



SCIENCE AND PREJUDICE A SOCIAL HISTORY OF EPILEPSY IN BRAZILIAN EARLY MEDICAL ACADEMIC WRITINGS. 1859 – 1906.



Margarida de Souza Neves

History Department - Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro
BRAZIL - msneves@his.puc-rio.br

Purposes:

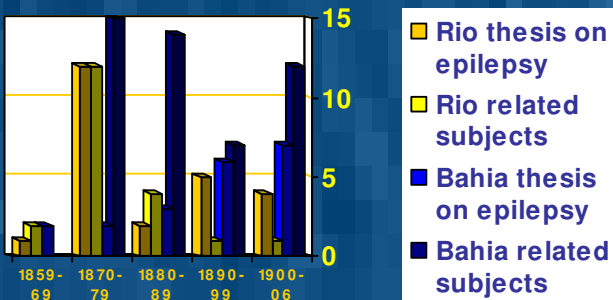
- to study Brazilian medical writings on epilepsy from 1859 (first doctoral thesis on epilepsy in Rio de Janeiro Medical School) to 1906 (Golgi and Ramón y Cajal Nobel Prize) in order to identify the particular patterns of prejudice and stigmas socially constructed towards this illness and those who suffer from it.
- to verify how the prevailing prejudice towards epilepsy present at the time was represented in Brazilian scientific thought.
- to identify how specific prejudices, peculiar of a strongly hierarchic and slave-labor based society appear in academic papers.

Methods:

- Historical analysis of medical doctoral theses and scientific papers.
- Iconography (religious, moral and medical) and literature are considered subsidiary documents.



Results:



48 theses on epilepsy have been studied, and their content is very similar, following the same narrative protocol, and the ones produced in Rio de Janeiro are strongly influenced by French physicians.

Epilepsy is considered a curse and prejudice towards patients with epilepsy is patent in vocabulary, etiology, treatment procedures, moralizing tone and social issues.

Different approaches are discussed on Medical Journals (34 titles) where a lineage of Brazilian physicians, influenced by Lombroso's theories, links epilepsy to criminal tendencies.

Conclusions: further research is required, but it is possible to state that gender, moral and sexual prejudices are present on early Brazilian medical writings about epilepsy, while there is a significant silence about racial issues.

"Irritable, sensitive, extremely nervous, suffering from the sad privilege of spasmodic accidents, women are indeed more exposed to epilepsy than men".
Ernesto de Castro Moreira – 1877

"(...) crime perpetrated by an epileptic is, as a matter of fact, a symptomatic evidence of epilepsy"

Afrânio Peixoto 1898.

