

To create perfect citizens for a masculine, strong, and virtuous Republic]: the First National Feminist and Education Congress in Lisbon (1924) and the modernization of inequality¹

“Criar cidadãos perfeitos para uma República máscula, forte e virtuosa”: o Primeiro Congresso Nacional Feminista e de Educação em Lisboa (1924) e a modernização da desigualdade

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Abstract

Organized by the Conselho Nacional das Mulheres Portuguesas [National Council of Portuguese Women – CNMP], the Primeiro Congresso Feminista e de Educação [First Feminist and Education Congress] took place between the 4th and 9th of May 1924, in Lisbon. On the occasion, some theses were presented and discussed on topics related to political and civic rights, education, social assistance, hygiene, and women’s health. Taking advantage of the centenary of this Congress, we propose a historicized analysis of the event, especially some of the theses, which mobilizes reflections on the intrinsic relationships between a certain feminism and a hygienist nation project, focused on improving the race. Without wanting to reduce feminist expressions from the beginning of the 20th century to a rigid definition – even because the conflicts within the CNMP point to various positions regarding the emancipation of the female sex –, we intend to draw attention, as Susan Besse well outlined in the study the Brazilian case, for a “modernization of inequality”. For this historian, marriage, sexuality, motherhood, and female education – themes recurrently present in feminist discussions in the late 19th century and in the first decades of the 20th century – acquired enormous importance, since “clean reproduction” was considered a way to overcome the backwardness and degeneration of certain

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nations. Our hypothesis is that the institutional feminism represented by the CNMP, by claiming dignity and equality of opportunity for women, found a place in the ingenious project of social reform based on eugenic precepts, supported mainly through medical-anthropological discourse. In this, “the woman” was called upon to carry the heavy burden of civilizing her family, assuming a fundamental role for the State, although conservative: that of wife and mother, educated to manage the home and to create “perfect citizens for a masculine, strong, and virtuous Republic” – words by Julieta Ribeiro, author of the thesis *A mulher naturista* [The naturist woman].

Keywords: Feminism. National Council of Portuguese Women. Eugenics. Biopower. Lisbon/Portugal.

Resumo

Organizado pelo Conselho Nacional das Mulheres Portuguesas (CNMP), o Primeiro Congresso Feminista e de Educação ocorreu entre os dias 4 e 9 de maio de 1924, em Lisboa. Na ocasião, foram apresentadas e discutidas teses que versaram sobre temáticas relacionadas aos direitos políticos e cívicos, à educação, à assistência social, à higiene e saúde da mulher. Aproveitando a efeméride, propomos uma análise historicizada do evento, especialmente de algumas das teses, que mobilize reflexões sobre as relações intrínsecas entre certo feminismo e um projeto de nação higienista, focado no aprimoramento da raça. Sem querer reduzir as expressões feministas do início do século XX a uma definição engessada – mesmo porque os conflitos no interior do CNMP apontam para uma variedade de posturas relativamente à emancipação do sexo feminino –, pretendemos chamar a atenção, tal qual Susan Besse bem delineou ao estudar o caso brasileiro, para uma “modernização da desigualdade”. Para a historiadora, o casamento, a sexualidade, a maternidade e a educação feminina – temáticas recorrentemente presentes nas discussões feministas do final dos Oitocentos e nas primeiras décadas do século XX – adquiriram enorme importância, uma vez que a “reprodução limpa” foi encarada como forma de superar o atraso e a degeneração de determinadas nações. Assim, nossa hipótese é a de que o feminismo institucional representado pelo CNMP, ao reivindicar dignidade e igualdade de oportunidade às mulheres, encontrou lugar no engenhoso projeto de reforma social fundamentada em preceitos eugênicos, sustentados, principalmente, através do discurso médico-anropológico. Neste, “a mulher” foi convocada a carregar o pesado fardo de civilizar sua família, assumindo um papel fundamental ao Estado, embora conservador: o de esposa e mãe, educada para administrar o lar e criar “cidadãos perfeitos para uma República máscula, forte e virtuosa” – palavras de Julieta Ribeiro, autora da tese *A mulher naturista*.

Palavras-chave: Feminismo. Conselho Nacional das Mulheres Portuguesas. Eugenia. Biopoder. Lisboa/Portugal.

Introduction

In issues 2 and 3 of *Alma Feminina* [Feminine Soul], the official bulletin of the Conselho Nacional das Mulheres Portuguesas [National Council of Portuguese Women], corresponding to the months of January and February 1924, a call was published for an event that would be held for the first time in Portugal, in the capital city of Lisbon: the Primeiro Congresso Feminista e de Educação [First Feminist and Education Congress]². The aim of the endeavor, according to the Organizing Committee, was “to discuss and explore feminist and educational principles, which are so closely related”³. The same bulletin also published the names of the members of the Organizing Committee, a set of regulations, and a list of the titles and respective authors of the theses already submitted—all related to the event that, in principle, would take place in March of that same year⁴.

On the centenary of the Primeiro Congresso Feminista e de Educação, we propose a historicized analysis of the event that seeks to foster reflections, particularly on the intrinsic relationships between a certain type of feminism and a hygienist nation-building project, with a focus on the improvement of the race. To this end, we will draw on sources related to the event, such as the *Relatório* [Report] and the *Homenagem às Relatoras das Teses do Primeiro Congresso Feminista e de Educação* [Tribute to the Rapporteurs of the Theses of the First Feminist and Education Congress], written by Arnaldo Brazão; the special issues of *Alma Feminina* dedicated to the congress; as well as the brochures of the theses that we are most interested in highlighting.

This article, developed in co-authorship, is also the result of portions of two ongoing doctoral theses that interact in aspects particularly related to the intersection between feminism and eugenics in the context of the first half of the 20th century. Thus, we take advantage of the dialogic potential of the previously referenced sources, giving special attention to the theses that were explicitly developed based on eugenic principles. These include: *Abolicionismo* [Abolitionism], by Arnaldo Brazão; *Educação Sexual* [Sexual Education], by

² CONSELHO NACIONAL DAS MULHERES PORTUGUESAS. “Sem título” In *Alma Feminina: Boletim Oficial do Conselho Nacional das Mulheres Portuguesas*, Lisboa, V. VIII, n. 2 e 3, p. 5, 1924.

³ *Ibid.* In Portuguese: “discutir e ventilar princípios feministas e educativos e que tão intimamente se relacionam”.

⁴ The Organizing Committee postponed it until May following several requests from teachers to hold it during the Easter holidays”. COSTA, C. Rosa. *História do Conselho Nacional das Mulheres Portuguesas (1914-1947)*. Lisboa: Tinta da China, 2021, p. 144. In Portuguese: “em virtude de ter recebido ‘vários pedidos de professoras da província para se transferir a realização para as férias da Páscoa”.

Paulina Luisi; *A luta Anti-Alcoólica nas Escolas* [The Anti-Alcohol Struggle in Schools], by Adelaide Cabete; *A Mulher Naturista* [The Naturist Woman], by Julieta Ribeiro; and *Educação dos Indígenas nas Colônias e suas Vantagens* [The Education of Indigenous Peoples in the Colonies and Its Advantages], by Domingas Lazary do Amaral. From this selection, we also incorporate into our analyses other publications by the aforementioned rapporteurs, in an attempt to more consistently understand their respective arguments.

Although feminism has never been a homogeneous movement, expressing in various ways its discomfort with the limitations and inconsistencies of a liberal model consolidated by the development of capitalism, it was revolutionary, even in its liberal form, especially in the context of the last decades of the 19th century through the early decades of the 20th century. It sparked reflections on the possibilities afforded to women in society, demanding dignity and certain rights. However, as Fabíola Rohden aptly noted, “the relations between the genders constitute a fundamental knot around which a series of indispensable precepts for life in society are articulated”⁵, feminism was perceived as a threat, especially when represented by women who linked gender oppression to other forms of violence, such as those related to class and race.

This movement, therefore, prompted various attitudes, some of an antifeminist character—more overt and, perhaps, easier to identify and analyze—and others more complex, which seemingly aimed to reconcile women’s political demands with the collective needs of the period. Theologians, jurists, and physicians were actively involved in theorizing about feminism while also striving to reaffirm the foundations of the difference between men and women⁶. Furthermore, these “translators of natural designs”⁷ insisted heavily on the idea of the complementarity of the sexes—and thus, on heterosexuality—which they deemed fundamental to the proper progress of both individual and national development. As a result, some feminists, whether for strategic reasons or due to their belief in a more individualistic

⁵ ROHDEN, Fabíola. *Uma Ciência da Diferença: Sexo e Gênero na Medicina da Mulher*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora da FIOCRUZ, 2001, p. 13. In Portuguese: “as relações entre os gêneros constituem um nódulo fundamental em torno do qual se articula uma série de preceitos indispensáveis para a vida em sociedade”.

⁶ Below, we list some examples authored by Portuguese theologian, jurist, and physician, respectively: SILVA, M. Abúndio da. *Feminismo e Ação Feminina: Cartas à uma Senhora*. Braga: Cruz & Cia, 1912; MOURA, Carneiro de. *A Mulher e a Civilização*. Lisboa: Seção Editorial da Companhia Nacional Editora, 1900; ALMEIDA, Jaime Pereira de. *Elementos para o Estudo da Condição Física e Intelectual da Mulher*. Porto: Tip. Do Porto Médico de Magalhães & Figueiredo, 1907.

⁷ ROHDEN, op. cit., p. 15. In Portuguese: “tradutores dos desígnios naturais”.

definition of feminism—focused on individual achievements, for instance—became involved in this proposal, which ultimately dressed inequality in a modern guise. We draw this idea from Susan Besse, a Brazil specialist who, in studying gender relations in Brazil during the first half of the 20th century, observed that:

Increasingly secular in their thinking, urban modernizers imagined that progress was achieved through the application of modern scientific theories [...]. The enormous influence of eugenics—both a “science” and a social movement concerned with the improvement of the “race”—was focused on reproduction as a mean to overcome the supposed “backwardness” and “degeneration” of the country. Thus, marriage, sexuality, motherhood, and female education [expensive topics to the feminism of those time] took on huge importance from their point of view⁸.

Despite certain advances, particularly related to access to education and professional careers experienced by a fraction of predominantly affluent women, the essential social role of women was maintained: reproduction. Moreover, and perhaps as a way to grant women a civic responsibility that would remove them from the position of eternal wards, they were burdened with the heavy task of sanitizing their homes, aiding in the fight against alcoholism, so-called venereal diseases, sexual perversions, etc. Thus, while there was an effort to uncover the scientific nature of women’s role in the evolutionary progress of the race, feminist movements were placed under masculine surveillance and guidance. As Anne McClintock aptly summarized in her analysis of the Men and Women’s Club, a Darwinist English group founded by the statistician and mathematician Karl Pearson, “Feminism was considered a product of evolution, necessary but dangerously volatile”⁹.

⁸ BESSE, Susan K. *Modernizando a Desigualdade: Reestruturação da Ideologia de Gênero no Brasil, 1914-1940*. São Paulo: EDUSP, 1999, p. 3. In Portuguese: “De pensamento cada vez mais secular, os modernizadores urbanos imaginavam que o progresso se realizava mediante a aplicação das modernas teorias científicas [...]. A enorme influência da eugenia — ao mesmo tempo “ciência” e movimento social preocupado com o aperfeiçoamento da “raça” — concentrava-se na reprodução como forma de superar os supostos “atraso” e “degeneração” do país. Assim, casamento, sexualidade, maternidade e educação feminina [temas caros ao feminismo da altura] assumiram, a seus olhos, enorme importância”.

⁹ MCCLINTOCK, Anne. *Couro Imperial: Raça, Gênero e Sexualidade no Embate Colonial*. Campinas: Editora da Unicamp, 2010, p. 413. In Portuguese: “O feminismo era visto como criado da evolução, necessário, mas perigosamente volúvel”. An example of a similar club is the Heterodoxy Club in the United States, founded in 1912 in Greenwich Village, New York. This club included prominent feminists, activists, and intellectuals, promoting debates on women’s rights, suffrage, education, sexuality, and social reforms. Some of its members, like many feminists and social reformers of the early 20th century, were sympathetic

The Primeiro Congresso Feminista e de Educação, 80 and 100 years later

Organized by the Conselho Nacional das Mulheres Portuguesas (CNMP), then chaired by the physician Adelaide Cabete, the Primeiro Congresso Feminista e de Educação was held from May 4 to 9, 1924, at the premises of the Associação de Socorros Mútuos dos Empregados no Comércio de Lisboa [Association of Mutual Aid for Employees in Commerce of Lisbon]¹⁰. Finally, imitating a gesture popularized at least since the early days of feminist associativism, the members of the organization and some of their supporters intended, with this event, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the CNMP—an organization considered by Arnaldo Brazão, Cabete’s nephew, as the only Portuguese women’s association to debate the feminist issue¹¹. It is important to note that the initiative was, in the words of the lawyer, “crowned with great success and applauded by figures of the highest social standing”, receiving commendations from the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate¹². The Congress featured well-known public figures as session presidents, including Bernardino Machado, Magalhães Lima, Abranches Ferrão, and Barbosa de Magalhães. The President of the Republic himself, Manuel Teixeira Gomes, presided over the inaugural session, concluding it with a speech:

to eugenic ideas, believing in the improvement of the human race through the conscious selection of desirable traits. This belief was common among those advocating for birth control, reproductive health, and women’s rights, seeing eugenics as a way to improve the social and biological conditions of the population. See: WITTENSTEIN, Kate. E. *The Heterodoxy Club and American Feminism (1912-1930)*. Dissertation (Doctor of Philosophy)—Boston: Boston University, 1989.

¹⁰ Issues related to the regeneration of the Portuguese race constituted a central motivator for the implementation of projects during the first decades of the 20th century. A notable example occurred a hundred years ago, in 1924, when the Portuguese Liga Portuguesa de Profilaxia Social [League of Social Prophylaxis] was founded in Porto by Dr. António Emílio de Magalhães, along with Drs. Cândido Henrique Gil da Costa and Arnaldo Cândido Veiga Pires. This civil association, which is still active, initially committed itself to spreading hygiene principles, combating venereal diseases, alcoholism, cancer, and tuberculosis, promoting proper care for the mentally ill, ensuring workplace hygiene, and fostering childcare. VIEIRA, Ismael Cerqueira. “Em prol do bem comum”: o contributo da Liga Portuguesa de Profilaxia Social para a Educação Higiénica no Porto (1924-1960)” In *CEM Cultura, Espaço & Memória*, n. 5, 2014, p. 20. In its programs, the use of terminologies such as “improvement”, “healthy constitution”, and the fight against “physical degeneration”, including syphilis and alcoholism, as well as the emphasis on childcare, reveals the almost eugenic nature of this institution. Although eugenics was not explicitly mentioned in the founding statutes, these objectives reflect a concern with the enhancement and health of the population, aligning with the eugenic ideals of the time. PROGRAMA DA LIGA PORTUGUESA DE PROFILAXIA SOCIAL In *Boletim da Liga Portuguesa de Profilaxia Social*, n. 1. Porto: Empresa Industrial Gráfica do Porto, p. 6-9, 1929.

¹¹ BRAZÃO, Arnaldo. *O Primeiro Congresso Feminista e de Educação (Relatório)*. Lisboa: Edições Spartacus, 1925, p. 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 11. In Portuguese: “coroada do melhor êxito e teve a aplaudi-la figuras da mais alta representação social”.

I believe it was wise to choose the title Feminist and Education Congress for this women's assembly. For a long time now, women have played a more direct role in guiding societies; since they became the educators of men, they have been earning the respect of all of us. The women entrusted with the education of our children have the right to participate in the public life of their country.

[...] Do not worry about what is happening abroad. Reforms must be subordinated to the spirit of our nationality, and we must shape the great Feminist movement within the bounds of Portuguese traditions¹³.

Dozens of national and foreign organizations supported and congratulated the CNMP's initiative, as did individuals such as Carolina Michaëlis de Vasconcelos, Norton de Matos, Fernão Boto Machado, and the physicians Célia and Ambrosina de Almeida Leite. During the Congress, twenty-five theses were discussed, which, according to Brazão's interpretation, "explored issues of Law, Hygiene, Education, Sociology, and Criminology"¹⁴.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 43–44. In Portuguese: "Acho que fizeram bem em escolher o título do Congresso Feminista e de Educação para esta assembleia feminina. Há muito tempo que as mulheres têm uma ação mais direta na orientação das sociedades; desde que passaram a ser a educadora do homem se vêm impondo à consideração de todos nós. As mulheres a quem está confiada a educação dos nossos filhos têm o direito de intervir na vida pública do seu país. [...] Não se preocupem com o que se passa lá fora. As reformas têm que ser subordinadas ao espírito da nossa nacionalidade e acomodamos a grande jornada do Feminismo no limite dos moldes portugueses".

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 15. In Portuguese: "ventilaram questões de Direito, Higiene, Educação, Sociologia e Criminologia". Titles of the theses and their respective authors, in order of presentation, according to the Report by Arnaldo Brazão: *Reivindicações políticas da mulher portuguesa* [Political Demands of Portuguese Women], Aurora de Castro Gouveia; *Bibliotecas infantis* [Children's Libraries], Ilda Pinto de Lima; *As pensões de estudantes* [Student Scholarships], Tito de Sousa Larcher; *A mulher na administração dos municípios* [Women in Municipal Administration], Isabel Correia Manso; *Assistência e educação à infância desvalida* [Assistance and Education for Underprivileged Children], A. C. Amaral Frazão; *Nacionalidade da mulher casada* [Nationality of Married Woman], Jaime Gouveia; *Assistência às delinquentes* [Assistance to Delinquents], Angélica Porto; *A educação dos anormais* [Education of the Abnormal], Deolinda Lopes Vieira; *Assistência e trabalho* [Assistance and Work], Maria O'Neill; *A influência da mulher na extinção da mendicância* [The Influence of Women in the Eradication of Begging], Jorge das Neves Larcher; *A luta anti-alcoólica nas escolas* [The Anti-Alcoholism Campaign in Schools], Adelaide Cabete; *Escolas ao ar livre* [Open-Air Schools], Regina do Carmo; *A mulher como educadora* [Women as Educators] Albertina Gambôa; *Situação da mulher casada nas relações matrimoniais dos bens de casal* [The Status of Married Woman in Marital Property Relations], Aurora Gouveia; *Educação dos indígenas nas colônias e suas vantagens* [Education of Indigenous in the Colonies and Its Advantages], Domingas Lazary Amaral; *Abolicionismo* [Abolitionism], Arnaldo Brazão; *Educação sexual* [Sexual Education], Paulina Luisi; *As ligas de bondade* [The Kindness Leagues], Maria O'Neill; *A influência dos espetáculos públicos na educação* [The Influence of Public Performances on Education], Victória Pais Freire de Andrade; *Proteção à mulher grávida e à criança* [Protection of Pregnant Woman and Children], Adelaide Cabete; *A mulher e a alimentação vegetariana* [Women and Vegetarian Diet], António Carvalho Brandão; *A mulher naturista* [The Naturist Woman], Julieta Ribeiro; *Solução biológica do problema educativo e Solução biológica do problema da assistência* [Biological Solution to the Educational Problem and Biological Solution to the Assistance Problem] Bentes Castel-Branco.

Analyzing the event's report, historian Zília Osório de Castro, who greatly contributed to the development of women's studies in Portugal, observed that,

[...] of the 25 theses presented, 17 were authored by women, demonstrating the existence of a determined and pioneering group of feminists in Portugal, although this reality had its downside. The analysis of the debates reveals, as a whole, a majority of male participants, 26 compared to 16 feminists. In other words, of the total names mentioned, about 60% were men, which carries its own significance, pointing to what I call "male feminism" of intervention and action¹⁵.

Castro, Anne Cova¹⁶, João Esteves and other scholars of feminism in Portugal participated, in May 2004, in the "Seminário Evocativo do I Congresso Feminista e da Educação em Portugal" [Evocative Seminar of the First Feminist and Education Congress in Portugal]. Eighty years later, in recalling the event, the aim was to give "face and life to the Portuguese feminists [...] who remained faithful to the feminist ideal"; to inscribe feminism into the history of Portugal, "through the evocation of its different forms of action in response to political contexts and its ongoing contribution to the modernization and democratization of Portuguese society throughout the 20th century"; and to develop an assessment of feminist thought and action in the country"¹⁷. Published in book form, some of the works that more directly referenced the 1924 Congress reflect a celebratory attitude that was also shared by the organizing committee of the 2004 Seminar:

By deciding to hold that Congress in 1924, the same year as its 10th anniversary, the National Council of Portuguese Women

¹⁵ CASTRO, Zília Osório de. "Seminário Evocativo do I Congresso Feminista e da Educação em Portugal" In *O Longo Caminho das Mulheres. Feminismos 80 Anos Depois*. Lisboa: Publicações Dom Quixote, 2007, p. 21. In Portuguese: "[...] das 25 teses apresentadas, 17 eram assinadas por mulheres, demonstrando a existência de um grupo aguerrido e pioneiro de feministas em Portugal, embora esta realidade tivesse a sua contraface. A análise dos debates revela, no seu conjunto, uma maioria de intervenientes masculinos, 26 para 16 feministas. Ou seja, no total dos nomes mencionados, cerca de 60% são de homens, o que não deixa de ter o seu significado próprio, apontando para o que chamo 'feminismo masculino' de intervenção e ação".

¹⁶ COVA, Anne. "O Primeiro Congresso Feminista e da Educação em Portugal numa Perspectiva Comparada" In *O Longo Caminho das Mulheres. 80 Anos Depois*. Lisboa: Publicações Dom Quixote, 2007, pp. 27-43.

¹⁷ AMÂNCIO, Lígia et al. *O Longo Caminho das Mulheres. 80 Anos Depois*. Lisboa: Publicações Dom Quixote, 2007, pp. 15-16. In Portuguese: "rosto e vida às feministas portuguesas [...] que se mantiveram fiéis ao ideal feminista"; "através da evocação das suas diferentes formas de ação em função dos contextos políticos e da sua permanente contribuição para a modernização e democratização da sociedade portuguesa ao longo do século XX; e desenvolver um balanço sobre o pensamento e a ação feministas no país".

marked an important milestone in the history of Portuguese feminism, promoting, for the first time in Portugal, an event aimed at “discussing and propagating feminist ideas”. Feminism was then embraced in both word and action by the first women who, at the beginning of the 20th century, fought for women’s rights in Portugal. Courageously, they challenged prejudice and conservatism, as highlighted in one of Adelaide Cabete’s remarks at that Congress: “To those timid souls who ask where Feminism will lead, we will respond: Feminism will end where all ideas of Progress and all generous hopes end, where all just aspirations end”¹⁸.

It is important to note, however, that João Esteves, a scholar of Portuguese feminist associations during the First Republic, took a more critical stance regarding the CNMP and republican feminists in general. He recalled the actions of women who, years before the foundation of the aforementioned association, were already advocating for women’s dignity—actions that were sometimes contrasting. Furthermore, by highlighting how the Uruguayan doctor Paulina Luisi was presented in one of the issues of the *Alma Feminina* bulletin, the historian critiqued “the tendency of Portuguese feminists to overly value the legislative advances achieved with the Republic, at the expense of a realistic analysis of their weaknesses, both in organizational terms and in concrete responses to their demands”¹⁹.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 458. In Portuguese: “Ao decidir realizar aquele Congresso [de 1924], no mesmo ano do seu 10º aniversário, o Conselho Nacional das Mulheres Portuguesas marcou uma etapa importante na história do feminismo português, promovendo, pela primeira vez, em Portugal, uma realização que visava ‘discutir e propagar as ideias feministas’. O feminismo era então assumido na palavra e na ação das primeiras mulheres que lutaram, no início do século XX, pelos direitos das mulheres em Portugal. De forma corajosa, desafiando o preconceito e o conservadorismo, como se destaca de uma das frases da intervenção de Adelaide Cabete naquele Congresso: ‘Àqueles timoratos que perguntam onde irá o Feminismo parar responder-lhes-emos: o Feminismo terminará onde acabam todas as ideias de Progresso e toda a esperança generosa, terminará onde acabam as aspirações justas’”.

¹⁹ ESTEVES, João Gomes. “Os Anos 20: a Afirmação de uma Nova Geração de Feministas” In *O Longo Caminho das Mulheres. 80 Anos Depois*. Lisboa: Publicações Dom Quixote, 2007, p. 78. In Portuguese: “tendência das feministas portuguesas em valorizar em demasia os avanços legislativos obtidos com a República, em detrimento de uma análise realista das suas debilidades, quer no plano organizativo, como nas respostas concretas às suas reivindicações”. In the aforementioned edition of the bulletin, Paulina Luisi was honored by the CNMP: “At the Kristiana Congress [Denmark], particularly when discussing the situation of illegitimate children within the family, Dr. Paulina Luisi demonstrated to the select feminist assembly how Portuguese legislation on this matter was much more advanced than that of many other countries. This brought about a great wave of sympathy for our country, as many women were unaware that it was at such a developed level of civilization”. CONSELHO NACIONAL DAS MULHERES PORTUGUESAS. “Dr^a Paulina Luisi” In *Alma Feminina: Boletim Oficial do Conselho Nacional das Mulheres Portuguesas*, Lisboa, V. V, n. 5 e 6, 1921, p. 22. In Portuguese: “No congresso de Kristiana [Dinamarca], principalmente, quando se tratava de discutir a situação dos filhos ilegítimos na família, a Dr^a Paulina Luisi mostrou à seleta assembleia

Recently, a master's thesis supervised by Anne Cova was published in book format, *History of the National Council of Portuguese Women (1914-1947)*. In this work, Célia Rosa Costa presents—much like the previously referenced works of Castro, Cova, and Esteves—data on the 1924 Congress, based on sources such as Arnaldo Brazão's report, while also offering pertinent reflections. First, the author notes that the very title of the event, which differed from most similar gatherings abroad by incorporating the word “education”, revealed the cautious stance of the CNMP, “since feminism was still a ‘misunderstood cause’ among the general Portuguese population” and also because “it was not in the feminists’ interest to confront the established power, given that the majority identified with the republican regime”²⁰. Additionally, Costa draws attention to the strategic effort of the organizing committee in inviting prominent male political figures and publicizing their participation in the Congress through the mainstream press—actions that lent a certain credibility to the CNMP. Finally, she clarifies it that the content of the theses presented, as well as the very definition of feminism upheld by those involved, aligned with a moderate current, “as it reconciles the traditionally assigned social roles of women—as mothers and wives—with the demand for participation in political and social activities”²¹.

As Mark Adams rightly pointed out, much of the historiography has established the idea that eugenics was a singular and coherent movement, primarily developed under the aegis of Anglo-Saxon states, guided by genetic heredity theories (especially of a Mendelian nature), and often associated with conservative and authoritarian political projects²². The ideas analyzed here contrast with this historiography, which, on various occasions, has overlooked the temporal, spatial, and social diversity in which eugenics spread, ignoring, for example, in the Portuguese case, the strong Christian and neo-Lamarckian tradition. Moreover, this historiography often fails to account for the fact that,

feminista como a legislação portuguesa neste ponto era muito mais avançada que a de muitos outros países. Valeu isto uma grande corrente de simpatia para o nosso país que muitas senhoras desconheciam estar num grau de civilização bastante desenvolvido”.

²⁰ COSTA, op. cit., p. 145. In Portuguese: “uma vez que o feminismo era ainda uma causa ‘mal compreendida’ do quadro geral da população portuguesa”; “às feministas não interessava confrontar o poder instituído, em virtude de ser o regime republicano aquele com que a maioria se identificava”.

²¹ Ibid., p. 151. In Portuguese: “uma vez que faz conciliar o papel social tradicionalmente atribuído às mulheres — de mãe e esposa — com a reivindicação do exercício das atividades política e social”.

²² ADAMS, Mark. B. “Toward a Comparative History” In ADAMS, Mark B. (Ed). *The Wellborn Science: Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil, and Russia*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

in the early 20th century, eugenics also attracted supporters from progressive political groups, such as feminists, liberals, and socialists²³.

Although the formalization of eugenics as a concept in Portugal occurred only in the early 1910s, the evolutionary discussions that began in the late 19th century laid the groundwork for questions about the future of the Portuguese race²⁴. Social problems such as alcoholism, prostitution, crime, juvenile delinquency, as well as mortality rates caused by poverty and endemic diseases, were on the rise. All these factors clearly obstructed, from the perspective of policymakers, national development and demanded the implementation of preventive and therapeutic measures to mitigate conditions that seemed to contribute to the weakening of the Portuguese people²⁵. After the Proclamation of the Republic in 1910, the regenerative discourse was thus incorporated into political rhetoric.

Recognizing that historiography itself is subject to historicization²⁶ and that, today, feminist theory increasingly questions major milestones²⁷ and the limits of certain feminist expressions²⁸, this study aims to interrogate precisely

²³ About the influence of eugenics within the progressive sphere, see: CLEMINSON, Richard. *Anarchism and Eugenics: an Unlikely Convergence, 1890-1940*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019; LAVRIN, Asunción. *Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, 1890-1940*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995; NADKARNI, Asha. *Eugenic Feminism: Reproductive Nationalism in the United States and India*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

²⁴ According to José Manuel Sobral, since the late 19th century, contemporary observers frequently resorted to racial explanations to justify Portugal's disappointing development. This context motivated anthropologists and social scientists, with an evolutionary mindset, to conduct statistical studies in an attempt to map degeneration in the country. SOBRAL, José Manuel. "O Norte, o Sul, a Raça, a Nação — Representações da Identidade Nacional Portuguesa (séculos XIX-XX)" In *Análise Social*, V. 39, n. 171, pp. 255- 284, 2004.

²⁵ GIESBRECHT, Daniel Florence. "Trabalhos de Antropologia e Etnologia: o Movimento Eugênico Português a partir da Perspectiva da Antropologia Histórica" In *Revista Científica do Centro Universitário do Rio São Francisco*, n. 30, pp. 361-384, 2021, p. 368.

²⁶ BARROS, José D'Assunção. *A Historiografia como Fonte Histórica*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2022.

²⁷ LAUGHLIN, Kathleen A. et al. "Is It Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor" In *Feminist Formations*, Baltimore, V. 22, n. 1, pp. 76-135, 2010; FRACCARO, Glaucia Cristina Candian. *Os Direitos das Mulheres: Feminismo e Trabalho no Brasil (1917-1937)*. Rio de Janeiro: FGV, 2018; ALVES, Iracélli da Cruz. *Feminismo Entre Ondas: Mulheres, PCB e Política no Brasil*. Tese (Doutorado em História)—Universidade Federal Fluminense, Niterói, 2020.

²⁸ In response to Nancy Fraser's text, *How Feminism Became Capitalism's Handmaiden*, Brenna Bhandar and Denise Ferreira da Silva noted that Fraser's observation—that feminism would have been co-opted by capitalism—had already been felt and problematized by Black and Third World feminists for decades. In this sense, we reference only a few of the classic works that address intersections of gender and race, for example: DAVIS, Angela. *Mulheres, Raça e Classe*. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2016; hooks, bell. *Não serei eu mulher?*. Lisboa: Orfeu Negro, 2018; GONZALEZ, Lélia. "Por um Feminismo Afro-Latino-Americano" In *Pensamento Feminista Hoje — Perspectivas Decoloniais*, Rio de Janeiro: Bazar do Tempo, 2020. Texts cited in the note: FRASER, Nancy. "How Feminism Became Capitalism's Handmaiden — And How to Reclaim It" In

some of those limits present in Portuguese institutionalized feminism of the 1920s²⁹. In response to this initiative, some might argue that there is a degree of anachronism here or that, given the conditions of the past, things could not have been otherwise. Despite evidence that other forms of contemporary feminism existed alongside that represented by the CNMP, our intention is primarily to highlight how certain movements, despite being distinct and seemingly contradictory (such as feminism and eugenics), could, given the historical circumstances, converge and even blend into larger and more complex projects or as a strategy for survival. If we cannot question past situations and their celebratory narratives, then we are doomed to repeat attitudes that, today, are no longer comprehensible.

Discourses on Sex

To develop his concept of biopolitics, Michel Foucault posed several questions, including the following: “[...] at a time when labor power is systematically exploited, could one tolerate it dissipating in pleasures, except for those, minimized to the utmost, that allow it to reproduce itself?”³⁰. With this in mind, let us move on to a brief consideration of the treatment of prostitution in the 19th and early 20th centuries in Portugal. In the mid-1800s, legislation related to the activity—such as the *Regulamento Policial das Meretrizes e Casas Toleradas da Cidade de Lisboa* [Police Regulation of Prostitutes and Tolerated Houses in the City of Lisbon], promulgated in 1858—aimed to remove prostitutes from visible public spaces “in order to safeguard the respectability and apparent decency of ‘respectable’ women”³¹. José Pais, who studied the issue in Lisbon, argued that the moralistic discourse condemning prostitution, which circulated among both supporters of the

The Guardian, 2013, e BHANDAR, Brenna; SILVA, Denise Ferreira da. “White Feminist Fatigue Syndrome” In *Critical Legal Thinking*, 2013. Nancy Fraser herself, along with other feminist theorists, issued a manifesto in favor of a feminism capable of necessarily articulating race and ethnicity, class and gender, in dialogue with ecosocialist agendas. ARRUIZZA, Cinzia; BHATTACHARYA, Thiti; FRASER, Nancy. *Feminismo para os 99%*. Lisboa: Objectiva, 2019.

²⁹ Regarding the problem, see also: ALMEIDA, Jaqueline Moraes de. “Limites e Possibilidades do Feminismo Português na Primeira Década do Século XX, a Partir da Análise de ‘Alma Feminina’” In *Revista de História das Ideias*, Coimbra, V. 41, pp. 141–164, 2023.

³⁰ FOUCAULT, Michel. *História da Sexualidade: a Vontade de Saber*. São Paulo: Paz & Terra, 2014, p. 10. In Portuguese: “[...] na época em que se explora sistematicamente a força de trabalho, poder-se-ia tolerar que ela fosse dissipar-se nos prazeres, salvo naqueles, reduzidos ao máximo, que lhe permitem reproduzir-se?”.

³¹ PAIS, José Machado. *A Prostituição e a Lisboa Boémia do Século XIX a Inícios do Século XX*. Lisboa: Ambar, 2008, p. 43. In Portuguese: “de maneira a salvaguardar a respeitabilidade e a decência aparente das mulheres ‘de bem’”.

regulation of the activity and the so-called abolitionists, was driven, among other reasons, by concerns about the spread of venereal diseases, especially among those of productive and reproductive age³². However, the project that sought to confine sexuality, entrusting the family with the “seriousness of the reproductive function” while simultaneously tolerating male pleasures restricted “to the bedroom or the brothel”³³, faced difficulties in sustaining itself in the face of the visible advancement of the contradictions within the capitalist system, including the development of feminism, for example. By the end of the 19th century, the failure of regulatory policies—those that broadly aimed at controlling the practices of prostitution—gave way to the abolitionist movement. This movement was championed by individuals—including a significant number of feminists—who “rejected the legalization of prostitution, as they saw it as a measure of repression and control over public women”³⁴.

In *Do Cabaré ao Lar* [From the Cabaret to the Home], Margareth Rago clearly explains the criticisms developed by abolitionists against the regulatory model. For them,

[...] the old method of monitoring prostitution had numerous flaws: first and foremost, it targeted only the woman, pursuing her for a type of relationship in which the man was equally involved. She was seized and confined in isolated, special houses, registered by the police as a professional prostitute, strictly monitored by both the police and doctors, accused of transmitting syphilis and other venereal diseases, and subjected to all the repression for practices deemed intolerable by society, while the man remained free from any responsibility. Furthermore, the result of the regulatory system then adopted was the opposite of what it had intended: clandestine prostitution had visibly increased, both here and in other countries. [...] But the point on which abolitionist criticism of the regulatory system most vigorously focused was that the legal registration of prostitutes trapped them and hindered their potential rehabilitation. The vice police were seen as a machine that transformed “occasional

³² Ibid., p. 46.

³³ Ibid., p. 47. In Portuguese: “seriedade da função reprodutora”; “à alcova ou ao bordel”.

³⁴ RAGO, Margareth. *Do Cabaré ao Lar: a Utopia da Sociedade Disciplinar e a Resistência Anarquista, Brasil (1890-1930)*. São Paulo: Paz & Terra, 2014, p. 145. In Portuguese: “recusavam a legalização da prostituição, pois viam neste ato uma medida de repressão e de controle sobre as mulheres públicas”.

whores” into “eternal whores”: the registered prostitute ended up becoming a perpetual prisoner of the police³⁵.

Broadly speaking, the same shift in understanding and treatment of prostitution observed in Portugal and other European countries also occurred in Brazil, Uruguay, and very likely in other countries, especially during the early decades of the 20th century. The international associations and congresses, which were so common during this period, played a crucial role in this convergence of ideas and practices.

***Abolicionismo*, by Arnaldo Brazão (1890–1968)**

On the fourth day of the Feminist and Educational Congress, Arnaldo Brazão, who also took on the role of secretary for the event, presented the thesis titled *Abolicionismo*. According to the report, this thesis was discussed by Angélica Porto (President of the Moral Section of the CNMP), Domingas Lazary do Amaral (Secretary of the Interior of the Council), and Jaime de Gouveia, a lawyer. “The regulation of prostitution is a hygienic error, a social injustice, a moral monstrosity, and a legal crime”—this was the epigraph chosen by Brazão for his thesis, recalling the words of the International Abolitionist Federation³⁶.

His work follows a typical format, segmented into an introduction—which immediately synthesizes abolitionism as “moral education”—and a justification based on the supposed scarcity of studies on the subject in Portugal³⁷; a literature review; the development of arguments capable

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 144–145. In Portuguese: “[...] o antigo método de vigilância da prostituição comportava inúmeras falhas: em primeiro lugar, visava apenas à mulher, perseguindo-a por um tipo de relação em que o homem também estava envolvido. Ela era sequestrada e confinada em casas isoladas e especiais, fichada na polícia como prostituta profissional, vigiada severamente pela polícia e pelos médicos, acusada de ser transmissora de sífilis e de outras doenças venéreas, sofrendo sozinha toda a repressão de práticas intoleráveis para a sociedade, enquanto o homem ficava isento de qualquer responsabilidade. Além disso, o resultado do sistema regulamentarista então adotado foi o oposto do que se propusera: a prostituição clandestina aumentara a olhos vistos, tanto aqui quanto em outros países. [...] Mas o ponto sobre o qual incidia mais vigorosamente a crítica abolicionista aos regulamentaristas era que o registro legal das prostitutas prendia-as e impedia sua possível recuperação. A polícia de costumes era vista como uma máquina que transformava ‘putas ocasionais’ em ‘putas eternas’: a prostituta inscrita acaba se tornando uma prisioneira perpétua da polícia”.

³⁶ BRAZÃO, Arnaldo. *Abolicionismo*. Lisboa: Tip. da Casa Garrett, 1924, p. 3. In Portuguese: “A regulamentação da prostituição é um erro higiênico, uma injustiça social, uma monstruosidade moral e um crime jurídico”. The International Abolitionist Federation was founded in 1875 in Liverpool by the English feminist Josephine Butler.

³⁷ Among Portuguese feminists, the topic of prostitution or “white slavery traffic” has appeared recurrently since at least the 1910s, in line with debates held abroad. Below, we list some articles on the subject that

of supporting his claims; and the proposition of alternative measures to regulationism. The explicitly feminist nature of the thesis is evident in the account of the process of consolidating an association focused on defending abolitionist arguments. “When they saw their efforts were in vain”—related to opposing the regulationist law of 1864 in England—doctors, lawyers, and “other people of high social standing” turned to Josephine Butler who, after the invitation,

[...] embarked on the crusade by founding the National Association of English Ladies and saw figures such as Florence Nightingale, Mme Lucas, sister of Stuart Mill, Mrs. Bright, daughter of Dr. Bright, the renowned doctor Inés Mac Laren, who even took her advocacy to Pope Leo XIII, the Duchess of Manchester, Crestina Alsop, Herbert Spencer, Stuart Mill, James Stansfeld, George Russell, Drs. Wood, Hodgson, Bell Taylor, and many others, stand by her side³⁸.

In addition to Josephine Butler and other English women, Brazão recalls the involvement of feminists such as Maria Deraismes (France) and Concepción Arenal (Spain) in the abolitionism. He also references the studies of Paulina Luisi, then a permanent member of the International Commission on White Slave Traffic of the League of Nations, who viewed the regulation regime as hateful, “because it is both favorable to vice and a relentless enemy of the fallen woman, entirely opposed to its mission as a repressive social law”³⁹. With this stance, the author conveyed that the arguments of a woman, Dr. Luisi, held the same impact and value as those put forth by male physicians, such as Ângelo da Fonseca, Silvio Rebelo, and Félix Renault—also referenced in the thesis.

Regarding the argumentation in favor of abolitionism, in addition to citing a body of literature developed by medical professionals, Arnaldo Brazão

were published in *A Madrugada* [The Dawn], the journal of the Liga Republicana das Mulheres Portuguesas [Republican League of Portuguese Women]: PEREIRA, Avelina Correia. “A Prostituição” In *A Madrugada*, Ano II, n. 13, 1912, p. 3; FAZENDA JÚNIOR. “A Prostituição”, *A Madrugada*, Ano II, n. 15, 1912, p. 2; LIGA REPUBLICANA DAS MULHERES PORTUGUESAS. “Escravidura Branca” In *A Madrugada*, Ano II, n. 15, p. 3; SERPA, Maria P. Bastos. “A Prostituição” In *A Madrugada*, Ano II, n. 19, 1913, cover page.

³⁸ BRAZÃO, op. cit., Abolicionismo, p. 4. In Portuguese: “[...] empreende a cruzada fundando a Associação Nacional de Damas Inglesas e vê colocarem-se a seu lado Florência Nightingale, M.me Lucas, irmã de Stuart Mill, Mrs. Bright, filha do dr. Bright, a célebre médica Inés Mac Laren que levou a sua propaganda até junto ao Papa Leão XIII, duquesa de Manchester, Crestina Alsop, Herbert Spencer, Stuart Mill, James Stansfeld, George Russel, os drs. Wood, Hodgson, Bell Taylor e tantos outros”.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 11. In Portuguese: “porque ao mesmo tempo é favorável ao vício e implacável inimigo da mulher caída, é completamente oposto à sua missão de lei social repressiva”.

presents a table containing English statistical data “concerning syphilis, extracted from the Army Medical Reports and published by [Abraham] Flexner”, an American physician⁴⁰. Brazão’s idea was to demonstrate that the number of people infected with syphilis significantly decreased after the abolition of the regulatory laws on prostitution.

In his book *Catholicism, Race and Empire: Eugenics in Portugal (1900–1950)*, Richard Cleminson emphasizes that the sanitary problems faced by Portugal during the period from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, such as the spread of venereal diseases, allowed for the alignment with the principles of reformist eugenics⁴¹. This essentially environmentalist eugenic model was characterized by its emphasis on public health measures aimed at preventing the transmission of diseases and improving the genetic quality of the population. The Portuguese psychiatrist Miguel Bombarda, for example, was one of the first to advocate that the dangers arising from acquired conditions were significantly greater than those originating from cases of hereditary degeneration, once again highlighting the considerable influence of Neo-Lamarckian ideas in the country: “Various intoxications, multiple infections, play a predominant role here. An alcoholic, a syphilitic, is much more dangerous for the offspring than, I know, a simple lunatic”⁴².

In the conclusions of his thesis, Arnaldo Brazão asserts that prostitution was not a crime, thus distancing himself from criminologists like Cesare Lombroso, who claimed that prostitutes were characterized “by their small cranial capacity and much heavier jaws than those of honest women”⁴³, or, to cite a Portuguese example, the anthropologist Mendes Correia, who believed that “Among prostitutes, as among criminals, degeneracy, neuroses, psychoses—especially moral insanity, hysteria, and mental deficiency—abound

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 8. In Portuguese: “respeitantes à sífilis, extraído dos Army Medical Reports e publicado por [Abraham] Flexner”. The statistical data used by Brazão were also published in the book *Prostitution in Europe: ABRAHAM FLEXNER. Prostitution in Europe*. New York: The Century Co., 1919, pp. 372–373.

⁴¹ CLEMINSON, Richard. *Catholicism, Race and Empire: Eugenics in Portugal (1900-1950)*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014, pp. 62-65.

⁴² BOMBARDA, Miguel. “A Esterilização dos Degenerados” In *A Medicina Contemporânea*, V. 13, n. 5, 1910, p. 34. In Portuguese: “As várias intoxicações, as múltiplas infecções, representam aqui um papel preponderante. Um alcoólico, um sífilítico, é muito mais perigoso para a progênie do que, eu sei, um simples alienado”.

⁴³ RAGO, op. cit., p. 138. In Portuguese: “por sua fraca capacidade craniana e por mandíbulas bem mais pesadas que as das mulheres honestas”.

in stigmatizations”⁴⁴ ⁴⁵. In his conclusions, Brazão also suggested a social prophylaxis that would provide free medical assistance to venereal disease patients and function parallel to the widespread dissemination of individual hygiene knowledge.

Arnaldo Brazão’s thesis was approved and praised by Angélica Porto and Domingas Lazary do Amaral. In the motion of the latter, we draw attention to the following statement, which, among others, legitimized the approval of the thesis by the commentator: “Considering that exceptional measures based on sex differentiation are inequitable and infringe upon individual freedom”⁴⁶ – we will revisit this argument at an appropriate time. Contrary to the position of these feminists, Jaime de Gouveia expressed some disagreements with the content of the thesis. Firstly, he argued that “If it is impossible to abolish prostitution, if it persists and develops despite all prohibitions and punishments, it is because it is part of our social environment, because it is an evil, a necessary evil as Saint Augustine said”⁴⁷. With such an argument, the commentator concluded that “if prostitution is a necessary evil, its regulation may not aggravate the situation but rather alleviate it”⁴⁸. The thesis rapporteur countered Gouveia’s comments by invoking the data borrowed from Flexner’s study, concluding that, “Even if abolitionism cannot reduce the number of prostitutes, it at least visibly decreases the number of syphilitics,

⁴⁴ CORREIA, Mendes. *Os Criminosos Portugueses: Estudos de Antropologia Criminal*. Coimbra: Tip. França Amado, 1914, p. 77. In Portuguese: “Entre as prostitutas, como entre os criminosos, a degenerescência, as nevroses, as psicoses, especialmente a loucura moral, a histeria e a debilidade mental, espalham abundantes estigmatizações”.

⁴⁵ In the same study, however, Mendes Correia considers the relevance of the social environment for the development of certain criminals. For him, some prostitutes would be victims of conditions such as “family abandonment, mistreatment, poverty, seduction, unhappy love, poor or nonexistent education, etc.”. *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78. In Portuguese: “o abandono de família, maus tratos, miséria, sedução, amores infelizes, má ou nula educação, etc.”. According to the studies by Patrícia Ferraz de Matos, Mendes Correia was one of the pioneers in linking eugenics with Lombrosian degeneration theory and neolamarckism. Although he did not agree with all of Lombroso’s assertions, Correia fully accepted the notion of inherited criminal predisposition. At the same time, he highlighted the benefits of education for those deemed deserving, arguing that it would stimulate civic consciousness, good work habits, and ultimately, a healthy and eugenic lifestyle. MATOS, Patrícia Ferraz de. *Anthropology, Nationalism and Colonialism: Mendes Correia and the Porto School of Anthropology*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2023, pp. 182-195.

⁴⁶ BRAZÃO, op. cit., O Primeiro Congresso Feminista..., p. 181. In Portuguese: “Considerando que as medidas de caráter excepcional baseadas na diferenciação dos sexos são iníquas e atentatórias da liberdade individual”.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 182. In Portuguese: “Se é impossível abolir a prostituição, se ela apesar de todas as proibições e castigos subsiste e se desenvolve, é porque faz parte do nosso meio social, é porque ela é um mal, um mal necessário como o disse Santo Agostinho”.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* In Portuguese: “se a prostituição é um mal necessário a sua regulamentação talvez o não agrave, antes o minore”.

which is something”⁴⁹ 50. Furthermore, Brazão, in a courageous move—given that the Feminist and Educational Congress was, as previously mentioned, legitimized by republican authorities—seized the opportunity to lament that the Republic’s legislation not only “maintained what was humiliating” but also made “the already existing measures” regarding prostitution in the country “even more oppressive and hateful”⁵¹.

Educação Sexual, by Paulina Luisi (1875–1949)

In dialogue with Brazão’s thesis, particularly in his concern about venereal diseases, Paulina Luisi presented the paper *Educação Sexual*, whose conclusions, as explicitly stated by the doctor herself, were debated and approved in previous congresses — 1st American Congress of the Child, Buenos Aires, 1916; 2nd Congress of Medicine, Montevideo, 1921; 3rd American Congress of the Child, Rio de Janeiro, 1922; and the International Congress of Social Hygiene, Paris, 1923. In the thesis in question, Luisi defines and repeatedly emphasizes what she understands by sexual education: “it is the pedagogical action that aims to subject the sexual instinct to the action of the will under the control of an educated, conscious, and responsible intelligence”⁵². Based on this conceptualization, she establishes a methodology that integrates the “knowledge of things” — that is, knowledge of life and its respective laws, made possible through disciplines such as Natural History, Botany, Zoology, Anatomy, and Physiology — and the “moral knowledge of sexual issues”. Although she does not provide detailed explanations about this latter type of knowledge, she references a study, also authored by her, where

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 184. In Portuguese: “Se o abolicionismo não consegue diminuir o número de prostitutas, daqui ressalta logo à primeira vista, que pelo menos, faz diminuir o número dos sífilíticos o que já é alguma coisa”.

⁵⁰ In 1912, Avelina Pereira regretted: “But there are women who disdain the poor lost souls and there are men (men? no: monsters!) who even say that *prostitution is necessary!* It is difficult to believe, but it is true. Therefore, any effort against prostitution is not enough. Let us work for the emancipation of our sisters, let us fight for women’s independence, for a free woman through thought and independent through work will never descend to the vile profession of a prostitute”. PEREIRA, op. cit., p. 3. In Portuguese: “Mas há mulheres que desprezam as pobres extraviadas e há homens (homens? não: monstros!) que até dizem que a prostituição é necessária! Custa a crer mas é verdade. Por isso toda a guerra à prostituição é pouca. Trabalhem para a emancipação das nossas irmãs, lutemos pela independência da mulher, pois que a mulher livre pelo pensamento e independente pelo trabalho, jamais descerá ao vil mister de prostituta”.

⁵¹ BRAZÃO, op. cit., O Primeiro Congresso Feminista..., p. 183. In Portuguese: “deixou ficar o que era humilhante”; “ainda mais opressivas e odientas as medidas já existentes”.

⁵² LUISI, Paulina. *Educação Sexual*. Lisboa: Tip. da Casa Garrett, 1924, p. 3. In Portuguese: “é a ação pedagógica que pretende submeter o instinto sexual à ação da vontade sob o domínio da inteligência instruída, consciente e responsável”.

the issue was more thoroughly addressed. Following these leads, from the article “Plan y Métodos de Enseñanza Sexual”, published in *Acción Femenina* [Female Action], a periodical of the *Consejo Nacional de Mujeres del Uruguay* [National Council of Women of Uruguay], we recover a brief summary in which Luisi distinguishes between the concepts of instruction — equivalent to what she termed as knowledge of life in the thesis — and sexual education:

It is necessary, then, to establish two major chapters in what is called sexual education: sexual instruction, which pertains to scientific knowledge on the subject, and sexual education, which, penetrating into the realms of ethics, encompasses within its lessons the gospel of a new morality based on human respect and individual responsibility within collective life. This education should develop, as fundamental to fulfilling the morality it teaches, two great and powerful virtues within the strength of will: character and a sense of responsibility⁵³.

In the 1916 text *Algunas ideas sobre Eugenia* [Some Ideas on Eugenics]⁵⁴, Paulina Luisi already expressed her affinity for the French eugenic model, particularly that promoted by the vice president of the French Eugenics Society, Adolphe Pinard, an obstetrician recognized as one of the pioneers of childcare in Europe and one of the world’s leading experts in prenatal pediatric care⁵⁵:

Eugenics, in one of its practical applications, seeks precisely to civilize this generative instinct, directing it towards the production of descendants who represent progress over their predecessors. These words also encapsulate the concept of Eugenics as understood by Pinard, the old champion of puericulture, who could not limit his work to the care of the child during gestation and after birth⁵⁶.

⁵³ LUISI, Paulina. “Plan y Métodos de Enseñanza Sexual” In *Acción Femenina*, Año IV, n. 27, 1920, p. 14. In Spanish: “Hay que establecer, pues, dos grandes capítulos en la llamada Enseñanza sexual: la instrucción sexual que corresponde a los conocimientos científicos relativos a la materia, y la educación sexual que, penetrando en los dominios de la ética encierra en sus lecciones el evangelio de una nueva moral, basada en el respeto humano y en la responsabilidad individual dentro de la vida colectiva, educación que debe desarrollar como fundamentales para el cumplimiento de la moral que enseña, dos grandes y poderosas virtudes en la fuerza de la voluntad: el carácter y el sentimiento de la responsabilidad”.

⁵⁴ LUISI, Paulina. *Algunas Ideas Sobre Eugenia*. Montevideo: El Siglo Ilustrado, 1916.

⁵⁵ DUNN, Peter M. “Adolphe Pinard (1844–1934) of Paris and Intrauterine Paediatric Care” In *Archives of Disease in Childhood: Fetal and Neonatal*, n. 91, pp. 231–232, 2006.

⁵⁶ PAULINI, op. cit., *Algunas ideas sobre eugenia*, p. 7. In Spanish: “La Eugenia en una de sus aplicaciones prácticas trata, precisamente, de civilizar este instinto de la generación, encaminándolo a la producción

Pinard argued that maternal protection and monitoring during pregnancy were essential for the health of the fetus (intrauterine puericulture) and later for the newborn (extrauterine puericulture). However, the French physician sought to extend puericulture beyond maternal prenatal and postnatal care. In his 1899 text, *De la Conservation et de l'Amélioration de l'Espèce* [On the Conservation and Improvement of the Species], he outlined a broad program of medical eugenics based on “preconceptional puericulture”⁵⁷. This strong emphasis on the health and hereditary value of parents was expressed through traditional pro-natalist and neo-Lamarckian language, encapsulated in the concepts of “Eugênica” (the study of eugenic practices, focusing on understanding their methods) and “Eugenética” (the dissemination of ideal reproductive conditions for effective application, aiming to conserve and improve the human species). These concepts were especially valued among eugenicists in Latin countries⁵⁸.

For Adolphe Pinard, the mission of puericulture was to determine the means to preserve and improve the human species, both through the selection of parents before conception and through proper care of the mother and child. In October 1922, responding to an invitation from the Belgian Society of Eugenics, Pinard delivered a lecture in which he emphasized that the goals of puericulture could only be achieved through a campaign of “rational sexual education”⁵⁹. This perspective was equally shared by Paulina Luisi.

In the conclusions of the thesis presented at the Lisbon Congress, Luisi proposed pedagogical guidelines for the implementation of sexual education in schools:

II

Sexual Education should begin with the awakening of a child's intelligence and continue from the maternal school through the entire duration of their school years.

de descendientes que señalen un progreso sobre sus antecesores. Estas palabras también sintetizan el concepto de la Eugénica de Pinard, el viejo campeón de la puericultura, que no podía limitar su tarea al cultivo del niño durante la gestación y después del Nacimiento”.

⁵⁷ PINARD, Adolphe. “De la Conservation et de l'Amélioration de l'Espèce” In *Revue Scientifique*, V. 1, pp. 167-174, 1899.

⁵⁸ Regarding Latin eugenics, see: TURDA, Marius; GILLETTE, Aaron. *Latin Eugenics in Comparative Perspective*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014.

⁵⁹ APERT, Eugène. “Les Journées Eugéniques Internationales de Bruxelles et la Fondation de la Ligue Nationale Belge Contre le Péril Vénérien” In *Paris Médical*, n. 46, pp. 322-333, 1922.

III

Sexual Education is the work of both the family and the school. [...]

VII

Sexual Education should not exist as a special subject in school curriculum [...]. The concepts it includes should be integrated into the subjects to which they belong, blended, so to speak, with the rest of the related analogous subjects, distributed across the disciplines of Natural History, Physiology, Anatomy, Hygiene, Prophylaxis, and Moral Education. [...]

X

No distinction should be made in the education of both sexes. Boys' and girls' schools should have the same curriculum as far as possible to achieve the *desideratum* of rational education: the Coeducation⁶⁰.

Analyzing Paulina Luisi's work on the topic of sexual education, Fernanda Cedrani and Santiago Zemaitis highlighted that it was based on medical knowledge that the introduction and recommendation of behavioral norms to populations were justified⁶¹. They highlight how the biological sciences, eugenics, and morality were intertwined in the discourse of the Uruguayan physician:

According to Luisi, the concern for hygiene and morality was considered “the need for physical and mental health”, and it was in defense of health that moral principles were established. She expressed that “morality must be based on science”. Again, sexuality, morality, and reproduction were strongly associated in her proposal⁶².

⁶⁰ LUISI, op. cit., Educação sexual, pp. 5-7. In Spanish: “II A **Educação Sexual** deve começar desde o despertar da inteligência da criança e deve prosseguir, a partir da escola maternal, durante toda a duração da vida escolar. [...] III A **Educação Sexual** é ao mesmo tempo a obra da família e da escola [...]. VII A **Educação Sexual** não deve existir como uma matéria especial nos programas escolares [...]. As noções que compreendem devem confundir-se nas matérias à quais pertencem, amalgamadas por assim dizer, com o resto das nações [sic] correlativas análogas, disseminadas nos programas de História Natural, Fisiologia, Anatomia, Higiene, Profilaxia e Moral. [...] X Não deve estabelecer-se nenhuma diferença no ensino de ambos os sexos [...]. As escolas masculinas e femininas devem ter os mesmos programas enquanto o seja possível alcançar o *desideratum* da educação racional: A Coeducação”.

⁶¹ CEDRANI, Fernanda Sosa; ZEMAITIS, Santiago. “Educación sexual, eugenesia y moral en el pensamiento de Paulina Luisi. La experiencia de la cátedra de Higiene Social (Uruguay, 1926-1930)” In *Mora*, Buenos Aires, n. 27, pp. 7-26, 2021, p. 14.

⁶² Ibid, p. 14. In Spanish: “Según Luisi, la preocupación por la higiene y la moral eran ‘la necesidad de la salud física y psíquica’ y en defensa de la salud es que se dictaminaban principios de orden moral. Expresaba que ‘La moral debe fundarse en la ciencia’. Nuevamente sexualidad, moral y reproducción quedaban fuertemente asociadas en su propuesta”.

Thus, despite appearing disruptive to some at the time—due to its public treatment of traditionally private matters and its advocacy for projects such as coeducation—Luisi, ultimately, did not abandon the idea of a “natural function”, which, since Rousseau⁶³ at least, had been associated with the feminine role in reproduction. Instead of liberating women from this condition, she and other intellectuals of the period attempted, particularly through their discourses, to subject men as well to the dictates of nature, focusing on the preservation and improvement of the race. In revisiting Foucault’s inquiry, we note that the period which systematically exploited labor—considering labor broadly and diversely, encompassing workers in factories, monoculture farms, colonial mines, domestic spaces, etc.—coincided with advancements in the technologies of sex, particularly represented by medicine and eugenic programs. As Foucault observed, the analysis of heredity from the second half of the 19th century “placed sex (sexual relations, venereal diseases, marital alliances, perversions) in a position of ‘biological responsibility’ regarding the species”⁶⁴. By merging the useful—the need for healthy and disciplined bodies—with the pleasurable—the control of women’s movement—the sciences of the period helped legitimize a discourse that, on the surface, elevated women to the status of emancipated beings, as they were entrusted with the most important mission in that context: ensuring the future and improvement of the race.

A Luta Anti-Alcoólica nas escolas, by Adelaide Cabete (1867–1935)

The thesis of Adelaide Cabete, *A Luta Anti-Alcoólica nas Escolas*, points to several of the arguments she had previously developed⁶⁵. Following a

⁶³ ROUSSEAU, Jean-Jacques. *Emílio ou Da Educação*. Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 1995.

⁶⁴ FOUCAULT, op. cit., p. 128. In Portuguese: “colocava o sexo (as relações sexuais, as doenças venéreas, as alianças matrimoniais, as perversões) em posição de ‘responsabilidade biológica’ com relação à espécie”.

⁶⁵ It is important to highlight that Adelaide Cabete was a Miguel Bombarda’s student in the Physiology and Histology courses at the Lisbon Medical-Surgical School. As previously mentioned, Bombarda was aligned with theories about acquired states and saw alcohol as one of the primary agents of degeneration. In an article published in 1904, he even advocated for legislation that would be forbidden marriage between individuals considered “defective”, including alcoholics, syphilitics, and people with mental disorders. BOMBARDA, Miguel. “Degenerescência das Raças” In *A Medicina Contemporânea*, V. 7, n. 32, 1904, p. 254. In 1910, in the Chamber of Deputies, the topic was discussed by Duarte Gustavo de Roboredo Sampaio e Mello, who defended the prohibition of marriage between individuals considered degenerate. He argued that the State should not allow the marital union of syphilitics, tuberculars, lepers, chronic alcoholics, epileptics, and those with heart diseases. Although the proposal was not approved, it demonstrates the concern with the physiological decline of the Portuguese race and, simultaneously, the mobilization of biopower mechanisms aimed at regenerating future generations. SERRADO, Ricardo Fernando Fontes Jesus. *O Problema Corpo-Mente no Portugal Contemporâneo: para uma Epistemologia do Desporto (1870-1910)*. Tese

structure similar to the works of Brazão and Luisi, Cabete's work presents a medical definition of alcoholism, followed by a listing of the main harms caused by the disease. According to the reporter, the greatest of these harms is the transmission of various conditions to the offspring of alcoholics, "such as the propensity for diseases, pauperism, and atavistic lesions so severe that the descendants end up as "human abortions or social monsters"⁶⁶. To legitimize her point, the doctor presents statistics developed by Charrin [sic], who found that in a children's hospital, 80% of the patients were kids of "alcoholics"⁶⁷. Like her nephew, Cabete adopts a liberal stance, rejecting direct State intervention in solving the problem of alcoholism. For her, the solution would involve expanding access to treatment for the afflicted, improving the conditions of the working class (raising wages, providing hygienic housing, promoting leisure activities, etc.), and, fundamentally, implementing an educational project aimed at school-aged children:

It is necessary to engrave in the minds of children the harmful effects of alcohol because the outcomes we seek are more certain than those achieved through propaganda among adults. Many adults are so accustomed to alcohol that they cannot live without it; it has become a physiological necessity for them. In contrast, a child, still free from such a vice, is an excellent field in which to cultivate a fear of alcohol.

This underscores the great mission of the Educator in this relentless battle, in which thousands upon thousands of good wills and kind hearts are engaged⁶⁸.

Knowing that the late 19th century saw a process of feminization of primary education in various countries, including Portugal⁶⁹, it will once

(Doutorado em História)—Lisboa: Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, 2021, p. 192.

⁶⁶ CABETE, Adelaide. *A Luta Anti-Alcoólica nas Escolas*. Lisboa: Tip. da Casa Garrett, 1924, p. 3. In Portuguese: "condições várias de receptividade de doenças, como o pauperismo e lesões atávicas de tal gravidade que os descendentes acabam por serem uns abortos humanos ou uns monstros sociais".

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 4. It is likely that "Charrin" is actually Élisée Charra, the author of the study *Contribution à L'Étude de L'Alcoolisme Héritaire* [Contribution to the Study of Hereditary Alcoholism], published in 1906.

⁶⁸ CABETE, op. cit., p. 6. In Portuguese: "É preciso gravar no cérebro das crianças os malefícios do álcool, porque os resultados que nós temos em vista são mais seguros do que a propaganda feita entre os adultos. Nestes, muitos há que estão tão habituados ao álcool que não podem passar sem ele, é para eles uma necessidade fisiológica, enquanto que a criança, ainda livre de tal vício, é um excelente campo para nela se desenvolver o medo pelo álcool. Daqui a grande missão do Educador nesta luta sem tréguas em que andam empenhados milhares e milhares de boas vontades, milhares de corações bondosos".

⁶⁹ ADÃO, Áurea. "A História da Profissão Docente em Portugal: Balanço da Investigação Realizada nas Últimas Décadas" In *Encontros Ibéricos de História da Educação*, Porto, V. 1, pp. 123–135, 1992, p. 125.

again be women who are tasked with solving the problems associated with the “destruction of the home” and the generation of “deformed offspring”. Cabete herself, when historicizing the anti-alcohol movement, highlights the involvement of women, “not because they [women] are more prone to vice, but because they directly suffer and feel the intemperance of men to whom they have tied their life”⁷⁰.

A mulher naturista, by Julieta Ribeiro (s/d)

The thesis developed by Julieta Adelina Menezes Rodrigues Ribeiro, author of the book *Culinária Vegetariana, Vegetalina e Menús Frugívoros* [Vegetarian Cooking, Plant-Based Cuisine, and Frugivore Recipes], presents a format that differs from the others analyzed, as it is a compilation of propositions. Despite this, her work strongly resonates with the theses of Brazão, Luisi, and Cabete, as it suggests that a natural diet⁷¹, without the consumption of meat, could prevent social ills such as alcoholism and syphilis. However, the majority of the author’s propositions establish a connection between the feminine element, the regeneration of the race, and the moralization of society: “Human happiness can only be the work of women, who hold the conquests of knowledge, building the modern home on the ruins of the past”, “From daughters, sisters, mothers, and wives should come the cry for universal redemption”, etc.⁷².

⁷⁰ CABETE, op. cit., p. 4. In Portuguese: “destruição do lar”; “frutos disformes”; “não porque ela [a mulher] seja mais viciosa, mas porque ela que mais diretamente sofre e sente as intemperanças do homem a quem ligou a sua vida”.

⁷¹ O *Vegetariano* [The Vegetarian], a periodical founded and edited by Julieta’s husband, Jerónimo Caetano Ribeiro, published a list of the advantages of plant-based diet, which included the following points: “8 – Overcomes drunkenness; 10 – Clarifies the mind; 11 – Strengthens the will; 12 – Softens the character; 13 – Prevents crimes; 15 – Frees the kitchen wives; 16 – Brings joy to the family; 17 – **Prevents divorce**; 18 – Prevents all social evils”. ANGELATZ Y ALBORNA, Juan. “Ventagens da Alimentação Natural” In *O Vegetariano*, Porto, V. 13, n. 9 e 10, 1922, p. 178. In Portuguese: “8 – Vence a embriaguez; 10 – Clarifica a mente; 11 – Fortifica a vontade; 12 – Suaviza o caráter; 13 – Evita o crime; 15 – Liberta a mulher da cozinha; 16 – Provoca a alegria na família; 17 – **Impede o divórcio**; 18 – Impede todos os males sociais”. The disclosure of an advantage related to the maintenance of marriage, underlined by us, highlights the recurrence of one of the moral values of the period which, ruffle speaking, associated divorce with a woman’s lack of commitment to safeguarding her family, even if made up of a husband alcoholic and violent.

⁷² Julieta Ribeiro’s thesis was also published in the journal *O Vegetariano*: RIBEIRO, Julieta. “Defesa da Tese Naturista” In *O Vegetariano*, V. 15, n. 9 e 10, pp. 19–23, 1924, p. 1. In Portuguese: “A felicidade humana só pode ser obra da mulher, detentora das conquistas do saber, edificando o lar moderno nas ruínas do passado”; “Das filhas, irmãs, mães e esposas deve partir o grito de redenção universal”.

The focus on female knowledge and education, expressed in the idea that human happiness can only be achieved when women possess the fruits of knowledge, echoes eugenic proposals that saw educated and healthy women as fundamental elements for the strengthening of the nation. This perspective also aligns with the European hygiene movement, which advocated for individual hygiene as a means of improving public health. Additionally, vegetarianism, by advocating a natural diet, aimed to prevent social problems such as alcoholism and syphilis, reflecting the principles of reformist eugenics⁷³.

In the thesis presented, Julieta Ribeiro praises the qualities of her sex, contrasting them with the “ferocity of war” and the “disordered ambition for power” — characteristics associated with the manhood — but does so without questioning a supposed essence or feminine nature, based on attributes like kindness, sensitivity, and compassion. Furthermore, her naturalist discourse, seemingly opposed to any form of barbarism and imbued with a civilizing morality, becomes starkly inconsistent with the glorification of colonial violence. At one point in her thesis, she writes:

In the expansion of nationality, men always need to seek the indispensable support of women. How can Portugal colonize the Alentejo plain and the vast African colonial empire? Certainly, by finding steadfast support from Portuguese women, who have so often demonstrated their patriotism and social value⁷⁴.

To conclude, we present another inconsistency, perhaps the most evident, present in the naturalist’s thesis: despite women being persistently identified as the primary agents of physical regeneration and social moralization, the ultimate desirable outcome was a “masculine, strong, and virtuous” Republic—masculine attributes—resulting from the ingenious conception of biologically perfect citizens⁷⁵.

⁷³ To understand the history of vegetarianism and its connections with eugenics and hygiene movements, see: BRAGA, Isabel Drumond. “Em Busca do Novo Éden no Século XX: os Portugueses e a Fundação de Colônias Naturistas no Brasil” In *História, Ciências, Saúde - Manguinhos*, Rio de Janeiro, V. 25, n. 3, pp. 659-678, 2018; BERNARDINO, Maria Gabriela; CARVALHO, Leonardo Dallacqua de. “Sociedade Vegetariana Brasileira: Tópicos sobre Eugenia, Moral e Higiene por Meio da Trajetória de Francisco Jaguaribe (1917-1923)” In *Outros Tempos: Pesquisa em Foco - História*, V. 21, n. 37, pp. 10-32, 2024.

⁷⁴ RIBEIRO, op. cit., p. 2. In Portuguese: “Na expansão da nacionalidade tem sempre o homem de solicitar o auxílio indispensável da mulher. Como poderá Portugal colonizar a planície do Alentejo e o vasto império colonial africano? De certo, encontrando apoio decidido na mulher portuguesa, que tantas vezes tem afirmado o seu patriotismo e o seu valor social”.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 3. In Portuguese: “máscula, forte e virtuosa”.

Educação dos Indígenas nas Colônias e suas Vantagens, by Domingas Lazary do Amaral (1883–1954)

We intentionally left the analysis of the thesis authored by Domingas do Amaral until the end, because its content reveals: I) that some advocates of women’s emancipation—including, evidently, some feminists—ended up entangled in discussions about biological determinism, falling into contradictions⁷⁶; II) and that some of these individuals, by participating in certain negotiations, contributed to the promotion of an apparently modern and hygienic domesticity that, in addition to keeping women in a social role related to their physiological function, seems to have been fundamental to the consolidation of a national identity that, in the Portuguese case, had colonialism as an important element.

Before we address the main points of the thesis, we need to contextualize it: simultaneously with the implementation of new republican legislation, which, among other aspects, defined the rules of colonial administration and established the legal status of so-called indigenous people, there was a prevalent “modern colonialist ideology, based on the work of the Geographical Society [...] and which spread throughout Portuguese society”⁷⁷. José Luís García, a scholar of the intellectual output of journalist and anti-colonial activist Mário Domingues⁷⁸, argued that the fundamental vectors of this

⁷⁶ Using a definition of feminism— “the resistance of women to accept roles, social, economic, political, ideological situations, and psychological characteristics that are based on the existence of a hierarchy between men and women, from which there is discrimination against women”—Lélia Gonzalez proposes to replace the terms “men” and “women” with “whites” and “blacks”, respectively, to achieve a good definition of the anti-racist struggle. She explains that this correspondence in meaning occurs because both racism and sexism stem from biological differences to establish themselves as ideologies of domination. GONZALEZ, op. cit., p. 55. In Portuguese: “resistência das mulheres em aceitar papéis, situações sociais, econômicas, políticas, ideológicas e características psicológicas que tenham como fundamento a existência de uma hierarquia entre homens e mulheres, a partir da qual a mulher é discriminada”. Recall that, in commenting on Brazão’s thesis, Domingas Lazary argued that “exceptional measures based on the differentiation of the sexes are inequitable and infringe upon individual freedom”. BRAZÃO, op. cit., O Primeiro Congresso Feminista..., p. 181. In Portuguese: “medidas de caráter excepcional baseadas na diferenciação dos sexos são iníquas e atentatórias da liberdade individual”.

⁷⁷ DOMINGUES, Mário. *A Afirmação Negra e a Questão Colonial. Textos, 1919-1928*. Lisboa: Tinta da China, 2022, p. 51. In Portuguese: “ideologia colonialista moderna, baseada nos trabalhos da Sociedade de Geografia [...] e que se disseminou por toda a sociedade portuguesa”.

⁷⁸ Mário Domingues (1899–1977) was a journalist, a columnist, a translator, and a writer who advocated for black empowerment and anti-colonialism. He and Domingas do Amaral share common identity elements: both were born in colonial territories—he in São Tomé and Príncipe, and she in Angola; in addition, they were both children of African mothers and Portuguese fathers. See: ROLDÃO, Cristina et al. *Tribuna Negra: Origens do Movimento Negro em Portugal (1911-1933)*. Lisboa: Orfeu Negro, 2023, p. 127. As a “mixed-race” individual, it is likely that Domingas do Amaral have occupied different positions on the power hierarchy of human relations: superior to the indigenous people of the colonies, and, at the same time, insufficiently

ideological construction “were the idea of the civilizing colonial vocation of the Portuguese people, altruistically carried out towards the Africans, and the humanitarian paternalism towards blacks”⁷⁹.

“Resulting from her experience as an educator in Angola”⁸⁰, Domingas do Amaral’s thesis advocates for an education project for the indigenous peoples of the Portuguese colonies led by a well-prepared contingent that could serve as a good example to the colonized. For this reason, the educator, in the conclusions of her thesis, calls for the Depósito Geral de Degredados de Angola [General Deposit of Exiles in Angola] to be replaced by agricultural colonies situated away from Luanda. In line with this modern colonialist ideology, Amaral urges that soldiers should not be sent to subdue the colonized, as they, instead of being called to reason

[...] with deadly weapons that devastate their huts, excite their warrior instincts, and at the same time, while the sword seemingly annihilates them, it fosters a new feeling of revenge, which sooner or later becomes a terrible weapon against its victor. This is a matter of history. The Motherland should seek to gain a friend in every indigenous person, not an enemy whose unleashed wrath it must fear⁸¹.

Except for a brief part of the thesis where she describes, almost in the manner of a European traveler or Jesuit of the 16th and 17th centuries, the excessive indolence of the indigenous people⁸², Domingas do Amaral pays little attention to the colonized women. Regarding them, she states that despite working harder than men – “The indigenous mother is solely

white to, for example, deal with other themes recurrently discussed among feminists in the metropolis.

⁷⁹ DOMINGUES, op. cit., p. 51. In Portuguese: “foram a ideia da vocação colonial civilizadora dos portugueses, altruisticamente levada aos africanos, e o paternalismo humanitário em relação aos negros”.

⁸⁰ CASTRO, Zília Osório de; ESTEVES, João. *Dicionário no Feminino (Séculos XIX-XX)*. Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 2005, p. 283. In Portuguese: “Resultado da vivência de educadora em Angola”.

⁸¹ AMARAL, Domingas Lazary. *Educação dos Indígenas nas Colônias e suas Vantagens*. Lisboa: Tip. da Casa Garrett, 1924, pp. 13-14. In Portuguese: “[...] com arma mortífera que arrasa as suas cubatas, excitam o seu instinto guerreiro, e ao mesmo tempo que a espada, aparentemente o aniquila vai dando vida a um novo sentimento de vingança, que, cedo ou tarde, se torna em arma terrível contra o seu vencedor. Isto é da História. A Mãe Pátria deve procurar conquistar um amigo em cada indígena, e não um inimigo de quem tenha a temer as iras desencadeadas”.

⁸² bell hooks draw attention to this: “When discussing black people, the focus often falls on black men; when discussing women, the focus tends to be on white women. This is particularly evident in the vast corpus of feminist literature”, hooks, bell. *Não Serei eu Mulher?*. Lisboa: Orfeu Negro, 2018, p. 26. In Portuguese: “Quando se fala de gentes negras, a atenção tende a recair nos *homens* negros; quando se fala de mulheres, a atenção tende a recair nas mulheres *brancas*. Isto é particularmente flagrante no vasto corpus da literatura feminista”.

responsible for supporting her sometimes numerous offspring” — they do everything “without the slightest shadow of criteria”⁸³. Besides, differences related to family organization, the author reveals other distinctions, always establishing hierarchies. For example, she makes distinctions between those who do domestic work and those who give orders, and between the clean and the dirty: “[...] I remember, we would talk about the struggle we had to endure to ensure that the servants dried the dishes with appropriate towels: they would use the first rag, dirty and tattered, that they came across on the floor”⁸⁴.

In *Couro Imperial* [Imperial Leather], Anne McClintock proposes the development of a social history of soap—until then obliterated due to its association with the female domain of domesticity—in order to reflect on the domestic value of women in industrial capitalism. Studying the English case, she observed that, in the last decade of the 19th century, soap sales surged, while “advertising emerged as a central cultural form of mercantile capitalism”⁸⁵. In one of the advertisements analyzed by McClintock, from the “Pears Soap” brand, divided into two parts and featuring two boys, a bar of soap, and a mirror, the upper part shows a white boy, dressed in a white apron, offering a bar of soap to a black boy who, from within a bathtub, looks at the water in fear. In the lower part of the advertisement, the black boy is outside the bathtub, with his genitalia covered by a white towel, and he looks in a mirror held by the other character: his face, the place of identity, remains black, but the rest of his body has changed color, becoming white. According to McClintock’s interpretation,

The white boy appears as the agent of history and the male heir of progress, showing the reflection of his “inferior” brother in the European mirror of self-awareness. In the Victorian mirror, the black boy witnesses his predetermined fate of imperial metamorphosis but remains a passive racial hybrid, part white and part black, brought to the brink of civilization by the twin mercantile fetishes of soap and mirror⁸⁶.

⁸³ AMARAL, op. cit., p. 11. In Portuguese: “À mãe indígena cabe exclusivamente o pesado encargo de sustentar a sua, por vezes, numerosa prole”; “sem a mais leve sombra de critério”.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 12. In Portuguese: “[...] lembro-me, íamos dizendo da luta que tínhamos que sustentar para conseguir, das criadas, que enxugassem a louça às toalhas competentes: sendo apropriado para elas, o primeiro farrapo sujo e esburacado que se lhe deparava no chão”.

⁸⁵ MCCLINTOCK, op. cit., p. 311. In Portuguese: “propaganda surgira como forma cultural central do capitalismo mercantil”.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 317. In Portuguese: “O menino branco aparece [...] como agente da história e o herdeiro masculino

In her thesis, Domingas do Amaral describes the habits of Africans who, she claims, lived in a “complete state of primitive eras”:

They live in a filthy hut, without light, without air, and without the slightest comfort, even for the most basic needs [...]. Everything is in a revolting promiscuity; and they are absolutely unaware of even the most rudimentary rules of hygiene. [...] For clothing, the indigenous person wears nothing; and instead of the fig leaf with which old Adam from the Bible covered himself after sinning, the black person wears a rag or the skin of the last deer they killed!⁸⁷

It is true that, from such a report, the author sheds light on the incompetence of the secular Portuguese colonial enterprise (or on the resistance of African peoples), but what interests us is to understand and reflect, as McClintock does, on what were the agents and mechanisms essential to imperialism, or why a thesis like that of Domingas do Amaral, which did not even attempt to address the specifics of colonized women, found space and relevance in an essentially feminist congress. In this sense, a social history of soap, in Portugal, seems useful to us.

Domingas do Amaral, in advocating for an educational project for the indigenous peoples of the Portuguese colonies, reflects a mindset that not only seeks domination but also a supposed “civilization” of the colonized. However, when we analyze this issue through the ideas of anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler, we see that this “civilization” is not merely an educational effort but also a way to exert colonial power over all spheres of the lives of the dominated populations, including their sexual practices and racial identities. Stoler argues that the discursive management of these activities, between colonizer and colonized, is crucial for maintaining the “colonial order of things”⁸⁸. Additionally, whiteness and its preservation, as exemplified in soap advertisements, are fundamental elements of colonial power, not only as

do progresso, mostrando o reflexo de seu irmão “inferior” no espelho europeu da autoconsciência. No espelho vitoriano, o menino negro testemunha seu destino predeterminado de metamorfose imperial, mas continua um híbrido racial passivo, parte branco, parte negro, levado à beira da civilização pelos fetiches mercantis gêmeos do sabão e do espelho”.

⁸⁷ AMARAL, op. cit., p. 9. In Portuguese: “em completo estado das primitivas eras”; “Tem por habitação uma cubata infecta, sem luz, sem ar, sem o menor conforto, mesmo para as mais exíguas necessidades [...]. Vive tudo numa promiscuidade revoltante; e ele desconhece, em absoluto, as mais rudimentares regras de higiene. [...] Por vestuário, usa o indígena, o corpo nu; e em vez da parra com que se cobriu o velho pai Adão da Bíblia, depois de haver pecado, o negro traz um farrapo ou a pele da última corça que matou!”.

⁸⁸ STOLER, Ann Laura. *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995, p. 5. In Portuguese: “ordem colonial das coisas”.

part of bourgeois identity but also as expressions of European biopower. Racial and sexual differences are maintained and reinforced through a “grammar of difference” that is symbolic, material, and discursive⁸⁹. Therefore, we can see that colonial education is embedded within a broader context of power and domination, where the management of social practices is an integral part of the imperialist project.

Conclusion

In 1872, *Harper's Weekly* published a cartoon by Thomas Nast: in the foreground, a demonic female figure holds a sign that reads “Be saved by free love”; she looks back towards another female figure in the background, who struggles up a rocky mountain carrying a drunk man and two small children on her back⁹⁰. The image is accompanied by the text: “GET THEE BEHIND ME, (MRS.) SATAN! – [see page 143]. Wife (with heavy burden) ‘I’d rather travel the hardest path of matrimony than follow your footsteps’”.

Victoria Woodhull, cartoon, by Thomas Nast.



⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 39-41. In Portuguese: “gramática da diferença”.

⁹⁰ GET THEE BEHIND ME, (MRS.) SATAN!, *Harper's Weekly*, V. XVI, n. 790, 1872, p. 140.

The purpose of the publication, according to a note from the newspaper itself (“page 143”), was to convey a moral lesson to those who might be tempted to accept the pernicious doctrines of the free love movement⁹¹. The note further explains that the satanic figure, “Mrs.,” was inspired by a prominent leader who advocated for women’s rights and was traveling across the United States giving lectures at the time. In addition to supporting divorce, “Mrs. Satan”, according to *Harper’s Weekly*, declared in these meetings her choice for free love: “Yes, I am a free-lover. I have an inalienable, constitutional, and natural right to love whom I may; to love as long or as short a period as I can; to change that love every day if I please”⁹². In response to such a stance, the author of the note questioned: “If this mischievous talk does not emanate from Satan, whence does it come?”⁹³.

Thomas Nast’s cartoon is titled “Victoria Woodhull, Caricature”—the “Satan” figure, who was also portrayed in the Brazilian press as a speaker advocating before an audience largely composed of women that marriage was a form of slavery⁹⁴ ⁹⁵. We revisit this caricature, published approximately half a century before the *Primeiro Congresso Feminista e de Educação* because it can visually highlight and encapsulate a long-term project that materialized, for example, in several of the theses defended in Lisbon and discussed here. This project was based on a superficial social valorization of women willing to take on, according to the directives of the “masters of knowledge”, the heavy burden of family life. It is worth noting that the post-First World War context highlighted the radicalization of old institutions in response to the development of new forms of organization and understanding of the world, exemplified by the Russian Revolution and anti-colonial movements. Thus, the project of female emancipation based on deeper transformations—sketched at least since the 1890s in Portugal and focused, for example, on women’s financial emancipation through socially valued work, which was *sine qua non* to obtaining other freedoms—was replaced, at least within institutionalized feminism, by a retrogressive perspective where women, despite a modern facade, remained bound to their merely biological condition.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 143.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Sem título, *Diário de Notícias*, Ano III, nº 416. p. 3, 1872.

⁹⁵ Victoria Woodhull (1838–1927) was the first woman to run for President of the United States and the first female stockbroker on Wall Street. See: BRANDMAN, Mariana. “Victoria Woodhull” In *National Women’s History Museum*, 2022. Available in: <www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/victoria-woodhull>. Last consulted June 2024.

In the European case, accounting for the particularities of each country, while the white man took on the burden of the neocolonial venture “No tawdry rule of kings / But toil of serf and sweeper — / The tale of common things”⁹⁶, the white woman, his complement, bore the burden of civilizing, first, the family (the micro-State), and then the other “children”, namely, minors in the metropolis and indigenous peoples in the colonies. And how could they do this? Through the “soap”, this also a metaphorical tool used to refer to hygienic and eugenic techniques and practices. In a context marked by the increasing importance given to the influence of the environment, especially concerning acquired characteristics, the female role was considered crucial in forming a national state of “strong race”. Women, considered guardians of morality and family health, were encouraged to adopt rigorous hygienic practices and to educate their children according to these principles, reinforcing the idea that national regeneration began at home. This approach elevated women’s civic responsibility, seemingly removing them from the position of mere wards and giving them an active role in building a healthy nation.

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⁹⁶ KIPLING, Rudyard. *The White Man’s Burden (O Fardo do Homem Branco)*, 1899. Available in: <https://www.fafich.ufmg.br/hist_discip_grad/KIPLING%20O%20Fardo%20do%20Homem%20Branco.pdf>. Last consulted June 2024. In Portuguese: “sem a mão-de-ferro dos reis/ Mas, sim, servir e limpar — / A história dos comuns”.

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