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Early Twentieth-Century Eugenics in Europe's Peripheries: The Polish Perspective

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Abstract

The history of eugenics had been ignored for decades in many European countries like Poland, Bulagaria, Latvia. It was due to a variety of reasons: linguistic considerations, the peripheral status of the states, and Cold War realities after World War II. The communist propaganda of the 1940s and 1950s, stigmatising Western determinism in the form of genetics and demonstrating, in a simplified way, its connection with World War II genocide, was at the same time covering up information on the local varieties of eugenics throughout the Eastern Bloc. The propaganda message attributing racism and eugenics to the former colonial powers: the UK, Belgium, France, and to the 'German Nazis' had to be simple and persuasive; there was no place in it for ambivalence, for the nuancing of attitudes and opinions, i.e. for precisely the kind of approach that was necessary to tackle the subject of local eugenics movements. The absence of eugenics in public discourse especially in Poland was caused also by the character of Nazi occupation. During World War II no *Lebensborns* were built in Poland, but concentration camps, and this is the fundamental difference between the historical experiences of Polish and foreign eugenicists. In this paper I analyze the model of Polish eugenics with references to the article of Paul Weindling on anti-eugenics coalition in Europe before the outbreak of the World War II and other articles devoted to eugenics in Poland, Bulgaria, and Austria collected in this volume.

Keywords

eugenics, biopolitics, Poland, critics of eugenic selection, communism

The papers presented in this issue (most of them first presented at a conference in Warsaw in 2008) mostly pertain to those regions of Europe, let us describe them as "peripheral", in which eugenics/racial hygiene was, until quite recently, a relatively new research area for historians. In the 1990s, the American historian Mark Adams, the author of a highly regarded work on eugenics movements in Germany, the United States, Brazil and Russia, called for a comparative history of similar movements in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in Romance-speaking European countries, such as Italy, Spain, Portugal

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and Romania (Adams 1990). A number of works analysing the phenomena of eugenics, racism and biological nationalism in the above-mentioned regions have been published since, including the pioneering work *Blood and Homeland. Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900–1940*, edited by Paul Weindling and Marius Turda (Budapest, 2007). The fact that this subject area, so important from the point of view of the history of ideas and political history, not to mention the history of science, had been ignored for decades in those regions of Europe was due to a variety of reasons. As Richard Cleminson points out in one of his articles, such an absence [i.e. of the whole Iberian Peninsula in international research] is no doubt partly due to linguistic considerations but it is also due to a more general disregard for the 'south' of Europe as a generative force in labour politics and scientific discovery. (Cleminson, forthcoming). One cannot but agree. The research focus on the three major European countries England, France and Germany was due, among other factors, to the peripheral status of the remaining states. Historical literature on Central and Eastern Europe (with the exception of Russia, which has traditionally been a research interest of Anglo-Saxon, chiefly American, historians) has been fighting its way into the West with much difficulty. However, this does not change the fundamental fact that the history of eugenics, in the Eastern Block at least, had been put aside for reasons beyond the centre-periphery discourse, for reasons referring us, rather, to the Cold War realities.

The communist propaganda of the 1940s and 1950s, stigmatising Western determinism in the form of genetics and demonstrating, in a simplified way, its connection with World War II genocide, was at the same time covering up information on the local varieties of eugenics throughout the Eastern Bloc. The propaganda message attributing racism and eugenics to the former colonial powers: the UK, Belgium, France and to the "German Nazis" had to be simple and persuasive; there was no place in it for ambivalence, for the nuancing of attitudes and opinions, i.e. for precisely the kind of approach that was necessary to tackle the subject of local eugenics movements. In the Polish context, a meaningful consequence of that process was the absence of eugenics even from multi-volume works devoted to the history of science (which was not easy, given a sizeable representation of the academic elite in the eugenics society) and the deletion by censorship of eugenic phraseology and any references to various eugenic/racial theories from pre-war academic textbooks. In biographical entries for various members of the scientific community, their pre-war advocacy in favour of enacting eugenic legislation was completely passed over in silence. In the few in which eugenics was mentioned, it was presented in a completely distorted way, as hygiene or social medicine. Obviously, from the perspective of several decades, given the scarcity of sources, and, most

importantly, the lack of accounts from the persons concerned, a historian faces a challenging job of deciding whether the concealment of their involvement in eugenics by scientists and physicians after World War II was dictated mainly by censorship or whether it resulted from an understandable, or at least human, impulse to suppress from memory the disturbing facts that could cast a shadow on their entire, otherwise often exemplary biographies. The situation of Polish physicians after World War II was incomparably more difficult than that of their Western colleagues. Beginning from 1939, the occupied Polish territories were used as a testing ground by eager followers of Nazi eugenics/racial hygiene. Suffice it to mention the extermination of the patients of Polish psychiatric hospitals, murdering of disabled children and care home inmates, the victims of medical experiments and sterilizations or, finally, the decisive factor, the Holocaust. During World War II no *Lebensborns* were built in Poland, but concentration camps, and this is the fundamental difference between the historical experiences of Polish and foreign eugenicists. After the Nazi occupation, a vast majority of the pre-war Polish Eugenics Society activists did not want to have anything to do with eugenics, racial hygiene or segregation.[1]

Even in a country as severely affected by Nazi occupation as Poland was, it took a long time to realize the connection between Nazi genocide and the eugenic theory. As late as 1947, the Polish Eugenics Society was revived, and demands appeared within it to implement sterilization practices. There were also attempts, whether voluntary or forced is unclear, for a rapprochement between some eugenicists and the communist repression apparatus (Gawin 2003, 296–297). In the post-war lectures by the president of the Polish Eugenics Society, Leon Wernic, who was seeking to reanimate the pre-war eugenics movement, we find a ritual dissociation from Nazi racial hygiene combined with an unshakeable belief that legal prohibitions to marry and forced sterilizations were in conformity with the standards of a civilized society. The efforts to restore eugenics in Poland where short-lived, however, as they lasted only until 1949, when the communist authorities definitively ended the activities of the Eugenics Society, thus sending a signal to withdraw genetics as a subject from higher education curricula.

Even though it pertains to Poland, the context outlined above may also be representative of other former Eastern Bloc states, and thus explains why it

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[1] Fifty-eight Polish psychiatrists were killed during World War II. Some of them lost their lives in the process of extermination of the patients of psychiatric hospitals in 1939 and 1940, in the Jewish ghetto and Nazi concentration camps, while others were killed as Polish reserve army officers in the 1940 Katyń massacre and in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 (Jaroszewski 1993, Nasierowski 2008).

was not until the 1990s that a major breakthrough occurred in studies on eugenics throughout Central and Eastern Europe.

The notion of 'biopolitics' used in the title of the conference, which is implicitly incorporated in the papers presented here, has an impressive track record in the humanities. It has been used by scholars of the stature of Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Michael Hardt, as well as by Antonio Negri and Agnes Heller. At first sight, the term seems to be an oxymoron, as it combines two contradictory concepts: that of biological life (Greek *bios*) with that of politics. In classical political philosophy, to invoke Hannah Arendt, these ideas are separate; politics is a realm of common action and decision, i.e. a kind of activity that transcends the sphere of biological life (Arendt 1958). To put it differently, while politics begins beyond the existential necessities, in biopolitics that which constitutes its external border, i.e. the body and life, becomes the deepest essence and core of politics (Lemke 2011, 117).

The historical beginnings of this notion are connected with the name of the Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén, professor at Uppsala University, who was a follower of the organicist idea of the state, regarding it as a collective living entity. The state as a "form of life" was supposedly distinguished by a struggle for social interests and ideas, whose carriers were classes and groups. In 1920, Kjellén wrote: "In view of this tension typical of life itself … the inclination arose in me to baptize this discipline after the special science of biology as biopolitics.… In the civil war between social groups one recognizes all too clearly the ruthlessness of the life struggle for existence and growth, while at the same time one can detect within the groups a powerful cooperation for the purposes of existence" (Kjellén 1920, 93; English translation Lemke 2011, 19).

Michel Foucault pointed to the evolution of politics starting from the second half of the 18th century and to the emergence of a different technology of power, directed not towards an individual body of a person, but towards the collective body of the population. The French scholar understood the population not as a political and legal entity, but rather as an independent being: a "social body" that is defined by the processes and phenomena related to birth rates, mortality rates, health standards, life expectancy and the production of goods. The regulation of the population is effected, from the very beginning, through the central institution of the state, while other activities to discipline the society are dispersed in the operations of institutions such as school, prison, army and hospital. In this context, the state takes over responsibility e.g. for collecting demographical data on the populace, notes the incidence of diseases and life expectancy. Accordingly, to Foucault biopolitics was first and

foremost a product of modernity related to the evolution of the institution of the state.

Three persons may be regarded as pioneers of biopolitics in Poland: Zofia Daszyńska-Golińska (1860–1934), Apolinary Garlicki (1872–1940) and Tomasz Janiszewski (1867–1939). All three of them, an economist, a historian and a phthisiologist, were active in the Polish Eugenics Society, but what distinguished them among the other members was their particular perception of the nation: "A nation is an organisation based on biogenetic unity and on the unity of civilisation", Daszyńska-Golińska declared (Daszyńska-Golińska 1927, 15). "It is health, and nothing but physical and moral health, that absolutely determines the existence of nations and states", Tomasz Janiszewski wrote (Janiszewski 1917; see also by the same author: 1933, 117; 1922, 4; 1924, 319). According to Garlicki, a nation "may last as long as it preserves its health and relatively pure collective idioplasm". A common feature of these opinions was defining the nation, whose past, present and future were determined by biological and genetic factors, in biopolitical terms.

The success of the eugenic idea in the form of enactment of the relevant legislation, from prenuptial certificates to sterilization, depended on whether the biopolitical vision of the nation could be transplanted to the political ground, in other words, on whether eugenics movements were able to gain recognition for their goals and to secure the support of the political circles. Even though Poland had a sizeable eugenic movement between World War I and World War II, with a membership close to 10,000, the biopolitical definition of the nation was not accepted and functioned on the margins of the political discourse. Among other reasons, that was why the attempts to enact eugenic legislation in Poland in 1934–1938 were not successful.

Polish eugenics never reached a state of nationalist turmoil nor was the Polish movement brainwashed by the idea of Nordic supremacy that came to be the trademark of German and Italian eugenics. Characteristically, Ludwik Hirszfeld (1884–1954), a distinguished Polish serologist and a prominent member of the Polish Eugenics Society, said upon seeing Italy's main eugenic-racial periodical at the 1939 General Pathology Congress in Rome:

> They are showing me an academic-propaganda journal: *La razza*.[2] It is an unbelievable combination of *Das Schwarze Korps* and the *Zeitschrift für Gesellschaftsbiologie*, articles on Mendel's laws, blood groups, and in the same [issue] caricatures of Jews, crooked noses. At last, photographs of … blond Italian men and women, with their addresses and names

[2] Hirszfeld inaccurately quoted the title of the journal. In all probability, he was referring to *La Difesa della razza*.

> given. To prove, as it were, that the Italians are Nordics. And people have come up who have contributed to such journals. Allegedly, Pende, too, has joined this orientation. [Nicola Pende, 1880–1970, an Italian endocrinologist—M.G.]. A journal of this kind is not just a breaking of the character, it is the ultimate, hopeless stupidity (Hirszfeld 1957, 184).

Admittedly, Polish eugenicists invoking Mendelism and the laws of heredity derived from it were seeking to have Scandinavian-style prenuptial certificates and sterilisation introduced in Poland, but they did not use anti-Semitic rhetoric, nor did they warn against race-mixing. The foremost leaders of the Polish eugenics movement, such as Leon Wernic (1870–1952) and Tomasz Janiszewski (1867–1939), directed their whole arsenal of hate speech against the sick, mentally or physically disabled, or against people belonging to the underclass. The absence of anti-Semitic rhetoric on the pages of *Zagadnienia Rasy* (Racial issues, renamed *Eugenika polska* [Polish eugenics] in 1938) was due to the liberal character of the mainstream Polish eugenics community, which included Polish citizens of Jewish descent until the outbreak of World War II. Nationalist racists, such as Karol Stojanowski (1895–1947), who situated himself on the margins of the Polish eugenics movement (and who published his writings mostly outside *Zagadnienia Rasy*), rejected sterilisation and prenuptial certificates, but vigorously called for the Jews, as an alien and dangerous race, to be deprived of civil rights.

The constant presence of scholars of Jewish origin, who, like Hirszfeld, regarded nationalist racism and anti-Semitism as a kind of "hopeless stupidity", in the Polish Eugenics Society right up to World War II testifies to the non-nationalist character of Polish eugenics. This makes it all the more difficult to accept the fact that the draft Polish eugenic legislation of 1934 and 1935 shows some signs of having been inspired by the Third Reich eugenic legislation, and one would gladly pass over in silence the reactions of some Polish eugenicists to Nazi labour camps, allegedly putting vagrants and all sorts of dregs of society back on the right path in life.

The broad overview offered by Paul Weindling, *"Critics, Commentators and Opponents of Eugenics 1880s–1950s",* will allow the readers to acquaint themselves with the goals of eugenics as a programme of regeneration of European nations and with the criticisms of eugenic selection and discrimination measures. These articles deserve attention for a number of reasons. In present-day public debate, an argument has appeared that the eugenicists were in error because of their imperfect knowledge of heredity, which supposedly led them astray towards eugenic regeneration. It is also argued that their opinions were the result of the lack of historical experience that historians have. Indeed, after the experiences of World War II and the Holocaust, we tend to

differently assess the fascination with the category of race, for we are aware of its tragic consequences. On the other hand, we must not forget that historians always are in a privileged position as compared to the subjects they study, knowing the end and epilogue of every story they relate, even if they seek to take the stance of a neutral commentator under the mask of cold objectivism.

Certainly, criticising eugenics and any signs of racism, legitimised by scientific authorities in interwar Europe, was a genuine challenge that only few proved equal to. Thus, the opinions critical of racism and eugenics quoted by Paul Weindling in the context of international debates are all the more noteworthy. It seems worthwhile to add Polish contributions to this "anti-racist coalition" outlined by the scholar.

One of the first criticisms of eugenics, dating back to 1925, was offered by Julia Blay, a suffragette, community worker and highly regarded physician of Jewish origin. From the context of her whole speech one can conclude that eugenics was debated in her professional circles and that it found a sizeable following there. Her contribution concerned mainly the idea of prenuptial certificates, but the arguments included in it referred to eugenics viewed as the basis for social policy:

> Regulations on sexual selection may be of importance in cattle breeding or planting, from the point of view of the breeder's/planter's profits regarding the quantity of milk in a cow, the variety of fleece in a sheep, or the kind of fruit.… But what kind of yardstick is suitable for breeding humans?… It is impossible to secure immortality or even health for the human body. Moreover, it is not only a healthy body that creates a healthy spirit, but also a strong spirit upholds a healthy body. One must not make a new religion, binding upon all and sundry, out of imperfect medical knowledge; a religion whose forced followers are to make a sacrifice of the freedom of their conscience to their priests in the name of the expected health and of securing the future for themselves and their progeny. One must not make people happy by force. A rebirth of humanity may occur not in the name of the liver, the spleen or the kidneys, but rather in the name of the ideals of truth, charity and respect for other people's freedom (Blay 1925, 5).

Another opponent of eugenics was Stefan Dąbrowski (1877–1947), MD, professor of Physiological Chemistry, dean of the Medical Faculty of the University of Poznań, and the rector of the university from 1939. In 1920–1921, Dąbrowski served as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, and was a Member of Parliament in 1922–1935 (for Stronnictwo Chrześcijańsko-Narodowe [Christian-National Party], from 1928, for Stronnictwo Narodowe [National Party]) and a member of parliamentary committees on health, foreign affairs and the army. Dąbrowski believed eugenics to be a result of the evolution of two doctrines: that of etatism, present in the ideologies of totalist states,

which strived to weaken the family (most importantly by taking away from it the responsibility for childrearing) and that of extreme individualism, calling for a reduction of the number of children (neo-Malthusianism) (Musielak 2008, 259). In his assessment of Polish draft eugenic legislation, which in his opinion had some features imitating German legislation, he did not deem it advisable to determine the "boundaries of strictness of eugenics as a science". Eugenics, Dąbrowski said, should be judged from moral and philosophical perspectives, which evoke a question: "Who is man and what is his destiny?" From the perspective of negative eugenics, Dąbrowski argued, man is but a biological fact, while positive eugenics views man as a distinguished being that is responsible for his/her own life. For this reason, while accepting some of the recommendations of positive eugenics, he entirely rejected its negative variant.

A more radical stance was taken by another commentator, active in the Federation of Catholic Women's Unions (Zjednoczenie Katolickich Związków Kobiet), Maria Kępińska, who perceived eugenics as part of the birth control movement. She rejected the eugenic idea in all of its varieties. In her opinion, eugenics has as its inherent feature a load of class hatred, as it manipulates the lives of the poor, of racial hatred, as it connects civilization, culture and affluence with health characteristics and good heredity, and it may condemn not only individuals, but also races and peoples viewed as less worthy to sterilization. In the writer's opinion, eugenics paved the way from individual to mass selection, manifesting itself e.g. in the statutory prohibition against race-mixing. According to Kępińska, the eugenic doctrine is essentially undemocratic, as it questions the equality of people, as well as non-humanitarian, as it has as its logical consequence the killing of the incurably ill (Kępińska 1934, 125). These words were uttered in 1934, i.e. five years prior to the implementation of the Nazi euthanasia programme in Poland.

It is worth noting that the anti-eugenic coalition in Poland focused primarily, though not exclusively, around the stance of the Catholic Church. The interpretation of the standpoint of the Catholic Church on eugenics was presented in an extensive two-part study published in *Przegląd Powszechny* (Universal review). The author of the articles, Jesuit Stanisław Podoleński (1887–1945), presenting the Pope's standpoint included in the Casti Connubii Encyclical and a ruling of the Congregation of the Holy Office of 21 March 1932, went on to present his own reflection on birth control and eugenics (Podoleński 1932a, 319–331; 1932b, 171). The Catholic clergy in Poland saw eugenics as a philosophical, political and social issue as a result of the widely publicised anticlerical planned parenthood campaign of the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Podoleński maintained that eugenics, both in its negative and positive dimensions, is underpinned by extreme utilitarian tenets that reduce human life to the animal level. Human life, Podoleński explained, is considered valuable by eugenicists only provided that it meets certain health standards; in their opinion, a disabled individual or a family with disabled children are but a burden to the rest of society. Matchmaking and health certificates offend human and parental dignity, are contrary to natural law and Christian morality. To this writer, the problem of sufficient or insufficient knowledge of heredity did not constitute any valid argument for or against eugenics. For science has no right to judge the value of a human being.

Polish eugenicists were aware of the opposition on the part of the Church; that is why the topmost leadership of Polish eugenicists sought to close the gap between the stance of the Catholic Church and the eugenic doctrine. In the 1930s, in the journal *Zagadnienia Rasy*, a special section, entitled "Eugenics and Catholicism", was even created, in which there appeared conciliatory notes concerning the stance of the Church. The author of one such note, invoking a Catholic publication, pointed out that a Catholic may count with the possibility of an error in Church rulings, and he may thus prepare, through individual studies, the right solution to a given problem in the future (Lucius 1936, 136). In these words, a hope was hidden for a change in the stance of the Church, but it was more than that. Eugenicists were sending a clear signal to Catholics, i.e. to the vast majority of the citizens, that in supporting eugenics they were not entering into a doctrinal conflict with the Church, which had modified its stance on other issues more than once. With minor gestures, such as inviting clerics and nuns to the jubilee of the Polish Eugenics Society President Leon Wernic (which was recorded on one of the photographs), all possible means were used to prevent the Society from entering into an open dispute with the Polish Church. This is also confirmed by Hirszfeld, who clearly wrote that compulsory sterilisation was feared lest it might "unleash opposition on the part of the Church" (Hirszfeld 1957, 136).

However, the decisive voice in the debate was that of the officials of the interwar Second Republic of Poland, to whom the successive draft eugenic laws were submitted (Gawin 2003, 274–276), and who rejected draft eugenic legislation both of the positive and the negative kinds, arguing that both types of eugenics, consisting in the promotion of the reproduction of the "worthy" and in reducing the breeding of the "worthless" through marriage prohibition and sterilization, introduced an element of social segregation. Both responses clearly indicated that it was not the mission of the state to classify the citizens and segregate them into more or less worthy:

> A national law may introduce an obligation for candidates for marriage to check their state of health and to learn about the state of health of the person they intend to marry. However, the law should not go any further and the possibility of contracting a marriage should not depend on any eugenics police. The introduction of permits of this kind would be an unbearable tyranny, as it would restrict people in their freedom to decide on the deepest recesses of a person's being. Eugenicists should use propaganda devices to make people realize the enormity of the unhappiness they are preparing for their offspring, for themselves and for society if they bring offspring to the world being mismatched in eugenic terms, but etatising marital life would be an excessive simplification of eugenicists' work, and putting forward proposals of this kind may only make eugenics unpopular (Archiwum Akt Nowych, Welfare Ministry Files 532, 25).

The Polish model of eugenics was one of the many existing in the interwar years. The article by Christian Promitzer ("*The Issue of Degeneration and the Origins of Eugenics in Bulgaria, 1890–1929*") provides information on a rather different pattern of the reception of eugenic thought. Christian Promitzer uses the formula of "mirror reading" of ideas borrowed from the West, starting with the very notion of degeneration, which could not have emerged spontaneously in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, struggling with backwardness and relatively minor social consequences of nascent industry.

Young graduates of biological sciences had access to the vast German-speaking culture area with reputed universities, including those at Berne, Freiburg, Zurich, Vienna and Berlin. In Poland, too, the topmost Polish psychiatrists had been educated at German-speaking universities, which largely shaped the local version of this scientific discipline together with its entire terminology and phraseology. The psychiatrist Jan Mazurkiewicz (1871–1947), called the father of the Polish school of psychiatry, mentor to many generations of Polish psychiatrists, complained in the 1930s: "There are works by Polish psychiatrists, but there is no Polish psychiatry … today, the so-called Polish psychiatry is still an echo and digestion not even of international psychiatry, but of German psychiatry" (Borowiecki 1935, 31; see Gawin 2007, 67–78).

That powerful influence of the German model of psychiatry on Europe's peripheral countries had a bearing on the attitude of the scientific community towards the Nazi law of 1933.

On Polish soil, psychiatrists, on the one hand, were introducing the principles of reformed psychiatry in hospital treatment. In practice, the cruel treatment of psychiatric patients, typical of the nineteenth century, was being abandoned. In the name of humanitarianism, bars in the windows, single wards and high walls isolating the hospitals from the outside world were eliminated, and new elements of therapy, such as painting workshops or work

in hospital gardens, were introduced. But on the other hand, the very same psychiatrists, for example the circle of Oskar Bielawski (1891–1973), the director of the hospital in Kościan and the editor of the journal *Higiena Psychiczna* (Mental hygiene), believed eugenic legislation discriminating against the mentally ill to be absolutely necessary. The historian Hans Walter Schmuhl aptly diagnosed this phenomenon:

> The apparent contradiction between reformed psychiatry, which paid attention to the social aspects of the treatment of the mentally ill (family, housing, work) and eugenic prevention, with its underlying assumption of pure genetic determinism, disappears upon closer inspection. Reformed psychiatry retained clinical perception, in which the causes of mental illnesses are organic disorders. It only strived to limit the disorders resulting from institutionalisation and did not try to address the causes in the treatment of mental illnesses. Meanwhile, eugenic prevention sought to identify the very essence of mental illness and to eliminate it from the chain of heredity, hence it could serve as a substitute element in causal treatment. It seemed that only a combination of individual rehabilitation with collective preventive measures led towards the formation of modern psychiatry (Schmuhl 2000, 394).

Polish psychiatrists debated on the legitimacy of sterilization up till the outbreak of World War II, often articulating contradictory opinions. Starting from the mid-1930s, they began to dissociate themselves from the Nazi legislation, but not from sterilization in general, regarding it as a necessary preventive medicine measure on the scale of the population as a whole.[3] Polish doctors were appalled by the pace of sterilization in Germany, but the so-called compromise in Polish draft legislation consisted only in the rejection of the performance of the procedure on economic grounds. Ludwik Hirszfeld wrote: "The resolutions of the [Chief Health] Council, requiring not only eugenic, but also social grounds for sterilization, I deem to be the most fortunate of the existing ones" (Hirszfeld 1957, 136).

In this issue, the process of penetrating of eugenics into Bulgarian forensic psychiatry is shown by Gergana Mircheva in her essay "Fighting Social Pathology: Criminology and Eugenics in Bulgaria, 1896–1939". The author

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[3] The psychiatrist Witold Łuniewski, the head doctor of a big psychiatric hospital at Tworki near Warsaw, condemned the Nazi sterilization law in 1935 as a manifestation of "blind fanaticism" and "violence against individual rights". In particular, he protested against applying economic criteria to patients: "If economic considerations were to determine the fate of the mentally ill, then a much more effective way to eliminate the costs involved would be e.g. to poison or shoot all the patients, rather than sterilize them" (Łuniewski 1935, 189). However, one year later he himself drafted a Curbing Undesirable Reproduction Bill, in which he allowed compulsory sterilization on social and eugenic grounds (Gawin 2003, 255–256, 268, 272).

presents an interesting "nature versus nurture" debate, as a consequence of which the concepts of degeneration and hereditary criminal predispositions have left their mark on judicial theory and modern criminology.

The moral aspects of eugenics are described by two scholars, Herwig Czech ("*Venereal Disease, Prostitution, and the Control of Sexuality in World War II Vienna*") and Sylwia Kuźma-Markowska ("*An Unexpected Continuity: Voluntary and Compulsory Sterilization in the Rhetoric of the Pre- and Post-World War II Polish Birth Control Movement*"), who analyse the extent of cooperation between the pre-war promoters of "conscious life" and eugenicists (cf. Gawin 2008, 181–189). In her other works, Kuźma-Markowska draws upon archival sources unknown thus far—an interesting correspondence between Herman Rubinraut (1894–1978), a co-founder of Poland's first planned parenthood clinic, and the first American feminist and promoter of contraception, Margaret Sanger. The American feminist icon was not only an eugenicist, but also a social Darwinist, opposing all kinds of philanthropy and criticizing charities for helping the poor and the "worthless". The correspondence between Sanger and Rubinraut, starting in the 1930s and spanning 30 years, with breaks, reveals the persistent influence of the eugenic paradigm on the reformers' way of thinking; suffice it to say that as late as the 1960s, the authors of the letters resumed the theme of social segregation and sterilization as attributes of a modern society (Kuźma-Markowska 2007, 199–214; also 2009, 113, 250).

In Czech's article, on the other hand, we follow the relationship between prostitution, venereal disease control and the sexual politics of the Third Reich during World War II. Crucially, as pointed out by the author, the agency responsible for combating venereal diseases, the Public Health Office, had little in common with similar institutions known in the past or operating in democratic societies. Despite its innocuous name, the agency was an establishment designed as a tool for implementing a population policy agenda consistent with the tenets of Nazi biopolitics. The office played a central role in the reconstruction and expansion of the welfare system to bring it in line with Nazi values, with selective assistance provided only to the "worthy" members of the community and the exclusion of "outsiders" who did not conform to the image of a perfect community for racial or eugenic reasons. For example, the office supervised the programme of biological elimination of retarded children, known as the euthanasia campaign, under which nearly 800 children were killed in Vienna alone, in the *Am Spiegelgrund* hospital. In the name of racial hygiene, it also oversaw obligatory sterilizations and abortions.

Last but not least, Richard Cleminson's article ("*Eugenics in Portugal, 1900–1950: Setting a Research Agenda*") steps out of the East Central European context to offer a broader comparative framework for analyzing the reception of eugenic ideas in peripheral European societies.

The collected articles show eugenics between World War I and World War II as a form deriving from the *Zeitgeist* and the universal fascination with the biological category of race. In the interwar years, an etatist form of eugenics prevailed, invoking the institution of the state, a form that will not resurface in the same historical costume.

Unlike other European movements, Nazi eugenics and the preceding German eugenics had an extermination potential that revealed itself fully after 1939. The remaining eugenics movements may have resulted in a discrimination of certain social groups, but nowhere, not even in the case of American eugenics, was any scheme of extermination of the sick even discussed, let alone implemented. This points to the uniqueness of Nazi eugenics both at the theoretical and practical levels.

The history of eugenics/racial hygiene is undoubtedly a combination of the history of science and political history, allowing historians to reinterpret a number of phenomena that had been difficult to describe or outright indescribable before its emergence. In Polish historiography, no logical cause-and-effect connection had been established earlier between the events that occurred between 1939 and 1941, such as the extermination of psychiatric patients, inmates of old people's homes and care establishments for disabled children. Meanwhile, these acts were a logical consequence of thinking in terms of concepts developed by eugenicists: "the destruction of beings that are a burden". It is a major research challenge for Polish scholars to determine the still unknown number of the victims of the Nazi experiment in occupied Poland.

The papers collected in this issue are the products of a conference: "Eugenics, Biopolitics and State", organised in April 2008 in Warsaw by the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland, the late Lech Kaczyński, and the Institute of History of the Polish Academ of Sciences in cooperation with The Working Group on the History of Race and Eugenics (HRE), affiliated with Oxford Brookes University. The conference was accompanied by a bilingual (Polish-English) multimedia exhibition devoted to the international eugenics movement with particular focus on Poland. Occupying a 700-metre exhibition space, it featured numerous photographs, drawings, propaganda posters from many foreign (including US, British, German, Austrian) and Polish museums and archives, as well as feature films and documentaries.

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