

## GUEST EDITORS' NOTE

### Eugenics in Mediterranean Europe and Latin America

In recent years, research on the international development of eugenics has been flourishing. In the context of Mediterranean Europe and Latin America, the groundbreaking work of Nancy Stepan (1991), Anne Carol (1995) and Raquel Álvarez Peláez (1999) helped open up a kind of “Pandora’s box” by locating sources and constructing new approaches to existing ones. Thanks to their pioneering work, there has been growing interest in the field of research on the “science of racial cultivation,” and since the 1990s, studies on eugenics have ceased to concentrate exclusively on the English-speaking world and its univocal relationship with totalitarian regimes in the interwar period.

This issue, therefore, deals with eugenics’ underlying links to the conceptual axes of health/disease, normality/abnormality, and inclusion/exclusion, placing the historical perspective in an unfinished dialogue with the present. Transcending a limited identification with episodes that have a beginning and an end, it opens up questions that point to the nebulous boundaries of eugenics: where was the border between health and unhealthiness drawn at different points in time? Who defined it, and what was their overriding motivation beyond their individual interests? How far did eugenics spread? How many of its premises remained unaltered in non-English-speaking countries, and did hybrid versions of it upset its initial assumptions? Above all, why is it valid to talk about eugenics beyond Nazism?

Even though these questions are too major for us to provide immediate, finished answers, the articles in this issue provide contributions that in turn open up other new questions, taking on a global dimension that decentralizes the English-speaking world.

Eugenics is historicized here as an expression of the connections between science and power, biology and politics, medicine and religion, and health and sexuality, in the framework of countries involved in a permanent dialogue on the topic. From that perspective, based on *histoires croisées* that emerge either implicitly or explicitly, this issue examines specificities within geographical and historic contexts marked by the impact of the First and Second World War and the Cold War.

The texts assembled here reveal a variety of methodologies and objects of study. Some are histories dealing with biographic profiles, books and their reception, countercultural movements, and normalizing organizations and institutions. Others explore the presence of a Foucauldian microphysics of power.

Our starting point is the framework of the First World War and the crisis of civilization it provoked. In that context, the French physiologist and Nobel Prize winner Charles

Richet (1919) encouraged the creation of intellectual elites through “human selection.” In that same historical context, Spanish anarchists questioned the links between neo-Malthusianism and eugenics with a systemic critique that offered its own view of the regeneration of the human species. Meanwhile, Argentina saw the foundation of its first Eugenics Society, and the debates that arose in the scientific field about this new knowledge opened up a range of alternatives that narrowed when Argentine eugenicists became identified with European authoritarian regimes.

Also, the interwar period shows the persistence of French degenerationism under the novel guise of eugenics, both in the way they were integrated into social hygiene in Colombia, and in the concerns that led Renato Kehl, in Brazil, to formulate a theory that included a call for criminals to be sterilized. Meanwhile, the Chilean physician Hans Betzhold and the Portuguese psychiatrist and neurologist Egas Moniz, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for discovering the therapeutic use of lobotomy, are studied via their most emblematic works, the enormous impact of which was reflected in the number of re-editions. While Betzhold’s *Eugenesia* concentrated on achieving a “Chilean superman,” Moniz’s book *A vida sexual* symbiotically linked eugenics with sexuality, thus reinforcing traditional gender roles (Betzhold, 1939; Moniz, 1901). The articles on anarchist counterculture show that while based its eugenic ideas on decoupling sexuality from reproduction, the most conservative versions of the institution of the family were reinforced by intimately associating the two.

The normalization of the family continued over time, crossing over into the Cold War period, with the consolidation of a stereotype like the one promoted until the 1970s by the Argentine Eugenics Society, examined in this issue. There, the principles of “Galton’s science” coincided so closely with mandates from the Vatican that they became indistinguishable, so that criteria for artificial selection were determined by moralistic views of social customs and environmental determinism.

Thus, the articles in this issue provide a range of contributions that interpellate this Mediterranean and Latin American version of eugenics, whose characteristics include strategies for identifying, classifying, hierarchizing and excluding otherness. That goal led to the utopic vision of achieving a homogeneous, harmonic society by eliminating fate in the process of human reproduction. Dialogues between the Catholic church and scientific forms of knowledge were unique to the development of eugenics in this region of the world, making it an important chapter in the history of the twentieth century. This special issue offers a contribution to it.

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