

The messianic movement of the *Mucker* in Rio Grande do Sul: charisma, power, and authority in German immigration

O movimento messiânico dos *Mucker* no Rio Grande do Sul: carisma, poder e autoridade na imigração alemã

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Abstract

This article investigates the messianic phenomenon of the *Mucker* – which emerged in the early decades of German immigration to Brazil – through a sociological approach that interweaves mystical dimensions, identity formation, and power relations. It analyses the unique features of the movement, led by Jacobina Mentz Maurer and João Jorge Maurer, the historical context of colonization, and intergroup conflicts among German-Brazilian settlers, economic elites, and ecclesiastical representatives. The study engages with Weberian theory of charismatic domination, connecting it with contemporary contributions on messianism, educational processes, and the construction of ethnic identities in Brazil.

Keywords: messianism; *Mucker*; German immigration; ethnic identity; charismatic domination; Max Weber.

Resumo

Este artigo investiga o fenômeno messiânico dos *Mucker* – emergido nas primeiras décadas da imigração alemã no Brasil – mediante uma abordagem sociológica que articula dimensões místicas, identitárias e relações de poder. Analisam-se as singularidades do movimento, liderado por Jacobina Mentz Maurer e João Jorge Maurer, o contexto histórico da colonização e os conflitos intergrupais entre colonos teuto-brasileiros, elites econômicas e representantes eclesiásticos. O estudo dialoga com a teoria weberiana da dominação carismática, articulando-a com contribuições contemporâneas sobre messianismo, processos educativos e construção de identidades étnicas no Brasil.

Palavras-chave: messianismo; *Mucker*; imigração alemã; identidade étnica; dominação carismática; Max Weber.

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1 Introduction: Theoretical-Methodological Framing

The messianic Mucker phenomenon emerged in the context of German immigration to Brazil, in which, over the first four decades of the nineteenth century, the appearance of mystical elements was observed among these immigrants (Amstad, 2005; Bobsin, 1989; Dreher, 2003, 2017). Marked by ‘isolation,’ institutional fragility and tensions between religious and ethnic identities, this social environment favoured the emergence of charismatic religious leadership, leading the movement to be interpreted by its adversaries as a form of ‘religious fanaticism.’ The phenomenon peaked between 1869 and 1874 and was distinguished not only by the presence of ‘institutionalized’ preachers but also by Lutheran pastors and Catholic priests with mystical inclinations and an outsider status. Responding to the threat that this form of religiosity posed to the prevailing social and symbolic order, political actors and the German-Brazilian economic elite, represented by figures like Karl von Koseritz, mobilised and contributed to the movement’s suppression and ultimate extermination (Biehl, 1999; Oliveira, 2008; Silva, 2005; Witt, 2015).

A singular phenomenon, the Mucker episode also lies at the intersection of religion, power and ethnic education. Setting out from the Weberian premise that charismatic authority centres on the legitimacy derived from the exceptionality attributed to the leader (Weber, 2004), I argue that the repression of the movement was not limited to the religious field² but extended to the dynamics of symbolic control (Bernstein, 1990) exercised by German-Brazilian elites. In this sense, the suppression of the Mucker expressed a deliberate project of cultural homogenisation, which instrumentalised educational and religious institutions as mechanisms for disciplining identity.

The leadership shown by Jacobina Mentz Maurer comprises a paradigmatic case of Weberian charismatic domination in contrast to ecclesiastical control over souls. By claiming spiritual authority outside official institutions, Jacobina’s curing rituals and bible readings created a space in which ‘marginal’ knowledge could challenge established medical and religious authority, thereby intensifying the perception of threat among local elites.

Among the key works on the Mucker revolt is the 1996 doctoral thesis by Maria Amélia Schmidt Dickie, entitled *Afetos e circunstâncias: Um estudo sobre os Mucker e seu tempo* (Affects and circumstances: a study of the Mucker and their time). In this study, she analyses the socio-religious movement of the Mucker from an anthropological viewpoint that foregrounds the analysis of discourse and the meanings produced within the context of social relations. The author takes a processual approach, understanding meanings to be dynamically constructed and reconstructed through interactions between historical subjects. Her work is primarily based on legal documents from the period, especially criminal case records, which she treats as ‘testimonies’ – that is, as situated and engaged discourses produced in the context of disputes.

In her thesis *A Revolta ‘Mucker,’ Rio Grande do Sul, 1868-1898* (The ‘Mucker’ Revolt, Rio Grande do Sul, 1868-1898), Janaina Passos Amado (1976) argues that the movement led by Jacobina and João Jorge Maurer should be understood in light of the profound socio-economic transformations affecting the German colony of São Leopoldo. According to the author, the transition from an ‘egalitarian society’ (1824-1845) to an

² Or *sphere* in Weber’s terminology.

‘unequal society’ (1845-1874) – marked by land concentration, speculation, rural impoverishment and the imposition of external religious structures – created fertile ground for the emergence of messianic movements. The Mucker were not mere fanatics, but represented a symbolic and communal response to the marginalisation and loss of autonomy experienced by the settlers (Amado, 1976).

In his most recent work, *Jammerthal, o Vale da Lamentação: A minha Guerra Mucker* (Jammerthal, the Valley of Lamentation: My Mucker War), João Biehl (2024) offers a dense ethnographic reinterpretation of the Mucker conflict. Diverging from traditional historiographical narratives that cast the figure of Jacobina Mentz Maurer in a negative light, the author uses documentary research channelled through an anthropology of becoming to recover the social and religious agency of the insurgents. Biehl argues that the state violence unleashed against the Morro Ferrabraz community was not just an act of military repression, but also an operation intended to wipe out alternative forms of life and healing that might challenge the hegemony of the Church and the then consolidating Brazilian state. By interweaving personal memory with anthropological rigour, the work reveals how the stigma of ‘fanaticism’ was constructed to justify extermination, offering a critical reflection on biopolitics and the formation of colonial identities in southern Brazil.

In *A religião de Jacobina* (The Jacobina Religion), Martin Dreher (2017) offers a detailed analysis of the theological foundations and ecclesiastical context surrounding the Mucker episode, situating the leadership of Jacobina Mentz Maurer at the epicentre of the tensions of immigrant Protestantism in southern Brazil. The author argues that the movement should not be read solely as a social revolt, but also as a manifestation of popular religiosity that directly collided with the institutional structure of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession. In developing her analysis, Dreher demystifies the accusation of ‘false messianism,’ demonstrating how the Mucker bible reading practices and their pursuit of a living spirituality constituted a form of resistance to religious orthodoxy and to the pastoral neglect of the period.

2 Messianism and Ethnic Identity: Tensions in the Formation of the Colonial Habitus

The pejorative designation ‘Mucker’ (*santarrão*, ‘fake saint’) functioned as a technology of stigmatisation (Goffman, 2013), constructing an ethnic boundary between proponents of *Bildung* (a German humanistic ideal of formation associated with modernity) and mystical groups perceived to pose a threat to the civilisational ethos.

Mucker is a designation whose exact meaning is a matter of controversy among different authors. According to Brockhaus [...], it is an old term in the German language used to describe a person who appears saintly but is untrustworthy. [The linguistic encyclopaedia] also notes that, since the sixteenth century, the term has been employed in Germany as a pejorative label for Pietists. [...] Authors who have written about the Mucker of Ferrabraz [...] have translated *Mucker* as *santarrão* [fake saint] or *beato* [holier-than-thou]. Common to all these acceptations is the depreciation of the person so designated. (Dickie, 1996, p. 13)

In the early phase of German immigration, the relationship between Protestantism and the construction of ethnic identity was shaped by local factors, without direct interference from external initiatives of the German states (Wirth, 1998). Ecclesiastical communities and secular ethnic associations sought to foster a common identity through private initiatives, such as colonisation companies, which incorporated religious assistance into their strategies for attracting immigrants. From 1864 onwards, with the establishment of missionary societies and the dispatch of pastors trained in theological faculties, a more systematic form of religious mentoring of German-Lutheran immigrants in Brazil began (Maske, 2013).

Between 1869 and 1874, the Mucker messianic movement acquired prominence in the German colonies, being interpreted in divergent ways by the eventual 'winners' – representatives of the intellectual, economic and ecclesiastical elite – and the 'losers,' whose voices were historically silenced (Dreher, 2017, 2014b). Characterised as a spiritual revival, the phenomenon has been compared to other messianic episodes in Brazil, such as those of Canudos and the Contestado, albeit with some striking peculiarities, especially its female leadership, exercised by Jacobina Mentz Maurer, a 'controversial figure' symbolically central to the group (Dreher, 2014a, 2014b). Here, it is crucial to emphasise that messianic movements may mislead researchers when the latter fail to approach the events on their own terms and through the actors involved. As Amado (1976, p. 6) observed, for the historian to comprehend a messianic movement, he or she must be attentive to the fact that these phenomena 'are symbolic, magical, they invade the terrain of dreams.'

The group's internal dynamics – marked by the consolidation of messianic rituals that spanned from healing practices to the elaboration of a doctrine that distinguished between 'us' and 'them' – provoked violent external reactions. The use of the terms 'Mucker' and 'Muckerism' signals the pejorative character attributed to the group and the ways in which its opponents sought to delegitimise the movement through social exclusion and marginalisation (Amstad, 2005; Lesser, 2015; Rotermund, 1997).

Analysis of the Mucker phenomenon can be enriched by Max Weber's theory of charismatic authority. For Weber, this form of authority is grounded in the legitimacy conferred on the leader by his or her capacity to mobilise and inspire trust among followers, in contrast to legal authority (based on rules and bureaucracy) and traditional authority (rooted in custom).

In the case of the Mucker, the figure of Jacobina exemplifies charismatic authority, insofar as her power was based on her followers' belief in her divine revelations, even in the face of arguments that denounced her as a product of illiteracy and manipulation (Dreher, 2014b; Rotermund, 1997).

Jacobina Mentz Maurer's authority posed a double challenge to the prevailing order: first, due to its charismatic nature, since her curing practices and eschatological interpretations of the Bible were based on 'divine revelations' experienced during somnambulistic states (Rotermund, 1997); and second, in gender terms, as a form of female leadership within a deeply patriarchal context, subverting ecclesiastical and communal hierarchies alike. This dual transgression helps explain the virulence of the repression.

3 Historical Context and German Immigration

The German colonies constituted a *religious field* (Bourdieu, 2020) marked by competition between agents: on one hand, ordained pastors versus lay leaders (the so-called *pastores-cachaça*); on the other, the competition for symbolic capital between the pan-Germanist project (as advocated by Rotermund) and the communal autonomy defended by the Mucker. The Mucker's refusal to attend institutionalised schools and churches (Amstad, 2005) was a form of resistance by preserving non-formal educational spaces rooted in the Pietist tradition.

During the initial period of German immigration, the relationship between ethnic identity and religiosity was shaped by local factors. The absence of a robust institutional structure enabled the emergence of autonomous and mystical initiatives among the new settlers. As well as promoting colonial settlements, colonisation companies incorporated religious assistance to attract non-Catholic emigrants. This context created the conditions for the emergence of messianic movements, of which the Mucker became the foremost, albeit most controversial, example, since they contrasted sharply with other religious representatives (Maske, 2013; Wirth, 1998).

The movement, which originated in Prussia and was brought to Rio Grande do Sul by immigrants descended from Pietist groups, gained momentum when figures like Jacobina and João Jorge Maurer began to engage in 'healing practices' associated with eschatological interpretations of the Bible (Dreher, 2017). Accounts of Jacobina's mystical condition – associated with somnambulism and the prescription of divinely inspired remedies – contributed to consolidation of the group and its identification with a messianic figure. This phenomenon revealed both the resistance of a marginalised community and the anxieties of the elites about the potential for hegemonic cultural and religious values to become subverted among 'institutionalised' immigrants (Amstad, 2005; Bobsin, 1989; Dreher, 2017).

The growing influence of the Mucker attracted the attention and hostility of sectors representing the German-Brazilian elite. Figures such as Karl von Koseritz publicly denounced the group, associating it with a 'lack of education' and with a threat to the values of 'Germanness' – understood here as the ideals of *Bildung*, culture and progress. The escalating conflict culminated in military and police repression, which intensified from 1873 onwards, with episodes of violence, persecution and the eventual break up of the movement (Dreher, 2017; Lesser, 2015; Rotermund, 1997). The military repression of 1874 – repeated two decades later in 1897 – reveals an alliance between: (1) economic elites, who felt that their landed interests were under threat; (2) religious agents, engaged in disputes over the monopoly of truth; and (3) the Brazilian state, invested in asserting control over territories deemed 'unruly.'

Karl von Koseritz personified the intellectual elite who saw the Mucker as the antithesis of German *Kultur* (Dreher, 2017). His writings in the *Deutsche Zeitung* associated the movement with ignorance ('lack of education'), a threat to 'progress' and the degradation of Germanness (*germanidade*). This narrative served to justify both social exclusion and physical extermination.

The approach presented here enables a deeper understanding of the multiple dimensions in which the Mucker messianic movement was immersed and its repercussions within Rio Grande do Sul society, contributing to contemporary sociological debates on religion, identity and power.

The situation of German immigrants left to their own devices persisted until 1864 when Evangelicals of German origin who had emigrated abroad were 'rediscovered.' It should be noted that during the first four decades of German immigration to Brazil, mystical elements emerged within these communities, most notably in the case of the Mucker messianic movement (Amstad, 2005; Bobsin, 1989; Dreher, 2017, 2003). This movement was ultimately extinguished through the articulation of the rising German-Brazilian economic elite (Silva, 2005; Witt, 2015) with political actors representing German-Brazilians, such as Karl von Koseritz (Biehl, 1999; Oliveira, 2008),³ who perceived the movement as a threat. The Mucker case also illustrates that not only 'institutionalised' preachers emigrated to Brazil, but also other Lutheran pastors and Catholic priests, including the mystics.

During this initial period of German immigration, the relationship between immigrant Protestantism and ethnic identity can be explained primarily by local factors, without direct external intervention from the German states (Wirth, 1998). In other words, local ecclesiastical communities and secular ethnic associations sought to foster a sense of ethnicity, yet they lacked the resources available to the institutions later supported materially from Germany. During this period, colonisation companies also emerged as private initiatives for the establishment of colonial settlements.⁴ It was these companies that included religious assistance in their strategies for attracting emigrants, particularly non-Catholics. The beginning of a more systematic and institutionalised form of religious mentoring of German immigrants in Brazil dates from 1864, a period shortly preceding the unification of the German state on 18 January 1871. Around this time, missionary societies from various regions of the German territory started to finance the dispatch of pastors, missionaries and even teachers to provide spiritual and educational support to German-Lutherans in Brazil. Trained pastors from theological faculties arrived in Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Paraná and Espírito Santo (Maske, 2013), bringing with them an intellectual formation grounded in German idealism and shaped by pan-Germanist debates. At the same time, missionaries trained in seminaries affiliated with institutions engaged in missionary work in Africa and Asia also migrated to Brazil, many of whom showed little interest in promoting Germanness.

One of the major obstacles faced by German-Brazilian Protestants in the period between the departure of Borchard in 1870⁵ and the arrival of Rotermund in Brazil at the end of 1874⁶ was the Mucker question.⁷ This movement, which emerged in 1869 and lasted until 1874, remains one of the most contested episodes in the history of the German colonies, generating divergent interpretations to this day. In most cases, only the perspective of the 'winners' has been heard: the 'losers' – that is, the Mucker

³ Also written as Carlos von Koseritz.

⁴ Even so, the German national state never ceased to support initiatives for the colonisation of Germans abroad, for example through tax incentives, such as financial assistance for state and private colonisation projects. A more detailed account of this legislation can be found in the Legislative Assembly of the State of Rio Grande do Sul, *Imigração e Colonização: legislação de 1747-1915* (Iotti, 2001).

⁵ Dr. Hermann Borchard, 1823-1891, pastor in São Leopoldo from 1864 to 1870 and in Petrópolis/RJ from 1870 to 1872.

⁶ Dr. Wilhelm Rotermund (1843-1925) was sent to Brazil by Friedrich Fabri of the *Evangelische Gesellschaft für die protestantischen Deutschen in Südamerika*. He took over the parish of São Leopoldo as Hermann Borchard's successor.

⁷ I did not undertake a detailed analysis of the case; there are many works that explore this topic from a wide range of perspectives (Amstad, 2005; Biehl, 1999; Bobsin, 1989; Dreher, 2017, 2014a; Lesser, 2015; Rotermund, 1997).

themselves – have remained unheard (Dreher, 2017). It is unanimously described as a messianic and mystical movement, comparable to what occurred in Canudos, the Contestado and the Caldeirão. ‘One difference between the Mucker movement and the others mentioned is that the Mucker were predominantly Lutheran and were led by a woman, Jacobina Mentz Maurer’⁸ (Dreher, 2014b, p. 74). Martin Dreher stresses that the Mucker question reminds us how the society of Rio Grande do Sul during the Imperial period was composed of both pre-modern and modern forms of religion, as well as of their staunch critics. Although the historiography of immigration has tended to privilege an image of the immigrant as deeply Catholic or Lutheran, there was also a strong presence of ‘Freemasons, rationalists, liberals, positivists, anarchists [and] socialists. There was no collective religious identity. The latter is the product of an intelligentsia that sought to frame immigrant communities within an ideal to be attained’ (Dreher, 2014a, p. 217). Among these actors were pan-Germanist pastors and priests. It should be noted, however, that alongside these ‘institutionalised’ religious figures, there were also ‘others,’ ‘outsider’ preachers and mystics who emigrated together with those who would later form independent communities.

4 The Mucker question

To understand the Mucker question, it is important to have in mind that ‘from 1851 onwards, intellectuals associated with the German generation of 1848 began to arrive in Rio Grande do Sul, later led by the former cabin boy of the ship that transported them to Rio Grande, Carlos von Koseritz. Koseritz was shaped by the German Romantic imaginary of *Bildung*’ (Dreher, 2014a, p. 217). Dreher explains how the German individual of the *Aufklärung* during this era was formed and educated according to Enlightenment ideals and was thus often neglectful or indifferent towards religion. ‘[...] he is a lover of progress and the natural sciences, has faith in the progress of History and knows about elucidating the mysteries of the universe. He does not orient himself by the discourse of Jesuit priests nor by pastors trained in mission houses and is the complete opposite of the Mucker [...]’ (Dreher, 2014a, p. 217). The latter, in turn, were seen as fervently religious and, at times, illiterate figures. In general terms, the number of Mucker sympathisers, according to Dreher (2017), reached somewhere between 700 and 1,000 individuals.

The term ‘Mucker’ is used pejoratively to designate a particular form of religious fanaticism. The volume edited by Theodor Amstad (2005, p. 163), extremely critical of the movement, argues that it ‘distinguishes itself from others through isolation and clear separation and not infrequently descends into violence against those who think differently.’ The movement in Rio Grande do Sul originated in Prussia, emerging from a Pietist religious group in the eighteenth century. Two descendants of this group, Libório Mentz and Ernestina Magdalena Lips, emigrated to the German colony of São Leopoldo, where they preserved a Mucker worldview. In the 1870s, Mentz’s granddaughter, Jacobina, together with her husband, provided medical care through practices of *curandeirismo* (folk healing). While she read and recited passages from the Bible, her husband prescribed home remedies. Accounts suggest that, during these practices, she would become possessed by spirits. Jacobina

⁸ Also written as Jakobine.

and her husband, João Jorge Maurer, founded a religious sect that eventually attracted many followers. Jacobina's leadership – based, for her followers, on divine revelations and healing practices – exemplifies an ideal type of charismatic authority that challenged the institutional structures of the time. The Mucker had many enemies: not only the armed forces of the state, but also religious groups and, above all, the rising intellectual and economic sectors of the German-Brazilian population. '[...] we can observe that the fiercest attacks were directed at those with divergent views. The language used was far from polite. There was a Catholic press, a liberal and materialist press, and a small newspaper, *Der Bote*, which attempted to defend Protestants, whose situation was complicated' (Dreher, 2014b, p. 63).

Wilhelm Rotermund did not witness the events of the Mucker movement, having arrived in Brazil shortly after its conclusion, yet he describes the period as a turbulent one in the province, marked by what he called the 'Mucker era.' In his view, 'those who did not experience it cannot adequately imagine the huge influence exerted by the small group of Mucker at Fazenda Leão. They exercised a veritable tyranny over people's spirits. The watchword was: for or against. And anyone who swam against the current risked their life' (Rotermund, 1997, p. 192). Rotermund labelled the Mucker a sect. In his account of Jacobina, he relates that she came from an Anabaptist family and had experienced prolonged periods of unconsciousness since childhood, in addition to displaying an inclination towards the mystical. Having read a book recounting the case of a sleepwalking woman, 'who, in her dormant state, is said to have prescribed with precision remedies for every kind of illness' (Rotermund, 1997, p. 279), Jacobina came to present herself as a somnambulist and prophet, receiving revelations from God while prescribing herbs and medicines to the patients of her husband, the carpenter João Jorge Maurer.

From then on, Jakobine assumed the role of a somnambulist who, in states of dormancy, not only discovered the remedies for illnesses but also received revelations from God concerning the future and His will for the 'elect.' She no longer contented herself with the preparation and prescription of potions and ointments; her visitors, and there were more than a few, also had to listen as she read passages from the Bible, which she then interpreted in a fantastical manner. (Rotermund, 1997, p. 279).

Among the accusers of the Mucker, one of the movement's biggest 'rivals' (Dreher, 2017, 2014b) was Karl von Koseritz, who spared no ink in attacking them in the pages of the *Deutsche Zeitung*. Since Koseritz regarded himself as a herald of Germanness, he viewed the Mucker as the antithesis of everything represented by German culture (Dreher, 2017). It is worth recalling that 1874 marked the jubilee year, the fiftieth anniversary of German immigration to Brazil. This date, which was expected to be marked by celebrations, especially by the upcoming German-Brazilian intellectual and economic sectors, instead became one of the most conflict-ridden episodes in the German colonies. Koseritz forged an image of the Mucker as individuals 'without culture, religious, averse to Enlightenment and to the advances of science – the opposite of what he advocated as the great values of Germanness, of German *Kultur* and *Bildung*' (Dreher, 2017, p. 36).

One year after the end of the Mucker movement, Karl von Koseritz wrote the text *A fraude Mucker na Colônia Alemã. Uma contribuição para a história e cultura da germanidade daqui*, originally published in the *Deutscher Volkskalender*.⁹ In the introduction to this text, Koseritz writes:

The space occupied by the present article in this year's annual volume was originally intended for another, more agreeable topic: it was set to contain the words saluting the fiftieth jubilee of the town and colony of São Leopoldo, followed by a retrospective of the achievements accomplished there, over half a century, through German courage and German labour.

For this jubilee year, the aforementioned topic was all but obligatory; yet even so, it had to be set aside to make room for the account that follows. All celebration of the jubilee was abandoned, since no one remembered it any longer: astonishment, fear and terror dominated the colony on the very day that, exactly fifty years earlier, the first German settlers had disembarked in São Leopoldo.

On the night of the jubilee day (24 June), the alarm bell tolled throughout the rural clearings of São Leopoldo; barbarous murderers hurled firebrands into peaceful homes, slaughtered women and butchered children, as though we were back in the Middle Ages amid the horrors of the Peasants' War.

It was a sombre jubilee celebration, and our article today is a truly disheartening contribution to the cultural history of Germanness here, for it records events that ought to be regarded as utterly impossible in our century and among a population composed exclusively of people of German descent. These events cast a stark light on our idea of progress and elicit the gravest concerns for the future.

Let it be said, in truth: would anyone, a year ago, have deemed it possible that such scenes of horror would come to bring disrepute to our colonies?

No one deemed it possible; no one imagined that religious enthusiasm, exploited by a few scoundrels, could lead to such outcomes among a peaceful and industrious German population! (quoted in Dreher, 2017, p. 181-182)

Karl von Koseritz laments that, rather than glorifying Germanness by celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of German immigration to Brazil, the population had been forced to witness the 'tragic' Mucker event. The author then raises a series of arguments critical of religion, especially with regard to the Jesuits who were beginning to arrive, although he extols the fact that they did not encourage the reading of the Bible – for Koseritz, the most dangerous of books. He repeatedly exalts the 'peaceful and industrious' character of the Germans and attempts, as far as possible, to frame the Mucker phenomenon as something apart, exceptional, a product of religion. In one passage, Koseritz writes:

To what is it due that, today, amid the progress of our colonies, the Mucker fraud could arise and produce such terrible consequences as have recently filled us with dread? We do not doubt for a moment that the sole culprit is the lack of proper education among the

⁹ Porto Alegre, 1875, p. 119-144.

population of the colonies and the systematic stupefaction of their residents through superstitions and belief in miracles, propagated by fanatical priests of both confessions. (Dreher, 2017, p. 184)

The effort to present the history of German immigration to Brazil as ‘peaceful and industrious,’ while mentioning only a few isolated cases of violence or disorder – if not preferably omitting them altogether – also underpins the volume *Cem anos de Germanidade no Rio Grande do Sul*, compiled by Father Theodor Amstad. Among other adversaries of the Mucker movement, we can observe, for example, how the episode was represented in the pages of this work, originally published in 1924.

The mystification reached its apogee in the grand ‘comedy’ staged on the occasion of the Pentecost festival of 1872. On that day, Jacobina first appeared before her devotees in a state of ecstasy and then withdrew to her chamber. After the ‘sanctuary’ was closed and then reopened some time later, only the prophetess’s clothes were visible. Hannjörg solemnly explained that Jacobina had ascended to heaven and that the community should pray and sing for her to return to earth. And indeed, after much prayer and singing, a noise was heard and Jacobina reappeared among her followers, as if transfigured, clothed in a white, luminous tunic. The conclusion of the comedy fell to the ‘mystery figure’ (the former preacher Klein), who fell to his knees before Jacobina and exclaimed: ‘Yes, I believe you are Christ.’ In this way, Jacobina was solemnly proclaimed the head of the new sect. That same day, she appointed a number of apostles: her husband became John; a certain Einsfeld was designated Judas, because he had given her a considerable sum of money that very day; her two brothers, Heinrich and Franz, became James and Peter. When the latter refused to play any part in the mystification, the role of Peter was given to Robinson, a scrupulous follower from Dois Irmãos. Rudolf Sehn was another of the ‘chosen ones,’ his selection owing more to ‘reasons of the flesh’ than of the spirit, given that in the end the prophetess took him as her husband in place of her Hannjörg. (Amstad, 2005, p. 164)

This symbolic enactment reinforced Jacobina’s charisma, consolidating her leadership through rituals that created a radical separation between the ‘elect’ and the ‘mockers.’ Her followers showed little concern at being called Mucker or becoming subject to ridicule within the broader community, since they rapidly established a distinction between themselves and the ‘mockers.’ They constituted themselves as a group through a familiar division between ‘us’ and ‘them’ – a distinction rooted here in a mystical orientation. The Mucker ceased sending their children to school and withdrew from ecclesiastical communities. Denounced by local residents, some of the movement’s followers were imprisoned for a time. Rotermund (1997) reports that, in revenge, the Mucker marked those who had informed the police about them. In November 1873, the first bloodshed occurred.

From 1873 onwards, the Mucker began to be accused of responsibility for arson attacks and murders (Dreher, 2017). On 24 May 1874, Jacobina assembled her followers and announced that the end of the world was imminent: her role had already shifted from seer to messiah. She began to hold regular religious meetings at Ferrabraz, entering the space only after the opening hymn in order to read and give her

eschatological interpretations of biblical passages. Jacobina allegedly ordered the killing of sixteen families who had abandoned the movement. The first murder occurred in June. Subsequently, houses were set on fire, resulting in the deaths of adults and children. A police battalion was dispatched to the colony to restore order (Lesser, 2015, p. 89). Mobilised by an elite perturbed by the Mucker, the police attacked their houses, but Jacobina managed to escape – a feat that strengthened her followers' conviction in her divinity. In August 1874, however, after receiving information on her hiding place, the police located Jacobina, and she was killed along with a large number of her followers. The violence that marked the movement's denouement reflects the intolerance of established power structures when confronted with a charismatic leadership perceived as a threat to the prevailing order. Yet the death of its leader did not mark the end of the Mucker story in Rio Grande do Sul.

In 1897, twenty-three years after the tragic *Mucker drama*, a belated and bloody incident occurred. Jacobina's daughter, Aurélia Maurer, had married Michael Noë and was living at Fazenda Pirajá. Suspicions arose that Aurélia was displaying symptoms similar to those of her mother and had begun to prophesy. A physician who examined her diagnosed her condition as a severe form of hysteria. It was also said that Mucker people were moving back and forth between Nova Petrópolis and Lajeado. At Fazenda Pirajá, neighbours organised night watches to monitor the dangerous activity of these Mucker. The vigilantes shot and killed three suspects, among them Wilhelm Gräbin, whose father resided in the Bastos Colony in Lajeado. In this way, old hostilities between settlers and descendants of the Mucker flared up again. Around the same time, a woman was murdered in the Lajeado colony in what was taken to be a ritual killing, since it appeared that her blood had been collected. This mysterious episode was obviously linked to a supposed resurgence of Mucker activity, not least because the victim was a niece of Georg Haubert who had been killed by the Mucker in São Leopoldo in 1874. As a consequence of this suspicion, on 3 January 1898, five individuals suspected of Muckerism were violently killed in the Bastos Colony. With this lamentable late episode, we may also conclude this account of the disturbances caused by the Mucker, certainly the darkest chapter in the history of the German colony in Rio Grande do Sul. (Amstad, 2005, p. 169, my italics)

On 2 August 1874, the Mucker movement – or at least its most significant segment, under the leadership of Jacobina – was decimated. A second – and final – uprising would occur only in 1897. The pejorative term 'Muckerism,' used to designate 'fanatical' German-Protestant sectors, persisted among its opponents. Wilhelm Rotermund took on the task of attempting to eradicate this pejorative conception of the German-Lutheran population. One year after Jacobina's death, he wrote:

Most of the Mucker are dead; the remainder are still in prison. Some have been convicted and have appealed, while others have yet to be tried. No judge wishes to burn his fingers on this hot potato and there are ways of transferring jury sessions from one court to another. As far as can be gathered from the prisoners, none has yet changed their views. The men whose wives have rejoined the Community and now

send their children to school are beside themselves; their families and relatives fear the day when they may once again regain their freedom. (Dreher, 2017, p. 112)

Like many messianic movements in Brazil, the Mucker movement combined popular mysticism with forms of mobilisation, frequently political, viewed with suspicion by much of the intellectual, political, economic and religious elite. Although short-lived, Jacobina's charismatic authority destabilised established hierarchies, revealing how charisma-based domination can emerge in contexts of ethnic and religious fragmentation. The Mentz family and those around them, influenced by German Pietism, were confronted with the introduction of Enlightenment thought within the German Church and were subsequently rejected by the new preachers who arrived in Brazil, who 'represented the thought of the European religious Restoration in the persons of German Jesuits and of the pastors led by Hermann Borchard' (Dreher, 2017, p. 44). Citing this movement is also important in terms of illustrating an ongoing project: the construction of an idealised image of German culture among German-Brazilians vis-à-vis the Brazilian state. Because the Mucker withdrew from the schools, churches and even cemeteries used by the other members of the population, they ended up excluded from the ethnic group itself. For intellectual sectors who viewed ethnic consolidation as beneficial both individually and collectively – such as Karl von Koseritz, along with many priests and pastors – the movement was perceived as a potential enemy. The latter groups, especially, given the Mucker's anticlerical stance, missed no opportunity to disqualify them by any and every means possible. In conclusion, the Mucker movement can be understood as a spiritual revival (Dreher, 2017). Yet, in the context of the time, it was treated as an enemy to be extirpated, particularly since it was led by a woman.

The Mucker case is also significant in terms of providing an idea of the religious sphere in the colonies, home to diverse fragmented groups: these were small religious communities, both mystical and materialist in inclination. It was for this reason that, between 1873 and 1874, at the height of the Mucker movement, a priest and a pastor arrived in Rio Grande do Sul – most likely in an attempt to confront the 'non-institutionalised' expressions of their religious denominations then emerging or being perpetuated in the colonies. These men, Ambros Schupp and Wilhelm Rotermund, would become prominent figures (Dreher, 2017). In this sense, the early years of colonisation were marked by both ethnic and religious fragmentation. This brings us to the question of confessional distribution among the colonies. In the work compiled by Father Theodor Amstad (2005, p. 507), it is noted that:

The big difference in confessional distribution can be explained largely by the way in which each colony was founded. From the outset, Catholics tended to avoid colonies that exhibited a strong confessional mixture. Examples include Taquara, São Lourenço and Ijuí. By contrast, other municipalities contained colonial districts with an almost exclusively Catholic population, resulting in a numerical predominance of Catholics. Examples are Montenegro with the districts of Bom Princípio, São Salvador and Poço das Antas; Lajeado with the districts of Santa Clara and Arroio do Meio; and Passo Fundo with the colony of Não-Me-Toque, particularly its southern portion, including the colonies of Coronel Selbach and

Barra do Colorado. In the new municipality of São Luís are the colonies of Serro Azul and Pirapó, which likewise ensure a substantial Catholic majority. On the other hand, Protestants secured a majority in municipalities such as Estrela and Cruz Alta, notably through the colonies of Teutônia and Neu-Württemberg.

The concern shown in the distribution of religious groups was not repeated when it came to ethnic groups migrating from different German states to the colonies. This led to tensions among groups in some communities and hindered the formation of a cohesive unity among them – after all, were they not all ‘German’? In fact, the notion of being German, as constructed in Brazil, was largely attributed by the native population, not the immigrant communities themselves.

If, in 1868, Hermann Borchard had created a first synod – which did not last – it fell to Wilhelm Rotermund, in 1886, to make a new attempt, one that would prove successful: ‘the Rio-Grandense Synod is his greatest legacy’ (Dreher, 2003, p. 83). From its foundation, this synod sought to promote the immigration of academically trained German pastors, though this was often rendered impossible by the institution’s limited resources (Fischer, 1967). During this period, new pastors arrived in the country, such as Wittinger, Haetinger, August Kaz and H. Thiesmann. By 1876, the number of ordained pastors active in Rio Grande do Sul had risen to sixteen (Amstad, 2005). *Cem anos de Germanidade no Rio Grande do Sul* records that it was ‘a fortunate idea of Dr Fabri¹⁰ to persuade Dr Rotermund, who had taught theology for a year at the Mission House, to transfer here’ (Amstad, 2005, p. 536). Shortly after his arrival, Rotermund assumed the editorship of *Der Bote von São Leopoldo* and in 1881 the *Deutsche Post* was created. In this way, an organ was created that could convey the ‘interests and expressions of the population and of the communities aligned with the synodal idea. Dr Rotermund also devoted all his efforts to the promotion of schooling’ (Amstad, 2005, p. 536). In terms of the German-Protestant newspapers, *Der Bote von São Leopoldo* and subsequently the *Deutsche Post* effectively functioned as the mouthpieces of Protestant communities.

Wilhelm Rotermund was one of the most active pastors in the institutionalisation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church on Brazilian soil. He criticised earlier colleagues who were not ordained. In his view, although they had prevented the disappearance of Protestantism in the German colonies, they had merely ‘chosen the pastorate in order to secure “a comfortable means of livelihood”’ (Witt, 2015, p. 85). Seen from his perspective, the pastoral vocation was incompatible with other activities that might compromise the ethical and moral life of both pastor and community (Witt, 2015, p. 85). From this, we might argue that Rotermund had a distinctly this-worldly ascetic conception (Weber, 2004) of the *Beruf* of pastors. The label *pastor-cachaça*, applied to non-ordained pastors, was especially given to spiritual leaders who had succumbed to alcoholism or who supplied alcoholic beverages to the faithful in their stores (Witt, 2015). For this reason, Rotermund would describe the first pastors in Rio Grande do Sul as follows:

¹⁰ Friedrich Fabri (1824–1891) was a German theologian who worked for the Rhenish Mission, one of the main organisers of the German colonial movement, and an honorary professor at the University of Bonn.

Most of those who volunteered for the ministry were adventurers seeking to earn a living and the journeys undertaken along the forest paths were not, for many, regarded as missionary service motivated by love of Jesus and their compatriots, but rather, quite candidly, as business trips, during which their pockets were filled, since in each locality there were, at the very least, a few baptisms to be performed. Since many pastors devoted themselves to drink during these visits, they came to be called *Schnapspfarrer* (*cachaça pastors*). (Rotermund, 1997, p. 251)

According to Rotermund, ‘one of these pastors ran a tavern where he served *cachaça* to members of the community before and after services (quoted in Witt, 2015, p. 85) [...]. By 1886, it was observed that, in Brazil, a church without an adjacent “store” or tavern was deemed an incomplete establishment’ (Wachholz apud Witt, 2015, p. 85). This issue even reached international circles, as Rotermund informed Fabri about the *cachaça pastores* and the latter also commented on the issue. For this reason, Rotermund advocated the migration of more formally trained pastors in order to counter the pseudo-pastors. In criticising the activity of the earliest preachers in Brazil, Rotermund describes the cry of longing many felt:

Many tears were shed there: the ancient desire for devote worship and a regulated ecclesiastical situation was felt by all. Yet no assistance came from those quarters: government circles did not look favourably upon emigration; departures to Brazil were impeded; nor is it surprising that church authorities likewise declared, ‘with regret,’ that they were unable to assist the emigrants: ‘they should have stayed here.’ (Rotermund, 1997, p. 250)

Rotermund lamented the neglect shown by the German Evangelical Church and the independent German states toward their emigrants now living in Brazil. He speculated how different the situation might have been had there been material and spiritual support for the ‘German’ colonies in southern Brazil from the very outset of colonisation. For this reason, he believed that pastors should organise and mobilise to promote this German ideal in Rio Grande do Sul.

For pastors immersed in the pan-Germanist debates of the period, independent pastors did not assist the cultural project of Germanness promoted by the Rio-Grandense Synod and by the German state. Consequently, conflicts emerged within evangelical communities, often involving pastors and their communities, especially between ordained and non-ordained clergy. Hence, it is important to avoid ‘giv[ing] the impression that the theologians sent from Germany to Brazil from 1864 onwards were all well received and fully accepted in the places where they worked’ (Witt, 2015, p. 90). Rotermund himself frequently became embroiled in conflicts that extended beyond the strictly spiritual sphere of the church. However, unlike the dispute between Voges, Ehlers and Klingelhoefter, the conflicts involving Rotermund were situated within a different context. From 1864 onwards, ordained pastors sought to restore the Church, ‘freeing it from the habits and customs acquired since 1824, when, according to them, the religious practice of the settlers, guided by the “non-ordained,” gave rise to a form of faith that differed from the teachings received in Germany’ (Witt, 2015, p. 90). Within this new context, there was a strong critique of

the form of church that had developed in Brazil. At the same time, many members either preferred or had become accustomed to the model of an independent church that had developed in the absence of ordained pastors (Witt, 2015). These new conflicts among pastors were thus embedded in the process of the formation of German-Brazilian ethnicity within the Lutheran religious sphere.

Specifically with regard to the Mucker question, although Rotermund arrived in Rio Grande do Sul only a few weeks after the end of the conflict, he had to deal with its legacy for a long period afterwards. On starting his activities in São Leopoldo, he found himself in a delicate situation. The Mucker messianic movement had been decimated, yet it continued to haunt evangelical communities. Some sectors of Freemasonry saw pastoral activity as an attempt to keep the population in a state of ignorance and alienation. For Karl von Koseritz, reading the Bible led to 'Muckerism.' How, then, did Rotermund interpret these events, and in particular, how did he view the Maurer family?

Rotermund regarded João Jorge and Jacobina as individuals who had grown up in the countryside ('behind hedges': *hinter den Hecken aufgewachsen*), possessing a level of formation similar to that of other German peasants in Brazil. João Jorge was considered illiterate, and Jacobina semi-literate. They attended the services of Pastor Haesbaert regularly. Jacobina's mother was said to have been affiliated with a sect in Germany and to have maintained a circle of followers in Brazil. Jacobina, Rotermund was told, was a woman of dubious morality and a somnambulist. The population's interest in the Maurers, however, was initially stirred by the remarkable healings performed by João Jorge. These cures are said to have attracted many followers. On one occasion, João Jorge reportedly claimed that the remedies he administered were prescribed by his wife while she was in a somnambulistic state. (Dreher, 2014b, p. 77)

In other words, they are depicted pejoratively, in ways similar to the negative qualities attributed to pseudo-pastors, perhaps as a strategy to differentiate 'right' from 'wrong' German-Lutherans. Rotermund arrived at three main conclusions regarding the events: (1) An anti-church faction interpreted the events as a warning against pastors and the Bible, especially in the view of Karl von Koseritz; (2) The Jesuits claimed that the Mucker movement revealed the very essence of Protestantism. 'Rotermund comments that the Jesuits overlooked the fact that at least half of the Mucker were Roman Catholics' (Dreher, 2014b, p. 81); (3) Another group claimed that the Mucker episode 'had been staged to undermine the Christian faith, financed by influential individuals and Freemasonry. This argument is based on the observation that the leaders of the movement had originally maintained good relations with opponents of the word of God' (Dreher, 2014b, p. 81). On this last point, substantial sums of money had allegedly been transferred from Porto Alegre to Fazenda Leão. The conflict against the Mucker was said to have taken on the 'appearance of a staged war, with Maurer allegedly disappearing rather than being killed. Rotermund considers this third interpretation to be false. Contemporary research suggests, nevertheless, that it may not be entirely unfounded' (Dreher, 2014b, p. 81). Wilhelm Rotermund himself was unaware that certain individuals may have benefited from

the conflict, whether through the sale of arms and ammunition or in other ways (Dreher, 2017). In any case, the Mucker question was something to which Rotermond dedicated considerable time and effort to solving, attempting both to enhance the standing of the German-Evangelical population and to counter the prevailing public perception that 'Muckerism' was an inevitable outcome of Protestantism among the German settlers.

In light of Max Weber's theory, the Mucker movement can be understood as a paradigmatic example of charismatic authority. Expressed through rituals and mystical manifestations, Jacobina's leadership challenged institutional rationalism and tradition, and was characterised by the 'acceptance' of her followers, despite her limited formal education and the vehement criticism from sectors deemed 'correct.' This analysis sheds light on how processes of legitimation and delegitimation intersected within German-Brazilian society, coexisting alongside the construction of an ambiguous ethnic identity marked by internal tensions (Weber, 2004).

The Mucker movement transcends the historical episode to reveal structural dynamics, such as the use of violence as a language of power, manifested through extermination as the ultimate expression of the civilising project. The resistance to Jacobina's charisma among intellectual and religious elites demonstrates the conflict between charismatic forms of authority and the rational and traditional structures seeking to consolidate an 'acceptable' Germanic identity in the Brazilian setting. Finally, it is noteworthy that 'the trials of the imprisoned Muckers for the various crimes attributed to them lasted between four and six years. All were ultimately acquitted on appeal to higher courts, including those who died during the proceedings' (Dickie, 1996, p. 16).

5 Final remarks

The Mucker case reveals the complexity of the relationships between religion, ethnic identity and power within the context of German immigration in Brazil. Through an analysis of this messianic movement – which was shaped by factors such as the fragmentation of religious communities, the influence of colonisation companies and the arrival of formally instituted missionaries – we can observe how tensions between tradition, mysticism and modernisation intersected in Rio Grande do Sul society during the Imperial period. Furthermore, Weber's analysis of charismatic authority helps elucidate the mechanisms of legitimation present in the figure of Jacobina. Her methods and the repercussions of her practices make evident both the critique from dominant sectors and the potential for social mobilisation under charismatic leadership. Far from being a mere episode of fanaticism, then, the Mucker phenomenon emerges as a pivotal moment for understanding the cultural and social processes that defined the history of German immigrants in Brazil.

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