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Scientific motherhood: a positivist approach to patriarchy in fin-de-siècle Argentina

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SCIENTIFIC MOTHERHOOD: A POSITIVIST APPROACH TO PATRIARCHY IN
FIN-DE-SIÈCLE ARGENTINA

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

In late nineteenth and early twentieth century Argentina underwent large-scale immigration and fast-paced urban changes commonly associated with the coming of modernity. These changes led to elite fears of potential social instability. They turned to the French philosophy of Positivism, which advocated the view that all social problems could be systematically solved through scientific observation in order to “civilize” the Argentine nation. As a result, the government implemented numerous policies that catered to upholding traditional family structures.

The purpose of this thesis is to understand the ways in which these policies affected women of different social classes. In developing my arguments, I use secondary literature from prominent scholars in Argentine history, gender studies, and intellectual history, as well as primary sources, including essays written by prominent officials and elite women, government reports, laws and penal codes. This thesis examines the impact of scientific motherhood on Argentine society. Elite men and women viewed their role in society as that of fathers and mothers to the poor and the working classes. This study permits a broader understanding of the impact of Positivism and European influence on Argentine society and policymaking.

DEDICATION

For all my professors who taught me not only *how* to conduct research, but *why* to conduct research.

For my family, who could always be counted on to ask, “So, how’s the research going?”

And for my friends, who endured my endless babbling about Argentina for two years.

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INTRODUCTION

Between 1857 and 1930, 6,278,341 immigrants poured into Argentina.¹ These immigrants helped make Buenos Aires the second largest city on the Atlantic seaboard.² The immigrants and other members of the poor working classes began to crowd into the city center, close to their work. They lived in conventillos, overpopulated tenement housing; in fact, James Scobie said that these tenements often housed “as many as 350 persons into a building that had formerly accommodated twenty-five family members and servants.”³ These overcrowded dwellings were a visible warning to the *porteño* elites that society was changing, rapidly.⁴

On the one hand, these conventillos were filled with laborers: men to haul wares to and from the docks, and women and children to work in shops or work at piecework in their homes.⁵ On the other hand, the working class grew exponentially, and the risk to the social status quo grew with it. According to Jonathan C. Brown, the Generation of 1880, which came to power with General Julio Roca, “was a regime of the elites and for the

¹ Jose C. Moya, *Cousins and Strangers: Spanish Immigrants in Buenos Aires, 1850-1930* (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 1998): 56.

² *Ibid*, 1.

³ James Scobie, “The Paris of South America,” in *The Argentina Reader*, ed. Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo, 170-181. The Latin American Readers Series. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002): 179.

⁴ *Porteño* refers to residents of the port city of Buenos Aires, also the national capital. Also, Elizabeth Quay Hutchison gives the following definition of those elites who participated in the reforms in her work, *Laborers Appropriate to Their Sex: Gender, Labor, and Politics in Urban Chile, 1900-1930* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001), “social elites – industrialists, educators, aristocratic women, social reformers, and legislators.” I have used this to define my scope of the term “elite.”

⁵ James Scobie, “The Paris of South America,” 176, 179.

elites.”⁶ This group of liberal politicians and intellectuals looked toward Europe and the US to lead their fledgling nation.⁷ They internalized European racial dialogues such as Social Darwinism and Larmarckianism, as well as the tenets of Positivism. From Herbert Spencer, Argentine elites took the notion of the “survival of the fittest,” the idea that natural selection occurred among the human population in the same manner that it occurs in the plant and animal populations.⁸ Lamarckian evolutionary theory, while less influential, stressed “use and disuse” in evolution; in this model, the interaction between an organism and its environment is paramount.⁹

Auguste Comte’s theory of Positivism was also internalized by Argentine elites. As Teresa Meade argues, “Positivism became quite popular in Latin American scholarly circles because it provided a technical, seemingly achievable, path to modernization.”¹⁰ The generation of 1880 looked back to earlier figures in Argentine history, including former president, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento. In 1845, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s essay, “Physical Aspect of the Argentine Republic, and the Forms of Character, Habits, and Ideas Induced by It” examined the dichotomy of barbarism and civilization. Although not nominally a Positivist, Sarmiento was influenced by similar philosophical movements,

⁶ Jonathan C. Brown, *A Brief History of Argentina*, 2nd ed. (New York: Facts On File, 2010): 139.

⁷ Julia Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the State* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 26.

⁸ *Ibid*, 33.

⁹ Snait D. Gissis, “Introduction: Lamarckian Problematics in Historical Perspective,” in *Transformations of Lamarckism: From Subtle Fluids to Molecular Biology*, ed. Snait B. Gissis and Eva Jablonka, Vienna Series in Theoretical Biology (Cambridge, M.A.: The MIT Press, 2011): 24.

¹⁰ Teresa A. Meade, *A History of Modern Latin America: 1800 to the Present*, Concise History of the Modern World Series (West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010): 152.

particularly Social Darwinism. This theory legitimized racial inequality in the eyes of the new Positivist school. Lamarckian thought also influenced Sarmiento's argument that the people of the interior were inferior to the porteño population. He argued that the dictator, Juan Miguel de Rosas was the "climax of [provincial] barbarism", a clear insult as he believed that residents of the provinces were less evolved than porteños.¹¹ This essay was extremely influential in the decades that followed, particularly among the liberal elites of the generation of 1880 who sought to elevate Argentine society during the fin-de-siècle period.

In 1901, a prominent lawyer named Victor Pesenti, used Sarmiento's rhetoric of "civilization v. barbarism" to make an argument for the efficacy of a Positivist approach to solving social problems. He argued, "Civilization is the most fertile development, the most beautiful of the human energies, but it also possesses an infectious virus of great potency. Along with the splendor of artistic labor and scientific industry, it accumulates gangrenous products: laziness, poverty, madness, crime, suicide, and weakness."¹² These "gangrenous products" were products of the rapidly modernizing city of Buenos Aires; a city with a booming export-driven economy and a steadily increasing number of immigrants. Speaking as a member of the elite class, Pesenti sees these "products" as signs of degeneration within the Argentine society. The elite professionals and politicians saw these "products" as problems that, according to Positivist doctrine, could be solved through scientific

¹¹ Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, "Civilization of Barbarism" in *The Argentina Reader*, ed. Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo, 80-90. The Latin American Readers Series. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002): 83.

¹² Victor Pesenti qtd. in Julia Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the Modern State*, 28.

observation. Kristin Ruggiero succinctly summarizes elites' views of these degenerative characteristics, saying, "Politicians and professionals saw degenerative characteristics, not only as integral physical states of individuals, but as causes of Argentina's underdevelopment, political instability, and the lack of respect among the civilized nations, and as symptoms of modernity's less desirable features."¹³

Modernity engendered a fundamental change in the economics of both family and nation, a shift in what elites considered to be socially acceptable behavior for women and the lower classes, and increasing expert scientific knowledge. Elites feared that these facets of modernity would disrupt the status quo and their high-ranking social positions. Elites began their efforts to maintain control by creating legislation to control immigration and the poor and the working classes. Eventually, these efforts evolved into attempts to create a new *raza Argentina* (Argentine race).¹⁴

These efforts to create a new and improved *raza Argentina* centered on women and impacted the daily lives of women, particularly of poor and working class women. In a time when gender roles were transitioning as women began to work outside the home, these efforts to raise a healthy, moral *raza Argentina* helped maintain a patriarchal social

¹³ Kristin Ruggiero, *Modernity in the Flesh: Medicine, Law, and Society in Turn-of-the-Century Argentina* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2004): 115.

¹⁴ Kristin Ruggiero, *Modernity in the Flesh* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2004): 118, 122. Ruggiero succinctly discusses the concept of race in Argentina at the turn of the century. She proposes that there were in fact three distinct conceptions of race; the superior/inferior model of race, race as the biological base of a population, and race as synonym for nationality. She posits that the elite sought to create a new *raza Argentina* as a way to unify the population and save Argentina from degeneration. Mike Hawkins also touches on this plurality in Chapter 8 of *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

structure. Elites, fearing a disruption of the status quo, preferred to see women working in the private sphere, as servants and wet nurses, etc. Donna Guy makes the observation that “If women’s social and economic roles linked family and nation, then women who existed outside traditional family structures threatened the nation.”¹⁵ For this reason, when discussing the social ills that plagued Buenos Aires, many professionals, including criminologist Eusebio Gómez, counted prostitution among them.¹⁶ They were seen as eschewing their “natural” roles. As Social Darwinian thought became established in the country, women’s roles became inextricably linked to motherhood; it was “natural” for women to bear children and raise them.

The role of women was not static throughout the fin-de-siècle period. In fact, Karen Mead argues that even the Sociedad de Beneficencia (Beneficent Society), Argentina’s most prominent female philanthropy organization, changed their definition of the “mujer Argentina” (Argentine woman) throughout the years.¹⁷ Organizations like the Sociedad sought to aid young, working class and poor mothers by supporting them during and following pregnancy, and by instructing them in gender appropriate labors and the science of motherhood – an endeavor that changed throughout the fin-de-siècle period.

At the same time, elite men used their positions in government to create new legislation and institutions to aid mothers in raising a new raza argentina. The elite’s

¹⁵ Donna Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina*, Engendering Latin America Series (Lincoln, N.E.: University of Nebraska Press, 1991): 2-3.

¹⁶ Gómez devoted a chapter in his work *La mala vida en Buenos Aires*. Eusebio Gómez, *La mala vida en Buenos Aires*, (Buenos Aires, Argentina: 1908).

¹⁷ Karen Mead, “Beneficent Maternalism: Argentine Motherhood in Comparative Perspective, 1880-1920,” *Journal of Women’s History* 12 (2000): 130.

efforts to create a new raza argentina impeded women's rights in a variety of ways including their rights as mothers, heads of household, and workers.

The first chapter of this thesis will discuss the elite roots of positivist and Social Darwinian thought in Argentina and the effects of these philosophies on government policy at the turn of the century. The second chapter looks in turn at elite women and the philanthropies that acted as mothers to the nation. The third chapter focuses on the institutions which both government officials and elite women created to help improve the lives of mothers and the new raza argentina.

All of these measures combined to maintain the traditional patriarchal social structure of the colonial period. The elites preserved their position at the top of the social ladder by acting as parents to the poor and working classes of the nation. All of their efforts to improve society subjected the poor and working classes, particularly mothers, to sets of rules and regulations in much the same fashion that parents create rules for their children. Elite women were crucial in this process; they sought to take the scientific discoveries of their male counter-parts and include these improvements into warm, maternal institutions for young mothers in Buenos Aires. Together, elites used scientific knowledge and institutions to carry out their plans for the improvement of Argentine society.

CHAPTER 1: PATRIARCHY AND THE ROOTS OF STATE INTERFERENCE IN WORKING WOMEN'S LIVES

This chapter will examine the philosophical origins of Argentine Positivism and the implementation of these philosophies in government as they applied to gender, immigration, and social policy. The Argentine elite intertwined Auguste Comte's Positivism and Herbert Spencer's Social Darwinism to create a doctrine that proposed the betterment of society and of an improved "raza argentina" as a whole.¹⁸ The doctrine posited that the improvement of the race and society could be accomplished through empirical or scientific observation. Such observations were expected to lead to effective forms of social control and the resolution of the "social question." As Nancy Leys Stephan, who studied eugenics in Latin America, has stated, "nationalist self-making" in Latin American states was "carried out by and through scientific and medical discourses."¹⁹ In fin-de-siècle Argentina, the "social question" included issues that the scientists of the era termed "social pathologies". Historian Julia Rodriguez lists these pathologies as, "dirt, disease, crime, prostitution, vagrancy, and violent class conflict."²⁰

The early origins of the tango provide a clear example of the type of "social pathology" that alarmed porteño elites. An anonymous article in the Buenos Aires' newspaper, *Crítico*, and signed under the moniker Old Tangoer, told the history of the tango.

¹⁸ Kristin Ruggiero, *Modernity in the Flesh* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2004): 118, 122.

¹⁹ Nancy Leys Stephan, *"The Hour of Eugenics": Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991): 7.

²⁰ Julia Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the State* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 27.

The Old Tangoer traced the origins from the Afro-Argentine neighborhood of Mondongo, to the seedy Corrales Viejos district where the dance was practiced in brothels and blended with the milonga, a lower-class phenomena within the city.²¹ The elites of porteño society would have been alarmed by the lower-class origins of this dance, by the violence that occurred in the establishments in Corrales Viejos, and the prominence of prostitution in the early stages of the tango, all of which are part of the “social pathologies” discussed by Julia Rodriguez.

The porteño elite developed the “social question” in order to quantify and classify the social unrest that arose from the rapid social and economic changes which modernity and mass immigration ushered into Buenos Aires at the turn of the century. They used the social sciences of the period to garner support for the solutions they considered appropriate to control immigrants and women. Historian Eduardo Zimmermann argues that three beliefs influenced the social reforms enacted by the elites; the belief that the government was the proper venue to look for solutions to the “social question,” that social science could guide state policy, and that foreign precedent could be used on Argentine soil, thus allowing Argentina to enter into the international reform discourse.²²

I argue that the elite’s quest to understand and control these social pathologies created an environment in which society, particularly single and working mothers, became subject to state-sponsored patriarchy. Based on their empirical observations, they drew

²¹ Simon Collier, “The Birth of the Tango” in *The Argentina Reader*, ed. Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo, 196-202. The Latin American Readers Series. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002): 198-199.

²² Eduardo A. Zimmermann, “Los intelectuales, las ciencias sociales y el reformismo liberal: Argentina, 1890-1916,” *Desarrollo Económico*, Vol. 31, No. 124 (1992): 546.

conclusions about working women's lives. Their preconceived notions of working women as victims targeted their search for patriarchal philosophies aimed at explaining gender, class, and race within society. In this chapter, I begin with a discussion of the elite's adoption of European-based scientific theories, such as Positivism and Social Darwinism. Second, I analyze the processes by which these ideologies were adopted and "adapted" to fit Argentina's realities.²³ Nancy Leys Stephan's assertion that "science is a highly social activity and is not sealed off from the values of the society in which it is practiced,"²⁴ is highly applicable to this process of "adaption;" societal norms were at once influential to and influenced by the process.²⁵ Lastly, I examine how these theories led to a form of scientific maternity. State agencies relied on the science of motherhood as they became directly involved in the individual lives of mothers in order to raise a new raza argentina.

Bearing children came to be seen as a civic duty to one's country rather than a biological function or a personal decision. Women were expected to do their part in creating the ideal Argentine race. In 1908, Positivist José Ingenieros wrote in the prologue to *La mala vida in Buenos Aires*, a sociological study of crime in the city by criminologist Eusebio Gómez, that the two most elemental duties of humans were "self-preservation and reproduction."²⁶ This preoccupation with future citizens led to advances in hygiene and

²³ Arturo Ardao, "Assimilation and Transformation of Positivism in Latin America," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24, no.4 (1963): 515.

²⁴ Nancy Leys Stephan, "*The Hours of Eugenics*": 9.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ José Ingenieros, Prólogo, *La mala vida en Buenos Aires* by Eusebio Gómez (Buenos Aires, 1908): 32.

puericultura, as well as regulation of working conditions for women and children.²⁷ These preoccupations and the implementation of such social services to “help and protect” the poor, are an example of what Jocelyn Olcott terms “the porous nature of the divide between the public and private spheres.”²⁸

INTERNALIZING FOREIGN IDEOLOGIES AND THE RISE OF THE “SOCIAL QUESTION”

By the late nineteenth century, porteño elite professionals were well educated. It was not uncommon for this education to take place in Europe and these professionals typically also served as government officials in some capacity.²⁹ These porteño elites used European theories that explained how to develop an ideal civilized and orderly society. The elites believed that creating a new organized and cultured society, based on the European model, would show that civilization was not the sole property of Western Europe and the United States. The Argentine elites believed that by “civilizing” their nation in such a manner, they could simultaneously prove that Argentina belonged among the racial “superior” European nations.

²⁷ I use Julia Rodriguez’s definition of *puericultura* as the study infant and maternal hygiene. For her discussion of the topic, see *Civilizing Argentina*, 30. For a further discussion of the field of *puericultura*, see Alisa Klaus, *C. Every Child a Lion: The Origins of Maternal and Infant Health Policy in the United States and France, 1880-1920*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993 and Mary Lynn Stewart, *Women, Work, and The French State: Labour Protection and Social Patriarchy, 1879-1919*. London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989.

²⁸ Jocelyn Olcott, “Introduction: Researching and Rethinking the Labors of Love,” *HAHR* 91:1, 15.

²⁹ Kristin Ruggiero, *Modernity in the Flesh*, 7.

Among the most popular of the race-based theories which Argentines had internalized was Herbert Spencer's Social Darwinism. The theory categorized the world population by race and was characterized by an interpretation that the people of white races located in the Northern European regions were superior to those people of varying races in South America, Africa, and Asia.

Spencer's theory incorporated the idea that the process of natural selection occurred similarly in the human population and the plant and animal populations. In 1900, writer Roberto Bunge lauded Herbert Spencer for applying Darwin's principles of evolution to "to the biological world in all its manifestations, providing a scientific explanation for the formation of the global system with all its animated beings."³⁰ Mike Hawkins argues that Charles Darwin's theory of Evolution and Natural Selection "was embedded within and formed part of a wider world view."³¹ According to Hawkins, this Socially Darwinian worldview consisted of four parts: (1) "biological laws [that] governed the whole of organic nature, including humans," (2) population increases drove competition for resources; (3) this struggle caused a natural selection of advantageous traits in the gene pool of a population; and finally, (4) this process accounted for the birth of new species and the eradication of other species.³²

This view on natural selection influenced Argentine leaders who were on a quest for social stability. In order to join the ranks of the racially superior, Argentine leaders, such as

³⁰ Quoted in Alex Lovine and Adriana Novoa, *Darwinistas! The Construction of Evolutionary Thought in Nineteenth Century Argentina*. (Boston: Brill, 2012): xiii.

³¹ Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 30.

³² Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought*, 31.

Juan Bautista Alberdi, sought to distance themselves from the “climax of provincial barbarism” by re-creating European “civilization” on Argentine soil.³³ Alberdi viewed the racial dialogue of Spencer’s Social Darwinism as a viable means to separate themselves from the caudillos and gauchos of the past.³⁴ Social Darwinian and Positivist thought essentially proposed to solve the problem of societal degeneration; elites feared that if the population degenerated, Argentina would not become a “civilized nation.”³⁵

Along with Social Darwinism, Argentine leaders turned to the European philosophy of Positivism because it promoted a solution to the perceived degeneration within the Argentine population. Auguste Comte published his *Cours de philosophie positive* during France’s July Revolution in 1830; this was an extremely turbulent time in France that influenced his critique of the government. Comte advocated a strong patriarchal family unit as the base of society, a belief that his followers in Argentina maintained through legislation.³⁶ He did, however, envision a role for the government “as the brain of the social

³³ Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, “Civilization of Barbarism” in *The Argentina Reader*, ed. Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo, 80-90. The Latin American Readers Series. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002): 83.

³⁴ Julia Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the Modern State*, 33.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 34. Rodriguez makes the point that Argentine elites saw degeneration as the opposite of progress. This progress was the Social Darwinian progress of the *raza argentina*.

³⁶ For Comte’s views on the family unit, see Mary Pickering, “Angels and Demons in the Moral Vision of Auguste Comte,” *The Journal of Women’s History* 8 (1996): 29. For an example of legislation aimed at maintaining a patriarchal unit, see Kristin Ruggiero, *Modernity in the Flesh*, Chapter One, in particular her discussion of the practice of depositing women. These practices are yet another example of the blurred line between the public and private spheres.

organism, leading the people intellectually and administratively.”³⁷ Looking at this model half a century later in the heyday of scientific advancement, Argentine leaders such as José María Ramos Mejía, Eduardo Wilde, and José Ingenieros, saw science as a vital part of the “brain” that made it possible to control society, in particular the popular classes.

These efforts to control the lower classes were often couched as solutions to the “social question” through Social Darwinist, Positivist, and Neo-Lamarckian approaches. Argentine elites were able to draw from all three views as they all represented what Alex Levine and Adriana Novoa termed “strands in the larger “civilized,” or European, lineage they sought to join.”³⁸ A combination of Social Darwinism and the Positivist faith in observable facts dictated the parameters of these endeavors. Porteño elites subscribed to the Neo-Lamarckian view that in order to solve the “social question” properly, both the environmental and hereditary causes need to be addressed and resolved.³⁹ This belief came to fruition in the numerous institutions for young mothers which aimed to foster a better environment for these mothers and their children that would allow the best possible biological outcome – a strong, healthy and moral raza Argentina. Writing in 1902 about the influence of Neo-Lamarckian thought among porteños, Angel Gallardo argued, “we Argentines, who see our country transformed before our eyes and who have witnessed the

³⁷ Melissa Lane, “Positivism: Reactions and Developments,” in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Political Thought*, ed. Terence Ball and Richard Bellamy, 321-342 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 329.

³⁸ Alex Levine and Adriana Novoa, *¡Darwinistas!*: 29.

³⁹ Eduardo Zimmermann, “Racial Ideas and Social Reform: Argentina, 1890-1916,” 38.

rapid assimilation of foreign elements, are naturally inclined to exaggerate the influence of the environment.”⁴⁰

On the other hand, Juan Bautista Alberdi was among the first Argentine leaders to put forth a possible solution to the racial problem. In 1853, Alberdi wrote *Las Bases*, in which he outlined his plans for the social improvement of Argentina. His main recommendation consisted of a six-part plan to bring in large numbers of Northern European immigrants. He thought that increasing the population of “superior” races within Argentina was the most expedient way to improve society. Alberdi cautioned the Argentine elite: “Do not be afraid that our national identity will be compromised by the effect of numerous foreigners or that national character will disappear.”⁴¹ Alberdi believed that by combining the blood of the Argentines with the industrious workers of Northern Europe that a homogenous, superior race would evolve. Alberdi claimed that the English were “the most perfect of men,” due to their racially mixed ancestry.⁴²

Throughout the next half century, and beyond, racial discourse relying on Social Darwinian principles proved to be politically unifying.⁴³ As public health physicians and governmental officials searched for the answers to the social question, they counted on racial discourse to override partisan lines. In the fin-de-siècle, progress was equated with simultaneously achieving a European model of society and stopping the process of social

⁴⁰ Angel Gallardo, quoted in Alex Levine and Adriana Novoa, *¡Darwinistas!*: 42.

⁴¹ Juan Bautista Alberdi. “Immigration as a Means of Progress,” in *The Argentina Reader*, ed. Duke University Press, 2002: 100.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Eduardo Zimmermann, “Racial Ideas and Social Reform: Argentina, 1890-1916,” *HAHR* 72:1 (Feb., 1992), 45.

degeneration caused by a multitude of social ills and by native populations. Argentina's leaders believed that they would not progress without eradicating the causes of social instability, the causes of degeneration. Historian Eduardo Zimmermann argues that this process led to a number of measures such as Sunday rest for workers, the regulation of working conditions for women and children, insurance against accidents for workers, and the regulation of immigration.⁴⁴ These measures were seen as civilizing in large part because they were taken directly from Europe; a number of Western European nations had enacted similar, or identical, measures within the preceding decade.⁴⁵ Through a number of maternalist policies aimed at improving the process of motherhood, particularly for working women, and increasing the population, leaders strove to create a new, healthy, racially superior Argentine race that would propel Argentina toward the "civilization" that President Domingo Sarmiento (1868-1874) imagined in his "Civilization and Barbarism".⁴⁶ This belief was not completely outside of possibility according to the scientific beliefs of the time. Argentina had a hospitable environment and a booming economy; thus, to the elites of Buenos Aires it was a logical conclusion to assume that the only thing holding them back was an "inferior" population. After all, the indigenous Argentines were South American,

⁴⁴ Eduardo Zimmermann, "Racial Ideas and Social Reform: Argentina, 1890-1916," *HAHR* 72:1 (Feb., 1992), 45.

⁴⁵ Proof for the use of European codes as inspiration can be found in the notes of Gabriela's 1904 report on the working conditions of women and children; she carefully combed the legal codes of a number of nations for support of her recommendations.

⁴⁶ See Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, "Civilization and Barbarism" in *The Argentina Reader*, ed. Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo, 80-90. The Latin American Readers Series. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002). Sarmiento imagined a "civilized" society in Argentina based on the European model would displace the native Argentine barbarians of the pampas, the caudillos and the gauchos.

from a continent known to in Europe as “inferior.”⁴⁷ This feeling of “inferiority” was the impetus behind efforts to populate the country with a new raza argentina; the elite, almost entirely of European lineage, and the new industrious immigrants were responsible for regenerating Argentine society. Thus the elites enacted numerous reforms, adapted from European maternalist policies.

In the fin-de-siècle period, this trend toward maternalist policy was in step with new policies in Europe and the United States. In Europe, particularly in the war-ravaged nation of France, this tendency was rooted in what Karen Offen termed the “Crisis of Depopulation;” in Argentina it was the perceived racial inferiority that compelled leaders.⁴⁸ As Alberdi declared decades earlier, “to govern is to populate.”⁴⁹ By the turn of the century, Argentine leaders were convinced that with the aid of science they need not turn to immigrants to improve the stock of the raza argentina; the next generation would possess all the desirable traits of the Europeans.

Argentine leaders also turned to European and American models of social welfare reform. In 1902, Gabriela Coni presented her plans for reforming the laws protecting female and child laborers in factories. She proposed that all women and children have one

⁴⁷ This claim is drawn from the predominant belief that people from the Southern Hemisphere were inferior to the white races from Europe.

⁴⁸ Karen Offen, “Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France,” *The American Historical Review* 89 (1984): 648. Offen argues that the losses to the Germans in the Franco-Prussian war created a “crisis of depopulation” in France; they worried that they would not be able to compete with the Germans unless the population grew rapidly. For a discussion of elites’ feelings of inferiority, see Ruggiero, *Modernity in the Flesh*: 19-22. She makes a valid case for the argument that not all Argentines were enamored with the “imitation” of Europe.

⁴⁹ Juan Bautista Alberdi, “Immigration as a Means of Progress,” 95.

entire day off.⁵⁰ She based this recommendation on both her own observations of the factories in Buenos Aires and on examinations of the labor laws of Germany, Austria, Belgium, the United States, Denmark, Spain, Holland, England, and Russia.⁵¹ This endeavor is clearly inspired by the Positivist ideal of empirical research to solve social problems. Ultimately, these efforts resulted in the beginnings of legislation, which strongly affected the lives of women, that resembled that of a number of European nations.

Argentine scientists and politicians borrowed more than just social welfare models from Europe. They sought to emulate European styles of governance with the aim of combating internal social instability caused by massive immigration, rapid urbanization, and economic expansion between 1880 and the 1920s. These social scientists and politicians relied on each other: scientists gave legitimacy to the elite government and the government in turn gave the scientists funding and a sense of purpose.⁵² This mutual dependence led to the materialization of a number of institutions for the study of criminality and public health.

POSITIVISM, CRIMINALITY, AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Argentine elites relied on the Positivist maxim that empirical research would lead to social progress and civilization. In 1845, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento wrote of the battle between “Civilization [and] Barbarism.” For Sarmiento, the city of Buenos Aires with its factories, universities, and European immigrants represented modern civilization. On the

⁵⁰ Gabriela Coni, Report (Buenos Aires, 1904): 2.

⁵¹ Gabriela Coni, Report (Buenos Aires, 1904): 5.

⁵² Julia Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina*, 31.

other hand, the caudillos and gauchos of the interior represented barbarism and represented the greatest obstacle to the progress of Argentina. Sarmiento felt that modernity would be democratic, representing the antithesis of the dictatorial reign of Juan Manuel de Rosas, whom he referred to as a caudillo.⁵³ Scientists and politicians of the fin-de-siècle used this dichotomy between civilization and barbarism to justify new scientific measures and studies. In their minds, each “advance” further combated the forces of barbarism within the city and beyond.⁵⁴ The elites made “advances” in new fields which studied different social pathologies, including hygiene, psychiatry, criminology, and later, eugenics and *puericultura* (which studied infant and maternal hygiene).⁵⁵

For the elites to begin their efforts to remedy the social ills of Argentina, it was necessary to internalize and adapt European racial discourses and associate the “lesser races” with social and racial degeneration. Much like other developing nations, such as the United States or Australia, Argentina looked toward Europe to find what they considered the most “civilized,” or “evolved”, race. Argentines also examined the Pampas, to find examples of inferior races. According to the European worldview indigenous populations of the Southern Hemisphere, a category under which residents of the Pampa fell, were inferior to the populations of Northern and Western Europe.

Thus, many of the earliest scientific developments centered on how to socially control the lesser races, the indigenous and Southeastern European immigrants flooding

⁵³ Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, “Civilization or Barbarism,” 83.

⁵⁴ Julia Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Motherhood, and the Modern State*, 31.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 30.

the ports of Buenos Aires. In order to prove the inferiority of these races, Argentines first turned the Cesare Lombroso's Italian School of Criminology, which advocated a number of different measurements that could be taken and observations that could be made to identify "born criminals."⁵⁶ In 1890, in a critique of the way in which Emilé Zola portrayed a criminal in his novel *La Bête Humaine*, Lombroso laid out a number of ways in which "born criminals" differ from "occasional criminals," citing differences in secretions, power of smell, taste, style of walk, and the skeleton.⁵⁷ Argentine Positivists appreciated this view that criminality could be directly observed. They also worried that the line between the poor and criminals could be easily blurred or altogether eradicated; thus it was necessary to identify criminals to prevent the spread of the social disease within poor and working class neighborhoods.⁵⁸ José María Ramos Mejía, a prominent criminologist and public health physician, wrote an essay entitled, "The Modern Crowd," in which he classified immigrants in racial terms. He devised the categories, of *guarango*, *canalla*, and *huaso* each of which was accompanied by a number of characteristics to aid in the identification of such groups. These characteristics included displaying homosexual tendencies and supporting the caudillo Rosas, tendencies that Ramos Mejía would have personally

⁵⁶ Julia Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Motherhood, and The Modern State*, 35-36.

⁵⁷ Cesare Lombroso, "Illustrative Studies in Criminal Anthropology: I. 'La Bête Humaine' and Criminal Anthropology; and II. Criminology Anthropology and Psychiatry" in *Monist*, vol. 1 (1890), pp. 177-196, reprinted in *The Criminal Anthropological Writings of Cesare Lombroso Published in The English Language Periodical Literature During the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries*, edited by David M. Horton and Katherine E. Rich (Lewishton: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2004).

⁵⁸ Ricardo Salvatore, "Criminology, Prison Reform, and the Buenos Aires Working Class," 289.

abhorred.⁵⁹ Throughout the discussion, his belief in the process of evolution and the existence of different species is clearly discernable in his use of “biological” classification of immigrants.

In the late nineteenth century, these scientific developments came about through careful imitation of European methodologies and institutions. At the turn of the century, Argentine scientists began to develop their own methodologies and institutions to solve national social ills.

Many of these innovations came from scrupulous observation of European research and methodology. Horacio Piñero, an Argentine psychologist, speaking in France in 1903 summed up Argentine feelings toward French science, through the following speech.

We follow the French scientific example called ‘the mind of the world.’ Intellectually, we are in reality French; we live in the echo of your progress, listening to your lessons in all manifestations of intelligence. And, I should affirm, we owe more to you than all other nations of the world combined, for one simple reason: at the beginning of our adolescence, it was the French who directed our steps, instructed the generations who govern the country today and teach our youth in the schools and universities.⁶⁰

Clearly, these are the words of a dedicated Francophile who has internalized European racial discourse. Piñero does not mention the considerable influences of Spanish and Italian culture, language, architecture, and academics.⁶¹ Piñero’s praise of France seeks to prove the place of Argentina among the civilized nations of Europe; by following in the

⁵⁹ José María Ramos Mejía, “The Modern Crowd,” in *The Argentina Reader*, ed. Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo. The Latin American Readers Series. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002): pages 182-187.

⁶⁰ Horacio Piñero qtd. in Julia Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina*, 32.

⁶¹ For example, the influence of Lombroso on Argentine criminology or the Spanish architecture found throughout the city of Buenos Aires.

footsteps of France, Argentina is attempting to engage in the European scientific community. France gave rise to Positivism and the tradition of public health. Argentine hygienists modeled many of their practices off of the French institutions. For example, during their crisis of depopulation in the late nineteenth century, French scientists studied the effects of breast-feeding babies and discovered that babies who were breastfed were generally healthier than those who were not.⁶² In turn, Argentine philanthropic societies, at the behest of the hygienists, eventually developed a system of screening for wet nurses.⁶³ The development of this system was gradual since the societies fought the hygienists at every turn. In 1875, physicians in Buenos Aires were given the right to create a system for the inspection and registration of wet nurses, but it was 1888 before physical examinations officially became part of the inspection process.⁶⁴

Hygienists' involvement in philanthropy, however, was not always seen in a positive light. As Karen Mead argued, Positivist hygienists sought to expand aid to the poor in order to more fully control the social changes that urbanization had created.⁶⁵ If elite women or Catholic organizations were interacting with the poor and offering aid, then control was being taken from the government. Some positivists looked at philanthropy with disdain, seeing their actions as siphoning control from the institutions that they had so painstakingly created. Positivist, and socialist, José Ingenieros went so far as to argue that

⁶² Mary Lynn Stewart, "Protecting Infants: The French Campaign for Maternity Leaves, 1890s-1913," *French Historical Studies* 13 (1983): 81

⁶³ Donna Guy, *Women Build The Welfare State*, (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009): 47.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Karen Mead, "Gender, Welfare, and The Catholic Church in Argentina, 1890-1916," *The Americas* 58 (Jul. 2001): 96.

the principles of Christianity, “humanity, resignation, piety, compassion, and charity” opposed evolutionary principles.⁶⁶ Ingenieros, a stalwart believer of Spencer’s theory, saw aiding the poor and unfortunate as aiding the weak in the struggle for survival, thus upsetting the process of natural selection. This total disdain is different from the system developed during the early years of Uruguay’s welfare state, where female philanthropy was used a sort of continuum during the transition. Female advisory boards served with the National Public Assistance (APN).⁶⁷

In Argentina, because there were no women serving as intermediaries between the government and the public, involvement of scientists and officials in everyday life was seen as admissible because the scientific nature of their interference lent them a “badge of legitimacy.”⁶⁸ The elites, and to a lesser extent the middle and lower classes, were fascinated with the improvements in science and medicine made by the “Generation of 1880,” so, for the sake of scientific advancement they suffered state intervention in their lives.⁶⁹ The majority of these developments came about through attempts to address the social ills of urbanization and modernity, which included “dirt, disease, crime, prostitution,

⁶⁶ Karen Mead, “Gendering the Obstacles of Progress in Positivist Argentina, 1880-1920,” 670.

⁶⁷ Christine Ehrick, “To Serve the Nation: Juvenile Mothers, Paternalism, and State Formation in Uruguay, 1910-1930,” *Social Science History* 29:3, 491.

⁶⁸ Julia Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the Modern State*, 5.

⁶⁹ An example of the improvements which so entranced Argentine society is Juan Vucetich’s system of dactyloscopy, or fingerprinting, which allowed the police and immigration officials to create a much more centralized system of reference. The system was so effective that it spread across the country and became part of the international scientific discourse, earning praise from the head of the Italian school of criminology, Cesare Lombroso. For a discussion of this, see Julia Rodriguez’s “South Atlantic Crossings: Fingerprints, Science, and the State in Turn-of-the-Century” and the second chapter of *Civilizing Argentina*.

vagrancy, and violent class conflict.”⁷⁰ One of the most important responses to the crises in Argentina was the advent of the field of Public Health, which sought to sanitize the city and its population.

Several institutions and departments within the government were created to facilitate the study of Public Health and implement new solutions to the “social question.” José María Ramos Mejía and Emilio Coni created the Asistencia Pública in 1883.⁷¹ This organization, based on French welfare organizations, was designed to improve the system of hospitals in Buenos Aires through centralization, organization, and regulation.⁷² Additionally, many of the leading public health physicians belonged to organizations such as the *Círculo Médico Argentino*, which was founded by Ramos Mejía in 1875.⁷³

Criminologists, along with public health physicians, were among the first Positivists in Argentina to develop institutions to further their research; these intellectuals saw “the creation and direction of new state institutions,” as part of their duty.⁷⁴ For example, in 1888 the *Sociedad de Antropología Jurídica* of Buenos Aires became the first society outside of Italy for the purpose of discussing Lombroso’s ideas of criminology.⁷⁵ Eventually, the University of Buenos Aires became the crux of the relationship between the scientists and government. In the field of public health, Francisco de Veyga developed a program to be

⁷⁰ Julia Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the Modern State*, 27.

⁷¹ Karen Mead, “Gendering the Obstacles to Progress in Positivist Argentina, 1880-1920,” 655.

⁷² Julia Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the Modern State*, 42.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 41.

⁷⁴ Eduardo Zimmermann, “Los intelectuales, las ciencias sociales y el reformismo: Argentina, 1890-1916,” 549.

⁷⁵ Julia Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the Modern State*, 39.

run through the Medical School at the University of Buenos Aires, in conjunction with the police and the city morgue. In 1899, this Legal Medicine Laboratory was established.⁷⁶ Two years later, Veyga was involved in another collaborative effort with police. This time, he served as the director for La Sala de observación de alienados, a center for the “study” of immigrants, widely considered to be one of the capital’s biggest social problems.⁷⁷

So many of these developments centered in Buenos Aires not only because the city had the most resources, but also because many leading experts considered the city to be part of the problem. These authorities saw the excessive population of the capital as a contributing factor to the social instability and degeneration. In particular, the Asistencia Pública exerted social control over the chaotic and boisterous metropolis.

CONCLUSION

During the decades leading up to the fin-de-siècle period, Argentine scientists and government officials partnered in the effort to establish institutions to “ensure that their nation would survive its civilizing process.”⁷⁸ Positivist doctrine stated that society could be improved through empirical study and Argentines elites sought to create legislation, based on such research, to improve society. In order to conduct this research, the positivists created of a multitude of institutions, journals, laboratories, and new regulations. These new developments in the scientific community helped the Porteño

⁷⁶ Julia Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the Modern State*, 42.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 39.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 28.

elites solidify their hold on government and their position as the dominating class amid industrial and societal changes. Influenced by Social Darwinist thought, scientists and intellectuals equated progress in Argentina to halting all forms of degeneration. In the decades leading up to the turn of the century, this was managed in several ways, ranging from eradicating the indigenous populations to encouraging new European immigration. Ultimately, the focus turned from encouraging new immigration to controlling the new population and engineering a new, superior Argentine race of European stock. The task of raising this new Argentine race fell to the women of Argentina. The scientists and government, along with female philanthropic organizations, worked together to enforce the improvements of the process of motherhood, which Positivism dictated, in the fledgling nation. This control was tolerated, even welcomed as progress, due to the precedent set by measures taken in the preceding decades to improve Argentine society.

CHAPTER 2: MOTHERHOOD – EXPECTATIONS AND REALITY ACROSS THE CLASSES

This chapter discusses the centrality of motherhood in the lives of women and family, and thus the nation. The role of mother was both highly respected and extremely demanding for women in porteño society at the turn of the century. Women were expected to raise the new raza argentina and contribute to the “new character” of the nation.⁷⁹ While they raised this new generation of Argentines, women held the responsibility of maintaining the honor of the family, regardless of class. In spite of these common expectations for all women, the responsibilities of women of different social classes varied. The fin-de-siècle period brought about changes, which altered these expectations in a myriad of ways.

At the turn of the century, there was an ideological battle between tradition and modernity. The role of women in the public and private spheres was an important battle in that war.⁸⁰ Modernity wreaked havoc on traditional gender roles within the family and the workplace; roles changed as perceptions of appropriate roles shifted and as the division of labor changed within households. Elites, however, viewed the deterioration of these gender roles as a sign of the supposed decline of society; they sought to uphold the norms of the separate spheres whenever possible. Even as they turned to science to identify and

⁷⁹ Kristin Ruggiero, *Modernity of the Flesh* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 4.

⁸⁰ Indeed, Jocelyn Olcott’s observation of “the porous nature of the divide between public and private spaces,” (15) in the respect to motherhood and gendered labor rings true in this instance. See “Introduction: Researching and Rethinking the Labors of Love,” in *HAHR* 91:1, 1-27.

solve the problems of society, governmental officials and scientists saw themselves as the fathers and protectors of porteño society. Using this logic, it follows that their wives, sisters, and daughters saw their role as that of the mothers of porteño society; mothering the working class, particularly the women and children, by treating them as children who were unable to make their own decisions.

Meanwhile, mothers of the working class were expected to provide for their children as best they were able; ideally, they would be able to rely on the wages of their husband and stay in the home. Alternatively, if it was necessary that women work, elites preferred that they work in another home or in other poorly paid, gender-appropriate occupations.⁸¹ As in much of the world, Argentines prized motherhood as the most important role women could take on. The positivists also valued motherhood for its biological and moral importance in creating a new raza Argentina.⁸² Raising the next generation of Argentines became a national priority and a heavy responsibility.

Consider Articles 106 and 107 of the Código Penal de la Nación de Argentina. Article 106 states that the abandonment of a minor carries a penalty of six months to two years of

⁸¹ Many leading philanthropic organizations had programs to train mothers and young girls for work as servants; it was seen as most desirable that they work in homes in order to protect their honor. For a discussion of this notion, see Donna Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009), Nara Milanich, "Women, Children, and the Social Organization of Domestic Labor in Chile," in *HARH* 91:1, 29-62, and Chrstine Ehrick, "To Serve a Nation: Juvenile Mothers, Paternalism, and State Formation in Uruguay, 1910-1930," in *Social Science History* 29:3, 489-518.

⁸² In her article, "Gendering Obstacles to Progress in Positivist Argentina," (*HAHR*, 77:4, 645-675) Karen Mead makes the argument that many Argentine positivists of this period held views about women's rights that can be termed "feminist." They supported these views by citing the importance of women's roles in reproduction and the moral education of their children.

imprisonment; if the parents of the minor abandon the child, the penalty is eighteen months to six years.⁸³ The document does not make allowances for the economic situations of poor families; no consideration was given to the possibility that the family was somehow unable to provide for the child they abandoned. The elites, in writing this, seem to have based the punishment on the assumption that parents always have the resources necessary to provide for their children, which was not universally true. The Positivist preoccupation with children and the demands of modernity fundamentally altered motherhood and the role of women within the family unit in Argentina during the fin-de-siècle period.

SHAME AND HONOR: SAVING FACE FOR THE FAMILY

Honor has held an important place in Spanish South America since the Colonial period. William Ian Miller writes that, “honor is above all the keen sensitivity to the experience of humiliation and shame, a sensitivity manifested by the desire to be envied by others and the propensity to envy the success of others.”⁸⁴ This definition is useful when considering male perceptions of honor at the turn of the century. They expected their wives and daughters to behave in a fashion that showcased the family’s social status. For example, well-behaved women demonstrated the family’s enviable socioeconomic status. Women who were not well behaved were expected to cover their steps.

⁸³ Código Penal

⁸⁴ William Ian Miller, *Humiliation and Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 84.

In most cases, elite professionals gave little regard to the reasons for illegitimate pregnancies. It was attributed to the assumed biological weakness of women that made them “vulnerable to seduction and promises of marriage.”⁸⁵ This particular justification was a comfortable fit with the predominant Social Darwinian beliefs, which held that women were weaker and more easily persuaded. Following this logic, no woman intentionally sought to dishonor herself, her family, or her employer; she simply could not help herself. Women who gave birth to illegitimate children could preserve the honor of their family or employer through infanticide, a crime.

Writing on the subject of infanticide and honor, Kristin Ruggiero states, “infanticide was defined as a crime of dishonor and the quintessential crime against motherhood,” by those whose main concern was the creation of the new raza Argentina.⁸⁶ The government aspired to create and protect a new raza Argentina.⁸⁷ In spite of these modern scientific views, the notion of honor still held sway over society in Buenos Aires and maintaining the family’s honor was paramount. Ruggiero argues that the penal code of 1887, featuring a range in the length of punishment, allowed judges flexibility in sentencing in cases involving infanticide “to take honor, shame, and maternal sentiment more into account.”⁸⁸ In 1922, the penal code listed the range for infanticide as three years of commitment or a

⁸⁵ Kristin Ruggiero, “Honor, Maternity, and the Disciplining of Women: Infanticide in Late Nineteenth Century Buenos Aires,” *HAHR* 72:3 (1992): 365.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 354.

⁸⁷ This new *raza* was to be a morally superior race; Kristin Ruggiero argues that elites saw the state as a “moral community” in which morality superseded political citizenship. Kristin Ruggiero, *Modernity in the Flesh* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2004): 6.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 355.

lesser penalty of six months to two years of imprisonment if the crime was committed with the intent of hiding their dishonor.⁸⁹ Women were expected to do what would best uphold the honor of their family; even if that meant brutally killing their own infant to hide the “illegitimate” birth.⁹⁰

Of course, not all women killed or abandoned their children; the problems of both infanticide and child abandonment were considered to be problems that plagued the lower classes. In discussing the role of midwives, Kristin Ruggiero discusses a group of midwives known as “*parteras*” who attracted clients with an offer to care for the mother and then carry the infant to the Foundling Home under a false name so that the mother could then find work as a wet nurse, without the “burden” of an illegitimate child.⁹¹

It was especially important that mothers of legitimate children uphold the family’s honor, as it was believed that morality, in the form of shame and honor, passed from the mother to their children. This, too, was dependent on elite’s preoccupation with Europe. Indigenous was commonly characterized as immoral. For example, in “Civilization or Barbarism,” former president Domingo Sarmiento argues that the “spirit of the Pampa” hampered the progress of Buenos Aires.⁹² In other words, he argued that the attitude of the gauchos, which was lazy and indolent, would prevent Buenos Aires from becoming

⁸⁹ Código penal, artículo 81, número 2. (p. 60)

⁹⁰ Kristin Ruggiero makes the argument that for domestic servants, “An employers household was often a woman’s only family.” “Honor, Maternity, and the Disciplining of Women in Late Nineteenth-Century Buenos Aires,” 367.

⁹¹ Kristin Ruggiero, *Modernity of the Flesh*, 73.

⁹² Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, “Civilization or Barbarism,” in *The Argentina Reader*, ed. Gabriela Nouzeilles and Graciela Montaldo, 80-90 (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 83.

Europeanized. In order to ensure that the new generation was moral, elites sought to equip working class mothers with the knowledge they needed to raise future citizens.

In their efforts to educate mothers on how to raise the new generation, some elites adopted views which Karen Mead classifies as “relative feminism.”⁹³ Carlos Octavio Bunges wrote of the importance of women, saying that while man is “superior to woman in the great arts of progress, [he is] inferior in the no less great art of the conservation of the species.”⁹⁴ Bunges believed that each and every woman must be educated in how to run a household and raise children.⁹⁵ Estanislao Severo Zeballos, too, advocated educating women for the benefit of the children. Zeballos revered women for their biological role as mothers, comparing them to God. He felt that women must play a central role in the scientific culture of the country and that Argentina was not progressing quickly as other countries because women were not as educated in Argentina.⁹⁶ Working women, indeed women of all classes, were expected to create a safe and caring home to raise their children and honor their spouses. This expectation, again, was driven by elite perceptions of family life and income; they did not account for the living conditions of working class families. Women from the upper classes, in particular, were expected to act as mothers to the patriarchal family and the nation.

⁹³ Karen Mead, “Gendering the Obstacles to Progress in Positivist Argentina, 1880-1920,” *HAHR* 77:4 (1997).

⁹⁴ Carlos Octavio Bunges, qtd. in “Gendering the Obstacles to Progress in Positivist Argentina, 1880-1920,” Karen Mead, *HAHR* 77:4 (1997): 665.

⁹⁵ Karen Mead, “Gendering the Obstacles,” 665.

⁹⁶ Zeballos listed Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. Kristin Ruggiero, *Modernity in the Flesh* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 27.

ELITE WOMEN: PATRIOTS AND MOTHERS OF A NATION

Intellectuals, scientists, and bureaucrats believed that it was their responsibility to improve society, to use scientific knowledge to elevate Argentina onto the world stage. Thus, it follows that elite women, too, saw their role within society as that of a parent. Elite women were expected to act as mothers to their own children, and to the servants employed within their households. Additionally, many women chose to “mother the nation” and honor their own families by joining philanthropic organizations; the act of which was a display of a family’s social status and allowed women the opportunity to step out of the private sphere of the home and into the public sphere.⁹⁷ These women practiced maternalism, a term which Karen Mead succinctly defines as “an organized activism on the part of women who claim that they possess gendered qualifications to understand and assist less fortunate women and children.”⁹⁸ Maternalism can be seen as the counterpart to the paternalist attitude of the scientists and governmental officials who were less preoccupied with individual mothers and children and more concerned with the collective good of the *raza argentina*. In spite of the different approaches taken by elite men and women, the aim of both groups was to maintain traditional gender roles and raise a strong, healthy, and moral generation of Argentines.

Indeed, in some cases, philanthropy and government converged. The most salient example of this convergence is the *Sociedad de Beneficencia*, a well-established philanthropic society run by a board of elite women. The organization supported mothers

⁹⁷ Donna Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State*, 57.

⁹⁸ Karen Mead, “Beneficent Maternalism: Argentine Motherhood in Comparative Perspective, 1880-1920” *Journal of Women’s History* 12:3 (2000): 120.

who were seen as at risk for child abandonment or infanticide through a number of institutes, including a Mother's Institute which provided care for women during all stages of pregnancy and immediately following birth.⁹⁹ Furthermore, they established a Foundling Home to care for children under the age of six months.¹⁰⁰ In order to fully fund all of these measures in both the capital and throughout the nation, the Sociedad de Beneficencia received large subsidies from the national, provincial, and municipal governments.¹⁰¹

In spite of the success enjoyed by the ladies of the Sociedad de Beneficencia, it did not enjoy a monopoly on philanthropy. In fact, there were many other organizations, many of which were either religious or run by groups of a particular nationality. Most religious organizations were Catholic, however, the Jewish women's philanthropic society is one notable exception. The only orphanage for Jewish girls was run by the Sociedad de Socorros de Damas Israelitas (Rescue Society of Israelite Ladies) and provided a place for all Argentine Jews to send young girls, so that they would not be baptized, which a common practice in orphanages run by the Sociedad de Beneficencia.¹⁰² Additionally, different national communities created philanthropic organizations to serve their communities within Argentina. Examples of this included the Patronato Español, an organization run by Spanish immigrants within the city of Buenos Aires. In addition to these rather specialized organizations, organizations such as the Sociedad de Beneficencia and Las Conferencias de

⁹⁹ Donna Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009): 46.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 47.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 45.

¹⁰² Donna Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State*, 50.

Las Señoras de San Vicente de Paul had catholic origins and included women bearing many of Buenos Aires' most prestigious surnames. Each of these organizations was maternalistic; they sought to provide the services that mothers would, such as assistance in child rearing and lessons in morality and gender-appropriate behavior.¹⁰³

Writing on Las Señoras de San Vicente de Paul, Karen Mead argues that the Señoras were particularly effective because the elite women regularly visited poor households to observe the conditions that those who they were assisting lived in and to spread their evangelical message, particularly the importance of baptism and marriage.¹⁰⁴ It is worth considering the social implications of these particular rites; marriage and baptism not only promoted Catholic beliefs but social stability by encouraging men and women to create nuclear, patriarchal family units.¹⁰⁵ The Señoras were also typically well-traveled and well-educated, making them fitting counterparts to the male scientists and reformers.¹⁰⁶ The Señoras and the Sociedad, as well as other organizations, expected that mothers provide for their families in the best way possible. Ideally, this meant the mothers stayed home to rear children. These organizations did recognize that for some working class women, single mothers or women whose husbands were working in the interior had no choice but to work. Working mothers were expected to work in gender-appropriate labor.

¹⁰³ Donna Guy writes about this in Chapter Four of *Women Build the Welfare State* and Karen Mead discusses the desire of the Señoras de Vicente de Paul to see women working as domestic servants in her article, "Gender Welfare, and the Catholic Church in Argentina: Conferencias de Señoras de San Vicente de Paul, 1890-1916."

¹⁰⁴ Karen Mead, "Gender, Welfare, and the Catholic Church in Argentina: Conferencias de Señoras de San Vicente de Paul, 1890-1916," *The Americas* 58:1 (2001), 102.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid,100.

In order to help these mothers and children find gender-appropriate jobs, many of the largest philanthropic organizations set up workshops or other training programs.¹⁰⁷ The Señoras de San Vicente de Paul ran the Casa de Santa Felicita which housed women workers and was run in conjunction with workshops which trained the women so they could earn a living wage, to support their children, in a socially acceptable position – such as factory work or household service.¹⁰⁸ The Sociedad de Beneficencia ran a large number of similar workshops for both women and children.¹⁰⁹ The elite women strove to prepare mothers and children for the new and improved society that the Positivists were planning to usher in at the turn of the century.

CONCLUSION

Elite women worked to maintain traditional gender roles while supporting elite men's efforts to modernize. Through their maternalist actions, philanthropic societies aimed to improve the health of the future generation and maintain gender appropriate roles in spite of the changes caused by modernity. Women were expected to run their household and raise their children while upholding the family's honor. Elite women held the extra

¹⁰⁷ Donna Guy discusses these gendered workshops in her work, *Women Build the Welfare State*. In Uruguay, too, workshops run by the philanthropic society, La Asociación La Bonne Garde, trained children for labor in gender-appropriate occupations. For more on this topic, see Christine Ehrick's article, "To Serve the Nation: Juvenile Mothers, Paternalism, and State Formation in Uruguay, 1910-1930," *Social Science History* 29:3 (2005), 489-518.

¹⁰⁸ See Karen Mead's discussion of the Casa in "Gender, Welfare, and the Catholic Church," 112-113.

¹⁰⁹ For more information on these workshops, see Donna Guy's *Women Build the Welfare State*.

burden of acting as mothers of the state. Many saw it as their personal duty to ensure that those less fortunate were cared for and able to care for their own children. This maternal instinct went hand in hand with Positivist efforts to modernize the process of motherhood, a process that will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: INSTITUTIONS – IMPROVING HEALTH AND MORALS OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Elite men and women sought to improve the lives of women and children by placing them in institutions.¹¹⁰ These institutions sought to “re-program” women and children to be upstanding, productive members of the new Argentine society. Institutions included facilities such as prisons and asylums, as well as educational workshops, which fed and sheltered participants. Both maternalist philanthropic organizations and the government sponsored these types of institutions.

Elite women viewed improving the morals of new mothers and their children by mentoring these working class mothers as their mission. Additionally, elite women stepped in to make sure that children whose own mothers had abandoned them still had a maternal influence in their lives. To do so, they set up a number of foundling homes and workshops to train children in gender-appropriate labor - many of which were run by nuns or other respectable women’s organizations.

Meanwhile, elite men, particularly those influenced by the Positivist idea that all social problems could be addressed through solutions based on scientific inquiry, founded their own institutions to protect the working classes. While mothers were not the focus, these institutions, which focused on children, heavily impacted the day-to-day lives of Argentine mothers. Positivists believed that they could improve society and used their new

¹¹⁰ They also enacted various laws and workplace regulations, but for the sake of brevity this chapter will focus on institutions only.

positions of power to do so.¹¹¹ They worked within governmental structures to create new programs to improve Argentine society and raise what they believed would be a stronger, better raza argentina. According to Kristin Ruggiero, for Positivists, ““flesh” communicated tensions of modernity and was a signifier of the ambivalence felt about modernity in a postcolonial Third World country.”¹¹² A plethora of problems such as sanitation, public health, and crime, were associated with modernity; but the Positivists had plans to solve these social problems.¹¹³ Part of these plans included establishing institutions to prepare the population for honorable, productive labor.

Both elite women and men viewed working class women as wards, or “children,” of the state, even as the government and philanthropic societies concerned themselves with these women’s children. State-run, subsidized, and private institutions alike stripped working-class women of their autonomy in the name of their health and the health of their children. Elite men and women claimed that the regulations were to protect the nations – much like parents have rules to protect their children.

MATERNALIST INTERVENTION

Elite women operated the largest philanthropy, the Sociedad de Beneficencia. The Sociedad’s goal was to help working class and immigrant women become good mothers. They intended to train them in the “science” of raising children and because they had to

¹¹¹ How these men rose to power is discussed in Chapter One.

¹¹² Kristin Ruggiero, *Modernity in the Flesh* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 3.

work, they sought to place them in gender-appropriate labors. The “science” of motherhood consisted of using both moral and scientific knowledge to properly run the household and raise the children. These women were placed in a number of different institutes and asylums.

One such institution was the Mother’s Institute, or Instituto de Maternidad, a place for expectant mothers. The Instituto was founded in 1927 by the Sociedad de Beneficencia and funded by the federal government.¹¹⁴ At the Institution, poor mothers had access to medical help and prenatal care – they could also obtain domestic skills training, and, if necessary, find wet nurses for their children.¹¹⁵ Ideally, the Sociedad and the government sought to maintain traditional families, nuclear families. In practice, simply hoped to reduce the number of poor women who abandoned their children due to poverty.¹¹⁶ While this institution was unique in offering housing to expectant mothers, the tradition of training mothers in domestic labor was not unique to the Sociedad.

The Señoras de San Vicente de Paul, a group of elite women who modeled their organization off of the French Catholic philanthropy, also aimed to help poor women support themselves through domestic labor.¹¹⁷ The Conferencias built the Casa de Santa Felicita, a place for poor women to live and labor, during the first decade of the twentieth century. The Casa also offered on-site workshops and gender-appropriate employment

¹¹⁴ Donna Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State: Performing Charity and Rights in Argentina, 1880-1955* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2009), 45.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 46.

¹¹⁷ Karen Mead, “Gender, Welfare and the Catholic Church in Argentina: Conferencias de Señoras de San Vicente de Paul, 1890-1916,” *The Americas* 58:1: 99.

opportunities for the young single women.¹¹⁸ Eventually, the institution grew to include a Professional School of Domestic Economy.¹¹⁹ The Casa was the pinnacle of the efforts of the Señoras because it combined emotional support, education, and a home; all the things that a mother ought to provide for a child.

Maternalist philanthropies also ran a number of different types of asylums and correctional facilities. For example, the Asilo del Buen Pastor (Good Shepherd Asylum) began under the auspices of the Sociedad de Beneficencia, and the Asilo de Pobres (Asylum of the Poor) also briefly fell under the jurisdiction of the Sociedad.¹²⁰ One asylum, the Asilo San Miguel, run by the Sociedad de Beneficencia was reserved just for prostitutes.¹²¹ Each of these institutions sought to protect those elements of society considered vulnerable; single women and mothers, as well as abandoned or poor children whose parents could not provide for them. The elite women of the philanthropies fulfilled their role as mothers of the nation by creating homes for wayward and poor young women and children who were without mothers of their own.

PATERNAL POSITIVISTS

While the female-run philanthropies sought to create homes for young women, mothers, and children, the positivists used their positions within Argentine government to establish their own methods for state-sponsored social assistance. Julia Rodriguez

¹¹⁸ Karen Mead, "Gender, Welfare and the Catholic Church in Argentina: Conferencias de Señas de San Vicente de Paul, 1890-1916," *The Americas* 58:1: 112.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Donna Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State*, 100.

¹²¹ Ibid, 115.

summed up the feelings of the elites, saying, “a physician’s interventions was understood not just to alleviate a woman’s individual suffering but also to heal the breach in the social fabric created by degenerate children.”¹²² Positivists designed various reforms with the aim of improving the raza argentina.

Asistencia Pública was the first and most far-reaching government institution to help the poor and working classes. In 1883, Emilio Coni and José Maria Ramos Mejía founded the Asistencia Pública with the goal of reorganizing and centralizing the hospital system of Buenos Aires based upon the French model.¹²³ Ramos Mejía considered the Sociedad de Beneficencia to be scientifically unqualified to answer the needs of women and children, a sentiment which may have been rooted in the Sociedad’s interference with Asistencia Pública actions.¹²⁴ This type of antagonism between government officials and maternalist philanthropies was not uncommon. Leading positivists, like José Ingenieros, considered the religious underpinnings of such associations to be antithetical to progress. Ingenieros believed that the charitable actions of these groups interfered with the process of natural selection, a process which was vital for the progress of the nation.¹²⁵

Between 1900 and 1920, Asistencia Pública became an important umbrella organization in the government’s efforts to improve the raza argentina from the bottom, up. For example, in 1908 the Protección de la Primera Infancia (Protection of the Infancy)

¹²²Julia Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the State* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 97.

¹²³ Ibid, 42.

¹²⁴ Karen Mead, “Gendering the Obstacles to Progress in Positivist Argentina, 1880-1920,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 77:4 (1997), 655.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 670.

was established to place breast-feeding under direct government control by looking in on nursing mothers, ensuring that nursing mothers were well fed, and by creating and monitoring milk dispensaries. In these dispensaries, extra breast milk could be distributed to those in need. Then, 1919, the agency expanded its control and began inspecting wet nurses.¹²⁶

This expansion of *Protección de la Primera Infancia* was partly driven by new knowledge in the field of *puericultura*.¹²⁷ Julia Rodriguez defines *puericultura* as “the science or practice of growing children.”¹²⁸ In practice, the field of *puericultura* sought to revolutionize child-care and lower infant mortality. Enrique Feinmann, a prominent pediatrician, led the field of *puericultura* and followed the French specialists. In France, *puericultura* began in the interest of raising a new, healthy generation of French citizens in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War at the end of the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, professionals in Buenos Aires sought to remedy a population crisis of their own; over half of the deaths in Buenos Aires during the year 1875 were children.¹²⁹

In France, medical studies were conducted to determine the leading causes of infant mortality. In true Positivist fashion, scientific inquiry was made to determine the causes

¹²⁶ Julia Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the State*, 119.

¹²⁷ It is important to note that this was not the only institution born out of the *puericultura* movement: the Instituto de *Puericultura* was established in Buenos Aires in 1912. This Instituto was born out of a number of clinics run by Dr. Enrique Foster which helped pregnant women and children under one year of age. Asunción Lavrin, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, 1890-1940*, Engendering Latin America Vol. 3 (Lincoln, N.E.: University of Nebraska, 1995), 103.

¹²⁸ Julia Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina*, 118.

¹²⁹ Asunción Lavrin, *Women, Feminism, and Social Change in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, 1890-1940*, Engendering Latin America Vol. 3 (Lincoln, N.E.: University of Nebraska Press, 1995): 100.

and possible solutions. In the last two decades of the 19th century, studies pointed to the numerous negative consequences if a mother failed to breast feed her child. Dr. Jules Comby's studies, for example, confirmed that breast-fed babies suffered less from gastroenteritis.¹³⁰ Another leading physician whose influence was felt in Argentine medicine, Dr. Adolphe Pinard, said "if she has breasts, it is for feeding!"¹³¹ While this last comment may seem more sexist than scientific, it reflects the views of professionals at the time; it was the biological responsibility of women to provide for their children. In France, one effort to make sure that more infants were being breast-fed was the Pouponnière of Porchefontaine.¹³² This establishment housed new mothers, who worked as wet nurses; nursing both their own child and another child. In order to staunch the spread of disease, they implemented a number of preventative measures.¹³³ This institution was doubly effective because it provided breast-milk, and thus helped battle depopulation, while employing women in a role that was consistent with traditional ideas about the proper role for women.

This type of scientific study and government intervention in the lives of mothers provided the model for Argentine physicians and government officials working to improve the raza argentina. In fact, in 1914, Enrique Feinmann wrote in support of breast-feeding; he carefully weighed the effects of feeding newborns a mother's breast milk, cow milk, and breast milk that is not entirely the mothers. In conclusion, Feinmann asserted that the

¹³⁰ Mary Lynn Stewart, "Protecting Infants," 81.

¹³¹ Alisa Klaus, *Every Child a Lion: The Origins of Maternal and Infant Health Policy in the United States and France, 1880-1920* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993):79.

¹³² *Ibid*, 126.

¹³³ *Ibid*.

“natural food of the child [is] the mother’s milk.”¹³⁴ In 1916, an article in the *Revista de Criminología, Psiquiatría, y Medicina Legal* linked the decrease in breast-feeding to the degeneration of the race.¹³⁵ The government was worried that Argentina’s population was regressing, rather than progressing. Thus, it is simple to understand why the *Protección de la Primera Infancia* began to closely monitor and regulate wet nurses; if it could not be the child’s mother, it had better be the best possible alternative. The study of puericultura allowed Argentine physicians to determine what they considered to be the best ways to raise children, and to interfere in mother’s lives to ensure that these methods were being used.

Puericultura, however, could only help those infants who were born. In order to improve the process of motherhood before birth, the field of obstetrics also began to flourish in Argentina during the fin-de-siècle period. Government officials sought to exert control over midwifery in Argentina. Dr. Pedro Pardo, head of the Council of National Hygiene, was one vocal detractor.¹³⁶ Another well-known obstetrician, J.C. Llamas Massini, added an extra year of training to his program to stop abortions and improve the bedside manner of the midwives under his tutelage.¹³⁷ On the other hand, Dr. Cecilia Grierson, the first female to become a doctor in Argentina, helped to found the National Obstetrics

¹³⁴ Enrique Feinmann, “Puericultura y pediatría,” p. 8.

¹³⁵ Julia Rodriguez, *Civilizing Argentina: Science, Medicine, and the State*, 119.

¹³⁶ Kristin Ruggiero, *Modernity of the Flesh: Medicine, Law, and Society in Turn-of-the-Century Argentina*, 72.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 73.

Association and its journal, the *Revista Obstétrica*.¹³⁸ The Association was formed by a group of less than twenty midwives when it was founded in 1901 and grew to over sixty by the end of that year.¹³⁹

Much like mothers, midwives were expected to be moralizing forces within society. Midwives could be accused of being immoral for causing abortion or helping mothers abandon their children by taking children to the Foundling Home and finding work for the mothers.¹⁴⁰ Midwives were expected to act like mothers to their patients; simultaneously taking proper care of their patients, both mother and child, and acting as a moralizing influence.

CONCLUSION

The elites, acting as mothers and fathers of the nation realized that it would not be possible to raise a new raza argentina unless they could aid and educate the new generation of mothers. Elites had a vested interest in raising a new and “improved” raza argentina. In order to do this, both maternalist philanthropies and the positivists created new institutions to support mothers and young children. Philanthropic institutions relied on motherly influence and material aid, while positivists sought scientific solutions. Although there were occasional quarrels between the women of philanthropy and the men

¹³⁸ Carolina Barry, “Cecilia Grierson: Argentina’s First Female Doctor,” *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*, 213.

¹³⁹ Kristin Ruggiero, *Modernity in the Flesh*, 73.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 73.

of government, for the most part the two worked together up until the 1920s to solve the problems of motherhood within Argentina.

CONCLUSION

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Argentine elites viewed Europe as the pinnacle of civilization. They sent their sons to study at European universities and emulated European scientific practices in the labs of Buenos Aires. Women modeled their philanthropic organizations off their successful European counterparts. Eventually, simply modeling themselves after Europe was not enough; elites wanted to improve the raza argentina so that Argentina could rise to the world stage. These same elites were also alarmed by the vast changes taking place within Buenos Aires as a result of modernity. Mass immigration in the city had created an unstable society and elites worried about maintaining their positions of power within the government and society as a whole.

In order to improve the raza argentina, solve the problems of modernity, and maintain the status quo, elites turned to science. Positivism and Social Darwinism allowed the elites to justify the status quo; they, the elites, were better and it was their duty to help improve the rest of society. Positivist thought, which dictated that all things could be improved by careful scientific consideration, drove elites to look for scientific answers to problems such as high infant mortality, high rates of disease, and a rise in crime rates. As Nancy Leys Stephan wrote, “science is a highly social activity and is not sealed off from the values of the society in which it is practiced.”¹⁴¹ In this case, science was not sealed off from elite Argentine values that were both traditional and nationalistic; the elites wanted to maintain what they depicted as traditional societal norms while showing the world that Argentina could be a world power, just like Europe. To do this, elites began by addressing

¹⁴¹ Nancy Leys Stephan, *Hour of Eugenics*: 9.

problems such as immigration and crime in Buenos Aires. During this time elites set a precedent for interference in the daily lives of the poor and working classes of Buenos Aires, which would serve them well in the coming decades as they tackled what they considered to be the problems facing Argentine mothers and children.

During the fin-de-siècle period, elites turned their energies toward raising a new and improved raza argentina. They aimed to decrease infant mortality, reduce disease, and stop mothers from infanticide and child abandonment. The precedent of interference in daily life would be put to the test as government officials and philanthropies began to “assist” mothers. Mothers-to-be and mothers of newborns became a major focus for groups such as the Sociedad de Beneficencia and the Señoras de San Vicente de Paul, as well as the government agency Protección de la Primera Infancia, among others.

As these agencies worked to protect and control mothers and their children while simultaneously claiming to be improving the raza Argentina, they acted as mothers and fathers to the state. Elite men worked through government channels to create legislation, based on scientific observation, to create a new raza argentina. Meanwhile, elite women took on the role of mother by offering day-to-day support and concern, in the form of job training and education, for the poor and working class mothers who were responsible for giving birth to the new raza argentina.

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