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SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY
AND MEDICINE IN
MODERN HISTORY

EUGENICS AND NATION

IN EARLY 20TH CENTURY HUNGARY

Marius Turda

Science, Technology and Medicine in Modern History

General Editor: **John V. Pickstone**, Centre for the History of Science, Technology and Medicine, University of Manchester, UK (www.man.ac.uk/CHSTM)

One purpose of historical writing is to illuminate the present. At the start of the third millennium, science, technology and medicine are enormously important, yet their development is little studied.

The reasons for this failure are as obvious as they are regrettable. Education in many countries, not least in Britain, draws deep divisions between the sciences and the humanities. Men and women who have been trained in science have too often been trained away from history, or from any sustained reflection on how societies work. Those educated in historical or social studies have usually learned so little of science that they remain thereafter suspicious, overawed, or both.

Such a diagnosis is by no means novel, nor is it particularly original to suggest that good historical studies of science may be peculiarly important for understanding our present. Indeed this series could be seen as extending research undertaken over the last half-century. But much of that work has treated science, technology and medicine separately; this series aims to draw them together, partly because the three activities have become ever-more intertwined. This breadth of focus and the stress on the relationships of knowledge and practice are particularly appropriate in a series concentrates on modern history and on industrial societies. Furthermore, while much of the existing historical scholarship is on American topics, this series aims to be international, encouraging studies on European material. The intention is to present science, technology and medicine as aspects of modern culture, analysing their economic, social and political aspects, but not neglecting the expert content which tends to distance them from other aspects of history. The books will investigate the uses and consequences of technical knowledge, and how it was shaped within particular economic, social and political structures.

Such analyses should contribute to discussions of present dilemmas and to assessments of policy. 'Science' no longer appears to us as a triumphant agent of Enlightenment, breaking the shackles of tradition, enabling command over nature. But neither is it to be seen as merely oppressive and dangerous. Judgement requires information and careful analysis, just as intelligent policy-making requires a community of discourse between men and women trained in technical specialities and those who are not.

This series is intended to supply analysis and to stimulate debate. Opinions will vary between authors; we claim only that the books are based on searching historical study of topics which are important, not least because they cut across conventional academic boundaries. They should appeal not just to historians, nor just to scientists, engineers and doctors, but to all who share the view that science, technology and medicine are far too important to be left out of history.

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Eugenics and Nation in Early 20th Century Hungary

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For Ariadne

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Note on place names. As this book focuses on the period between 1900 and 1919, all places are given first the Hungarian name in use at the time followed by its usage in German, Romanian and so on.

Prologue

In one of the many letters to his niece Milly, Francis Galton – the English scientist who pioneered modern research on heredity and eugenics – muses about a green woodpecker visiting the garden and the "uncommonly attractive" neighbours' daughter before making an important, if brief, remark about a request he had received a day before, on 1 December 1907.[1] It was made by "a man with a much more horrid name, which I can't venture to reproduce from memory", Galton remarked unsympathetically. The correspondent was modestly requesting Galton's "permission to translate my recent 'Herbert Spencer Lecture' into *Hungarian*, for his *Sociological Review*, of which he enclosed a prospectus".[2]

The gentleman whose name Galton could not remember was none other than Oszkár Jászi, the progressive Hungarian sociologist. Jászi had written to Galton on 26 November 1907, praising his "endeavours for propagating the new science [of eugenics]". Galton was, Jászi assured him, "already well-known to the public of this review and your powerful essay will surely awake a still greater interest in the Hungarian readers".[3] Galton agreed to have his lecture translated and published in Hungarian. "They do these things well in Buda-Pest", he conceded to Milly.

Jászi's letter to Galton serves to introduce the subject of this book: the history of eugenics in early twentieth-century Hungary. Effectively, it illustrates not only the remarkable level of communication between scientists across borders, cultures and languages at the time, but more importantly the widespread circulation of Galton's ideas of eugenics during the first decade of the twentieth century. The vision of social and biological improvement associated with eugenics became central to various programmes of social reform and national progress elaborated by Hungarian intellectuals, scientists and politicians after 1900.

For too long, however, eugenics has been ignored by historical scholarship on Hungary, paralleling another historiographic neglect, that of Hungary in the scholarship on international eugenics. This book should hence be read as a contribution to both historiographic traditions, generating – it is to be hoped – a meaningful dialogue between modern European history and the history of eugenics.

Introduction

In 1900, Hungary appeared to be a confident country. Four years earlier, the Millennium celebrations had paraded Hungarian achievements to the outside world, in fields as diverse as music, the fine arts, ethnography, justice, forestry and public health.[1] The director of the Royal Statistical Office, József Jekelfalussy, enthusiastically described the exhibition organized for the occasion as "a summary of the results of the development of a [nation over a] thousand years".[2] Hungarian officials finally seemed to have succeeded in establishing the myth of national homogeneity, glossing over important differences in language, religion and regional traditions within what was broadly defined as the Kingdom of St Stephen. These officials may have been, according to Lee Congdon, "intoxicated with the heady wine of nationalism",[3] but their confidence was nonetheless largely justified.

During the last decade of the nineteenth century, and the first decade of the twentieth, Hungary and Budapest, in particular, underwent a spectacular transformation, fostered by extensive urbanization and continuous industrialization. This transformation of Hungary's capital, reflecting the country's broader changes, fashioned a new physical environment, one to which the city's social and health reformers actively responded.[4] Increasingly, state authorities – rather than private initiatives – began to mediate the pursuit of national welfare.[5] This social and economic climate also promoted new and vibrant intellectual activity, highlighting Budapest's importance as one of the important centres of modernist Central European culture.[6]

There was also another side to Hungary's increasing modernity, one that historians have neglected so far. In his lecture to the National Association of Public Health (Országos Közegészségi Egyesület) delivered on 19 December 1900 in Budapest, the physician Mór Kende warned of the widespread "degeneration of the human race". According to Kende, the health of the individual and that of the national community were under threat due to a wide range of social and medical problems, as well as forms of physical and mental degeneration.[7] He was not the only Hungarian physician to link degeneration to modernity, especially industrialization and urbanization. An entire section (VII) focused on those with "physical and mental defects" at the 8th International Congress on Hygiene and Demography held in Budapest in 1894.[8] The topic was also discussed at the International Congress on Child Protection, organized in Budapest in 1899.[9] Moreover, the degeneration of the human body was given extensive treatment in the clinical literature on neurology and psychiatry. The prominent physiologist Ernő Jendrassik, for example, proposed the theory of "heredodegeneration" to explain the hereditarian nature of various nervous and muscular diseases, as well as the interrelation between degeneration, gender and biological inheritance.[10]

Artists, social reformers, intellectuals and progressive politicians in Europe and elsewhere increasingly adopted this new vision of degeneration provided by medicine, biology and anthropology. In Hungary, moreover, degeneration – whether social, cultural or biological – was simultaneously viewed as the emblem of modernity and an impious transgressor of traditional national values. In this context, the future of the Hungarian state depended on the protection of the Hungarian nation and race. It is precisely these different responses to the alleged social and biological degeneration brought about by modernity that must be stressed when analysing the emergence of eugenic theories in early twentieth-century Hungary.

To be sure, the sociopolitical emphasis on national regeneration was an important element in forming various ideologies of culture across Europe and the USA at the beginning of the twentieth century.[11] Yet this was also a period when, according to Michel Foucault, "the medical – but also political – project for organizing a state management of marriages, births, and life expectancies" received widespread support.[12] In this view, modernity fundamentally challenged existing interpretations of the human body, bringing them into contact with new cultural, political and epistemological arrangements of state power. Modernity also connected social control with the biological ideals promoted by the nation state.

Research into eugenic ideas of social, biological and national renewal, therefore, consistently reinforced the general significance of modernity as a central site of national identity formation, while at the same time offering a way of overcoming ideological volatility and asymmetrical cultural and political practices. In engaging with these issues, this book endeavours to redress the neglect of various eugenic narratives of national improvement, which have been largely marginalized in historical accounts of Hungarian culture. More detailed work into Hungary's individual and collective eugenic narratives is required in order to appreciate what was ultimately a much wider, indeed European project after 1900: the biological transformation of the modern state. Eugenics was predicated upon the idea of fusing scientific research on biological improvement with social and cultural critiques of modernity. Correspondingly, eugenicists addressed not only abstruse scientific topics related to mechanisms of heredity and evolution, but more general problems perceived to characterize Hungarian society as well.[13] This nascent eugenic ideology thus aimed to offer a totalizing, progressive and rational social vision both on, and for, modern Hungarian society.

The period under examination here is of particular significance in Hungarian history. In 1900 Hungary was a regional power in Europe with imperial pretensions; by 1919 it was reduced to the status of a small Central European country, crippled by profound territorial, social and national transformations. Yet, in the span of these two decades, Hungary experienced unrivalled cultural dominance in Central Europe, with Budapest becoming the impressive metropolis that we know today. Eugenics was an integral part of this dynamic historical transformation, serving as a vehicle for transmitting social and biological messages that transcended the differences between political parties and opposing ideological worldviews. Hungarian eugenicists not only engaged in the same speculative debates concerning heredity and evolution as their counterparts did elsewhere in Europe and the USA, they also conjured up a national interpretation of the application of eugenics to society, one which aimed at solving long-standing social, economic and medical problems specific to Hungarian society.[14]

Methodology

Recovering Hungary's eugenic past is a complicated task. First, one must excavate a large mosaic of hitherto unknown eugenic texts. Second, these texts and their meaning must be understood both historically and conceptually. At the beginning of the twentieth century, eugenics was a collection of disparate social, medical and biological arguments concerning human improvement, which gradually grew into an articulated system of ideas defined in opposition to rival cultural, social and political movements. Consequently, it is imperative to examine how and where eugenics intersected with culture and politics in order to acquire a better understanding of the extensive attraction that eugenics had for Hungarian intellectuals of various sociopolitical and professional orientations. Conceptual frontiers and ideological barriers were often much more fluid than has previously been assumed. With these considerations in mind, this book evaluates and describes the emergence of Hungarian eugenics from a comparative perspective, while simultaneously highlighting its specific national character.

The present approach draws sustenance from comparative and intellectual history as well as from the history of science and the social history of medicine. Eugenicists were part of coexisting cultural environments, public as well as professional, and attention must be given to their points of intersection. By occupying central positions in the scientific community, moreover, eugenicists were able to provide the reading public with the necessary concepts, references and symbols to define their collective attempt at creating a eugenic culture in Hungary. In broader terms, tracing the development of eugenics during the first two decades of the twentieth century illuminates many overlooked moments, which historians have repeatedly edited out of Hungary's national past. In attempting to restore these suppressed historical nuances and conceptual idiosyncrasies, focus will be placed upon different individual trajectories; the general sense of innovation and excitement; as well as the uncertainty, an absence of coherence and personal rivalries that characterized the eugenic movement in early twentieth-century Hungary.

After 1900, eugenics gradually became a dominant scientific language in which health experts, reform-oriented politicians and intellectuals expressed their duties and responsibilities towards the nation and state. Articulating a prospective eugenic programme, Francis Galton summarized it thus in 1904:

> firstly, [eugenics] must be made familiar as an academic question, until its exact importance has been understood and accepted as a fact; secondly, it must be recognised as a subject whose practical development deserves serious consideration; and, thirdly, it must be introduced into the national conscience, like a new religion.[15]

This was a promising attempt at clarification and practical systematization, and one which eugenicists the world over were to embrace enthusiastically in subsequent decades. Significantly, in 1904, the first professorial chair in eugenics was inaugurated at University College

London, followed by the formation of the Eugenics Education Society in 1907. For their part, American eugenicists had established the Station for Experimental Evolution at Cold Spring Harbor in 1904, followed by the Eugenics Record Office in 1910. By then, the Society for Racial Hygiene (Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene), established by Alfred Ploetz in 1905, was leading the way in disseminating eugenic ideas to the general public, both at home and abroad, as illustrated by the Hygiene Exhibition held in Dresden in 1911. These eugenic societies heralded the search for new forms of social engineering and biological propaganda that eugenicists everywhere were soon to undertake. There was a growing appreciation among cultural and political elites at this time that the nation's physical existence was wedded to its biological future; and eugenicists were the experts to supervise it.

By the time the First International Eugenics Congress convened in London during July 1912, Galton's first commandment – the popularization of eugenics "as an academic question" – had been embraced by more than 400 participants. In fact, as American eugenicists proudly praised their domestic achievements, it appeared that some were already experimenting with practical eugenics. Indiana introduced the first sterilization law in 1907, one targeting "undesirable" individuals, especially those with physical disabilities, the mentally ill and criminals. When the First National Conference on Race Betterment met in Battle Creek, Michigan, in 1914, the consensus among eugenicists held that members of "undesirable groups" should be prohibited from reproducing. Yet the early twentieth-century debate on eugenics was not only about the biological management of the population. Eugenicists also campaigned for the improvement of living conditions, gender equality, social progress and public health reforms; in short, the creation of a modern society and state.

With the turn of the twentieth century, eugenicists everywhere had become increasingly concerned with the social and biological implications of accelerated urbanization – served by large-scale internal migrations from rural to urban areas – and industrialization, which resulted in a deteriorating standard of living and worsening hygienic conditions in working-class social environments. The nation's health was thus viewed and interpreted through the lens of eugenics. Within this context, the individual's alleged biological deterioration became conterminous with a perceived collective degeneration, an imbalance that had to be remedied through appropriate eugenic, social and medical interventions.

There were, however, two other essential features of this emerging eugenic vocabulary. The first encouraged a hereditarily defined sociobiological hierarchy, while the second relied on interventionist state policies to maintain this hierarchy, including social segregation and even sterilization. These two directions led scholars to catalogue eugenic activities as positive and negative, respectively. Galton himself referred to this dual function when he offered his oft-cited definition of eugenics as "the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally".[16] His compatriot Caleb W. Saleeby agreed, defining "positive eugenics, as the encouragement of parenthood on the part of the worthy", and of "negative eugenics as the discouragement of parenthood on the part of the unworthy".[17] Eugenics, meanwhile, was expanding its purview in other ways and in other countries as well. Germany gave priority to ideas of racial improvement very early on, given that eugenicists like Alfred Ploetz and Wilhelm Schallmayer were much admired and emulated at the beginning of the twentieth century. Racial hygiene (*Rassenhygiene*), Ploetz's own term for eugenics, was focused towards increasing the number of racially "superior" individuals, while decreasing – through elimination, if possible – those considered racially undesirable.[18] The biological language used to describe and justify these eugenic projects connected the individual with a larger collective, namely the national community.

Correspondingly, this book will focus on eugenics as understood by its Hungarian supporters. This recourse to the original language and terminology is especially useful when trying to understand how eugenics emerged as a movement concerned concurrently with improving social conditions (education, better living standards, public assistance) and the population's health more generally (alcoholism, infectious and sexually transmitted diseases, differential fertility). Eugenics was in this context a complex constellation of ideas that linked social and health reform to scientific communities and state institutions. This was a process primarily focusing on protecting racial qualities deemed to be superior, while simultaneously introducing preventive measures against dysgenic individuals or racial groups perceived to be inferior and thus a threat to the nation. As a result, the nation's body politic was eugenically choreographed, thereby prompting another phenomenon: the biologization of national belonging. These two developments complemented each other. In the broad discourses on eugenics developed after 1900 in Hungary, the biologization of national belonging underpinned both theories concerning social reform and progress and theories about racial improvement.

In demanding that the modern state pursue the social and biological improvement of its national community, eugenicists frequently depicted the nation as a living organism, functioning according to biological laws. Eugenicists, whether situated on the left or the right of the political spectrum, invested the modern state with the specific mission of not only improving the life of the individual but also regenerating the national community. A corollary aim was to direct disparate narratives of historical experience and cultural traditions towards the overarching idea of improving the national community's racial qualities. The nation was seen to function according to biological laws and to embody certain key genetic qualities. These symbols of an innate biological character were transmitted from generation to generation. According to this line of reasoning, eugenics operated through the investigation of biological processes that regulated the sacred trinity connecting the individual to the nation and the nation to the state. Thus it is particularly important to understand how notions of social and racial homogeneity and protectionism informed eugenic conceptions of a healthy Hungarian nation. The eugenic dream of a modern state pointed to the creation of a racially unified society in which social and ethnic distinctions, divisions between the cultural and the political, no less than between the individual and the collective, would be controlled and managed according to scientific norms. This emphasis on science, in turn, empowered the eugenicists, who were heralded as the national community's ultimate defenders.

Debates on national identity endowed eugenics with a cultural significance we have still to appreciate. As in other European countries at the beginning of the twentieth century, Hungarian eugenics embraced this new nationalist ethos, placing it within a scientifically grounded discourse: one whose legitimacy stemmed from the dual claim that it could both improve the population's health and protect the nation's racial qualities. The oft-studied process of Jewish assimilation into Hungarian language and culture deserves to be mentioned here, as there were many active eugenicists of Jewish origin in Hungary. However, no "Jewish eugenics" developed in Hungary along the lines explored for Germany by Veronika Lipphardtand or for Poland by Kamila Uzarczyk[19] – a phenomenon explained largely by the Jews' complete identification with Hungarian nationalism and its claims for a strong and Hungarian-dominated state, especially after 1867. The effects of this entrenched assimilationist ethos are primarily in evidence in the case of the term *race* (*faj*) which, until the end of the First World War, was routinely employed as a synonym for the nation (*nemzet*). As eugenicists (particularly those associated with the political right) began to insist upon separating culture (nurture) from biology (nature) in determining the racial character of the Hungarian nation, they also began to expose the fragility of defining the nation in religious, cultural and linguistic terms, thus offering unexpected, ominous possibilities for the racial appropriation of nationalistic thinking.

Eugenics eventually engaged both prominent and peripheral figures from various professional disciplines, extending to medicine, biology, sociology and anthropology. A comparative approach is therefore required in order to uncover the sheer variety of approaches advocated at the time. Indeed it is essential to consider how the eugenic vision of a modern state in Hungary reflected more extensive European developments, as well as the multiplicity of cultural and political contexts underpinning the transmission of ideas of social and biological improvement. The corresponding objective is to assemble the scattered elements of this neglected history into an integrated narrative that accounts for its various individual components and which, ultimately, may help in shedding light upon its historical meaning.

Historiography

The emergence of eugenics in early twentieth-century Hungary was also essentially linked to a remarkable degree of institutional networking. At the time, British, American and German eugenicists were praised for their commitment to practical schemes of social and biological improvement. More often than not, developments in other national contexts exhibited a similar character. Eugenics in France, Italy, Russia and the Scandinavian countries, for example, emerged both as a response to local conditions and as an emulation of the above-mentioned hegemonic models.[20] This intermingling of internal and external factors dominates, in fact, all national histories of eugenics, and nowhere has this been more pronounced than among the lesser-known eugenic movements in Central Europe. Prior to the First World War, Austrian, Hungarian, Czech and Polish eugenicists sought to imitate European eugenic movements, particularly the German and the British.[21] However, eugenics in Central European countries, as existing scholarship on the interwar period demonstrates, retained distinctive national overtones, differentiated by the region's individual culture and social context.[22] The preoccupation with eugenics may not have been as strongly represented in Central Europe as it was in Western Europe and the USA, but eugenic and racial ideas, like their practices, were nonetheless present to a much greater degree than has generally been acknowledged.

The history of eugenics in early twentieth-century Hungary powerfully illustrates how seemingly universal eugenic ideas concerning social and biological improvement were nationalized through a convoluted process of negotiation, refutation and appropriation. Yet a systematic attempt to understand this transmission of eugenic ideas to, and within, Hungary has never been made. Before 1989, few Hungarian historians of medicine had acknowledged eugenics and, even when the topic was remarked upon, most authors gravitated towards the historiographic cliché that eugenics was inseparable from, if not identical to, National Socialist biomedical racism.[23] To speak of eugenics in Hungary at the time was, perversely, to speak in the vein of endorsing the atrocities committed by the "superior German race" during National Socialism. By and large, this generalized historiographic attitude developed as a result of official dogma which, following the Soviet model, condemned eugenics as "racist" and "fascist". Even scholars from other disciplines, who were generally less inclined to anachronistic generalizations such as these, mentioned eugenics hesitantly.[24]

It was only after the collapse of communism that scholars in Hungary and elsewhere rediscovered the history of eugenics.[25] Collectively, these studies have appropriately viewed Hungarian eugenics from the vantage point of the history of anti-Semitism, nationalism and racism.[26] For example, in his noteworthy survey of Hungarian political culture, Miklós Szabó extended this framework of analysis to examine, albeit succinctly, the relationship between eugenics, nationalism and nascent Hungarian racism prior to 1918.[27] Of late, preoccupations with the controversial politician Pál Teleki prompted Balázs Ablonczy to consider some of the early twentieth-century debates over eugenics and racial hygiene in Hungary.[28]

However none of this literature has attempted a systematic investigation of the eugenic ideas consistently professed by Hungarian intellectuals, not to mention the genesis, evolution and internal contradictions of eugenics in early twentieth-century Hungary, particularly in the light of its relationship to similar eugenic movements in Europe and the USA.[29] Such an omission is surprising, for even a cursory review of early twentieth-century medical, social and political literature reveals the depth of eugenic practices in Hungary. It is time to direct the historiographic gaze towards this neglected eugenic movement, and thus to advance our knowledge of the history of international eugenics through an exploration of the Hungarian case and of how it compares in relation to wider eugenic debates concerning social and biological improvement during the first two decades of the twentieth century across Europe.

Objectives and Organization

This book has three major objectives. First, it aims to identify the most important Hungarian eugenicists and to contextualize their arguments within their corresponding discursive cultures. After 1900 prominent physicians, biologists, social scientists, intellectuals, religious and political leaders in Hungary consistently expressed their support for eugenic ideas. Consequently, many of them advanced projects for protecting the Hungarian nation and race from its alleged biological degeneration, as well as strategies for improving the health of the population and for increasing the number of healthy families. An analysis of what was a highly biologized social and nationalist discourse thus offers a new perspective on the institutionalization and professionalization of social reform in early twentieth-century Hungary.

Second, this book explores and explains the interconnections between eugenics and nationalism, involving sociology, medicine, anthropology, biology and population policies in early twentieth-century Hungary. An integrated approach to these disciplines facilitates, in turn, a more extensive view of how scientific ideas about health and hygiene were couched in eugenic idioms, in addition to the means by which these idioms became embedded in social, political and national agendas. Eugenicists were interested in both biological and social reproduction, and as a result came into conflict with the interests of individuals and families. Eugenics hence serves as an ideal locus through which to illuminate the complexity of formal and informal relations between professionals, the state and its national community.

Third, this book portrays eugenics in Hungary as part of an international movement for social and biological improvement. Rather than merely adding another chapter to the general history of Hungary, or of treating it as an unfamiliar instance of more illustrious developments in other European countries, this history of eugenics in Hungary restores it to its place within a more general European context. This in turn facilitates a more nuanced interpretation of the relationship between science and politics during this period in general. Hungarian eugenicists were striving to save the nation in order to secure a healthy, protected and luminous racial future. Their quest for a Hungarian national state was translated into a quest for an organic, racial community, one completely integrated within its own geographical space. Consequently, the chapters that follow revisit the intellectual origins of eugenics, not only to improve our understanding of the history of Hungary, but more importantly to illuminate the currently popular debates on the relationship between science and politics in the twentieth century as a whole.

Chapter 1 thus opens with a wide-ranging discussion of the main European theories of eugenics and their reception in early twentieth-century Hungary. This is well illustrated by articles published in journals as thematically diverse as *Huszadik Század*, *Athenaeum*, *Egészség*, *Fajegészségügy*, *A Társadalmi Muzeum Értesítője* and *Magyar Társadalomtudományi Szemle*. Eugenics was, from the very beginning, portrayed as a concrete strategy to improve the biological possibilities of the Hungarian nation through modern medicine and technology. For authors like Pál Teleki, Károly Balás, Lajos Hajós, Gyula Donáth, Gyula Kozáry and Péter Buro, eugenic knowledge was to be applied for an exclusively social and national benefit, and eugenicists commented upon, and offered solutions to, a wide range of issues, concentrating on the protection of the family, child welfare, and state-controlled schemes of social hygiene and public health. Early indications of intellectual support for eugenics was shown by an invitation to the Austrian eugenicist Max von Gruber to address the 16th International Congress of Medicine, held in Budapest in 1909, on the topic of heredity and eugenics. In 1910, the Society of Social Sciences (Társadalomtudományi Társaság) organized a series of public lectures on eugenics in Budapest. This was followed by a lively public debate in 1911.

Chapter 2 suggests that the eugenic debate was influenced by wider developments within European evolutionary science. Through eugenics, supporters of social and national improvement – like Lajos Dienes, Zsigmond Fülöp, József Madzsar, István Apáthy, René Berkovits, Leó Liebermann, Vilma Glücklich and others – sought to determine the relative degrees of reciprocity existing between those scientific theories of biological perfection and the evolutionary language utilized by them. Seen in this context, the public debate on eugenics has a double significance: it gave supporters of eugenics in Hungary the necessary opportunity to synthesize their views on social and biological improvement while additionally introducing a new dimension to general discussions on social and political transformation, which characterized the evolution of social reform in Hungary at this time.

Chapter 3 explores the contested location eugenics inhabited at various intellectual crossroads, within and outside Hungary. In the years preceding the outbreak of the First World War, Hungarian eugenicists – like eugenicists everywhere – called for the supervision of the nation's body to be moved from the private into the public sphere. A number of important international exhibitions and congresses also took place during this period when eugenic theories were presented alongside other ideas advocating social and biological reform. This complex process of reconfiguring the individual – so as to match the broader biological canvas of the nation – was part of a much wider set of intellectual concerns that evolved. These included biological arguments for improving the living and working conditions of the peasantry and the urban working class, the nature of human reproduction, the inheritance of physical and mental traits, neo-Malthusian ideas of birth control, the potential of moral and religious education to shape racial character and, crucially, the individual's recognition as a member of the ethnic body. For eugenicists like Géza Hoffmann – the only Hungarian eugenicist to have achieved wide international recognition at the time – defining the nation in biological and eugenic terms also incorporated a greater attempt to find an alternative national experience for Hungary. Hoffmann also turned to American and German eugenics for ideas and practices that he then filtered and adapted to the Hungarian context.

Prior to the beginning of the First World War, Hungarian eugenicists succeeded in establishing their own eugenic organization. As discussed in Chapter 4, the Eugenic Committee of Hungarian Societies (Egyesületközi Fajegészségügyi Bizottság) was created in 1914 and entrusted with both the popularization of eugenics among the general public and the coordination of the dialogue between eugenicists and the state. What was proposed was a new form of cultural and political modernity, one adapted to the unique conditions resulting from the fusion between Hungarian nationalism and eugenic projects of state-building. This process presupposed inclusion and exclusion as well as new racial hierarchies. Essentially, it biologized national belonging.

The First World War marked a period of intensive eugenic activities, and it is not difficult to see why this international conflict was to become the central rite of ideological passage for eugenicists in Hungary and elsewhere. In reality, as revealed in Chapters 5 and 6, the war was the ultimate frontier that eugenic ideas of social and biological improvement had to traverse. If, prior to the war, eugenics had preponderantly advanced social and medical concerns, during the war these concerns were increasingly connected to a nationalist agenda based upon ideas of race-protectionism and national survival. Indeed, the vision of a healthy Hungarian race served as the eugenic programme upon which societies like the Stefánia Association for the Protection of Mothers and Infants (Országos Stefánia Szövetség az Anyák és Csecsemők Védelmére), the Association of National Protection against Venereal Diseases (Nemzetvédő Szövetség a Nemibajok Ellen), the National Military Welfare Office (Országos Hadigondozó Hivatal) and, finally, the Hungarian Society for Racial Hygiene and Population Policy (Magyar Fajegészségtani és Népesedéspolitikai Társaság) were all established between 1915 and 1917. These societies, and in particular the Society for Eugenics and Population Policy, promoted the image of a national eugenic movement in Hungary that had gradually been building since the beginning of the war in 1914.

This process of internal consensus-building among Hungarian eugenicists was to be short-lived, however. The conclusion to the war and the subsequent democratic and communist revolutions of 1918 and 1919 brought an end to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. As discussed in the final chapter of this book, the regimes that followed – while redefining the contours of the social and national body in Hungary – nevertheless retained the appeal and primacy of eugenics. Highlighting the importance of national health, the Ministry of Welfare (Népjóléti Minisztérium) was re-created as the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (Munkaügyi és Népjóléti Minisztérium), only to be subsequently transformed into the Commissariat for Labour and Social Welfare (Munkaügyi és Népjóléti Népbiztosság) by the National Council of Health (Országos Egészségügyi Tanács). Social hygiene and public health were invoked as possible eugenic strategies that would suitably connect the emerging proletariat to the new Hungarian state. A propitious set of circumstances for the unfolding of the eugenic ideal of a healthy nation and its corollary, the political project of creating a modern Hungarian state, was thus briefly achieved during this revolutionary period.

Yet these turbulent and often violent political changes, combined with the country's military occupation and a hostile international environment, ultimately brought the Hungarian nation to its knees. By the end of 1919, however, it became obvious that neither the revolutionary nor the counter-revolutionary governments were able to avert Hungary's national disaster. The use of eugenic arguments at the peace negotiations, while a clear indication of the importance afforded to eugenics by the Hungarian delegation, was to no avail. With the signing of the Treaty of Trianon in June 1920, Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory and over three million Hungarians, who were now living in the successor states of Austria, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia. The eugenic dream of a healthy and numerically strong Hungarian nation turned into a nightmare. Hungary, as described in this book, was no more. It became an ideal lost country and the central reference within a new mythology of nation and state, one that is still with us today.

1

A New Dawn

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the debate over the nature and content of eugenics intensified. Interpretations differed from country to country, depending on eugenicists' cultural, social and political backgrounds. In Hungary, the ambition of the first generation of eugenicists was, first and foremost, to construct a *social* science which could be used as an instrument to facilitate social reform. This does not imply that the *biological* and *medical* dimensions of eugenics were ignored. On the contrary, next to sociology and anthropology, biology and medicine were seen as two essential disciplines underpinning eugenic claims for social re-engineering and national protection. This convergence – between social and medical dimensions of eugenics – deserves to be highlighted, both historically and theoretically.

In Hungary, the interpretation of eugenics as a social theory was most successfully popularized by the progressive journal *Huszadik Század* (*Twentieth Century*). It featured a wide range of intellectual arguments and controversies, centred on culture and society, right up to the publication of its last issue in 1919. No less a celebrity than the English philosopher and sociologist Herbert Spencer blessed *Huszadik Század*'s first issue with his encouragement. "I rejoice", he wrote to the editors, "to learn that you propose to establish a periodical having for its special purpose the diffusion of rational ideas – that is to say, scientific ideas, – concerning social affairs".[1] But Hungarian intellectuals associated with the journal had hoped for more than just a constructive and creative intellectual disposition. As Oszkár Jászi confessed to Bódog Somló in 1907, "We intend to not simply create well-written monographs but to stir up the intellectual life of this dark, backward country."[2] And they did.

Huszadik Század promoted an intellectual programme based on a mixture of positivism, socialism and Darwinism.[3] From its beginning in 1900, the journal attracted a large number of Hungarian social and natural scientists, including the historian Gusztáv Gratz, the economist Pál Szende, the sociologist Oszkár Jászi, the legal scholar Bódog Somló and two of Hungary's most promising philosophers, Gyula Pikler and Ervin Szabó. Many of these intellectuals also pursued political careers and played important public roles over the following years, fully justifying the journal's editorial credo that politics and science should be part of the same cognitive effort to both grasp social reality and advance scientific progress.

Huszadik Század's intricate history, and the cultural and political movements it generated, have been the subject of much debate in Hungarian historiography.[4] Less so, however, the eugenic texts published in this journal. Among the eugenicists who contributed to *Huszadik Század* are, for example, physicians József Madzsar and René Berkovits, the biologist Lajos Dienes, the natural scientist Zsigmond Fülöp, the geographer and politician Pál Teleki and the diplomat Géza Hoffmann. These authors participated in shaping Hungary's "complete *Weltanschauung*"[5] – the reconfiguration of intellectual traditions that Oszkár Jászi, one of the journal's editors-in-chief, identified, in 1899, as the rationale behind launching the new publication.

Equally important, in this journal more than any other, eugenics was conceptualized as an integral component of the Darwinian revolution and the newly institutionalized social sciences. In 1901, *Huszadik Század* mobilized a number of Hungarian scientists and intellectuals who, in turn, constituted the Society of Social Sciences (Társadalomtudományi Társaság), with the sociologist Ágost Pulszky as its first president.[6] At the time institutionalized sociology was in its infancy across Europe. The Sociological Society of London was only formed in 1903, followed by the Sociological Society (Soziologische Gesellschaft) of Vienna and the German Society for Sociology (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziologie) established in 1907 and 1909, respectively.[7]

To grasp the complex conditions that contributed to the development of eugenics in Europe, one must also recapture the emergence of sociology as the "science of society".[8] Not surprisingly – as Philip Abrams and R. J. Halliday have argued – the origins of sociology in Britain can be found in Émile Durkheim and Ferdinand Tönnies's methodologies to much the same extent as in Francis Galton's unified conception of statistics and biology.[9] In France, too, as Terry N. Clark has noted, "much of anthropology, segments of statistics and political science, and sizable elements of history, economics and geography emerged from identical sources".[10] Paul Weindling has identified a similar confluence of interests between eugenics and social sciences in Germany, where "advocates of social hygiene and demographic studies oriented to the European problem of a declining birth rate conflicted with those concerned primarily to establish sociology as an academic discipline".[11] As it was understood at the beginning of the twentieth century, eugenics – like sociology – was concerned with the rational regulation and management of both the individual and society.

However, it was not just the popularization of ideas of social and biological improvement but the fashioning of the entire edifice of the modern state and society that Hungarian eugenicists demanded. As simultaneous products of both Hungary's own particular conditions and its participation in larger intellectual European currents, eugenics and sociology engaged in public debates over how modern Hungarian society ought to be organized, and on which cultural and biological values it should be based. Intellectual and political change was thus recast by means of social and biological diagnoses. Yet the imposition of biological precepts, simultaneously both specific and idealistic, on modern society did not go unchallenged. As soon became clear, eugenicists in Hungary – embedded as they were initially in a dialogue between disciplines that wanted to assert their conceptual distinctiveness – would find it problematic to claim their own intellectual identity. Asserting this identity would ultimately become coterminous with the eugenic vision of a modern Hungarian state.

Crossing Boundaries

The question of whether biology can have a recognized social and moral role in society had preoccupied sociologists and eugenicists alike since the late nineteenth century. "Does a real biological science of the evolution of human societies exist?", pondered the English biometrician and eugenicist Karl Pearson in his 1909 study, *The Groundwork of Eugenics*.[12] Why this question should concern the eugenicist has everything to do with the fact that some of the most powerful critiques of eugenics have been found in the works of sociologists strenuously denying the significance of race as a factor in social improvement. Based on this conceptual framework, eugenics would not only study the biological basis for social evolution, but would investigate the ethics and morality of human improvement as well. What implications, then, does such a claim have for the reading of eugenic texts in Hungary?

Locating the intellectual genealogy of Hungarian eugenics within a broader European intellectual tradition – one in which various academic definitions of natural and social sciences competed for pre-eminence – contributes to an understanding of eugenics as a symbiosis of social and medical discourses geared towards both individual and collective improvement. It is thus worthwhile to reflect upon the specific lines of reasoning within which demands for population management were voiced by the eugenicists. For example, the first issue of the *Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschaftsbiologie* (*Journal of Racial and Social Biology*), the prestigious German periodical edited by Alfred Ploetz, was published in the same year as Galton's much-quoted 1904 article on the definition and aims of eugenics. With the founding of the Society for Racial Hygiene (Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene) in Berlin the following year, it seemed that German eugenicists had finally put their differences aside and transformed their irregular networks into a formalized constituency. The new journal's aims were both managerial and conceptual, as Ploetz not only wanted to unite German eugenicists, but to also provide them with a correspondingly attractive theoretical platform. *Rassenhygiene* (racial hygiene), Ploetz's own idiom for eugenics, was exclusively concerned with the hereditary qualities of the race. As such its aims were twofold: to encourage the reproduction of those individuals deemed hereditarily "superior" on the one hand, and on the other to decrease – if elimination was not possible – the number of those considered racially undesirable. The protection of existing hereditary racial qualities was given impetus by Ploetz's eugenic vision of a new racial community to be built on scientific rationality, biological solidarity and control over reproduction. Racial hygiene, as Ploetz conceived it, was ultimately a vast experiment in biological and social engineering.[13]

The *Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschaftsbiologie* was immediately recognized as providing a much-needed forum for the growing German-speaking eugenic community.[14] Questions of scientific complexity aside, Ploetz enlisted a number of disciplines – including the social and economic sciences more generally – along with history and psychology, in order to complement racial hygiene's provocative demand for scientific recognition. Central to this tendency was his explicit insistence on the primacy of *biology* (nature), as the necessary alternative to *culture* (nurture), that would set in motion the nation's social and political progress. It was a daring objective, and one with which those encountering and reading Ploetz's journal readily engaged.[15]

One of the first critical commentaries to confront the conceptual mosaic into which Ploetz fused social biology, racial hygiene and anthropology came from Hungary and was published in *Huszadik Század*. This testifies to the *Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschaftsbiologie*'s immediate