

Acknowledgements

Translated by Henry Hirschfeld

Anyone who has ever undertaken academic research knows that it takes time, resources, and intellectual effort. In this case, each of those three has been required, in addition to the support of multiple friends and collaborators. The archival research would not have been possible without the help of Dr. Gerardo Alberto Hernández-Aponte, author of *El Espiritismo en Puerto Rico, 1860-1907 (Spiritism in Puerto Rico, 1860-1907)*.¹ His book is an extensive research study that examines and salvages the early history of Spiritism on the Island through an analysis of the press from the time period. During the spring of 2019, thanks to my friend and colleague David Maldonado Rivera, Professor of Religious Studies at Kenyon College, I began a conversation with Hernández Aponte that continues today. Following his recommendation, I contacted Dr. María E. Ordóñez Mercado, Director of the Colección de Estudios Puertorriqueños (Collection of Puerto Rican Studies) at the University of Puerto Rico Río Piedras, with the intention of accessing the pioneer writers' primary texts and other essential research materials. I scheduled a trip where I would combine archival work with video recording of some interviews. The day before I left, Hernández Aponte informed me that the Collection of Puerto Rican Studies building would be closed indefinitely due to a governmental crisis in which the people were demanding the governor's resignation. Faced with extraordinary circumstances, the generous researcher offered me access to his personal archives, just after having met me. Despite the crisis, Olivia Geho, Ohio Five Digital Investigations Specialist, and I traveled to Puerto Rico. On Monday morning, we met at the Law School Library at the Río Piedras campus, the only library that remained open during the national crisis. We proceeded to work long days collecting materials; work that continued long-distance for the next eighteen months, throughout which we dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic. With his typical rigor and punctuality, Hernández Aponte read the analyzes I shared with him and offered me valuable bibliographic suggestions that enriched the contextualization of the study. Without the support of this great historian and friend, the work would have had no future.

I am just as deeply grateful for the Puerto Rican scholars, specialists in the field of Spiritism, who contributed not only documents and primary sources, but also biographies of pioneer writers. In particular, I am very grateful to: Dr. Sandra Enríquez Seiders, Professor of History at the University of Puerto Rico, Utuado; Dr. Carmen Romeu Toro, Professor of History at the Ana G. Méndez University at Carolina and Professor of Spiritist Doctrine at the Instituto de Estudios e Investigaciones Psíquicas (The Institute of Psychic Study and Research) (I.N.E.S.I.P.) in Río Piedras; Dr. Michele R. Hewlett-Gómez, great-granddaughter of Agustina Guffain; and Nydia E. Lozada, President of the Association of Puerto Rican Spiritist Women in Action (A.M.E.P.A.). Without the generosity, knowledge, and historical materials offered by

¹ Gerardo Alberto Hernández Aponte, *El espiritismo en Puerto Rico 1860-1907*, San Juan, Puerto Rico, Academia Puertorriqueña de la Historia, 2015.

these extraordinary women, it would have been very difficult to recover the biographies of the pioneer spiritists. Ana Troche, President of the Centro Amor al Bien (the Love for Good center) in Cabo Rojo, read all of the analyzes of the pioneers. Ana's knowledge and spiritual experience enriched all the work in ways that I did not even think about. Nélica González, journalist and writer from Mayagüez, and Linda Metzler, colleague, friend, and Professor Emeritus of Spanish Literature at Kenyon College, provided accurate and in-depth comments on important portions of the study. I am also deeply grateful to the narrators who enthusiastically received the invitation to be interviewed about their work and spiritist experience. With the specificity and emotional resonance of their oral histories, these contemporary spiritists offer a moving and enduring perspective of Spiritism.

In the Municipal Archives of San Sebastián, thanks to the help of a friend, the specialist Axel Toro, I rediscovered the story of my paternal grandmother Clara Cardona and the scope of her civic work. I am very grateful to Mr. Toro who graciously shared with me so many resources, including documents from his personal archive. I would also like to thank the artist from San Sebastián, Lizza I. Román, for granting us permission to use three of her paintings that illustrate core ideas of the study: *Peregrinaje (Pilgrimage)* (2013), *Energía cósmica (Cosmic Energy)* (2014) and *La ascensión de Jesús: Alfa y Omega (The Ascension of Jesus: Alpha and Omega)* (2016). Her visual work and critical reflections bring an insightful and authentic perspective of the spiritist experience. At the Centro Amor al Bien in Cabo Rojo, I met José Arroyo, Director of the Escuela Espírita Allan Kardec (Allan Kardec Spiritist School) in Río Piedras. José opened the doors of his school's library, offering me valuable bibliographic suggestions and connecting me with the Movimiento de Cultura Espírita (Spiritist Culture Movement) (C.I.M.A.), a prominent international organization for secular Kardecian Spiritism. Through C.I.M.A. conferences, I discovered a vibrant global spiritist community that educated me through a network of spiritist experts who study, explain, and update Spiritism today.

Collaborating with students and specialists from Kenyon College was extremely valuable to the project and to me personally. During the spring of 2019, Jenna Nolt, librarian and specialist in digital initiatives, and I participated in a workshop on the creation of digital collections, pedagogy, and research offered by the Ohio Five, a Consortium of Liberal Arts Colleges in Ohio. Supported by the Ohio Five, we also participated in 2019 HASTAC, an important conference on digital technologies for the expansion of democratic participation of knowledge. The conference widened our understanding of decolonial digital designs and gave us the basis for developing a pilot project in Puerto Rico. We are grateful to the following organizations and individuals for supporting this phase of the project: Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Ben Daigle, Director of the Ohio Five Library System Consortium, Brook Bryan, Director of Oral History in the Liberal Arts (OHLA) of the GLCA Consortium, and Olivia Geho, who recorded the first ten interviews, took photographs, and copied and organized the archival

documents. Using the materials collected in this pilot phase, Jenna Nolt created the archives of the project at Digital Kenyon (<https://digital.kenyon.edu/espirtismo/>).

Joe Murphy, Director of Kenyon's Center for Innovative Pedagogy (CIP), supported the project in its final stage with the *Digital Storytelling Fund* grant. In the CIP and OHLA of the GLCA consortium, I received essential instruction for creating digital stories and discovering the power of digital oral history. Ashley Butler, CIP Digital Technologies Instruction Specialist, taught my students, Scout Crowell and Sofía Alpizar Román, and I to create digital stories. Joe and Ashley have been patient and supportive mentors. Scout and Sofía used incredible artistic and intellectual craft in the creation of the project's digital stories. Sofía also contributed a comprehensive editorial review of the entire project. Mike Reilly, a digitization expert, trained two students, Beimnet Beyene Kassaye and Abdul Hafeez, in the digitization and handling of documents at risk of extinction. Beimnet Beyene was in charge of the organization, development, and archival of microfilms, and Abdul Hafeez of the digitization of periodicals and other at-risk materials. The student Henry Hirschfeld was responsible for completing an excellent translation of the texts produced for the study; and visual artist Emma Brown, a 2017 Kenyon graduate, created the project's extraordinary website. I am indebted to these students, exemplary collaborators who made my work an intellectual and creative adventure, supported by internships at CIP, the Kenyon Summer Scholars Program, and the *Digital Storytelling* grant. We thank Laurence Trask, Technology Support and Multimedia Specialist, for the excellent sound editing of the interviews, training students in video editing, and creating and editing my own interview. Cheryl Johnson, a Kenyon graduate and a specialist in digital technology training at Denison University, offered valuable technology recommendations for the study's creation and dissemination. Amy Badertscher, Director of the Kenyon College Library, provided valuable resources and help with logistics along the way. It has been a true privilege for me to work with these extraordinary collaborators. Thanks to them we are able to broadly share the fruits of this research.

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