

# An Imagined Race and its Architectural Defense. Modernism and Racial Discourse in Chile 1938-1941

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## ABSTRACT

*This article explores some of the ways in which modern architecture was involved in the construction of a racial imaginary in Chile during the government of Pedro Aguirre Cerda, from 1938 to 1941. It attempts to reconstruct how the concept of 'race' was used by Aguirre Cerda's state program 'The Defense of the Race and the Good use of Free Time,' and by Jorge Aguirre Silva, its leading architect. By situating architectural discourse alongside medical science, physical education, and eugenics in the development of Aguirre Cerda's program, it attempts to show how its architecture was influenced not only by European modernism, but also by a local version of hygienism, eugenics, and a form of nationalism based on the production and protection of an allegedly homogenous race.*

*In his late book El sur de los Andes: cómo renace un pueblo en el mensaje de su arquitectura y poesía (The South of the Andes: How a People*

*is Reborn in the Message of its Architecture and its Poetry) of 1988, the Chilean architect Jorge Aguirre Silva confessed a 'constant obsession' with finding an appropriate response to the question: "what is the image of our country?" (Aguirre Silva, 1988, p. 11). He pondered about the traits that, in all the individual differences of its people, "bring us together as a race and unite us spiritually with a deep sense of Nationality [emphasis added]" (Aguirre Silva, 1988, p. 14). The problem of national identity seems to have cut across an important part of his life and his career. As a sort of identity anxiety, he often tried to connect architecture, landscape, and the arts with the consolidation of national unity in nationality. Three years earlier, in his book *Hitos en Santiago: Esplendor y decadencia en su arquitectura y paisaje* (Landmarks in Santiago: Splendor and Decadence in its Architecture and Landscape), he regarded the importance of urban landmarks in this matter attentively (1985). In his view, they simultaneously represented and shaped the habits of a nation's peoples, thus significantly defining what it meant to be Chilean and actively forging what he often referred to as 'national character.' In the book, he writes about Plaza Italia, the San Cristóbal Hill, and perhaps most conspicuously about the Santa Lucía Hill, which had become part of the construction of the myth of national unity when, in 1888, the painter Pedro Lira represented its top as having been the site of the foundation of Santiago. Aguirre Silva*

*includes this painting in the book but does not discuss it. Furthermore, and perhaps unsuspectedly, the image in the book is not a reproduction of the finished painting but a preparatory study. In Lira's well-known painting, the Spanish Conquistador extends his hand pointing towards the future site of Santiago, a gesture that emphasizes the Hill's infrastructural role as a privileged site of conquest. Conversely, the Cacique's hand points towards the ground: presumably indicating his land and its cultural significance. Printed in Aguirre Silva's book, however, the painting exhibits no pointing gestures: both Pedro de Valdivia and the Cacique's hands are blurred. This pictorial erasure wipes away the epistemological incompatibility of both characters. And it is perhaps in this deletion that we see more clearly Aguirre Silva's difficulty in conceiving a definitive 'image of our country.' Only by blurring difference from identity something as race and national character could be produced as foundations for national unity. While the resistance to address this incompatibility may be tied to Aguirre Silva's personal anxieties, it is also symptomatic of more widespread and structural instances of cultural repression.*

*An obdurate impossibility to come to terms with the prospect of an open identity troubled Chilean politics since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nationalism became a reaction to an anxiety of dissolution that took center stage multiple times throughout Chile's national history. From 1938*

to 1941, more concretely, nationalism resorted to race to produce a notion of unity that was enacted through medical science, hygienist doctrine, eugenics, and architecture. Enacted, as architecture participated actively to give such anxieties the weight of real pathological symptoms and not just delirious representations. The identity neurosis Aguirre Silva describes in his books can be traced back to his first years as an architect and in relation to this national-scale anxiety. In 1938, at age 27, he was appointed director of a state program called 'The Defense of the Race and the Good use of Free Time' by President Pedro Aguirre Cerda, also his uncle. In effect, until the president's premature death in 1941, The Defense of the Race program was an ambitious plan geared towards the management of the working class' leisure time that was underpinned by the concern 'to fortify the race' and increase the population with "ethnic elements that maintain the unity of nationality" (Subercaseaux, 2007, p. 61). It focused on strengthening "the physical vigor" and "the moral health" of impoverished populations by providing them with means to escape social diseases and improving their physical condition (Subercaseaux, 2007, p. 61). It involved the provision of entertainment, sports, and medical facilities nationwide, as well as widespread sanitary control and physical, civic, and hygienic education. In the short-term, it considered the construction of 'Neighborhood Clubs' in major cities and districts, coupled with a long-term plan to build 'Resting Homes' and 'Resting Parks' in the countryside, seaside, and mountains throughout the country (Presidencia de la República, 1940, pp. 33, 51). Aguirre Silva, in partnership with his friends Enrique Gebhard and Gabriel Rodríguez, designed many of these facilities and built three, including the most visible one,

*The Model Home Defense of the Race, renamed Home Pedro Aguirre Cerda after the president's demise. He was appointed to lead a group of architects, artists, and advisors from several disciplines, who would give this program institutional and architectural form.<sup>(1)</sup>*

Himself an educator, Pedro Aguirre Cerda (1879-1941) rose to power marshaling the motto 'to govern is to educate,' aiming to fight poverty by radically improving access to public welfare services. As the first elected president representing the Popular Front, his administration carried out extensive efforts to integrate the lower and middle classes by beginning state-industrialization, economic protectionism, and promoting the autonomy and expansion of the state apparatus. By providing the urban poor with leisure infrastructure and sanitary housing, Aguirre Cerda likewise sought to address the 'social question' of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, which had increasingly stripped liberal and conservative oligarchies –dominating the country since its independence– from their political legitimacy. The Defense of the Race program advanced some of these measures, while at the same time responded to contingent political and social contexts. In the wake of the 1939 Chillán earthquake, the onset of the war in Europe, and longstanding levels of poverty across the Chilean population, unity in "the pride of being Chileans" became a strategic message of the presidential platform (Presidencia de la República, 1941, p. 3). Thus, the message

of the Defense of the Race program acquired the undertones of non-partisan unity, as "a social program removed from any political, social, or religious sectarianism" that had to be "eminently patriotic" (Presidencia de la República, 1940, p. 31). In this context, race became shorthand for the unity of the country as well as for a purported "dissolution of the class-struggle" (Presidencia de la República, 1940, p. 27).

Still, neither Aguirre Cerda's championing of national unity nor his public pledge to fortify the race were unheard of in 1939. They echoed initiatives like president Arturo Alessandri Palma's 'Law of the Defense of the Race,' that in 1925 raised the fight against the "degeneration of the race" to a state obligation (Decreto Ley 355, 1925, p. 1). During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, social hygiene and eugenics began to be articulated as a problem of governance, under the emergence of a model of liberal modernization that increasingly sought to control and regulate floating populations who simultaneously represented a risk to material progress and a 'reserve army of labor' for the country's growing economy. A process that in cities involved the organization of productive forces by installing an 'urban orthopedics' based on bio-social segregation enforced through moral discipline and biological sanitation (Leyton et al., 2015, p. 8). The task was first carried out by small agencies within ministries, such as the Institute of Hygiene and the Superior Council of Hygiene, formed after a cholera outbreak in 1886, or by independent philanthropic institutions like the National Association of Education or the Chilean League of Social Hygiene, among many others (Riobó & Villarroel, 2019). During the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the problem increasingly

(1) When talking to Alfredo Jünemann about the program, Aguirre Silva said: "I was the advisor who organized the activities that would conform the Defense of the Race, knowing that my lack of experience and knowledge were inscribed in a duty that I couldn't possibly develop. I told the President, and he told me 'look, you are responsible, you have to look for your own advisors,' and I had to do it in areas for which I didn't have sufficient knowledge" (Jünemann Gazmuri, 1996, p. 55).

begin to be assumed by the State with the creation of specialized state institutions, leading to the creation of The Ministry of Hygiene, Assistance, Social Prevision and Labor in 1924, renamed Social Welfare Ministry in 1927, and Ministry of Public Salubrity in 1932 (Ibarra, 2016b). By 1939, key figures within the Departments of State were actively discussing eugenics as a means of social control and the promotion of productivity. Eduardo Cruz-Coke and Salvador Allende, for example, Secretaries of Health of Alessandri and Aguirre Cerda respectively, both understood social hygiene as a hinge between the body and an apparatus of production or consumption, and spoke about the biological makeup of workers as a national resource to be controlled, managed, and enhanced.<sup>(2)</sup> Following these lines, and furnishing the board with an array of advisors that included doctors, physical educators, and eugenicists,<sup>(3)</sup>

Aguirre Cerda's 1939 program was an attempt to give national visibility to what he considered a project for the construction of a stronger nation by invigorating its most vulnerable elements.

Architecture and urbanism themselves had been central to the progressive medicalization of society from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>(4)</sup> At least since the urban reforms of Vicuña Mackenna in the 1870s, both disciplines were associated with discourses of social hygiene and moral propriety. Through measures of sanitation and security that included reorganizing the city around cordons sanitaires and 'hygienic parks,' canalizing urban water streams, and incorporating sewage systems, architecture and urbanism were understood as methods of population management with a significant role in the modernization of cities. Likewise, modernist architects had played a part in the spread and advancement of these discourses. For instance, in 1909 Ricardo Larraín Bravo –with whom Aguirre Silva designed his first building–wrote *La higiene aplicada en las construcciones* (Hygiene Applied to Constructions), condensing ideas around healthy urbanism and architecture circulating around the centennial (some heavily influenced by scientific racism), and became an authority on the subject, later advancing programs to battle high rates of infant mortality and

designing the first hygienic workers' housing complexes in Chile between 1911 and 1918 (Larraín Bravo, 1909, 1937). By the 1920s, issues regarding urban hygiene and public salubrity were widely recognized as integral to the profession of architecture (Ibarra, 2016a, p. 153).

By the end of the 1920s, a new generation of architects was championing the introduction of ideas from European modernism as a way of addressing the increasingly dire social situation in Chilean cities. Enrique Gebhard and Waldo Parraguéz, both students from the Universidad de Chile and militants in the socialist party, founded the magazine *ARQuitectura* in 1935, which by the third issue incorporated their colleague and close friend Jorge Aguirre Silva. The magazine published modernist texts by Gropius, Le Corbusier, Giedion, alongside fiery editorials advocating for a stronger involvement of architecture in the social question. The first issue included a manifesto that promoted "the integral-rational organization of collective life," the general separation of urban functions, and a "bio-social sense of dwelling" that was to emanate "directly from the physio-psychological life of the collectivity, expressed in its man-unit" (as cited in Torrent, 2013, p. 134). Often exposing the alarming living conditions of conventillos (shanties) through photography and statistics, by the fourth issue the editors had incorporated eight doctors, who worked in hygiene and statistics, as stable collaborators and correspondents. Interestingly, this 'man-unit' that the authors often referred to was never explicitly defined but rather simultaneously

(2) Consider this line in Cruz-Coke's book *Medicina preventiva y medicina dirigida*, published in 1938: "the machine that has to be repaired with more urgency in our country is man; but not any man, our worker, still healthy, still recoverable of an affection that is just beginning and whose health is the main positive element of the wealth we could make use of" (as cited in Cárcamo Gebhardt, 2015, p. 206). A more 'negative eugenics' would take place around debates on sterilization in which Allende played an important role. See Sánchez Delgado, 2017. For a much debated and discredited account on Allende's more radical eugenics see Fariás, 2005.

(3) Among others, there was Joaquín Cabezas, director on the Institute of Physical Education; Lucio Córdova, director of the School of Hygiene; Joaquín Orellana, administrator of the National Stadium (created a year earlier); Gregorio Schepeler, director of the Boy-Scouts in Chile; and Rosa Ester Barra, a connoted educator that formed the first congress of women educators. It is also worth noting that the second vice-president of the program, chosen unanimously, was Francisco J. Díaz, a retired army general that founded the first Nazi association in Chile, recognized by Adolf Hitler himself. According to some sources, Hans Betzhold, the author of *Eugenesis*, which promoted the creation of a Chilean *Übermensch*, also participated in the committee, although it remains unclear the extent to which his ideas might have been seriously considered. See Sánchez Delgado & Cárcamo Gebhardt, 2018, p. 63.

(4) Aguirre Silva himself was no stranger to these developments. His grandfather, the doctor José Joaquín Aguirre had been the first president of the Hygiene Institute, playing an important role in public disinfection and the legislation of hygiene, and his father, also a doctor and a military, had studied in France and Germany and followed his father as director of the Medical Department of Santiago's Penitentiary before becoming director of the Juan de Dios Hospital in 1922.

produced as an abstraction, a product of statistics, and more importantly, as belonging to a race that needed reinforcing.<sup>(5)</sup>

Hygienic discourse and eugenics circulated within architectural discourse as much as through state institutions and philanthropic organizations (Ibarra, 2016b; Mondragón López, 2015). Moreover, in this architectural environment, race circulated embroiled in debates on modernism, minimal housing, and urbanism, conflating European modernism with a local version of eugenics that had put forward a very specific racial perspective. In this sense, Aguirre and his colleagues entered the debate on eugenics at the same time they entered modern architecture: race and modern architecture occupied the same discursive devices and were articulated by similar polemics in similar media. The 'unit-man,' object rather than subject of this discourse, was imagined as both the inhabitant and the product of an environment, of a spatial context that could be designed and modified. As it is often pointed out, unlike European versions, Latin American eugenics usually combined hereditarian determinism with a transformed Lamarckian determinism of environment according to which milieu was a factor

as determinant as heritage to preserve the consistency of race. Thus natural selection was combined with rational selection: through regulation of the environment, heredity could be modified or strengthened so as to improve the race by incorporating adaptations to the biological constitution. Considered a 'positive eugenics,' these discourses focused on preventive measures and hygiene to preserve what Aguirre Cerda deemed the 'racial reserves' of the country (Presidencia de la República, 1941, p. 41). Architecture, as an instrument of environmental manipulation, occupied a privileged space within the project of defending a national race.

The Defense of the Race program was aimed precisely at this, the widespread provision of salutary environments where physical and cultural education could be imparted to enhance the biological makeup of the population. Among the buildings Aguirre Silva and his friends Enrique Gebhard and Gabriel Rodríguez designed for this purpose, were a Resting Park in the skirts of the San Cristóbal Hill, a Resting Park and Home in the Bosque de Santiago, a more modest one in the hills between Santiago and Valparaíso, a Neighborhood Club located on the site of the Santiago racetrack named Hogar Hipódromo Chile, and the Defense of the Race Model Home. The latter's comprehensive architectural brief included cinema rooms, auditoriums, classrooms, several sports fields, a gymnasium, an outdoor pool, a lagoon, an aquarium, an herbarium, a children's home, play areas, a restaurant, a cafeteria, a ballroom, and even a milk bar. In the booklet published to promote the program, this vast complex is described as "a national institution destined to create new human values through large and modern programs of

physical education, sports, recreation, social and cultural work in all the aspects of the human personality" (Presidencia de la República, 1940, p. 33).

The buildings themselves were designed as healthy machines to organize the psycho-biology of man-units by distributing them in different programs and activities, arranging them according to biological criteria like age and gender. The Model Home was located in the middle of Cousiño Park in downtown Santiago; supported by columns, it enabled the park to continue uninterrupted beneath its volumes. It was designed with ample windows for well-lit interiors and multiple terraces to be used as solariums and resting areas. Moreover, the whole building was immersed in a forest of pre-existing trees and a landscape project designed by German landscape architect Oscar Prager, who had been associated with the City Beautiful Movement in California (Viveros Letelier, 2019). Prager designed a square forest garden that surrounded the building and replaced older introduced species with native and ornamental ones. The attention to the landscape was further carried onto the Model Home's interiors, where large-scale photographs of the Andes mountains, forests, and alamedas taken by Antonio Quintana lined the building's walls. The purpose of intensifying contact with nature, fresh air, sunlight, and the surrounding landscape, followed the directions imparted not only by Le Corbusier and Gropius but also by local hygienic discourse and Larraín Bravo in his *Hygiene Applied to Constructions* (Hecht, 2016, p. 134). In addition to photographs, each room was decorated with mottos like 'the better you use your free time, the more useful you are to your homeland' (Presidencia de la República, 1940, p. 62). The building was equipped with a centralized heating and

(5) An instance of this can be seen in the second number, in which they published photos of Santiago's conventillos (shanties) by Antonio Quintana and an article on the "Statistics of the Conventillo," by Carlos Charlin that showed the anti-hygienic situation of 120.000 people in a city of 700.000 inhabitants, through a comparative approach that analyzed statistically surfaces of green areas in the city, surfaces of the workers' homes, number of families living in scarcity, number of necessary housing units, etc. In 1936, statistics were also used to convey the problem of hygiene in conventillos by Alfredo Johnson, who also joined the magazine that year, by using the term *mala vida*, or 'bad life,' and describing the situation as a "weakening of the race, that will come instigated by disease, malnourishment, and vice." See Mondragón López, 2010, p. 271; 2015, p. 33.

hot-water system, air conditioner in the auditorium, a telephone central, a public announcements central, an internal phone system, and electric clocks, among other technologies of environmental comfort, regulation, and supervision (Presidencia de la República, 1940, p. 62; 1941, p. 24). While the Defense of the Race program certainly relied upon the infrastructure that supported the medical control and measurement of the population –submitting them to compulsory exams and keeping thorough medical records– it also intended to evoke strong sentiments of national pride by resorting to popular culture and entertainment: the screening of patriotic films and literature, theatre plays on national heroes, morally-edifying parades, etc. (Presidencia de la República, 1940, p. 31).

The first booklet published to promote the Defense of the Race program is a sharp manifestation of how some of the material and rhetorical aspects of these discourses on race and eugenics came together in the Model Home. Printed in this document – and following the National Anthem – are the lyrics of the Anthem of Yungay that celebrates the triumph in the Battle of Yungay (1839) which was substantial in the construction of the myth of national unity through the creation of an anonymous national hero: the Roto Chileno. As an archetype of Chileanidad (Chileanness), el Roto was an anonymous character that embodied the poor and racially mixed worker whose fierceness in battle began to be celebrated in the 1880s as a means of consolidating the identity of Chilean people in nationality. Often reviled during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this representative of the bajo pueblo (lower classes) was first extolled as a reaction to labor shortages in the agrarian and mining economies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and during the Pacific War (1879–1883),

and then more substantially as it acquiesced as the protagonist of national identity in the wake of 20<sup>th</sup>-century nationalism. It became a literary figure as much as a social type that frequently sought to reconcile the Indigenous and Spanish origins of the Chilean people in an amalgamation with an identity of its own. In 1888, a bronze statue of El Roto Chileno sculpted by Virginio Arias was installed alongside a triumphal arc in the recently named Plaza de Yungay with a plaque that read: 'El Roto, a genuine expression of the Chilean Race.'<sup>(6)</sup> A holiday for 'the day of the Roto Chileno' was established in 1889 and multiple pictorial, literary, and sociological versions emerged shortly after. More a product of paternalism than of self-determination from below, the Roto came to embody national pride and the myth of a unified Chilean race (Cortés Aliaga, 2009; Gutiérrez, 2010)

It was not, however, until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that this myth intersected with pseudo-scientific theories of race and eugenics. In 1904, Nicolás Palacios, a doctor from Valparaíso, wrote *Raza chilena: libro escrito por un chileno y para los chilenos* (The Chilean Race, a Book Written by a Chilean for Chileans) staging a polemic against the degeneration of the Chilean Race by placing the mestizo, embodied in El Roto, as a cannon of Chile's racial uniformity. He sustained, in an elaborate theory, that the Chilean race was a combination of Visigoth and Araucano heritage, two virile races filiated patriarchally as the happy blend of Spanish conquistadors and Araucano warriors. The similarities between both races had made them

compatible enough to produce a uniform new race he identified as mestizo, which, at the same time, he used interchangeably with 'white' (Walsh, 2015, p. 615). Palacios imagined a prototypical Chilean that combined the fierce and vigorous but womanly traits of a defeated people like the Araucano, and the sober, intelligent, and manly character of European conquistadors –in his mind, more Germanic than Latino. He considered most 'foreign' racial influences dangerous and debilitating, especially those of Latino, African, and Jewish origin, and claimed the Chilean race had begun weakening with the rise of the aristocracy in the 1830s. Reacting against political oligarchy and its negative image of the working class, he saw the plutocracy that ensued the new fortunes made in the saltpeter mines, the French sensibilities of the elites, and recent policies of immigration as direct threats to national identity and the integrity of our racial stock. But the Chilean race, according to him, also had a future, a potential that lied in "restoring the soul of the race" (as cited in Subercaseaux, 2007, p. 45).

Palacios conflated nation and race in ways that had remarkable endurance during the rest of the century (Walsh, 2015, p. 633). When Pedro Aguirre Cerda spoke of "the homogeneity of our race," he was noticeably rehearsing some of Palacios's arguments.<sup>(7)</sup> By

(6) "In a dialectical jewel of social history," Salazar argues, the masters began to idolize the mestizo, but with a statue of Greek proportions, for "they could 't conceive of anything beyond their European imaginary" (Salazar Vergara, 2012, pp. 126 and 225).

(7) Consider for instance a letter he sends to Alfredo Duhalde Vázquez, his Secretary of State: "we will reach my pursued goal that the social components are effectively convinced of the convenience of duly appreciating each other; in a way that makes the man of wealth recognize the homogeneity of our race, its intelligence, and its kindness. And that modest individuals recognize too that in the accommodated classes there are understanding elements that are willing to help them with their culture and patriotism, so that in this way class rapport is verified and so its indestructible union in the longing for national progress that we must attribute to every Chilean [emphasis added]" (Aguirre Cerda, 2001, pp. 136–137).

connecting race and progress, he was further reproducing some of the theses Palacios had obtained from European eugenics; namely the notion that race, and not reason or material progress, was the engine of civilizational history (Subercaseaux, 2007). Following Gustave Le Bon and Georges Vacher de Lapouge, Palacios envisioned national race as the biological component that would determine the social psychology of a pueblo and with it, the spirit and destiny of a nation. In hindsight, it is not too surprising that Aguirre Cerda's project of national unity was based on such notions of uniformity and progress. As Bernardo Subercaseaux has shown, Palacios's myth was functional to political discourse because "it invented a tradition that extends the myth of the exceptionality of the country; because it created a sort of ethnic-cultural citizenship that was wider than the actual political citizenship" (Subercaseaux, 2007, p. 47). At the same time, however, the myth of a Chilean race was a way of incorporating the inescapable indigenous past, entombing the history of violence done to them by Chileans themselves, and exorcizing them from the image of national identity. The Araucano was present in the Roto Chileno, but only in blood, only as an extinct race whose dead ancestors now integrated the biological makeup of present-day mestizos, whose race, in different proportions throughout the population, was entirely homogeneous.

Beyond the purportedly silent functional features of the buildings designed by Aguirre Silva and his team, their role in these discourses was made intelligible by more self-consciously semantic additions: A mural painting in the Hogar Hipódromo, by Xavier Guerrero, whose filiation with the Mexican indigenismo of Lázaro Cárdenas and

José Vasconcellos' theory of cosmic miscegenation is well known, and a relief sculpture that the artist Tótila Albert made for the main façade of the Model Home (Zamorano Pérez & Cortés López, 2007). The latter, entitled 'The Flight of the Genius,' depicts a large condor, "The Bird of Return," with a man and a woman laying on its opposing wings, and a third male figure held in its claws. Albert himself explains the relief sculpture in the second booklet of the Defense of the Race, thus:

*The masculine properties of the father and the feminine properties of the mother are deposited in the being of each one (...) in that immaterial state that we call remembrance, the parents have converted themselves into images that guide us through the death as they have guided us through life. From the equilibrium of these two images in our memory depends the security of our flight, the reconciliation of life and death. (Presidencia de la República, 1941, p. 10)*

The structure of oppositions between feminine and masculine and the harmonizing of these in the figure of the son are indicative of a bio-social scheme that produces a balanced individual who feeds off of the memories of its heritage but has left them behind. The father, who points upwards "signals beyond matter, to the world of ideas, the ideal. Its creative force is abstraction," the mother, who points downwards "signals matter, and her matter which is the son," and the son, the new man who points forward "as between two abysses, the ideal and matter, flies forward, signaling its goal in space" (Presidencia de la República, 1941, p. 10). Its abstraction is barely distinguishable from the genetic theories of racial discourse. It's the merging together of the rational man, who points up, as the Spanish conquistador does in Lira's


painting or Palacios' characterization, and the motherly female, who points down like the subjugated Cacique: the new man, abstract and modern, assumes here the fabled character of the Chilean mestizo. The flight of the 'genius,' as in 'intellect' but also as in guiding origin (gens, genus, genius), echoes the biological determination of an imagined race that has to be defended for it to thrive and fly forward, uninterrupted by the death it has left behind.

The architectural discourse put forward by Aguirre Silva and his colleagues, moreover, also had structural correspondences with this racial discourse. The empty and abstract structure of one served as a recipient for the structure of the other. The outrage at the dire situation of the city's poor districts, the polemic reactions in the press, often portraying the city as a "sick body that collapses," and finally the possibility of a future, a potential for cities like Santiago or Chillán to "evolve" and overcome their "current chaos," put forward a discourse that was surely entrenched in European organicism but was also structural to a local entanglement of nation, body, and identity (as cited in Torrent, 2013, p. 134). Not only did race and modern architecture occupy the same discursive strategies and were legitimized by similar epistemological frames, but the language used to describe one ('severe,' 'stark,' 'unadorned,' 'sober,' 'rational,' 'vigorous,' 'hygienic,' etc.) paralleled the one used to describe the other.<sup>(8)</sup>

(8) Bernardo Subercaseaux (2007) summarizes the traits of the prototypical Roto as Palacios understood them as: having a warrior sense, braveness, sobriety, love for the homeland, severe domestic morality, rejection of ornaments or frivolities, laconic character, and predominantly patriarchal in psychology. French and Latin influences were to him especially harmful as they would "feminize the race."

As Subercasseaux argues, as the Raza Chilena discourse had no serious objective base, it became both a performative representation, functional however delirious, and an empty signifier, a form with no substantial content that could be filled according to different intentions. In this context, the buildings of the Defense of the Race were used not just as sanitary devices, but also as allegories of a modernity propelled by the production of a vigorous and homogeneous race. Their architecture was programmed with racial and eugenic ideas as they lent their alleged silent and functional structure to the ideological discourse of race and nationalism.

As with the Cacique in Lira's painting at the beginning, a different, more encompassing concept of race took center stage in social policies and leisure infrastructure in the first government of the Popular Front in Chile in the 1940s but remained crouched, and in chains. The emancipatory outcome of fifty years of struggles to incorporate the working classes into civic life subsequently threw into visibility older and more inconspicuous repressions but dealt with them only in imagination. Through a mythological concept of race whose defense and improvement, however, was to be carried out by concrete instruments, like medical science, physical education, and architecture. In this sense, the Homes functioned both as eugenic machines and as defense mechanisms against the painful histories of actual indigenous populations, swept under the myth of national character and sublimated into biological legacy. They were themselves one of those landmarks that years later Aguirre Silva described as both representing and forging a "deep sense

of nationality" (Aguirre Silva, 1988, p. 11). And although his difficulty to conceive a clear image of Chile was no doubt inscribed within a longstanding myth of racial unity, his story provides one trace of a silent genealogy of racism in Chile, one of many possible historical narratives for the same conflicted present.<sup>(9)</sup> 

(9) When he wrote and taught students about 'nationality,' he was rehearsing arguments of Hernán Godoy's 1976 *El carácter chileno* (The Chilean Character), a book that argues that Chileans, as a whole, were determined mainly by geography (the Andes, the desert, and the Pacific), and by the Mapuche prolonged resistance to the Spanish empire, which would have produced miscegenation, an unrestricted obedience towards authority, and the engrained love of Chileans for their country. See Prieto Larrain, 2011, p. 22; and the interview with Fernando Campino (who participated in Aguirre Silva's studios) in Jünemann Gazmuri, 1996.

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