



Zero hour of eugenics in Argentina: disputes and ideologies surrounding the emergence of a scientific field, 1916-1932

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Abstract

From the 1930s until the end of the Second World War, Count Keyserling's statement that "the hour of eugenics is at hand" was used to champion ideas and practices that Nancy Stepan argues were shared by different Latin American countries. We focus on the period prior to that, a sort of zero hour of eugenics in Argentina, which began institutionalizing in 1910 and emerged as a new scientific field. This period was marked by intra- and interdisciplinary tensions, a struggle to monopolize scientific authority, and dialogues between ideology and power in which a viscous type of eugenics was inscribed, whose initial polyphony lasted until 1932.

Keywords: eugenics; Argentina; scientific field; early twentieth century.

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In the 1930s and 1940s, until the end of the Second World War, Argentina provided various different figures interested in exploring the country's racial identity with enough reasons to make Count Keyserling's statement that "the hour of eugenics is at hand" a motto for the times.¹

As Nancy Stepan (1991) has shown, Keyserling's phrase illustrates expectations projected across the whole of Latin America, and it synthesizes a set of ideas and practices that were shared throughout the region at that particular period in time.

In this article, we examine the period prior to that stage, a time of ferment that constituted a sort of zero hour of eugenics as it began institutionalizing in Argentina. We focus on the first organizations created in response to eugenics, and reconstruct them like pieces of a puzzle that fit together when placed within a scientific field, in the strict sense defined by Bourdieu (2000). That is, as a system of relations within a delimited social space that fights for its autonomy and is valued enough to start competing for the monopoly of scientific authority.

We thus attempt to account for a complex and nuanced scenario that does not fit classifications based on a type of eugenics that was univocal throughout its development. Rather than seeing eugenics as always positive, soft, environment-based and preventive,² We analyze it from a flexible viewpoint that reveals its "viscosity," to use a metaphor for that which takes on the shape of another, which infiltrates, adapts, but is also impossible to seize, since it slithers away when one tries to pin it down (Miranda, 2013). This "viscosity" is also a sign of the instability within the eugenics field, until it became more clearly defined at the end of the zero hour of eugenics.

Eugenics as a biomedical program

In 1916, Dr. Antonio Vidal described in detail a plan for creating a eugenics society in Argentina. He did this in the First National Congress for Medicine (Primer Congreso Nacional de Medicina), held in Buenos Aires and presided over by Gregorio Aráoz Alfaro.³

His presentation ranged from the descriptive analysis (international advances in Galton's science) to the prescriptive one (different types of measures to be implemented). He advocated passing laws, changing the focus of certain professions, adjusting university training in line with eugenics requirements, specifying the outreach of public health, and creating a Ministry for Health and Public Charity (Ministerio de Trabajo y Beneficencia Pública). He argued that this range of actions by the Executive power, the Legislature, and relatively autonomous institutions such as the university and professional fields at the time, would bring them together in a drive to shape a national form of eugenics.

Vidal (1918, p.495) clarified that there was already a vast body of knowledge about social hygiene, which was leaving classical medicine behind and tending towards eugenics (which he defined as the biology of collective life), and also towards physiology and hygiene in the sphere of sexuality and heredity. While social hygiene dealt with tuberculosis, alcoholism, insanity, and specific ailments, the eugenics movement dealt with the theoretical and practical problems of sex, selection and heredity.

Examples from abroad, Vidal said, shed some light on the measures to be promoted in Argentina, where artificial selection was well-known in terms of livestock. In fact, that

was the first point of entry for eugenics in the country. Eugenics was linked to scientific support the Rural Society (Sociedad Rural) attempted to provide to members trying to improve the racial stock of their cattle so as to compete in international markets. From 1870 on, the Rural Society stressed the advantages of artificial selection, with reflections from Darwin and Haeckel that carried the latent possibility of extrapolating actions performed on livestock to the human race (Vallejo, Miranda, 2014).

Vidal (1918, p.495-496) then asked:

How can we not assume, in effect, that at least a small fraction of the activities ... we devote nowadays to the study of 'pedigree' will in future be devoted to following the creation of the human family? We have long had the 'Stud-Book' in Argentina, and it has even been said that it now features 'glorious' entries, so why should we not implant and pursue positive, serious investigations into 'type,' 'stock,' and 'race' in our native component of nationality? (emphasis in the original).

He therefore called for funding to provide the country with a stable center for biology and heredity research and studies, in the belief that

at the bottom of the data that zootechnics is carefully gathering to replace empirical stock-breeding; and at the bottom of what medical hygienists and sociologists examine and penetrate to find out the cause of many manifestations of life, there are common laws and principles (Vidal, 1918, p.495-496).

Vidal (1918, p.496) argued that two branches of contemporary knowledge needed to be brought together: "The agricultural and stock-raising side, which will cement our economic prosperity if we follow it, and the other, eugenic-social side that offers the human energy base required for prosperity in other spheres." These two tendencies could be synthesized in a eugenic society that used inductive and experimental biology to create a vast program of research into heredity and human descent, seeking connections with animal and plant physiology from a biologist, hereditist and Mendelian stance.

Eugenics, he believed, should also examine environmental influence from a biological point of view, in which psychology could be used to explain the origin of social problems, allowing the application of measures in line with Darwin's "struggle for life," and encouraging elements that helped advance social selection, as Anglo-American eugenicists were already doing. However, he also warned against "exaggerations," such as "certain laws, certain proposed decisions to detain and sterilize a good portion of the population, or to arrange select marriages for predetermined purposes" (Vidal, 1918, p.498).

Vidal believed that propaganda and health education, if extended to the entire body or soma of the nation, would create the habit, the common rule and the conduct appropriate for those purpose. And above all, people "would thus find the good sense and temperance – known as *sapientia* in ancient times – that the 'elites' must possess, not only for their own purposes but in order to govern the lesser folk, in other words, the 'masses'" (Vidal, 1918, p.503). We should note his belief that the masses lacked the capacity for discernment, and were thus the central object for the application of eugenics; those who acted upon the masses needed to be selfish and renounce any altruism that might interfere with natural selection.

He also saw a need to train professionals who could carry out preventive eugenic functions as public officials. The new eugenicist would deal with issues caused by the defects of the social body, societal scourges or “social poisons” (Stepan, 1991, p.63-101), including excessive criminality, high infant mortality, depopulation, and matters concerning the “complexion of the race.”

This plan sought to advance Spencerian evolutionism by combining it with a branch of French sociology that dealt the morality of science (Bayet, 1905) and the science of social traditions (Levy-Brühl, 1903), studying both physical and moral characteristics in order to understand true human nature. Invoking these ideas, Vidal called for a re-organization of the healthcare system to create a Ministry for Public Health (Ministerio de Salud Pública) and another Ministry for Hygiene, Work and Public Charity (Higiene, Trabajo y Beneficencia Pública), which would be guided by eugenic principles.

This proposal was enthusiastically adopted by the Congress, which included a special discussion of the eugenic project in its conclusions, recommending:

Support for research in this country on the various aspects of problems such as immigration, race, population, laws and social habits, and the corresponding creation of scientific bodies and centers (some within the institutions themselves) charged with pursuing investigations on biological inheritance in general and human heredity in particular.

Encouraging the foundation of an Argentine society for Eugenics, designed to incorporate foreign advances and foster corresponding ones here; to try out, launch, and create, in the enormous sphere that the aforementioned discipline is called to cover in terms of plant, animal and human life; and, finally, to bring together a set of approaches, the indispensable convergence of efforts by zootechnicians, educators, jurists and sociologists, biologists, legislators and men of state (Sanción, 1918, p.514).

The Congress ratified every aspect of the proposal to create an Argentine Eugenics Society (Sociedad Eugénica Argentina), making it a central priority. There was no critique of the Mendelian and hereditist approach that sought to integrate advances in zootechnics and studies of human descent; on the contrary, the need for this was explicitly praised. But while there was broad consensus up to that point on the urgent need for eugenics among the medical profession, there was, in fact, a point of conflict. This was raised by Vidal himself directly when he mentioned the president of the Congress, Aráoz Alfaro, in relation to other issues. According to Vidal, Aráoz Alfaro had used some of his early ideas about the project, presenting them as his own in the School of Medicine in Buenos Aires, something Vidal denounced, since “while powerful moral reasons enjoin me to silence, other even more powerful reasons oblige me not to maintain silence on the incident” (Vidal, 1918, p.513).

Vidal’s presentation turned controversial with this denunciation, but it is also worth pointing out what he did not say. In fact, after the First International Eugenics Congress was held in London in 1912, preparations had begun in 1914 for the second congress in New York, thanks to Charles Davenport. One of the invited speakers – the only one from South America – was Víctor Delfino from Argentina.⁴ An Argentine Consultant Committee (Comité Consultivo Argentino) had been formed; it consisted of Alfredo Palacios, Genaro

Sisto, Marcelino Herrera Vargas, Pedro Baliña, Mariano Castex, Víctor Arreguine, Benjamín Martínez and Delfino himself. The outbreak of the First World War had delayed the conference, but there was already an incipient Argentine eugenics movement, which Vidal, conspicuously, ignored.

Eugenics as a sex education program

Paralleling the advance of eugenics in the medical sphere, a set of interests began to coalesce around sex education, a process in which Juan Antonio Senillosa played an important role.

Senillosa, who was from one of the wealthiest families in Argentina in the 1900s, was distinguished by his political and social views. His membership in the Socialist Party, as well as his marked anticlericalism and his vocation for pursuing altruistic initiatives, caused him to disassociate himself from his relatives' expectation that he would take over and expand the family business, a leading firm in Argentina since 1830.

In 1901, Senillosa sponsored an initiative prompted by the success of Edmond Demolins' book *A quoi tient la supériorité des anglo-saxons?* In response to the title's question, he researched educational advances in the USA and came up with a plan to prepare people "for a healthy, noble and efficient life as children, as adolescents, and as young people" which could be taken at higher education institutes. It was an educational project "with no religious bent, whose ethics, aesthetics and philosophy [were] guided only by the purest views on Secularity and Eugenics" (Senillosa, 1920, p.171). Senillosa called it the Model School Town (Villa Escolar Modelo), and planned for it to serve as the origin and base for a free university like Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, directed by the philosopher Stanley Hall (Senillosa, 1920, p.171). Senillosa's objective was above all to include the "topic of sex" in the educational curriculum, from a "frankly anticlerical" position that was "firmly on the side of the proletariat" (p.173). Although important figures from pedagogical positivism and the medical field supported this educational initiative, the endeavor failed. The same thing happened with the Lay Missions Plan (Plan de Misiones Laicas) that Senillosa launched immediately afterwards. Like the Model School, it was also affected by the international context of the start of the First World War.

In 1916, alongside the project to create a eugenics society, spearheaded by Vidal, a lecture series was held on sex education and prophylaxis for venereal diseases, which began with a lecture delivered by Telémaco Susini. He was followed by Ángel Giménez, Samuel Bermann, Hernani Mandolini, Leopoldo Bard, Rodolfo Senet and Raúl Ortega Belgrano. At the eighth meeting, Senillosa called on the speakers and some other supporters to launch an institution that would represent those concerns. It was to be called the Pro-Adolescent Institute for Sex Education Research (Instituto Pro-adolescencia de Investigación sobre la Educación Sexual) and would be an education center that would revive his earlier attempt to set up a free university. The early meetings on this were held in the Argentine Social Museum (Museo Social Argentino),⁵ and a plan emerged that matched European and North American liberal tendencies, which put discussion of sexuality above "false religious morals and bourgeois philistinism" (Senillosa, 10 ene. 1918, p.4).

The Pro-Adolescent Institute's founding committee was to include Guillermo Bosch Arana, Ángel Giménez, Bernardo A. Houssay, Samuel Bermann, Hernani Mandolini, Víctor Mercante and Senillosa himself.

However, all this institutional scaffolding soon vanished. One of the founders, Bosch Arana, bowing to pressure from leading figures in the medical field (among them Antonio Vidal, Enrique Boero and Carlos Fonso Gandolfo), suspended signature of the institution's founding document, even though he himself was one of the founders. The motivation of the lobbyists behind this, who were all members of the Medical Circle (Círculo Médico) headed by Aráoz Alfaro, was that they were simultaneously working to found the Sociedad Eugénica Argentina (Argentine Eugenics Society).

Senillosa (1920, p.174) attributed this real blow to his society to a reaction that went beyond the medical field, or rather, caused it to participate in what was really a "stealthy Jesuit reaction in our intellectual environment," in other words, "a plan by the church" to avoid changes to the Argentine education system.

On July 27, 1918, instead of a founding meeting for the Pro-Adolescent Society, Víctor Delfino held a preparatory meeting for the founding of the Argentine Eugenics Society on the premises of the Medical Circle. Senillosa attended that day (1920, p.174-175), and upon leaving he said that he could "only exclaim, given the convent-style conservatism: 'They won't have any kind of eugenics or sexual ethics unless the red flag is flying high.'"

The Argentine Eugenics Society: conflicts between expectations and leaders

After Vidal laid out in detail his plan for creating a eugenics society, denouncing Aráoz Alfaro for claiming to have come up with the idea and ignoring Delfino's work on the matter, the medical profession achieved its first objective, avoiding interdisciplinary disputes over control of eugenics.

Now that their earlier struggles with educators were over, physicians could build bridges with figures from a range of academic backgrounds. When the Argentine Eugenics Society was first created, its president was Aráoz Alfaro, and Joaquín V. González, Mariano Castex, Genaro Sisto and Víctor Delfino all played leading roles in the organization. In addition, there were "about one hundred members, among them well-known scientific figures, and professors from the University of Buenos Aires" (SEA, 1919).⁶ As the initial group expanded, figures such as Estanislao Zeballos and Alberto Stucchi also became involved and played major roles.⁷

Aráoz Alfaro was one of the most important figures in the Buenos Aires medical profession, which had now added a new sphere of power to its existing influence in the university and the nation state. In 1918, he became president of the National Department of Hygiene. But it was Delfino, as editor of *La Semana Médica* and the Argentine representative at leading international eugenics meetings, who helped garner immediate recognition for the new Argentine Eugenics Society outside the country. In his Pyrrhic victory, Vidal and other physicians involved in the rebellion against Senillosa's society were forced to cede prominence, while the pedagogue began to seek out other spaces outside the orthodox field of eugenics.

Once the Eugenics Society was formed, the question of what its specific area of responsibility would be began to arise. Clearly, its objectives were very ambitious, as seen in the bill that the National Congress on Medicine enthusiastically recommended implementing in 1916. However, the expectations raised immediately, both within and outside the society, led to a burgeoning of ideas, some of which began to contradict one another. This suggests, at least, that there were certain problems from the outset.

Shortly after the Eugenics Society was formed, Aráoz Alfaro referred to a way to increase the population's strength without resorting to imperialist expansion nor "military high-handedness." In order to "fortify and elevate our country," he felt it was necessary to boost immigration "but on the basis of prior selection and bearing in mind the evils that can stem from ethnic make-up." Argentines, he said, were "lazy," prone to stimulation and lack of initiative. To counteract those evils, "we have to look at northern European races, who outrank the southerners in their ability to work and form strong national bonds" (*La formación...*, 10 ago. 1918). Consequently, it was preferable to attract immigrants from the northern hemisphere such as British, Germans and Scandinavians – the races that had made the USA an "exemplary nation." At the same time, social problems such as alcoholism, tuberculosis and syphilis needed to be addressed through a suitable prophylaxis campaign. To make headway on these issues, Aráoz Alfaro suggested looking to the example of Brazil (*La formación...*, 10 ago. 1918).

Given this position on the part of the president of the Eugenics Society, a quick review of the statements of support made in the founding ceremony shows what people expected of the institution and to what extent their statements overlapped with one another and matched the ideas of the institution's leader.

The local physician Guillermo Goñalons (1918, p.539) envisaged carrying out a great morality campaign to improve customs in Buenos Aires. They needed to attack "foci for the propagation of evil like cabarets," which turned their patrons into "social parasites, physical and moral degenerates," who reached that state by frequenting bars, bistros (*confiterías*) and liquor stores. That should be the function of eugenics.

The São Paulo Eugenics Society, the first of its kind in South America, which granted it some authority, might indicate the path to be followed. According to Renato Kehl, the new institution in Buenos Aires should continue promoting eugenics to develop the "religion of the future," for the moral and physical perfection of human beings (*Asociaciones...*, 6 ago. 1918).⁸ His colleague from São Paulo, Clemente Ferreira (1918, p.437), gave a detailed description of the Brazilians' goals, which were "to do for the human species what has long been done for livestock in the field of veterinary medicine." This could be achieved by controlling progenitors, preventing those who were suffering any chronic illness or who had a family history of hereditary diseases, convulsions or epilepsy from procreating. It was also, he said, important to bear in mind that the most favorable age for matrimony was 24-25 years old for men and 19-20 for women. Ferreira also recommended fighting the "poisons of the human race," and, lastly, reminded his listeners that no country in the world had made as much progress in eugenics as the USA, where the Eugenics Record Office, founded by Charles Davenport, had been doggedly studying heredity, following Mendel's theories (Ferreira, 1918, p.438).

However, in Argentina, Lázaro Sirlin (1918, p.57) recommended not following the measures promoted in the USA because “they are so exaggerated that they have only discredited eugenics.”

Paz Soldán (1918, p.340), from Lima, stressed that they were living in the aftermath of “the war in Europe, with its wanton destruction, reverse selection, its disabled survivors, who have been physically and psychologically traumatized, and its mental defectives,” which meant that the American continent was “obliged to fend for itself,” and forge its own race according to its own norms.

González Álvarez (1918, p.657), from Madrid, argued that they should look at what had been achieved in zootechnics in terms of “perfecting races,” using “selection” in some cases and interference in others. And he hoped to see eugenics bring together “in a close-knit community all Spaniards and their brothers in America.”

The first messages thus dealt with a wide variety of topics, and in some cases showed interests that manifestly clashed. Advocating control over morality does not seem to have elicited any questions among the strongly elitist figures, although it might seem an extremely isolated stance. However, the range of measures favored by the members from São Paulo, which included control of marriage partners, appeals to zootechnics, Mendelian heredity research and the struggle against “race poisons,” are not incompatible with Vidal’s original project, nor the one laid out by González Álvarez. Nevertheless, when Ferreira proposed looking to the USA as an example, Aráoz Alfaro was not opposed, but Lázaro Sirlin clearly was.

Similarly, while Paz Soldán advocated building a separate American race on the continent after the war, González Álvarez took a different view. He proposed recreating Hispanics as a racial entity, and encouraged immigration from the northern hemisphere, like Aráoz Alfaro.

Clearly, when people talked about eugenics, the term took on a “viscosity” that contained profound differences, depending on the source of the discourse, but also within Argentina itself, depending on whether the focus was on controlling morals, selecting immigrants, combating “race poisons” or appealing for more drastic measures of the type being implemented in the USA.

But another important element in this zero hour of Argentine eugenics can be seen in the problems concerning the principle of authority. As we mentioned earlier, Aráoz Alfaro was made president of the Eugenics Society. However, since the birth of the institution and during the remaining months of 1918, the journal *La Semana Médica* listed the numerous international expressions of support it had received, all of which included greetings to Víctor Delfino, whom they congratulated on his initiative. The letters from Peru, Spain, Uruguay, Brazil and from local colleagues never alluded to any other Argentine figure except Delfino.

Eugenics was thus creating a new field fraught with difficulties thanks to the diversity of issues covered and the unresolved matter of its leadership.

In 1921, the Second International Congress on Eugenics was held, and Delfino confirmed his international reputation by representing Argentina. In fact, he was invited by Charles Davenport, on behalf of the Eugenics Committee for the National Research Council, to become one of the vice-presidents because he was considered “the best representative on this

issue for the Republic of Argentina” and also “the only representative for South America” (Segundo Congreso..., 1920). Delfino’s visibility would eventually eclipse the president of the Eugenics Society, Aráoz Alfaro, exacerbating a situation that naturally resulted in the dissolution of the organization.

After the Argentine Eugenics Society came to an end, its principal supporters continued working on other initiatives, but were unable to combine forces to produce a joint program. In 1921, Alfredo Fernández Verano (1921, p.744) created the League for Social Prophylaxis (Liga de Profilaxis Social), aimed at preventing and treating problems caused by venereal diseases. He revived more concrete eugenic initiatives, among them the demand for premarital medical certification, praising the example of livestock breeders who focused on the “pedigree of their reproductive animals” and calling for the application of “similar measures for the human race.” The League’s president was Fernández Verano himself, and its Board of Consultants included Emilio Coni, Joaquín V. González, Gregorio Aráoz Alfaro, Alfredo Palacios and Alberto Stucchi, all of whom had been involved with the earlier Eugenics Society.

From sex education to eugenic *Clamor*

While the League for Social Prophylaxis worked to publicize concerns from the growing field of eugenics, Senillosa, who was outside the medical establishment, continued trying to promote an approach to sexuality that, while not entirely abandoning traditional prejudices, put some new topics on the agenda.

Meanwhile, Aráoz Alfaro was once again made head of the National Department of Hygiene (1923-1928) and Delfino continued to play a central role at *La Semana Médica*, as well as directing the recently-created Tutelary Institute for Minors (Instituto Tutelar de Menores). Although the early leaders of Argentine eugenics occupied government positions, building on the program proposed by the Society in 1918 remained a matter for the future.

But figures from different disciplines who were interested in eugenics started to be attracted to the Museo Social Argentino (Argentine Social Museum). In 1928, Senillosa himself was one of those who became involved with issues covered by the social hygiene section,⁹ which was created after an agreement signed with the University of Buenos Aires. Senillosa, who had led the creation of the Pro-Adolescent Institute in the Museo Social in 1918, lobbied ten years later for eugenics to contain socialist interpretations and distance itself from Catholic influence, following the example of Édouard Toulouse and the biocratic utopia in France (Carol, 1995, p.188-207; Campos, 2008).

Senillosa’s involvement with the Museo Social led to a new initiative: a radio program called *Clamor*, which had major support from the academic world. Its motto was “For the betterment of human life.” This early vehicle of dissemination for eugenics began with a series that was later broadcast on Radio Cultura in Buenos Aires (Vallejo, 2009).

Clamor helped Senillosa to unite the field of eugenics. From the beginning, he had ongoing collaboration from Dr. Samuel de Madrid, and a group of guests featuring notables such as Víctor Delfino and Aráoz Alfaro, the founders of the 1918 society, as well as Ángel Giménez, Enrique Mouchet, Víctor Mercante and Hernani Mandolini, among others.

The launch of *Clamor* coincided with the arrival in Argentina of Nicola Pende, who was invited by the School of Medicine in Buenos Aires. Pende's stayed through October and November 1930, in which time he gave eight lectures in the Carlos Bonorino Udaondo series at the Buenos Aires Clinical Hospital (Hospital de Clínicas de Buenos Aires), thanks to arrangements made by Mariano Castex, who was vice-president of the Institute for Italian Culture and, after Pende's successful visit, Rector of the University of Buenos Aires (Vallejo, 2012, p.174).

Pende's visit to Argentina overlapped with the start of a new political era. On September 6, 1930, there was a military coup and the democratic government of Hipólito Yrigoyen was overthrown and replaced by General José F. Uriburu, an undisguised supporter of Italian fascism. The new military regime moved quickly to adopt the eugenics measures that were high on its agenda, and in that context Aráoz Alfaro was once more put in charge of the National Hygiene Department. At the same time, there was a move to create a National Commission for Eugenics and Social Medicine (Comisión Nacional de Eugenesia y Medicina Social) whose ultimate goal was to create an Institute of Biotypology like the one Pende directed in Genoa.¹⁰ This initiative was based on a plan written up by Pende's followers in Argentina on September 20, 1930, notably coinciding with the coup and Pende's imminent visit. They set up the Argentine Society for Biotypology, Eugenics and Social Medicine (Sociedad Argentina de Biotipología, Eugenesia y Medicina Social) under the leadership of Arturo Rossi and Octavio López (the authors of the overall plan). The society's governing board was led by Mariano Castex, and it included other authorities such as Carlos Bonorino Udaondo, Alberto Peralta Ramos, Mariano Barilari, Nicolás Lozano and Gregorio Aráoz Alfaro. Meanwhile, Senillosa was appointed to be the director of the Department of Publicity and Propaganda (Sabem, 1930). The plan called for a marriage ban for people with transmissible hereditary diseases, mental disorders, or vices that might constitute a threat to their offspring. The "ailments" listed included tuberculosis, venereal diseases, cancer, epilepsy, alcoholism and homosexuality (Sabem, 1930).

The first step recommended by the Sociedad Argentina de Biotipología, Eugenesia y Medicina Social was to set up a National Commission for Eugenics and Social Medicine to advise the national government on eugenics. It also recommended creating a National Plan for the Protection of Mothers and Children (Obra Nacional para la Protección de la Maternidad y la Infancia), directly analogous to the organization of that name in Italy. It called for an Institute for Child-Rearing and oversight measures for children that would include the implementation of school registries. Other plans for action involved the scientific organization of work, racial selection of immigrants and focusing on the sexual problem. It recommended dealing with endemic diseases in the interior of Argentina and "social poisons" in the big cities.

In October 1930, the document incorporated an appendix containing an interview with Nicola Pende, in which he strongly recommended that the Argentine government support Rossi and López's initiative. With this addendum, the plan was presented to the President of Argentina and Aráoz Alfaro proposed entrusting its authors with an official mission to collect information on the development of eugenics in Europe. This recommendation was approved in a presidential decree signed on January 8, 1931.

Due to this trip, the newly-emerged Society for Biotypology was temporarily without its founders. Meanwhile, *Clamor* was becoming the main organ for uniting the field of eugenics.

Clamor allowed Aráoz Alfaro (15 abr. 1932) to return to ideas that had been around at the creation of the Eugenics Society, reviving the example of the land-owning elites in Argentina, who introduced eugenics to improve their livestock herds.

While our cattle ranchers have for many years been selecting sires and mothers, creating pure herds that are constantly being refined by new acquisitions of magnificent specimen animals, and while humbler rural ranchers would be ashamed to have animals that, while not inferior, are unappreciated due to their color or hair, men in government remain indifferent to the fact that there are fathers and mothers who are defective, vice-ridden, or affected by transmissible diseases or serious nervous disorders. These people continue procreating at will, producing blighted offspring who will succumb before they flourish, and only grow up partway, causing them unhappiness and creating a heavy handicap for the society in which they live.¹¹

The state should prevent “procreation by beings whose offspring would be highly likely to be born blighted or disabled” (Aráoz Alfaro, 15 abr. 1932). Aráoz Alfaro, who was once again at the helm of the National Department of Hygiene, hoped to implement measures that he had not succeeded in passing during his previous tenure because the federal, republican democratic system in Argentina made it difficult to apply country-wide rules. Thus, the “state of emergency” declared in Argentina in September 1930 represented an opportunity to carry out a eugenic campaign without the institutional checks imposed by the nation’s Constitution.

Clamor also advocated measures such a medical exam for would-be spouses; this was discussed on the radio by Fernández Verano of the League for Social Prophylaxis, who publicized his slogans, and the Premarital Medical Check-up was made mandatory in 1932.

The radio series was also a sounding board for more radical eugenic positions. Madrid Páez (24 abr. 1932) talked about the problems caused by unjustifiable sexual habits that prevented “cleaning and keeping the springs of heredity pure.” From his perspective, the easing of mores in the whirl of modern life created serious situations that it was eugenics’ mission to correct. Promiscuity was “the cancer of our so-called civilization,” causing “the depraved way of life in the big cities” which led to racial degeneration. Other “persistent enemies,” he said, were “bad literature and the scandalous lyrics to our tangos.” The general context in which these occurred proved the need to exercise special control in the region: “our ‘mestizo democracies,’ which Ayarragaray talks about, undoubtedly require us to exercise our right to protect society against dangerous individuals more rigorously than in highly-evolved democracies” (Madrid Páez, 24 abr. 1932).¹²

For his part, the pedagogue Víctor Mercante (25 abr. 1932) called for “less impulsiveness, less passion, fewer spur-of-the-moment behaviors and less freedom.” Clearly, he was advocating more self-repression. The responsibilities established by the rights of citizens in modern societies implied, he believed, parallel responsibilities in terms of eugenics. Given that “democracy will always be a utopia where revolutions are brewed,” it was necessary to free “transcendental selection” from instinct and from “the slow, winding processes of nature; while men needed to use their ability to correct and ‘channel’ their eugenic qualities through hygiene, nutrition, marriage, health, social control, education and the law.”

While Mercante prioritized educational action designed to improve young people's morals, he did not rule out more coercive measures to insure the efficacy of eugenics.

We should not expect moral cleanliness and physiological selection to come about from the slow action of death and imprisonment. We need to sterilize the malignant seed and fertilize the farsighted one, just as we weed out hemlock and thistles so that the wheat field can flourish ... We must regulate births; we must control children. North America has done a great deal in that sense, not only by passing proactive laws but ... by preventing the birth of offspring with physical, intellectual, moral and social flaws. Do you understand?

The right to life is not the right to transmit the irremediable evil of blight: it is not asylums, prisons and hospitals that we need; we need to get rid of invalids and criminals who are deformed and brutish (Mercante, 25 abr. 1932).

In Mercante's view, education could only work as a means for spreading eugenics if accompanied by what he considered an essential measure: premarital medical exams. However, he warned that "if it has unfortunately not been possible to avert a marriage between partners whose hereditary background suggests they will produce offspring with problems, the parents and the societies in control must understand that sterilization should be imposed" (Mercante, 25 abr. 1932).

Mandolini (27 abr. 1932) reinforced these ideas, calling for comprehensive legislation that would include "premarital certification, a campaign against alcoholism, occupational hygiene and, as a last resort, bloodless sterilization of the degenerate and inferior."

He also referred to socialism and recommended that eugenics adopt "what the Catholic church has done with confession." By that he meant emulating confession as a way of entering the individual's most private realm to scrutinize the secrets hidden in his body and soul, but doing so from "the lay, scientific and eugenic point of view," through "a spiritual director invested with all the high authority of science" (Mandolini, 27 abr. 1932).

Eugenics as a heteronomous field

Clamor reached five hundred thousand families around the country, and united the different strands of Argentine eugenics.

The high point of its success coincided with the return to Argentina of Rossi and López, who had finished the mission in Europe assigned to them by President Uriburu. During their lengthy European tour, these two Argentine physicians underwent training by Nicola Pende in Genoa, and attended the International Congress of Population inaugurated by Mussolini in Rome on September 7, 1931. They returned fresh from those experiences invested with great prestige, which was reinforced by the role they took on as mediators between Argentina and Pende, or rather (since they were one and the same), between Argentina and fascism's policy of cultural expansion.¹³

When they returned, they revamped the Biotypology Society and created the Asociación Argentina de Biotipología, Eugenesia y Medicina Social (Argentine Association for Biotypology, Eugenics and Social Medicine) in 1932.

The readjustments in the field of eugenics were noted with concern by the socialist Mandolini, who contacted Senillosa in June 1932 to explain his reasons for withdrawing from *Clamor*. Mandolini (13 jul. 1932) wrote laconically that he was no longer confident that the scientific nature of the eugenic movement would allow it to remain largely separate from political developments at the national and international level, above all when

new orientations are appearing, and a reactionary spirit in cultural and scientific disguise is overtaking eugenics' admirable enterprise and gradually overpowering it, entangling its noble and enthusiastic spirit in its nets. You are overseeing the recruitment by 'national socialist' elements of a child of your heart and mind, and, as a parent, you are hopeful, and believe that you will still be able to save it from adulteration by the Jesuits ... Eugenics is not a science that can be developed in isolation; it is not astronomy, or physics, or physiology. It comes into contact with social activities, becomes part of them, and, if based on science, could become a powerful weapon for collective action. In the hands of the members of the 'Scientific Society,' eugenics' broad, modern program, its program of 'becoming,' is turning into an instrument of reaction in false liberal guise. ... I am now obliged to suggest that I cease to belong to the 'national socialist' Eugenics Society, despite all the biotypes and Pende-style diagrams adorning its front door (emphasis in the original).

Mandolini's resignation coincided with the creation of the Argentine Association for Biotypology, Eugenics and Social Medicine and the launch of its official publication, *Anales de Biotipología, Eugenesia y Medicina Social*, edited by Arturo Rossi. The journal adopted the slogan used by *Clamor*: "For the betterment of human life." Under the new structure, there were no proposals linked to versions of French socialism, like Senillosa's. The director of *Clamor* no longer worked in the Department of Publicity and Propaganda. However, most of the radio program's collaborators did, and all of them – except for Mandolini – adapted to the explicitly fascist orientation of the new association, which, obviously, looked to Italy, but also closely followed developments in Germany. In fact, Josué Berutti y Mariano Barilari played important roles in the organization after returning from training stints in Germany with physicians who were deeply committed to the racial policy of the Third Reich. Mandolini's early hunch was ratified shortly thereafter, when *Anales de Biotipología* highlighted Hitler and Mussolini's pro-natalist policy in articles that reproduced racist slogans without questioning them. Thus, the speech given on February 15, 1934 by Wilhelm Frick, the minister for the Interior, was presented as a "scientific contribution,"¹⁴ even though it was clear it was an anti-semitic thesis intended to refute criticism of the German laws passed on April 7 and June 30, 1933, excluding "non-Aryans" from public service. Despite receiving protests from Franz Boas,¹⁵ the head of the Anthropology Department at Columbia University (*Legislación...*, 1935), *Anales de Biotipología* continued publishing articles on "scientific" measures based on "radical eugenics" that were being applied in Germany.

The relentless advance of this particular ideology rendered pleas from outside the field invisible; Argentine eugenics completely lost the level of autonomy it possessed earlier. It was now a heteronomous field, both scientifically and politically, and Senillosa came up against the same obstacle: the medical establishment took control of eugenics, and changed the name of the radio series, which had broadcast over eighty lectures, from *Clamor* to *Eugenics*. It was no longer directed by Senillosa.

Final considerations

The rise of the field of eugenics in Argentina allows us to trace the disputes that grew up both within the medical establishment and between physicians and sex educators. Above and beyond those differences, there was a shared understanding of the role of eugenics as a device for imposing social normality and order. Physicians and educational theorists, geneticists and sex educators all took part in early debates about the type of eugenics they wanted to see implemented in Argentina, and this combined with an already-present interest in transferring zootechnic knowledge to human heredity, based on the example of artificial selection performed by cattle breeders in the country.

Of all the features displayed by Argentine eugenics in its initial stages, the most prominent was a “viscosity” that escapes any attempt to establish clear-cut categories. While Anglo-Saxon biologist experience and zootechnics could arouse enthusiasm and dovetail with practices valued in a country internationally known for the quality of its beef animals, the weight of hygienic tradition also made people think of the need to control environmental variables in order to improve the human race. This “viscosity” also characterized complex interactions between eugenics and political ideology, because while it was indeed possible to discern the dangerous route being taken by European totalitarian regimes, being aware of eugenics’ connections with the political right did not, in some cases, prevent early eugenicists from supporting compulsory sterilization, in opposition to the Catholic church. Some of them rejected the church and totalitarianism, while accepting eugenics’ most radical solutions.

All these possible combinations were among the ideas proposed at a time in which the eugenic field was struggling to consolidate itself effectively. In the process, its increasing scientific autonomy was matched by intensification of its internal conflicts, to the point where they affected the stability of the field because of the excessively broad agenda of topics under discussion, which included struggles over who would be the field’s leader and thus define orthodoxy. However, the field did consolidate after its autonomy was drastically reduced and it became a direct extension of political ideas and praxis.

A final attempt to unite the different strands of eugenics through scientific autonomy came about through the radio program launched in 1930, which established an unprecedented relationship between the discipline of eugenics and mass society. However, various political events precipitated the reconversion of the field, stamping it with a heteronomy that resolved the question of leadership through the consensus that emerged over an outsider who was able to overcome previous internal disagreements. In effect, recognition of Nicola Pende overcame the unresolved battle for authority, at the cost of renouncing scientific autonomy in the eugenics field, which was undergoing a fusion with fascism in Argentina (Vallejo, 2012). “Latin eugenics” became established¹⁶ as a branch of knowledge that integrated science, politics and religion, and was strongly environmental. It rejected earlier critiques of the role of the church so as to clear the way for the exercise of disguised coercion.¹⁷ The zero hour of Argentine eugenics, marked by fascination with Mendelian genetics and rejection both of church interference and of the fusion of eugenics with totalitarianism, was thus left behind. “The hour of eugenics” had now begun.

NOTES

¹ Hermann Keyserling made this statement in 1925. In Argentina it was reiterated emphatically by Aráoz Alfaro in 1935 and Pou Orfila in 1943 (cf. Stepan, 1991, p.61). Gregorio Marañón, who was enormously influential in South America, also used it in 1933.

² Armus (2016, p.151) argues that “people have talked about eugenics as being either Anglo-Saxon or Latin, soft or hard-core, environmental or genetic, preventive or selective.” He associates the case of Argentina with “the reproduction of individuals or groups deemed superior in order to modify the populational average with eugenic education campaigns, marriage-regulation laws, initiatives aimed at maternal and child health, and general and specific public health measures.”

³ Antonio Vidal was born in 1864, graduated from medical school in 1893, and worked in criminology and school hygiene. He embraced experimental psychology and was involved in the foundation of the Buenos Aires Psychology Society (Sociedad de Psicología de Buenos Aires) in 1908. Gregorio Aráoz Alfaro was born in San Miguel de Tucumán in 1870, graduated from medical school in 1892, and was one of the most important figures in the early public healthcare system in Argentina. He died in Buenos Aires in 1955.

⁴ Víctor Delfino was born in Buenos Aires in 1883. He graduated in 1907 from the Faculty of Natural Sciences at La Plata, and began studying medicine in Buenos Aires. He did further studies in Rome and Paris. From 1912 on, he became associated with the principle eugenicists, and became a central figure in the eugenics movement in Argentina. He died in Buenos Aires in 1941.

⁵ The Argentine Social Museum was founded in 1911 in Buenos Aires in an initiative by Tomás Amadeo. It was inspired by the Musée Social in Paris, and was meant to become a space for informed debate and for generating proposals to address the main political and social problems of the day (Pelosi, 2000).

⁶ Among the members, one especially important figure was Joaquín V. González. He was born in Nonogasta, La Rioja, in 1863. At the turn of the century he played an important role in politics, promoting various governmental reforms from his ministerial position. He was the founder and president of the Universidad Nacional de La Plata, and also a well-known writer and legal theorist. He was a member of the National Senate from 1907 until his death in 1923.

⁷ Zeballos was a notable intellectual who was as prestigious as González; they both died in 1923. Acting for the Eugenics Society, Stucci worked on a project based on an earlier proposal by Emilio Coni to implement medical certification for future spouses as a social prophylaxis measure. The project was presented in 1919 to the second National Conference on Tuberculosis Prophylaxis (Conferencia Nacional de Profilaxis Tuberculosis), which met in Rosario.

⁸ On the links between Kehl y Delfino, see Santos (2012).

⁹ The social hygiene section was created to combine health engineering, law, sociology, biometry, philanthropy, eugenics, and heredity. It was the forerunner of a notion of social services inspired in the American Public Health Association in the USA (Pelosi, 2000, p.149-150).

¹⁰ Pende was born in Noicattaro in 1880 and died in Rome in 1970. He pioneered an Italian version of eugenics that he called biotypology, which brought him into direct contact with the Catholic church and fascism. On the biotypological institutes he created, see Vallejo (2004).

¹¹ The text used here, as in other lectures broadcast on *Clamor*, comes from the version authorized to be read on the radio, following official guidelines.

¹² Lucas Ayarragaray also signed the founding document for the Argentine Society for Biotypology in 1930.

¹³ The powerful personal and institutional relations between Argentina and Mussolini's Italy made Argentina an important example of the links between eugenics and fascism in Latin America (Stepan, 1991, p.16-17). At that time, active diplomacy tended to associate Latin values with those of fascism, presenting Rome as the base for undertaking “spiritual colonization” (Scarzanella, 1999, p.145), for which biotypology provided scientific backing. Under the Duce, Italy used Argentina to spearhead its policy of cultural expansionism in South America (Vallejo, 2012, p.177).

¹⁴ The text was presented as “a speech that will be of great interest to readers of our *Anales*,” because it was a “research document” (Legislación..., 1934, p.12).

¹⁵ Franz Boas, who is considered the father of anthropology in the USA, was one of the most outspoken opponents of scientific racism. He was born in 1858, in Westfalia, Germany, and died in New York in 1941.

¹⁶ This concept was used to identify an international network centered on Italy and backed by the Catholic church, but extending especially to South America (Miranda, Vallejo, 2005; Vallejo, 2012; Turda, Gillette, 2014; Vallejo, Miranda, 2014). For a historiography of eugenics in Argentina, see: Miranda, (2014), Armus (2016).

¹⁷ Eugenics began developing in Argentina from 1930 on, based on this notion (Miranda, 2003; Vallejo, 2009).

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