluís Llach, president of the spiritist centre ‘La Buena Nueva’, offered her board and lodging in exchange for writing in favour of spiritism. She became a famous

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<sup>35</sup> Amalia Domingo’s female leadership can be compared to that of Emma Hardinge Britten (1823-1899), the English-born medium and famous female leader of modern spiritualism in the United States. In the 1860s, Britten gave up séances to focus on giving public lectures on spiritual matters. She was politically active and supported Abraham Lincoln’s re-election in 1864. She was also one of the founders of the Theosophical Society. See: Jeffrey D. Lavoie, *The Theosophical Society: The history of a spiritualist movement* (Florida: Brown Walker Press, 2012), pp. 294-315.

<sup>36</sup> On her life, see her memoirs: Amalia Domingo Soler, *Memorias de una mujer* (Barcelona: Amelia Boudet, 1990).

propagandist and the spiritist community provided her with a stipend for the rest of her life in return.<sup>37</sup>

Once Amalia Domingo had settled in Gràcia, the spiritist editor Juan Torrents suggested she publish a spiritist journal for women. So she founded the spiritualist newspaper *La Luz del Porvenir* (1879-1900), a weekly journal exclusively written by women and especially addressed to women. In her own words, the aim of the journal was to ‘awaken [moral] feelings’<sup>38</sup> by means of tales from spirits with love as a conquering hero, probably thinking of her female audience. Nevertheless, the voice of Amalia Domingo denouncing women’s oppression—more than defending alternative roles—comes through in the tales that spirits told her. She especially condemned female subordination to ‘oppressive’ husbands and clergymen. As Christine Arkininstall points out, Domingo’s writings were ‘strategically designed to arouse emotional identification and sympathy for transformative sociopolitical purposes.’<sup>39</sup> Other women who worked for the journal wrote on women’s educational rights and claimed a place for women in the social regeneration of Spain. The periodical became a platform for these voices.

Amalia Domingo’s journal also built up a supporting economic network among the huge Spanish spiritist family. From time to time, the journal recommended a woman for a job or raised campaign funds to help a widow. In general, Spiritist journals were useful platforms where people could ask for, and receive, aid. *La Luz del Porvenir* also received donations that were distributed among the poor.<sup>40</sup> Letters from women in Latin America show that the journal was read there and their subscriptions were also crucial. When the colonial war in Cuba and Puerto Rico erupted in 1898, *La Luz del Porvenir* ended due to a shortage of funds.<sup>41</sup> The journal joined up with another local spiritist publication, *La Unión*, and Amalia Domingo continued to run it.

The day of Amalia Domingo’s funeral in 1909 a parade was organized (see Figure 2). Apart from spiritists, representatives of secular female associations marched

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<sup>37</sup> She published countless essays praising spiritism, clarifying some parts of the doctrine and criticizing the Catholic Church; one of her favourite topics. Amalia Domingo’s arguments with clergymen who attacked spiritism became famous and were broadly published in republican and freethinking newspapers. See for instance: Domingo, ‘Impresiones en la catedral de Barcelona al oír al Padre Sallarés refutar el espiritismo’, *La Luz Del Porvenir*, 6/2 (1884), 9-13; 6(10), 73-77.

<sup>38</sup> Amalia Domingo, *La Luz del Porvenir*, 6/2 (1884), p.10.

<sup>39</sup> Arkininstall, *Spanish female writers*, p. 36.

<sup>40</sup> For instance, between 1881 and 1891, 9,272 ‘pesetas’ were given as alms thanks to the journal. Domingo, *Memorias de una mujer*, p. 242.

<sup>41</sup> Pere Sánchez Ferré, ‘Los neoespiritualismos ante la crisis española de entresiglos. Espiritismo y teosofía’ in Ferrer Benimeli (ed.), *La masonería española y la crisis colonial del 98. Vol I.* (Zaragoza: Centro de Estudios Históricos de la Masonería Española, 1999), pp. 3-20.

alongside theosophists, freethinkers and other advocates of secular education such as members of the ‘Institución Libre de Enseñanza’.<sup>42</sup> This sizable and varied participation shows the multiple audiences she connected with, since she formed part of the hub of initiatives that were fighting for the secularization of the city.

Figure 7.2. Amalia Domingo’s funeral parade leaving her home in Gràcia neighbourhood (1909). © Biblioteca Nacional de España

### **Spiritists and the secular women’s league**

In 1890, Amalia Domingo participated in the founding of a society that was representative of early secular feminism in Barcelona: the ‘Sociedad Autónoma de Mujeres’ [Autonomous Women's Society], which in 1892 became the ‘Sociedad Progresiva Femenina’ [Progressive Feminine Society]. The two other founders of this feminist society were the anarchist Teresa Claramunt and a Freemason and freethinker, Ángeles López de Ayala.

The society was the first left-wing women’s association in Barcelona. Initially located in Gràcia, where Domingo and López de Ayala lived, the headquarters was later established on Ferlandina Street, where the ‘Centro Barcelonés de Estudios Psicológicos’ was also located. The spiritists gave them physical and symbolic space within their ranks. For more than a decade, the ‘Sociedad Progresiva Femenina’ and the ‘Centro Barcelonés de Estudios Psicológicos’ worked hand in hand to promote the social values they shared. The propaganda committees of these institutions organized weekly meetings to plan civil and charity-oriented activities to recruit followers, both for spiritism and for feminism.<sup>43</sup> The struggle against illiteracy and for secular education for both genders justified their alliance.

Those women were not a homogeneous group, however. Some of them, such as López de Ayala and Claramunt, embraced anarchist ideas and were more radical in their approaches; meanwhile Domingo and other female spiritists identified themselves as apolitical.<sup>44</sup> Not all of them believed in spirits, but they all wanted a secular society and shared basic claims for women in the fields of education and labour rights.<sup>45</sup> The feminism they promoted did not advocate female suffrage or women’s economic

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<sup>42</sup> ‘Funeral’, *Luz y Union*, 10/5 (1909), p. 136.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Agrupaciones’, *Luz y Union*, 2/9 (1900), p. 94.

<sup>44</sup> In the freethinker press *Las Dominicales del Libre Pensamiento* there appears Amalia Domingo’s regret of the combative positions of Ángeles López de Ayala, despite their being friends. *Las Dominicales*, 24 February 1898, 4.

<sup>45</sup> See the works of María Dolores Ramos cited in footnote 5.

emancipation, although they believed in the equal intellectual capacities of women. Those specific aims were not taken up in Spain until the 1930s.

Regarding educational goals, they supported two types of schools, as did male spiritists. On the one hand, they offered free instruction to children and workers in their centres by both male and female spiritist teachers. On the other hand, they contributed to the funding of private secular schools, as did freethinkers and others who supported a 'rationalist' education.<sup>46</sup> One of the most ambitious of the women's projects was the creation of the *Fomento de la Instrucción Libre* [Promoting Free Instruction], in Sant Pau Street, 31 (Raval) where working women could attend evening classes for free.<sup>47</sup> Another initiative was organized in the circle *La Buena Nueva* (Gràcia) where Belén de Sagarra, a rationalist, Freemason and spiritist teacher, gave lessons to both boys and girls. The school was financed by a spiritist, but had to close when the benefactor died.<sup>48</sup> The lack of continuity of schools that depended on private patrons was a common problem.<sup>49</sup> It was also a common tactic of the spiritists not to call these centres 'spiritist schools' in order to get funding as well as to attract pupils.

Another initiative that shows the commitment of spiritists to female emancipation was the awarding of a prize for 'work and virtue' in 1901. To dignify the value of female workers, the 'Centro Barcelonés' sought to award a young 'honest' woman worker who could prove to be sustaining her family only by means of her labour.<sup>50</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century, a female worker in the Catalan textile industry was often considered as morally degenerate and promiscuous.<sup>51</sup> So the award illustrates the wish to change that image.

The women in the 'Sociedad Progresiva de Mujeres' actually occupied some public male positions by giving public speeches. They spoke not only at the spiritist centres, but also at mass freethinker events in the middle of Barcelona, joining male

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<sup>46</sup> Secular schools were based on libertarian educational principles such as coeducation. The best known was Ferrer i Guàrdia's 'Modern School'.

<sup>47</sup> Pradas Baena, *Teresa Claramunt, la virgen roja barcelonesa*, p. 111; Ajuntament de Barcelona, *The legacy of working women in the historic old quarter of Barcelona* (Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2009), p. 44.

<sup>48</sup> Domingo, *Memorias de una mujer*, pp. 272-273.

<sup>49</sup> *Lumen* (1905), p. 282

<sup>50</sup> 'De colaboración', *Luz y Unión*, 2/56 (1901): 566-567.

<sup>51</sup> See Mary Nash, 'Identidad cultural de género, discurso de la domesticidad y la definición del trabajo de las mujeres en la España del siglo XIX' in Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot (eds.), *Historia de las mujeres en Occidente. Tomo IV* (Madrid: Taurus, 1993), pp. 591-593.

anarchists and libertarian thinkers on stage.<sup>52</sup> Around 1900, Domingo, Sagarra and López de Ayala gave regular talks at such meetings. They tried to encourage women to join the libertarian cause.<sup>53</sup> Their speeches applauded women's social role in the family as secular educators, and in society as 'social mothers' of secularism within the regeneration framework of Krausism.<sup>54</sup>

A circus in Plaza Cataluña square was one of the freethinkers' favourite places for speeches at the end of the nineteenth century. That emblematic square, nowadays the heart of the city, was at the time just an unpaved space, with few buildings around it. Yet it was ideally situated to connect with the intellectual bourgeoisie from the upper parts of the city as well as the workers and artisans from the centre of the old town. Male and female freethinkers helped turn the space into a site of social participation and intellectual exchange where people from different social strata and of both sexes intermingled.

Female spiritists also moved into another gendered space. In the Barcelona of 1900 it was not common for women to enter a graveyard during a burial; women could not accompany a coffin to the tomb. When Amalia Domingo expressed her wish to go to the funeral of José Fernández Colavida, known as the 'Spanish Kardec', spiritists discouraged her and only one male friend encouraged her. At the risk of being frowned upon, she entered the cemetery anyway with some other spiritist women and she read a poem to honour the spiritist leader.<sup>55</sup> Her desire was to mourn a friend and erect a monumental tomb to praise spiritism. The result was that those spiritist women broke a gendered Spanish tradition and entered a space that, under those circumstances, had been reserved for men until then.

A year after Amalia Domingo's death, in 1910, the 'Sociedad Progresiva Femenina' led by López de Ayala and in collaboration with two left-wing women's leagues was able to organize a mass demonstration of women. The protest was in favour of a law that prevented the establishing of new religious congregations for two years. Since there had been a march against this law in Madrid, women in Barcelona wanted to

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<sup>52</sup> Some of their speeches were published in *Las Dominicales* and in Amalia Domingo's journal, which facilitated the circulation of different claims and demands within close but different circles.

<sup>53</sup> See, for instance, their participation in *Las Dominicales*, 26 March 1892, 2 and 25 August 1895, 3.

<sup>54</sup> The Krausist movement was a philosophical and political trend with liberal and progressive characteristics that spread across Spain in the mid-nineteenth century. Krausism saw the woman as part of the social regeneration of Spanish society through her role as mother. For instance, Krausism advocated the instruction of women in their maternity duties. Elías Díaz García, *La filosofía social del krausismo español* (Madrid: Debate, 1989), pp. 9-53.

<sup>55</sup> Domingo, *Memorias de una mujer*, pp. 231-232.

demonstrate that Catholic women were not the only voice in Spain.<sup>56</sup> According to the newspaper *Nuevo Mundo*, 5,000 women marched and handed over 22,000 signatures in support of the law to the Civil Governor.<sup>57</sup> The demonstration was scheduled for a Sunday, at 4 pm and to be held in Urquinaona square under the slogan ‘freedom of conscience’.<sup>58</sup> As Figure 3 shows, a significant part of the female citizenship wished not to be identified as Roman Catholic. The photography would have been a good depiction to counteract the image of Spanish women as ‘beatas’—‘lay sisters’, said in a mockery—which was also very present among male anticlerical groups.<sup>59</sup> However, the picture was not carried by the mainstream daily press. Since historiography has dedicated little space to women taking the leading role in pictures, and even less when they adopt dissent attitudes and lead a public cause, its reproduction here aims to fill that gap.

**Figure 7.3. Anticlerical demonstration of women (1910). © Biblioteca Nacional de España**

### **The urban practice of secular charity**

With few exceptions, the spiritists considered themselves apolitical. Still, their behaviour in the everyday life was highly political. It was not only their public speeches explicitly on secularization that clashed with the Church. They questioned mandatory Church rituals at a time when the boundary between the religious and the secular was not well defined in Spanish society. Civil burials and civil marriages were encouraged between them, thus challenging the social order. Their civil ceremonies acted as part-ritual, part-propaganda against Roman Catholicism.<sup>60</sup>

The spiritists also engaged in public polemics with some priests, using the media of freethinkers to counteract the discourse certain clergymen gave in churches in central Barcelona. Spiritism did not intend to be a secret or discreet society as Freemasonry was. They tried to forcefully propagate their doctrine and encouraged public discussion of their principles in Athenaeums, journals and newspapers.

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<sup>56</sup> Luz San Feliu, ‘Del laicismo al sufragismo. Marcos conceptuales y estrategias de actuación del feminismo republicano entre los siglos XIX y XX’, *Pasado y Memoria. Revista de Historia Contemporánea*, 7 (2008): 59-78.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Manifestación femenina en Barcelona’, *Nuevo mundo*, 27/862 (1910); Sánchez Ferré, *Els orígens del feminisme*, 223, pp. 8-9.

<sup>58</sup> *La Vanguardia*, 10 July 1910, 3; ‘Por la libertad de conciencia. La manifestación femenina’, *La Publicidad*, 11 July 1910, 2.

<sup>59</sup> See María Pilar Salomón, ‘Beatas sojuzgadas por el clero: la imagen de las mujeres en el discurso anticlerical en la España del primer tercio del siglo XX’, *Feminismo/s*, 2 (2003): 41-58.

<sup>60</sup> Ángel Aguarod, ‘Consecuencia’, *La Revelación*, 32/4 (1903), pp. 60-61.

For a while, groups in Barcelona led publishing on spiritism in Spain. They edited all of Kardec's books in affordable editions and distributed spiritist pamphlets around the city.<sup>61</sup> However, around 1915, they lost the support of the two publishing houses that had mostly printed their publications: Juan Torrents and Carbonell y Esteva. Popularizing ideas through printed works was expensive and publishing houses could not afford the expenses without sufficient sales.<sup>62</sup>

Despite the decline, between the 1880s and the First World War, the spiritists were an important group in Barcelona in the struggle to secularize the city. They staged rallies in libertarian Athenaeums and in theatres. At least twice a month, spiritist societies organized dances, music recitals, theatre performances, poetry evenings, talks and children's entertainment open to everyone. Every year they celebrated and honoured Kardec together with distinguished local spiritists and mediums, taking flowers to the graves of spiritists in the civil cemetery of Montjuïc.

Apart from the means of propaganda already mentioned, some of their members also visited hospitals and prisons to give spiritual relief to the patients and inmates; they also sponsored philanthropic events. They collected money, distributed clothes and organized banquets for poor people. On one occasion, they held a banquet for around four hundred poor people. The meal was served by fifty spiritists, who also gave morally uplifting speeches and distributed pamphlets (Figure 4). According to one spiritist source, two thousand people attended the event, including two choruses invited to enliven the crowd and some members of republican and working-class parties such as *Fraternidad Republicana* [Republican Fraternity] and *Federación Obrera* [Workers Federation].<sup>63</sup>

**Figure 7.4. Spiritists after a banquet organized for the poor (1908). © Biblioteca Nacional de España**

The spiritists tried to attract people through this kind of act where their moral doctrine was espoused. We call this type of practice 'secular charity' as it was emulating Roman Catholic practices but with anti-clerical aims. Such practices reshaped Barcelona's urban space, transforming the city into a place where spiritual and social needs found alternatives to the orthodox ways of addressing them, such as those fostered by the Church through its education and care institutions.

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<sup>61</sup> For instance, in 1895, 8,000 handouts titled 'Interesting for all' were distributed in the streets. 'Boletín del Centro barcelonés de estudios psicológicos', *Revista de Estudios Psicológicos*, 17 (1985), p.115.

<sup>62</sup> B. Coris, 'Pesimismo ultramarino', *Luz, Unión y Verdad*, 27/10 (1916), p. 297.

<sup>63</sup> 'En honor de Allan Kardec y Miguel Vives', *Luz y Unión*, 11/6 (1910): 169-178.

These charitable acts were an excellent propaganda tool; they reflected the spiritist moral view of life and served as a way for members to improve themselves in accordance with their doctrine. They served the same purpose as charity did as practiced and understood in Roman Catholicism.

It seems fair to speculate that they did actually succeed in reaching some of those who suffered from spiritual anxieties but rejected the Catholic Church. They transmitted the hope of eternal life in spiritual evolution through reincarnation. The doctrine resonated with the public due to its messages of justice and retribution. The spiritist belief system held that one's current material conditions were a consequence of one's moral behaviour in previous lives. Spiritism became an attractive alternative to Roman Catholicism to the extent that it was able to show that a morally correct life would be rewarded without the guidance of the Roman Catholic Church. As we have already mentioned, spiritists used the term 'science' to lend credibility to their doctrine and give it an appearance of being progressive, modern and positivist.

Catalan spiritists staged all these propaganda events by means of collective funding. They lacked in their circles bankers or rich industrialists to support their associations. Neither did they have a prominent scientist or personality to promote them, although the famous architect Antoni Gaudí (1852-1926) was sympathetic to their ideas in his youth.<sup>64</sup>

In the next section we will deal with a remarkable enterprise patronized by spiritists: a clinic. This project bound the movement to the funding of heterodox therapeutic regimes: the use of magnetism and hypnosis.

### **A charity clinic sponsored by spiritists**

One of the most innovative ventures that the spiritists sponsored in Barcelona was a clinic which offered hypnotic and magnetic treatments. We analyse this venture to show the spiritists' commitment to providing free health care to all. At the same time, the success of the clinic shows the popularity of heterodox medical practices in the heart of the city.

In 1895, the Barcelona spiritists sponsored a charitable clinic run by two physicians and spiritist sympathizers from Barcelona: Víctor Melcior i Farré (1860-

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<sup>64</sup> The young architect Antoni Gaudí, moving in the republican circles of the city, was a friend of spiritists, Freemasons and freethinkers. The Masonic and heterodox symbols he used in his architecture before the design of the *Sagrada Família* are well known, as is his supposed conversion to Catholicism.

1929), who became its director, and José Cembrano i Ferrer. The clinic was known as Clínica Hidro-Magnética de Caridad [Hydro-Magnetic Charity Clinic]. The only treatments used were hypnotic suggestion, practiced by Melcior, and magnetic healing, offered by Cembrano<sup>65</sup>. It was located in a building that belonged to a Barcelona spiritist journal, the *Revista de Estudios Psicológicos* [Journal of Psychological Studies] in the Raval.<sup>66</sup> It was a strategic location from which to offer healthcare as the neighbourhood was already a ‘care’ centre of the city with charity and non-charity clinics, hospices, orphanages and a hospital. The property also housed a spiritist library and a room for séances. Melcior and Cembrano attended patients at the clinic without charge, six days a week for three hours a day. The clinic closed in 1905, it seems due to Melcior’s exhaustion.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, hypnotism was becoming popular among the Spanish population thanks to hypnosis stage shows. By then, Britain and France had successfully marginalized the practice of hypnosis by quacks and lay healers, demarcating a medical use of hypnotic suggestion. Yet, that was not the case in Germany or Spain.<sup>67</sup> During the First International Spiritist Congress, Barcelona also held an International Medical Congress at which some Spanish physicians discussed how to legitimize hypnosis within the medical field. They complained that the use of hypnotism in spiritist séances discredited its medical uses.<sup>68</sup> Those physicians would not have imagined that a few years later a charitable clinic sponsored by Barcelona spiritists would at the very least contribute to popularizing the medical use of hypnotic suggestion, and may be said to have demarcated the field entirely. Thanks to the success of the clinic, spiritists were able to popularize magnetic and hypnotherapeutic treatments.

Hypnotic suggestion was not seen by ordinary citizens as a medical cure when the clinic started. Melcior himself mentioned the difficulties they had to face in gaining the trust of the public at the beginning. But it seems that both magnetic and hypnotic

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<sup>65</sup> The distinction between hypnotism and animal magnetism was not recognized by spiritists in general, who considered that the former was just a modern name to refer to magnetism, understood under the mesmeric paradigm (see, for instance, Torres-Solanot in *Primer Congreso Internacional*, p. 9).

<sup>66</sup> At number 10, Doctor Dou street; very near to Barcelona’s famous central boulevard ‘Las Ramblas’.

<sup>67</sup> Andrea Graus, ‘Hypnosis in Spain (1895-1905): from spectacle to medical treatment of mediumship’, *Studies in history and philosophy of science, Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 48 (2014): 85-93; Heather Wolfram ‘“An object of vulgar curiosity”: legitimizing medical hypnosis in imperial Germany’, *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 67/1, (2012): 149-176.

<sup>68</sup> ‘Congreso médico’, *La Exposición*, 67 (1889), p. 6.

treatments worked well enough to make the clinic a success. During the ten years of its existence, the clinic treated an average of 20 patients per day.<sup>69</sup> Considering that it opened six days a week, that means that they received and treated nearly 500 patients a month. According to Melcior, the patients were initially ‘hysteric, superstitious and ignorant people’, but soon also ‘physicians, soldiers, employees and some lawyers’ became interested in the ‘new cure’.<sup>70</sup> Most of them were from Barcelona and its surroundings, but thanks to the propaganda in spiritist journals, letters from Latin America also reached the physicians asking for long-distant cures and written suggestions.<sup>71</sup> The number of patients grew so fast that long queues formed in the street. Once, the Civil Governor of the province even had to send an officer to prevent public disorder. Local authorities also came to inspect the clinic but could not close it. As the clinic was run by two formal graduate physicians, they could not accuse them of irregular practice or charlatanism. The spiritists did not miss the opportunity to celebrate this recognition by the political authorities.<sup>72</sup>

Around 1890 hypnotherapy was only accessible to a wealthy segment of Spanish society. As it lacked scientific legitimization in Spain, it was only practiced in a few private clinics and asylums, located in the wealthy upper neighbourhoods of the city. This fact made the Hydro-Magnetic Charity Clinic more valuable in the eyes of the spiritists. By financing such a charitable health institution, where no drugs or expensive medical instruments had to be paid for, the spiritists saw a chance to vindicate themselves as public benefactors. The governing board of the *Revista de Estudios Psicológicos* was very proud of their decision to finance the project. Even though it did not offer spiritist therapies, they considered it a superb way to promote spiritism.<sup>73</sup> According to them, the efficiency of the hypnotic and magnetic treatments testified to the truth of their own doctrine. From their point of view, the success of such a charitable institution proved their commitment to equality and scientific progress. Moreover, by financing the Hydro-Magnetic Charity Clinic, the spiritists attributed to themselves the

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<sup>69</sup> In 1895, the journal was asking other physicians to join the project. Also, a spiritist manufacturer was asked to construct a mesmeric bucket for collective treatment. ‘Clínica hidro-magnética’, *Revista de Estudios Psicológicos*, 17 (1895), p. 145.

<sup>70</sup> Víctor Melcior, *¿Puede considerarse la voluntad como una fuerza medicatriz?* (Madrid: Establecimiento Tipográfico de Enrique Teodoro, 1908), p. 88.

<sup>71</sup> ‘Notas clínicas del consultorio hidro-magnético’, *Revista de Estudios Psicológicos*, 17 (1875), p. 125. Agustín María Ramos, ‘Clínica. Cartas’, *Revista de Estudios Psicológicos*, 17 (1897), p. 125.

<sup>72</sup> ‘Clínica hidro-magnética’, *Revista de Estudios Psicológicos*, 17 (1895), p. 210.

<sup>73</sup> ‘La Clínica Hidro-Magnética’, *Revista de Estudios Psicológicos*, 17 (1895), p. 114.

role of introducers of magnetic and hypnotic medical procedures into Barcelona.<sup>74</sup> They considered that these therapeutic techniques were at the forefront of medical knowledge and would soon be adopted by all physicians.

Pursuing that end, Melcior offered public lectures to show how hypnotherapy worked. He presented fully recovered patients to large audiences, mostly formed of spiritists but also with some sceptic physicians and pharmacists present.<sup>75</sup> He explained the cases in clinical terms, naming the hypnotic suggestions given to each patient. Hence, the charitable clinic became one of the few sites in Barcelona where physicians could learn about medical hypnosis and see the results in former patients. For Melcior himself, the clinic was also a place for learning through practice, as hypnotherapy was not taught at Spanish universities.<sup>76</sup>

In conclusion, by sponsoring the Charity Clinic, Barcelona spiritists helped to legitimize the medical use of hypnosis to the population and some physicians. The long queues outside the clinic and the attendance of some white-collar professionals looking for help, as reported by Melcior, prove the success of this project among people from different social strata, many of them non-spiritists. By offering free healthcare, the spiritists were able to present themselves as independent public benefactors.

## Conclusions

Urban spaces contribute to the construction of social organizations and the shaping of civil society, which in turn transform cities. In part, the formation of social classes is a spatial process<sup>77</sup>, and so is the formation of civil associations such as the spiritists. If we consider the city of Barcelona as the locus of production of the local spiritist movement, we can analyse the specific practices that contributed to the secularization of the city. As active organized actors in the city, they contributed to transforming the urban ‘marketplace’ of ideas as well as to modifying some city spaces.

In this paper, we have seen different initiatives related to the spiritists’ urban areas of influence, mainly in the Raval and Gràcia. These two quarters, not coincidentally, were traditional working-class neighbourhoods. Rather than acting as a

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<sup>74</sup> ‘Clínica hidro-magnética’, *Revista de Estudios Psicológicos*, 17 (1895), p. 182.

<sup>75</sup> Víctor Melcior, ‘Notas clínicas del consultorio médico hidro-magnético’, *Revista de Estudios Psicológicos*, 17 (1895), pp. 126-7.

<sup>76</sup> Antonio Diéguez Gómez, ‘Hipnotismo y medicina mental en la España del siglo XIX’, in Luis Montiel and Ángel González de Pablo (eds.), *En ningún lugar, en parte alguna: Estudios sobre la historia del magnetismo animal y del hipnotismo*, (Madrid: Frenia, 2003), pp. 197-228.

<sup>77</sup> José Luis Oyón, *La quiebra de la ciudad popular. Espacio urbano, inmigración y anarquismo en la Barcelona de entreguerras, 1914–1936* (Barcelona: El Serval, 2008).

sectarian movement, the spiritists aimed to offer citizens of Barcelona alternatives to the dominant Roman Catholic social and healthcare institutions, regardless of their creed or ideological orientation. Their philanthropy through secular charity was especially directed at a new type of urban poverty resulting from industrialization. This new urban sociological context provided an excellent setting for the development of the movement.

Our research shows that in Barcelona the process of the secularization of society was not led by academics or politicians. Instead, it was in the hands of civil society. The spiritists were generating and reproducing anticlerical thought and, in less explicit ways, republican politics. Under the flag of being a ‘modern’ religion grounded on leading scientific theories that had nothing to do with Roman Catholicism, they contributed to anti-clerical discourse.

In accordance with their aim of secularizing society, the Barcelona spiritists promoted secular schools and supported secular laws in parliament. They also sponsored an alternative healthcare project: the Hydro-Magnetic Charity Clinic. By sponsoring charitable projects that were directed at the general population, spiritists were able to present themselves as public benefactors in the city. Although most of the initiatives did not involve spiritist practices, such as séances, the spiritists perceived them as a practical means of promoting their own movement, since the activities promoted the secular and progressive values defended by them.

In material terms, they literally transformed an urban space that remains with us nowadays: the graveyard. Spiritists fought for a secular space in cemeteries and financed mausoleums for their local leaders that still embellish the civil cemetery of Montjuïc. Today, Amalia Domingo’s grave is still a site of devotion.

Finally, as we have argued, the first women’s civil association was born in the bosom of the spiritist movement. The spiritists enabled the empowerment of women as there was more equality in their societies. Thanks to our urban approach, we have also shown how some women spiritists and freethinkers entered men’s public realms in Barcelona—for instance, Amalia Domingo’s attendance at a burial or the speeches by women in Plaza Catalunya square. Even if those women were not taking over those sites for feminist reasons, they did open the spaces up to women.