
Apresentação ao Dossiê Temático “*Engenharia Social e Modernidade: Os Impactos do Darwinismo Social e da Eugenia no Contexto Intelectual do Brasil e de Portugal*”

Presentation of the Thematic Dossier “*Social Engineering and Modernity: The Impacts of Social Darwinism and Eugenics in the Intellectual Context of Brazil and Portugal*”

Welcome to the dossier

Aiming to deepen the understanding of the influences of social Darwinism and eugenics in the Portuguese and Brazilian contexts, the organizers of this dossier started an investigation process during the 9^o *Congresso Internacional de Antropologia da Asociación de Antropólogos Iberoamericanos en Red — AIBR* (9th International Anthropology Congress by the *Asociación de Antropólogos Iberoamericanos en Red*), held at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM - Universidade Nacional Autônoma do México) in August 2023. The theme panel organized by Daniel Florence Giesbrecht, entitled “*Os Limites da Antropologia: Impactos do Darwinismo Social e da Eugenia nas Propostas de Engenharia Social entre os Finais do Século XIX e Meados do Século XX*” (The Limits of Anthropology: Impacts of the Social Darwinism and Eugenics in Social Engineering Proposals in the Late 19th and Mid-20th Centuries), aimed to foster an integrated analysis of these issues. The main purpose was to enable the presentation of studies that addressed both transdisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity promoting a broader and fluid approach regarding the consequences of such concepts in their most diverse aspects.

Considering the Panel success, evidenced by the commitment shown by the participant researchers, the quality of the works presented, and the discussions carried out, we concluded that the publication of such contributions is extremely valuable. It also create the possibility of gathering other authors, whose studies are fundamental to the theme proposed. Therefore, we are pleased to present the Dossier “*Social Engineering and Modernity: the Impacts of Social Darwinism and Eugenics in the Intellectual Context of Brazil and Portugal*”, which has just been published.

To inaugurate this collection, it seems relevant to point out that eugenics influenced the understanding and management of themes such

as childhood, mental “diseases” and criminality, and proposed a focus on genetics linked to racial improvement in several areas of the human life. For this reason, it advocated that the individuals’ health and genetic quality had to be protected from birth, which demanded the implementation of practices and policies aimed at selecting and promoting the development of children that met the requirements set. This is the theme addressed by Joana Vale Guerra in *A Crença na Inferioridade Moral e Intelectual das Crianças Pobres em Portugal: Um Ponto de Viragem* (The Belief in the Moral and Intellectual Inferiority of Poor Children in Portugal: A Crucial Point). According to Joana Guerra, in Portugal, not only was approaching children’s poverty fundamental to fight “social evils” in the light of hygienist principles, but also to promote the improvement of the national race. The moralization of children of poor families was considered a state responsibility, which led to the creation of institutions devoted to education, social, and hygienic care, based on scientific and pedagogical concepts strongly influenced by Darwinism and eugenics. To support her arguments, that author highlights the social, political, and cultural background that resulted in the approval of the Childhood Protection Law of 27th May 1911.

Still looking into eugenicist and hygienic approaches in the Portuguese context, the article co-authored by Jaqueline Moares de Almeida and Daniel Florence Giesbrecht, introduces a strong issue as suggested by its title: “*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* (“Bringing up Perfect Citizens for a Masculine, Strong and Virtuous Republic”: The First National Feminist Congress in Lisbon (1924) and the Modernization of Inequality). Taking advantage of the commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of the First Feminist Congress in Lisbon, organized by the National Council of Portuguese Women (CNMP - Conselho Nacional das Mulheres Portuguesas), those authors explored the connections between a type of feminism and a hygienist nation project aimed at racial improvement. According to those authors, the CNMP institutional feminism that claimed dignity and equality of opportunities for women was inserted in the social reform project based on eugenic principles. The study challenges the conventional idea that the eugenics was a single and diverse movement, mainly developed under the guidance of Anglo-Saxon states and very often associated with conservative and authoritative political projects. Conversely, the study seeks to demonstrate that eugenics also attracted the

adhesion of progressist political groups, such as feminist, liberal and socialist organizations.

It seems relevant to mention that the Catholic church played a crucial role in the opposition to radical eugenic measures (such as sterilization, abortion, and birth control), mainly in countries of Latin origin such as Portugal and Brazil. Regarding this issue, in Portugal, António Rafael Amaro, who wrote *Eugenismo, Higienismo e Racismo em Portugal na Primeira Metade do Século XX* (Eugenics, Hygienist Movement, and Racism in Portugal in the First Half of the 20th Century), highlighted the influence and dissemination of hygienist, eugenicist, and racist conception in the Portuguese society of that time. According to that author, the hygienist tradition, the Catholic opposition, and the low acceptance of eugenics among the conservative liberal and progressist circles in Portugal limited the acceptance of eugenicist theory and practices in that country.

As regards Brazil, the article entitled *Eugenia e Catolicismo no Brasil: Um Estudo a partir da Produção Intelectual Católica do Rio de Janeiro nas Décadas de 1920 e 1930* (Eugenics and Catholicism in Brazil: a Study from the Catholic Intellectual Production in Rio de Janeiro in the 1920s and 1930s), authored by Daniel Florence Giesbrecht, investigates the complex intersection between eugenics, the Catholic church and discourse power. Based on bibliographic and documental sources, including Catholic publications in Rio de Janeiro in the 1920s and 1930s, the study sheds some light on complex power dynamics, discursive control, and resistance between eugenics and religion, thus offering some perceptions of a fundamental period in the history of science and faith relationships.

Despite the Catholic resistance to biopolitical interventions in human reproduction, some Brazilian eugenicists defended openly quite polemical measures that aimed to improve the national “race” characteristics. In the article *Renato Kehl e o Radicalismo Eugênico no Brasil dos Anos 1930: uma Análise a partir da Obra Sexo e Civilização: Aparas Eugênicas (1933)* (Renato Kehl and the Eugenicist Radicalism in Brazil in the 1930s: an Analysis from the Work entitled Sex and Civilization: Eugenicist Trimming (1933)), Vanderlei Sebastião de Souza examines the eugenicist radicalism in Brazil in the 1930s, emphasizing the ideas defended by Renato Kehl in his book *Sexo e Civilização* (Sex and Civilization). Considered the main leadership in the Brazilian eugenicist movement, Kehl expressed extremism in eugenicist practices and defended violent measures of racial segregation and human reproduction control.

By defending that most of the “illnesses”, not only those that affected the body but also the psychological ones, which they believed were genetic, eugenicists justified the implementation of policies such as forced sterilization and institutional segregation of individuals with “mental disorders”, aiming to prevent the transmission of characteristics considered undesirable. However, in many cases, those practices were used to justify the imprisonment and reinforce the punishment of individuals identified as inferior due to other reasons such as gender, ethnicity, political positions, among other characteristics. In his work, *Demolindo Paradigmas da Saúde Mental Brasileira: O Hospital Psiquiátrico de Barbacena e sua Nova Identidade como Museu* (Demolishing Paradigms of the Brazilian Mental Health), Karen Cristina Galletto proposes a reflection upon the useful role of psychiatry in the social construction of “madness” and in the isolation practices that represented power and exclusion structures. Her study examines specifically the Psychiatric Hospital Colônia in Barbacena, Minas Gerais, Brazil, and reveals abusive and dehumanizing practices. That author employs the Dark Heritage concept to explore how the memory of horrors lived in that space might contribute to raise people’s awareness and to the seek social justice.

In relation to criminality, some eugenicists sustained that deviant conducts were genetically predisposed, which enabled the early identification of criminal behavior traits. In such situation, physical anthropology gained a relevant role by employing techniques such as anthropometry and phrenology to measure and analyze physical characteristics that might indicate a criminal behavior. Scholars such as Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909), and his theories about the “born criminal” individual, and Paul Broca (1824–1880), who pioneered craniometric studies, were considered symbols of advancement in that moment.

In *The Identity of Crime: Contributions from Medicine and Physical Anthropology in Portugal (1880–1940)*, Patrícia Ferraz de Matos develops a thorough analysis of how people considered criminals were identified between the late 19th century and the late 1930s in the country, based on theories and practices related to “criminal anthropology”, mainly from medical and legal works, including those by António Mendes Correia (1888–1960).

The co-authored article *O Contexto Político-Científico da Eugenia no Eixo Brasil-Uruguai: Uma Análise Crítica do Quadrante Político Proposto por Maurizio Meloni* (The Eugenics Political-Scientific Context in the Brazil-Uruguay Axis: A Critical Analysis of the Political Framework Proposed by Marizio Meloni),

written by Leonardo Dallacqua de Carvalho and Angelo Tenfen Nicoladeli, examines the use of a political framework developed by the sociologist and professor at the Deakin University, Maurizio Meloni, as an analytical and didactic tool to understand the eugenics policy. Although it was originally conceived based on the European and the United States eugenics, those authors sharply question whether Latin-American experiences can be contextualized within the same methodologies proposed by Meloni. To achieve that aim, they analyze four prominent figures in the eugenics field in Brazil and in Uruguay, namely Renato Kehl (1889–1978), Roquette-Pinto (1884–1954), Paulina Luisi (1875–1950), and Belisário Penna (1836–1906), positioning them in the framework to exemplify the application of such analysis structure.

Currently, issues such as antisemitism and the relations with Jewish communities still generate polemic and heated debates. The prejudice and violence against Jews as well as the extremism defended by Zionist groups show the relevance of a deeper analysis of the historical and social roots of those issues. The trajectory of the Jews and the Marranos (new Christians) is particularly revealing, not only due to the persecution they endured for centuries, but also for the resistance and survival strategies adopted by those communities. The article by João Paulo Avelãs Nunes, entitled *Judeus e Marranos, em Portugal e no Brasil, na Primeira Metade do Século XX: Anti-semitismo e Darwinismo Social?* (Jews and Marranos in Portugal and in Brazil in the First Half of the 20th Century: Social Anti-Semitism and Darwinisms?) firstly seeks to characterize the evolution of Portuguese individuals of Jewish origin from the early 16th century to the early 19th century. Next, it analyzes the specific situation of Portuguese and Brazilian individuals of Marrano origin from 1830 to the period immediately following World War II and the post-Holocaust period. The article also discusses the possibilities and risks of setting patrimonialization and socio-cultural intervention strategies based on historical production and in other social sciences as well as on the memory and post-memory of Jews and Marranos in Portugal and Brazil.

Brazil is a country characterized by mixed-race and ethnic diversity, influenced by a wide variety of peoples, where social Darwinism has generated intense debates, as previously mentioned. If it were true that social evolution depends on the racial composition and that there is a hierarchy among races, Brazilian mixed-race society would be condemned to an “inferior evolution level”. Miscegenation would worsen the situation since the racial mixture would degrade the qualities of races considered superior, thus leading to decadence. In *Tão Bom Como Tão Bom: Discursos Afro-Brasileiros, Racismo e Projeto*

de Nação na Bahia (1889-1937) (As Good as Good: African-Brazilian Discourses, Racism, and Nation Project in Bahia), Flávio Gonçalves dos Santos examines the position of African-Brazilian individuals in relation to racist discourses. Bahia, with its predominant population of African descendant people and as a center of racial ideologies, mainly in the Medical School and by intellectuals such as Nina Rodrigues, is a geographical landmark. The text focuses on the perceptions of African-Brazilian individuals regarding scientific racism and their strategies to fight it.

Closing the Dossier, the analysis focuses on the eugenicist thought production issue, mainly in southern Brazil. In the text entitled *Eugenia, Pensamento Social e Discursos Identitários no Brasil: Entre “Heróis Capengas”, “Urupês de Pau Podre” e “Manchas Loiras”* (Eugenics, Social Thought, and Identity Discourses in Brazil: between stumbling heroes, wood ear mushrooms, and blond spots), written by Maria Julieta Weber, the author explores eugenic debates and their repercussions in the Brazilian social thought, emphasizing national and regional identity discourses. In the first part, Julieta Weber examines the relations between eugenics and social thought, integrating elements of sanitation, hygienist practices, and the national identity construction. Next, she analyzes the intellectual production of identity representation in the South of the country, focusing on the ideas put forward by Bento Munhoz da Rocha Netto (1905-1973) and Wilson Martins (1921-2010), both writers, politicians, and university professors in the state of Paraná. Those intellectuals oppose the regionalist theoretical model of the Brazilian formation elaborated by Gilberto Freyre (1900-1987) and offer a rather intriguing alternative perspective to the regional identity construction.

To sum up, the comparison of the impacts of social Darwinism and eugenics in Portugal and Brazil revealed how scientific concepts were instrumentalized according to the cultural, historical, and religious particularities of each country. Thus, the analysis of each of these complex and multifaceted domains requires interdisciplinary approaches based on the integration of several knowledge areas, including history, social sciences, psychology, medicine, education, and religion. In addition, examining such themes from different analysis scales is necessary, considering both the different regional perspectives and employing comparative studies to recognize the importance of cultural peculiarities in the formation of identities and in the social dynamics over time.

According to René Remond, while history promotes the observation of changes, it also has the mission to propose the history of history seeking to elucidate “the trails of transformations in society” and “great oscillations of the movement of ideas”¹. Therefore, we expect that the eleven articles gathered in this Dossier will contribute significantly to the advancement of knowledge of the history of sciences, thus triggering new discussions and further investigations.

Enjoy the reading!

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(Organizers)

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¹ REMOND, René. “Uma história presente” In REMOND, René (Org.). *Por uma história política*. Rio de Janeiro: FGV Editora, 2003, p. 13.