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# Between Germanic and Latin eugenics: Portugal, 1930-1960

*Entre a eugenia  
germânica e a latina:  
Portugal, 1930-1960*

**Richard Mark Clemençon**

Professor, Spanish, Portuguese and  
Latin American Studies/University of Leeds.  
LS2 9JT – Leeds – West Yorkshire – United Kingdom  
r.m.clemençon@leeds.ac.uk

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## Abstract

This article assesses critically the participation of Portuguese eugenicists in “Latin eugenics” and traces the continuities and discontinuities with respect to this model. In particular, it focuses on a number of examples of more “Germanic” eugenics in contrast and in comparison to Latin versions of eugenics. In the former category, Eusébio Tamagnini, José Ayres de Azevedo and Leopoldina Ferreira de Paulo are considered; in the latter category, especially the work of Almerindo Lessa on “racial mixing” is considered. The conclusions suggest that we should seek diversity in both Latin and northern European eugenic models while at the same time placing Portugal within the array of possible versions of eugenics during the first half of the twentieth century.

Keywords: Portugal; Latin eugenics; Eusébio Tamagnini (1880-1972); Almerindo Lessa (1909-1995); José Ayres de Azevedo (1911-1978).

## Resumo

*Este artigo faz uma avaliação crítica da participação dos eugenicistas portugueses na “eugenia latina” e investiga as continuidades e descontinuidades relacionadas a esse modelo. Concentra-se especialmente em diversos exemplos de uma eugenia mais “germânica”, em contraste e em comparação com as versões latinas. Na primeira categoria, são considerados Eusébio Tamagnini, José Ayres de Azevedo e Leopoldina Ferreira de Paulo; na segunda, é dada consideração especial à obra de Almerindo Lessa sobre “miscigenação racial”. As conclusões sugerem que devemos buscar diversidade tanto no modelo de eugenia latino como no modelo do norte da Europa, também inserindo Portugal no leque de possíveis versões de eugenia durante a primeira metade do século XX.*

*Palavras-chave: Portugal; eugenia latina; Eusébio Tamagnini (1880-1972); Almerindo Lessa (1909-1995); José Ayres de Azevedo (1911-1978).*

The formal participation of eugenicists from Portugal within the International Latin Federation of Eugenics Societies was, to all intents and purposes, minimal and appears to have been limited to one figure, Doctor Almerindo Lessa, who attended the inaugural conference of the federation in Paris in August 1937 (*Fédération...*, 1937, p.6; *Bibliografia...*, 1938, p.221; Turda, Gillette, 2014, p.186). Despite the conference proceedings noting that a Portuguese eugenics society was in the process of being constituted (*Fédération...*, 1937, p.383), few references in Portugal itself were made to the federation and no formal involvement of the Portuguese Society for the Study of Eugenics (*Sociedade Portuguesa de Estudos Eugénicos*, SPEE), brought into existence by government decree in 1934, has been recorded.

Almerindo Lessa, active in fields as diverse as sex education, anthropology, hygiene and serology, in addition to playing a marginal role in the Latin federation, was also a rather marginal figure within the organized eugenics movement in Portugal itself. He was not one of the founding members of the SPEE and although he addressed the assembled society in 1934, he only formally joined it in 1939, two years after it was finally consolidated with its three branches in Lisbon, Coimbra and Oporto.<sup>1</sup> The marginal position of Lessa could perhaps be viewed in part as a consequence of his positive acceptance, unusual for the time, of “racial mixing,” having questioned in the 1930s the supposed deleterious consequences of “miscegenation” and, from the 1950s onwards, having actively encouraged it as part of a project for population improvement. What does such a pro-miscegenation position in Lessa and a predominant anti-miscegenation stance within the SPEE tell us about Portuguese eugenics and “Latin” eugenics in general? This article seeks to answer this question by assessing the relative importance of “Latin” and Germanic eugenic strains within Portugal and, in so doing, makes a contribution to an understanding of the complexities of “Latin” eugenics within Portugal and more broadly within the international eugenics movement.

It may be tempting to view the marginality of Lessa and the lack of Portuguese involvement in the Latin federation as confirmation of the predominance of Germanic or northern European strains of eugenics in this country. Initially, the most prominent or vociferous strands of eugenics in Portugal were indeed linked primarily to racial hygiene and hereditarian understandings of biological and racial fitness (Corrêa, 1927; Cleminson, 2014, p.57-60). However, as this article will argue, an interpretation signalling the predominance of Germanic eugenics within the SPEE cannot necessarily be sustained. Rather, it will be argued that a shifting equilibrium between different types of eugenics with different ancestry operated in Portugal over the years 1930-1960, both within the “official” eugenics movement as exemplified by the SPEE and outside of it.<sup>2</sup> Even though the expressions of eugenics that achieved greatest relative success in Portugal in the 1940s and 1950s had much more in common with Latin varieties, Germanic tendencies did not altogether disappear.

This brings us to a central although perhaps obvious question: What was eugenics and how can we account for its diversity historically? In order to inform our understandings of eugenics, I argued recently that it is useful to draw on analyses of the history of “race” (Cleminson, 2014, p.8-19). If “race” has been understood within a nominalist framework whereby what scientists understood to be race can, in fact, be taken to have constituted race at that specific moment (Stepan, 1982), and racial characteristics have been taken as mobile attributes in order to construct a supposedly essential racial identity (Roque, forthcoming),

eugenics can also be understood to be what its advocates believed it to be and what they did in its name at a particular time. Such a stance avoids us having to judge whether such and such a practice, considered under the banner of eugenics in any given place, was “really” eugenics or whether it was something that fell short of eugenics. This epistemological approach, developed in order to understand the history of eugenics now, however, does not obscure the very fact that there may well indeed have been debates in the past over what constituted eugenics “proper;” the contested category of eugenics in the past enables us to see how eugenics itself was constituted in that past.

To date, eugenics in Portuguese historiography has been largely understood as a derivation of primarily hereditarian thought and/or Nazi ideology. Although pioneering in its objectives and reach, Pimentel’s 1998 article on the history of eugenics in Portugal assessed the movement primarily through the lens of Nazi eugenics or, at least, sought to find the commonalities between the Portuguese and the German movements (Pimentel, 1998). Patrícia Ferraz de Matos (2006, 2010) examined the range of eugenic ideas in Portugal, particularly in respect of race and the colonial question, but the discussion was often filtered through Nazi eugenics. Ninhos has represented eugenics as the idea of racial perfection “through negative social engineering measures” (Ninhos, 2013, p.209), linked to Nazi approaches. All of these positions, to a greater or lesser degree, through their foregrounding of Nazi eugenics, a danger illustrated by Adams (1990), inhibit a broader view that takes into account the diversity of eugenics in Portugal. They also make it harder to differentiate between what could potentially be called “Latin” eugenics and those expressions that were more authoritarian or eliminatory in their aims and proposed methods.

### **“Latin eugenics”**

It would be difficult to deny that during the early twentieth century the notion of “Latin eugenics” as distinct from other forms of eugenics, particularly the North American and northern European varieties, was held by individuals and organizations in southern European and Latin and Central American countries. The question is how stable and historiographically viable such a distinct tendency can be taken to be. The Italian demographer and eugenicist Corrado Gini’s opening address to the Latin eugenics federation conference in August 1937 attests to this desire to distinguish “Latin” eugenics from other currents operating elsewhere: “The variety of circumstances in the Latin countries, the balanced nature and the moderation of their ruling classes ..., a more pronounced faculty to detach their judgements from personal interests” all contrasted with the “intransigent and extremist attitude in those countries where particular interests are in place” (Fédération..., 1937, p.6).<sup>3</sup>

Observers outside of Latin countries tended to confirm these differences. The British eugenicist K.E. Trounson, for example, observed in his overview of new developments in eugenics in the *Eugenics Review* in 1931 that the Brazilians “interpret the word [eugenics] less strictly than we do, and make it cover a good deal of what we should call hygiene and elementary sexuology [sic]” (Stepan, 1991, p.64). But this view, Stepan argues, shows how Trounson, and many others, missed the underlying rationale of Brazilian eugenics precisely by their “strict” interpretations, their failure to acknowledge the importance given to hygienic

questions and the complexities of the debate between the importance of congenital versus, or in concert with, otherwise inherited factors. In the Brazilian model, the same author observed that “no very clear distinction is drawn between congenital conditions due to prenatal injury and diseases which are strictly genetic” (Stepan, 1991, p.64).

This issue was highlighted in the report on the Latin federation’s 1937 meeting written up for the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. The report returned to the kind of questions signalled by Trounson and focused on the different explanations for disease degeneration discussed in the meeting (Latin..., 1938). Here, the conundrum over psychopathic constitutions in relation to eugenics is illustrative. The report noted that there were two “opposite conceptions of the influence of heredity on psychiatric conditions” (Latin..., 1938). The psychiatric position understood these to derive from “clear-cut hereditary morbid constitutions,” whereas the other theory, from psychoanalysis, maintained that heredity was not the dominant influence on the child. While reflecting the classic discussion between hereditarian and environmental factors in diseases, this kind of enquiry – and the conclusions arrived at – were particularly influential in Latin eugenics movements. Such debates and the acceptance of environmental factors in disease have led authors to uncover in Latin countries “an insistent association of eugenics with sanitation, social hygiene, mental hygiene or the hygiene of the reproductive cells” (Stepan, 1991, p.84). This association was very strong in the Portuguese case, just as it was in countries such as Argentina, Cuba and Mexico (García González, Álvarez Peláez, 1999; Miranda, Vallejo, 2005).

The most extensive examination of the contours of Latin eugenics to date has been undertaken by Marius Turda and Aaron Gillette. These authors note that “Latin eugenics” was, at least to some degree, a cultural and social construction made by those that subscribed to the idea. In distinction to Nordic and Anglo-Saxon eugenics, these authors argue, “Latin eugenics relied less on race and class and more on [the] individual and the national community” (Turda, Gillette, 2014, p.1). One of the central concerns of Turda and Gillette (p.2) is a focus on Latin eugenicists’ “attempts to achieve the social and political goals of the modern welfare state” in their respective countries. In discussing the issue of the welfare state, they concentrate on the impact of eugenicists on “countries’ population and family policies, maternal and infant health, preventive medicine, and social hygienic and public health campaigns against tuberculosis, alcoholism, venereal diseases, and prostitution” (p.3), again, all issues present in the Portuguese movement.

The intentions of Turda and Gillette are taken as framing points for this article. But they are taken with caution. Many of the vectors of Latin eugenics mentioned above, with their concentration on social hygiene and public health, certainly ring true for eugenics under the Portuguese dictatorship. But the relationship between the Salazar regime and any attempt to articulate a welfare state was problematic to say the least (Pimentel, 1999; Pereira, 2005) and any strong interventionist programme of eugenics was not to be in Portugal. Instead, the regime focused on limited hygienic reforms connected largely to maternity and child care and did not endorse these reforms as “eugenics,” no doubt in part given the opposition to eugenics from the powerful Portuguese Catholic Church. As Turda and Gillette (2014, p.193-195) illustrate, in numerous “Latin” countries there were tensions at the heart of these

strategies; the Romanian case, to name but one example, illustrates some of the issues around the heredity/environment debate and the legitimacy or otherwise of “eugenic sterilization.”

This article is divided into two main parts. The first will discuss Latin eugenic undertakings within Portugal and will focus on the work of Almerindo Lessa and the question of racial mixing. The second part will analyse the more Germanic strains of eugenics in Portugal, with an emphasis on the founder of the SPEE, Eusébio Tamagnini, on the pro-Nazi race hygienist José Ayres de Azevedo and on the anthropology researcher Leopoldina Ferreira Paulo. The latter two worked under the former Nazi party race hygienist Otmar von Verschuer in the 1940s and 1950s, respectively. Core issues, crucial to distinguishing Latin forms of eugenics from others, will be examined throughout and these include: the hereditarian/environmental question; the relationship between notions of the individual and the national community in comparison to concepts of race and class; and, the article’s main focus, the acceptability or otherwise of racial mixing or miscegenation, an issue at the centre of all eugenics movements of all stripes.

### **An exponent of “Latin eugenics” in Portugal: Almerindo Lessa**

The insistence on family policies, social hygiene and public health campaigns (Turda, Gillette, 2014, p.3) characterised a broad swathe of eugenic initiatives in Portugal, especially from the 1930s onwards. These coexisted with other projects that were more hereditarian and race hygiene oriented. Almerindo Lessa was a disciple of Doctor Abel Salazar and was steeped in the hygienic tradition of this socially active medical figure. Lessa articulated his thought on sexual hygiene, eugenics and, later on, racial questions through the prism of this progressive and environmentally-oriented foundation. In addition to writing some accessible texts on sexual education in his early twenties, such as *A educação sexual da mocidade* (Lessa, 1934a), and *Política sexual: ensaios de compreensão e de conduta* (Lessa, 1943) in his early thirties (Pacheco, 2012, p.97),<sup>4</sup> Lessa became increasingly interested in eugenics and marriage hygiene in the 1930s (Cleminson, 2014, p.138, note 51). His range of interests was impressive and the titles of his publications display this eclectic coverage typical of eugenicists in Latin countries, such as Spain (Noguera, Huerta, 1934; Sinclair, 2007). His writings on love, for example, were published as *Amor vermelho, amor loiro e amor roxo* (Lessa, 1932); he wrote about the education of women in *A educação da mulher: o conflito do seu perfil biológico e do seu destino humano com a coeducação* (Lessa, 1934b),<sup>5</sup> and he elaborated upon public health in his *Livro de higiene* (Lessa, 1936). By early 1939 Lessa was the head of venereal disease consultancy at the Lisbon Centro de Saúde and around that time developed an involvement with the Rockefeller Foundation by working on syphilis.

Lessa began to study blood diseases and was by 1945 head of the blood transfusion service at the Hospital de São José, Lisbon, and in 1950 he went to Mozambique to establish blood therapy programmes and consolidated a long relationship with Portugal’s colonies (Cleminson, 2014, p.138, note 51). He carried out further research on blood groups in a series of anthropological missions from 1950-1981 to countries as varied as Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, Goa and Macau (Pacheco, 2012, p.97). His doctoral dissertation read at the University of Oporto was published as *A individualidade biológica do sangue: importância médica,*



*antropológica e social dos tipos antigénicos* (Lessa, 1956). Finally, he published on the question of “racial mixing,” intervening in this debate extensively. One of his last works, *Macau: ensaio de antropologia portuguesa dos trópicos* (Lessa, 1996), openly celebrated the capacity of human beings to mix racially, a propensity long celebrated in Portuguese writing, albeit often uncritically (Bethencourt, 2012).

Given this varied scientific background, it was logical that the “curious science, Eugenics ... the art of creating good men” (Lessa, 1936, p.213) should become one of Lessa’s interests. He called for Mothers’ Schools or Institutes of Puericulture to be established to create the ideal hygienic conditions for the reproduction of the Portuguese (Lessa, 1934b, p.87). He argued that the undertaking to have children should be limited to those who were capable of such a step and to those who were able to conceive of the greater national good: “Having a child is a gift that should only be granted to honest parents, respectful of his intelligence, his blood, and the national bounty” (Lessa, 1943, p.179). This focus on the individual, through to the nation, rather than on race, clearly placed Lessa within the framework of Latin eugenics as identified by Turda and Gillette and contrasts his ideas with those of the more Germanic professor of anthropology, Eusébio Tamagnini. It was a tendency that would be further illustrated by Lessa’s engagement with the Latin eugenics federation itself.

Before attending the 1937 Paris meeting, Lessa had written his *Exortações eugénicas*, published by the medical students’ association at the University of Oporto in 1933. This was his clearest statement on eugenics and it proved to be something of a scandal when published, entailing rejection from university colleagues, opposition from the Church and censorship, with many of the copies of the publication being seized. Similar treatment befell Jaime Brasil on publishing his work *A questão sexual* in 1932 (Freire, 2010, p.199; Cleminson, 2014, p.108, note 179; Duarte, 2015, p.268-270), showing how problematic it was to broach issues of a sexual and eugenic nature in Portugal during the early Salazar years (Lessa, 1995, p.43-44). *Exortações eugénicas* outlined four interrelated strands of eugenics. These were the constructive, restrictive, destructive and creative (also called curative by the author) versions (Lessa, 1933). These different tendencies combined, to a greater or lesser degree, hereditarian and environmental understandings and strategies for improvement. Constructive eugenics focused on those already married and advised couples on how to procreate with maximum care and foresight. The issuing of marriage certificates would guarantee the best results and prizes would be awarded for large families (Lessa, 1933, p.7).

Lessa viewed restrictive eugenics as the most promising as it taught certain types of parents not to procreate by means of birth control and *coitus interruptus* (Lessa, 1933, p.13-19). The third tendency, the destructive form of eugenics, allowed for sterilization, preventing the “incapable” and “inferior” from reproducing and therefore, Lessa argued with no reference to any justifying theory of heredity, eliminating them from the population within three generations (Lessa, 1933, p.19-21). The fourth strategy, curative eugenics, was clearly based on hygienic measures and child-centred puericulture (Lessa, 1933, p.21-23). His endorsement of restrictive eugenics confirms his initial proximity to Latin forms of eugenics.

Four years later, Lessa attended the Latin eugenics congress and published a two-part discussion of the proceedings in *Arquivo de anatomia e antropologia* (Lessa, 1938a, 1938b), one of the principal sites for discussions on eugenics in Portugal. After a brief description of

the theory of eugenics, Lessa noted that the Latin federation had grown out of the Italian concern about the influences exerted by Germany, England and North America within the international eugenics movement. Lessa also noted that the federation stressed the common heritage of the Latin countries on issues such as population politics and a more open or positive attitude towards miscegenation (an attitude, in fact, not quite so clear-cut in Latin eugenics organizations). He also emphasized the opposition to sterilization within the federation (Lessa, 1938a, p.175).

Evidencing a strong environmental leaning hinted at in his 1933 *Exortações eugénicas*, Lessa argued that the improvement of the environment represented the fastest means of dignifying and perfecting the population. In addition, a process of parental selection would be the most effective means of correcting the environment in which people lived and brought up children: eugenics, as was the case for many Latin eugenicists, had its complement in “euthenics” (Lessa, 1938a, p.177). This dual approach provided Lessa with a platform to critique the application of Mendel’s theories as overly mechanistic, thus reaffirming his commitment to environmental improvements in tune with Latin eugenics. It should be pointed out, nevertheless, that Lamarckian theories, often used to justify such a position among Latin eugenicists, were not mentioned by Lessa at this stage.

As Lessa’s report on the Latin congress tends to suggest, he was fast consolidating an interest in expressions of eugenics that were different from northern European varieties and, as far as the question of race went, in recommendations that were focused more on the population and nation rather than ideas of racial purity. This stance was exemplified by his general openness to the possibility of racial mixing. Some 20 years after his initial 1938 report, in sections of his published diary, he noted that it was during the first Latin Meeting of Eugenics (Reunião Latina de Eugenia) that he first came across the idea of miscegenation as potentially beneficial for the population at large and admitted to being enthused at the time by the ideas of three figures at that congress: Corrado Gini, Raymond Turpin and René Martial (Lessa, 1958, p.187). This was perhaps a selectively positive reading of these three authors’ ideas on racial mixing. Nevertheless, such an engagement served Lessa to embark on the discussion of a process that would interest him for the next decades: the formation of racial mixes of all kinds for the Portuguese – “Luso-African, Luso-Amerindian, Luso-Indian, Luso-any race or Luso-any colour *mestiços*, who are the new men of this tropical community” (Lessa, 1958, p.187).

Although retrospective considerations on the naivety or lack of objectivity of thought on race in the 1930s were voiced by Lessa later – “Without doubt, the problem had a solid scientific basis but it was tainted, as I see it today, by a kind of sociological bourgeoisism that masked in us the racial hierarchies (*casticimos*) of Europe” (Lessa, 1958, p.187) – the parameters of the debate and his own views on it were laid out clearly in his 1938 report on the Latin federation congress. In the section corresponding to emigration and miscegenation, he reported on the papers given by René Martial, Dino Camavitto and Étienne Letard (Lessa, 1938a, p.184-192; cf. *Fédération...*, 1937, p.15-69). In doing so, Lessa did not draw back from signalling the “dangers” of some racial mixes; it was necessary, however, to be clear about the concepts employed. All researchers used “prior definitions of race, ethnicity, people and grafting” (Lessa, 1938a, p.185). It was perhaps this lack of definition or the particular



interpretations of these categories, he noted in a discrete brief aside, which gave rise to the somewhat negative comments that had been made on miscegenation at the First Congress of Colonial Anthropology in Oporto in 1934 (see, for example, Correia, 1934).

Instead of a biological notion of race, Lessa favoured that employed by Martial: race would be a collection of psychological traits whose anthropological traces “constitute in time, that is, in History, a distinct unit” (Lessa, 1938a, p.185). On this basis, a “eugenically good *mestiço* is one whose psychology is harmoniously suited to the psychology of the environment where he was produced” (Lessa, 1938a, p.185). Here, Lessa was probably voicing support for Martial’s idea of “racial grafting” and selection of the “best” immigrants (Schneider, 1990, p.240-248).<sup>6</sup> To this understanding, Lessa added the dimension of blood types, just as Martial had as part of his idea of a “frontière des sangs” in Europe (Schneider, 1990, p.249), and warned once more against an over-Mendelian interpretation of heredity (Lessa, 1938a, p.185).<sup>7</sup>

Rather than subscribe to notions of racial superiority common in Anglo-Saxon countries, Lessa explicitly favoured the theories of the Brazilian F.J. de Oliveira Viana, “who believes in the undulating and relative superiority of each one [of the races]” (Lessa, 1938a, p.186), an idea that Lessa also found in Abel Salazar’s work on the chronological development of civilizations (Lessa, 1958, p.187; Lessa, 1995, p.46). Relying on biotypological theories, Viana had argued that race or ethnic type determined the type of constitution of a group, which in turn determined the type of temperament and intelligence of each group (Lessa, 1938a, p.186).<sup>8</sup> This somewhat circular argument was perhaps less disapproving of racial mixtures within the “appropriate” psychological and blood groups. It was not, however, devoid of deterministic readings similar to those articulated within the more racially-oriented and Mendelian approaches to eugenics; neither was it devoid of racist “whitening” theses (Stepan, 1991, p.155-156).

Lessa was keen to differentiate between stances on miscegenation, a desire he would reaffirm in his 1958 diary (Lessa, 1958, p.190). Writing in 1938, he set out three groups of theories on this question. The first, opposed to miscegenation, argued that *mestiços* occasioned the dissolution of racial purity; the second theory recognized that mixing was inevitable and that the “efficiency” of *mestiços* should be monitored in the future; the third theory embraced *mestiços* on the basis that they were useful for the “renovation and new-creation of races” (Lessa, 1938a, p.187). In the first group were positioned the Nordic or Anglo-Saxon theorists such as Mjoen and Lundborg and also some Latins such as Gini, Roquette Pinto, Kehl and Tamagnini (cf. Tamagnini, 1934).<sup>9</sup>

The second interpretation was represented by figures such as Francisco García Calderón, José de Vasconcelos and, most famously after his intervention in Madrid during the Eugenics Conferences of 1933, the Mexican Rodolfo Reyes (1934). Martial represented the third group (Lessa, 1938a, p.188). Although one must be attentive to the attempt at retrospective interpretations, it is clear from both his discussion in 1938 and from his later diary that Lessa placed himself in the third camp, that is, among the pro-miscegenation thinkers. Writing in 1955, he stated that “[t]he first criterion is full of caste prejudice, psychological prejudice, Gobinism; the second was announced in Madrid over twenty years ago by the Mexican thinker Rodolfo Reys [sic]; the last one was proposed by Novicow” (Lessa, 1958, p.190).

Implicitly following Martial, Lessa argued that even though some races may have been better placed *vis à vis* others in certain respects, superiority itself was a relative concept. The truth was, he argued, that all races may have qualities that placed them in a superior position to others at a particular time. But all could learn from each other. In this way, he distanced himself from those in the Portuguese eugenics movement, such as Tamagnini, in the first group, who were opposed outright to racial mixing and aligned himself with other voices, such as that of Doctor Vaz de Sampaio e Melo (1936), professor at Escola Superior Colonial, who sustained similar points of view from a less “scientific” and more cultural or political position. Lessa, like Vaz de Sampaio, argued that no-one could deny that miscegenation had served Portuguese demographic politics very well and had entailed a fundamental contribution to world culture. Portuguese (and Spanish) racial mixing and the two countries’ openness to miscegenation had become a factor in the process of eugenic perfection and miscegenation could reinforce more robust lines by means of the appropriate “grafts” being attached to existing types.

Such a position came to form the core of Lessa’s ideas. His ideas were made up by an “enxerto” or grafting of their own: a mixture of ideas derived from Latin eugenics and others from sociology, most notably from the work of Gilberto Freyre. From the mid-1930s onwards, Lessa argued in favour of miscegenation and justified it within a positive reading of the history of racial groupings that Martial had referred to, with a particular emphasis on crossings between different types of blood (as the biological mechanism) and culture (as the environmental mechanism) – to what Freyre had called the “Albuquerque method,” whereby the captains-general in India married off their soldiers to the “biological flower” of Indian women (Lessa, 1958, p.188). White people gained from this mixture in the Tropics through better disease resistance (Lessa, 1958, p.189). The Portuguese were eugenicizers *par excellence* (Bastos, 2005, p.24), as Freyre had acknowledged:

And it is in this respect that Rodolfo Reys [sic] holds that the greatest political achievement produced to this day in terms of eugenics was the colonization that the Portuguese and the Spanish (Gilberto Freyre’s brown-skinned, Christocentric men) undertook in the Centre and South of the Americas – which he calls the contemporary miracle, equivalent to the Greek miracle before Christianity, because it created a race with adaptive features to some extent universal (Lessa, 1958, p.190).<sup>10</sup>

Although remaining unconvinced by Freyre’s idea that the future lay outside of Europe (Lessa, 1958, p.191; cf. Freyre, 1956), Lessa proclaimed the extraordinary capabilities of the tropical civilization made up by the Portuguese, a civilization “marked by a fixed or permanent harmonization of Lusitanian forms of being and living with the tropics and done by a process of domination of lands and assimilation of oriental and tropical values of which they partook from the outset” (Lessa, 1958, p.191). The advances of genetics confirmed the advantages of such a project by allowing observers to see the biological value of *mestiços* in a new way (Lessa, 1958, p.191). This programme of creating new human strains – “grafts of men,”<sup>11</sup> as Lessa called them – was a biosocial project of population building and settlement (*povoamento*). It would literally result in a new kind of race, or even non-race, universal in its cultural aspirations, championed by the Portuguese, whereby ethnic and

blood characters would blend: “The Portuguese are not one race: we are races – forming a human assemblage with diverse biochemical and ethno-linguistic groups and sub-groups united by common genetic, legal and religious bonds” (Lessa, 1969, p.33-34). Such an appreciation coincided with and helped to consolidate the increasingly positive reception of Freyre’s Lusotropicalism under Salazar, especially from the late 1940s and early 1950s onwards (Bethencourt, 2012, p.10; Castelo, 1998). As well as altered administrative and economic relationships between Portugal and the colonies, these changes were accompanied by new developments in Portuguese anthropology that moved the discipline beyond the old physical variety towards a more cultural version (Leal, 2000). In fact, Lessa’s thought represented a careful bio-political positioning whereby inter- and intra-racial “harmony” and variability were emphasized within the context of an on-going and durable “tropical” politico-racial Lusophone community.

The work of Lessa also fitted well with the professed characteristics and mode of operation of some participants, perhaps the majority, in the Latin eugenics federation, especially those who favoured environmental improvements over racial hygiene programmes and those that favoured the creation of new strains of humans through racial crossings rather than racial separation and hierarchy. Despite this, opinions in the Latin organization were far from unified. As the 1930s wore on, many Italian eugenicists under the sway of fascism opposed racial mixing between “white” Italians and colonized African “others” (Cassata, 2008). In contrast, others incorporated a pragmatic acceptance of miscegenation into their programmes. Doctor Josep Vandellós, of the Catalan Eugenics Society, advocated a strategic attempt to incorporate “non-native” Catalan immigrants in order to counter the process of depopulation taking place in Catalonia in the 1920s and 1930s (Domingo, 2012).

### **Germanic strains of eugenics in Portugal**

As stated above, there was a strong Germanic tendency in the eugenics movement in Portugal. But as we can see from Almerindo Lessa’s work and that of eugenicists who were more inclined to social sanitation and hygiene, this tendency was far from the only “legitimate” or “available” discourse (Bourdieu, 1991) on eugenics at the time. Lessa denounced the Nazi “experiments” as “one of the most shocking documents in the history of Humanity” in 1949 (Lessa, 1958, p.21), but others within the movement were much more clearly pro-German, pro-Nazi or both. The founder of the SPEE, Eusébio Tamagnini, professor of anthropology at the University of Coimbra, was certainly one of the more enthusiastic proponents of Germanic eugenics. But it was the somewhat maverick figure of Doctor José Ayres de Azevedo from Oporto who was the loudest voice explicitly in favour of Nazi eugenic measures.

Eusébio Tamagnini, minister of Public Instruction from October 1934 to January 1936, brought the SPEE into existence by decree in 1934 before establishing it as a working organization with three branches in 1937. He was a one-time adept of the National Syndicalist Movement (Movimento Nacional-Sindicalista), sectors of which constituted the main force of extreme right-wing opposition to Salazar’s National Union (União Nacional). He led dissident pro-Salazar dons within Coimbra to engineer a split within the organization, thus

distancing themselves from the overtly fascist wing led by Rolão Preto (Pinto, 2000, p.110). This does not necessarily mean that the Tamagnini-led grouping was less fascist than Rolão Preto's faction; they did, however, believe that their political objectives could be best served by working within the regime rather than by opposing it (Fonseca, 2010).

Before his evident disenchantment with the Salazar regime, Tamagnini (1936) developed strong associations with eugenicists such as Eugen Fischer, thereby consolidating a relationship between German and Portuguese anthropologists that was already strong (Gago, 2015, p.6). Fischer, who was awarded an honorary doctorate by Coimbra University on Tamagnini's request, was invited to the formal public opening of the SPEE in Coimbra in December 1937 (Cleminson, 2014, p.126). Tamagnini would go on to visit the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in 1938 (Pimentel, 1998, p.23, n.11).

In respect of Tamagnini's work, there are two principal areas which are of most relevance to the issues discussed here: first, his remarks on the question of "family" and "racial" eugenics (Tamagnini, 1938); second, his renowned opposition to miscegenation (Tamagnini, 1934). Tamagnini dismissed family-based eugenics as inadequate for two main reasons. Families could hide undesirable biological traits for the sake of convenience or because of their shameful consequences. Also, any eugenic policies would, by default, only reach the family unit and not the whole racial pool. This evidenced certain understandings of genetics and its socio-political dimensions at the time; Tamagnini believed that particular races had certain qualities in common and these could only be purified by means of national and racial intervention organized by the State.

In respect of the second matter, alongside Mendes Correia, Tamagnini was staunchly opposed to miscegenation. At the National Congress of Colonial Anthropology in 1934 in a paper on the "problems entailed by miscegenation" he spoke of antagonism between different racial characters, the risk of infertility and the "disastrous" results that occurred when racial crossings took place (Tamagnini, 1934). Such evaluations relied on a Mendelian framework which showed how negative traits were passed on from one generation to the next. His stance on miscegenation was significantly more critical than that of even Correia (1934).

A figure who took Tamagnini's racial style of eugenics further, supporting Nazi policies on sterilization, marriage regulation and the prevention of the reproduction of the "unfit," was José Ayres de Azevedo Novais Basto (Castanheira, 2010; Cleminson, 2014, p.155-162; Ninhos, 2013). Ayres de Azevedo had coincided with Tamagnini in the important national congress of population science where he elaborated upon the role of population management and empire (Azevedo, 1940a) and on the "bio-chemical purity" of the Portuguese (Azevedo, 1940b). He was to follow in Tamagnini's footsteps by working at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in the early 1940s as a visiting researcher. Working under Otmar Von Verschuer at the Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft (KWG) section on race biology and hygiene, he praised Nazi initiatives on racial policy and on the family (Azevedo, 1943a, 1943b), went on to conduct blood analyses and worked with Verschuer on "human material" derived from twins (Müller-Hill, 1999, p.337; Schmuhl, 2008, p.306, note 255; Cleminson, 2014, p.155-162). Despite his enthusiasm for this work and the supposed advances that it represented, his reception in Oporto when he returned from war-ravaged Germany was cool and his doctoral thesis (Azevedo, 1944) was not received favourably (Castanheira, 2010, p.131-139). It is likely that the prevailing tendency

in the Oporto SPEE grouping in favour of eugenic social sanitation (see, for example, Garrett, 1931) meant that eugenicists there frowned upon his pro-Nazi sentiments.

In addition to these two figures, some work that provided a bridge and some continuities between the physical anthropology of the 1930s and some of the methods, especially those of anthropometry, utilized by Nazi supporters such as Verschuer, is that of University of Oporto anthropologist Leopoldina Ferreira Paulo. Working as a research assistant at the Institute of Anthropology in Oporto, Paulo is worth our attention for a number of reasons. Following our initial comments on the meanings of eugenics, however, we cannot simply argue that Ferreira Paulo was a “eugenicist.” Her work was located in the field of physical anthropology. However, given the strong links between physical anthropology and eugenics in Portugal, it can be said that her work grew out of a field – institutional and scientific – that made up part of the intellectual foundations enjoyed by eugenics.

Ferreira Paulo continued the intellectual trajectory of Portuguese researchers such as Tamagnini and Ayres de Azevedo in visiting prominent German research institutes such as the KWI. In the 1950s, she arranged for a research visit to the Institute of Human Genetics at Münster University. The director of the Institute was no-one less than Otmar Von Verschuer. Verschuer was never sanctioned for his previous activities at the KWI under the Nazi regime despite his work with Josef Mengele, among others (Weiss, 2010).

Before going to Münster, Ferreira Paulo had worked on an anthropometric comparison between different indigenous women brought to Oporto for the first National Congress of Colonial Anthropology (Paulo, Oliveira, 1934). She performed research on the skin pigmentation of the Portuguese (Paulo, 1940), discussed craniometrics in 1942 (Paulo, 1944) and went on to write about constitutional types (Paulo, 1945, 1954). She published her material in the review of the newly formed Centre for Demographic Studies (Centro de Estudos Demográficos, established by decree in March 1944), an organism that offered an academic home for many of the most influential eugenicists of the day, including Tamagnini and Mendes Correia. The centre provided an environment that was shorn of strong interventionist eugenics and promoted work on demography and hygiene (Cleminson, 2014, p.199-202). In this sense, now that the outcome of the war was clear, the centre constituted the curtailment of Germanic eugenics and an unstated acceptance by the Salazar regime of eugenics and one-time eugenicists restricted to social hygiene measures and demographic planning. The work on constitutional types by Ferreira Paulo, supported by Mendes Correia and funded externally by the National Institute of Statistics, of which the centre was a part, developed population categories according to the system derived by Sigaud (Correia, 1944). This kind of anthropological work was continued by Paulo in the 1950s with an emphasis on comparative studies, corporal measurements and data collection (Paulo, 1954, 1959, 1962).

Ferreira Paulo's collaboration with Verschuer in the 1950s permitted a return to priorities that were at the heart of Germanic forms of eugenics and racial hygiene in the 1930s and 1940s. Her work enables us to see how the kind of science that informed Portuguese eugenics in previous decades set the stage for work after the war, thus showing continuities between “old” and “new” forms of eugenics, particularly of the German variety. In addition to the photographs and various tables on “Untermenschen” worked on by Ferreira Paulo in Münster dating from the late 1950s,<sup>12</sup> she also undertook

an extensive study on twins during the same period. This work under the direction of Verschuer consisted of some 196 profiles of monozygotic (identical) and dizygotic (fraternal) twins.<sup>13</sup> Each of the examples was classified as EZ, ZZ or PZ according to the type of twin and the sex of the individuals was identified (both male, one female and one male, both female). Their characteristics and measurements were recorded in tabular form. Most of the observations and data derived from 1958 but some were taken from 1952. It is possible that the first set of studies in the file were undertaken by Ferreira Paulo under Verschuer's supervision, but from number 134 onwards, with the results displayed in an almost identical printed table, she appears to conduct these observations alone as each report bears the title "Zwillingsuntersuchungen Münster (Arbeit Dr. Ferreira PAULO)." Some of the studies are accompanied by close-up photographs of eyes, lips and mouths and others with photographs of the feet, finger and hand prints of the individuals concerned.<sup>14</sup>

In a sense, there is little sinister about this work. Twin studies, of course, continue today. But given the context, this work with Verschuer perhaps takes on another aspect. Would Ferreira Paulo have been aware of the activities of Verschuer during the war? Would Verschuer have talked to her about Tamagnini's visit to the KWI and Ayres de Azevedo's work there on twins and inheritance? It is likely not. Rather than speculate along these lines, however, what the collaboration between Verschuer and Ferreira Paulo illustrates is how malleable thought on human genetics had become in the period when eugenics was no longer an acceptable scientific and social practice either in Portugal or elsewhere. It also illustrates how anything close to Germanic eugenics in Portugal was, certainly by the 1950s, if not the mid-1940s, only possible for Portuguese researchers outside of Portugal, in this case within Germany itself. The highly constrained political and scientific environment under the Estado Novo (Gago, 2015), where knowledge exchange was severely limited, had effectively curtailed not only eugenics, but a scientific research programme based on "risky" genetic models.

## Final considerations

The principal aim of this article has been to place Portuguese eugenics within the range of movements positioned within "Latin" eugenics and to assess the relevance of the specific issue of "miscegenation." While Portuguese involvement in the Latin eugenics federation was minimal, the kind of eugenics that eventually came to the fore in Portugal in the 1940s was decidedly environmentalist, less focused on "racial hygiene" and more on pro-natalist family hygiene; even this was patchy and lacked vigour (Pimentel, 1999). What occurred in Portugal was an ebb and flow of influences and different types of eugenics, which varied in accordance with locality and personal and institutional settings. While Tamagnini in Coimbra was clearly pro-German, Almeida Garrett in Oporto coincided with Latin forms of eugenics. While anthropology in both Coimbra and Oporto was broadly Germanic, the field of social hygiene shared commonalities with Latin eugenics.

In addition to complicating the make-up of eugenics in Portugal along the Germanic-Latin axis, such a reality makes any kind of periodization difficult and perhaps counter-productive. Strong hereditarian eugenics was visible in Portugal from the late 1920s onwards into the 1930s and it clearly drew on Germanic and even Nazi frameworks in the 1930s and 1940s,



following a German “style of science” (Harwood, 1993). But it coexisted with, and ran parallel to in many instances, an enduring environmental and public hygiene strain that was the version of eugenics that eventually became dominant. After the defeat of the Axis powers, the condemnation of Nazi eugenics and the establishment of the Centre for Demographic Studies, Germanic eugenics “within” Portugal became a closed chapter.

In this way, the kind of eugenics that prevailed in Portugal in the 1940s was one which had much in common with Latin eugenic postulates. The most significant contribution of Portuguese eugenics within this particular variety was Almerindo Lessa’s work on miscegenation and his favourable stance on racial mixing. Indeed, along with hygienics and puericulture, it was this dimension that would be one of the most lasting aspects of Portuguese thought. That it was partly a production of new sociological thought on miscegenation via the thought of Gilberto Freyre, coinciding with the geo-political exigencies of the Salazar State, reinforces the contention that scientific ideas rely upon an appropriate social milieu for their uptake and dissemination. The dictatorship provided those circumstances and a more flexible approach to race coincided with the Salazar State’s need to find a position in the post-war world. This was a carefully orchestrated move, however, and anthropologists such as Mendes Correia who had previously condemned miscegenation outright would only concede that racial mixing was beneficial to Portugal outside of the country in the existing colonies rather than “at home.”

When Lessa remarked three years before the Latin federation meeting, in 1934, that the Portuguese playwright Fialho de Almeida, who he described as the “prose-maker” of eugenics, provided a “balanced whole, with room for Lamarckism and Darwinism, Weissman [sic] and Gregório Mendel, and the whole extent of the theories of Francisco Galton” (Lessa, 1995, p.61), he perhaps summarized not only Latin eugenics, but the strongest variety of eugenics present in Portugal. Latin eugenics embraced an eclectic combination of theories of inheritance, with environmental factors predominating and with no “clear distinction” drawn between congenital and genetic conditions (Stepan, 1991, p.64). Fialho, Lessa argued, espoused different theories of inheritance and different eugenic strategies, covering and bridging eugenics and euthenics (Lessa, 1995, p.61).

In tune with such eclecticism, we should not forget that “Latin eugenics” contained contrary discourses. Eugenics in Latin countries contained theories and practices that did not concord with what eventually would be the dominant elements within Latin eugenics. In this sense, it is important to illustrate tensions in any given country and to indicate where continuities between northern European eugenics and the eugenics of southern European countries operated. The work of Tamagnini and Ayres de Azevedo are obvious examples in this sense. More nuanced is the work of Ferreira Paulo. Her work from the early 1930s to the late 1950s allows us to trace continuities between the eugenics of the first of these periods and the anthropometric and population hygiene work of the second period. It also allows us to trace the connections between the kinds of eugenics practised in different Latin countries between these years.

We also need to remember that there was diversity in northern European eugenics movements; these did not just focus on racial hygienic and hereditarian solutions to

the problem of dysgenesis. While the Portuguese case does not allow for the rejection of the usefulness of the interpretive category of “Latin eugenics,” we must caution against two temptations. On the one hand, the danger of over-homogenising Latin eugenics; on the other, the possibility of effacing continuities between the methods of northern European eugenics and some more hereditarian or racially-oriented strains present in particular national expressions of Latin eugenics.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Instituto para a Alta Cultura Archive, Almerindo Lessa, File 1575/9, *Curriculum Vitae*, Lisbon: Oficinas Gráficas, 1941, n.p. I am grateful to the Instituto Camões, Lisbon, for access to this archive. For the text of his 1934 talk, “Ciência ou utopia? As campanhas eugénicas de Fialho de Almeida e Ramalho Ortigão,” see Lessa (1995, p.27-63). For an overview of Lessa’s work, see Pacheco (2012).

<sup>2</sup> Analysis of the dissemination of eugenic ideas outside of “official” eugenics movements is still largely pending. See Cleminson (2011, 2014); Freire, Lousada (2012, p.22); and Duarte (2015, p.270-271).

<sup>3</sup> This and other citations from non-English languages were translated by Richard Cleminson.

<sup>4</sup> For details of Lessa’s life and work, see Câmara Municipal de Lisboa (2005). Here, he is described as “a defender of scientism allied to the poetic Portuguese soul” (p.8). See also Vasconcelos (2009).

<sup>5</sup> The text of a paper given at the Popular University of Lisbon (Universidade Popular) on 1 June 1934.

<sup>6</sup> See Martial (1931); Schneider (1990, p.343, note 33).

<sup>7</sup> Schneider notes that Martial became increasingly racist as the 1930s wore on. Lessa appeared not to notice the incompatibility between Martial’s Mendelism (Schneider, 1990, p.244) and his own thought.

<sup>8</sup> For the links between biotypology and eugenics in Portugal, see Cleminson (2014, p.87-103). For Latin America in general, see Stepan (1991, p.114-122) and for Argentina, see Vallejo (2010). Lessa was no doubt aware of the interest of his mentor, Abel Salazar, in this area (Salazar, 1999, p.53).

<sup>9</sup> It is surprising that Mendes Correia’s opposition to racial mixing (Correia, 1934) was not mentioned.

<sup>10</sup> Freyre objected to Viana’s condemnation of Africans as inherently inferior (Needell, 2011), an intricacy lost in Lessa’s approval of both Viana and Freyre. For Brazilian cultural figures’ opposition to dominant sociological and anthropological thought “heavily influenced by nineteenth-century eugenics,” see Lugarinho (2002, p.283).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, the second chapter, “Expansão biossocial. Uma política planetária de povoamento. Enxertos de homens. Introdução a uma história de mestiçagem portuguesa nos Trópicos,” of his *A história e os homens da primeira República democrática do Oriente: biologia e sociologia de uma ilha cívica* (Lessa, 1974, p.39-79).

<sup>12</sup> These documents are lodged in the uncatalogued Oporto Institute of Anthropology archive in the Faculty of Sciences library at Oporto University. I am very grateful for permission to view and cite these materials. See also Cleminson (2014, p.201, note 270).

<sup>13</sup> These documents were consulted in the previously-mentioned library in the folder “Gêmeos.” Sheets 1 to 64 bear the title “Nachuntersuchungen (Berliner Zwillinge). Block-Koch 1955;” others state that the work was performed by Ferreira Paulo.

<sup>14</sup> Such examples can be seen in the file named “Estudo,” located in the previously-mentioned collection of materials.

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