

7 Eugenics, modernity and nationalism¹

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Modern eugenics, the science of biologically improving the human race, influenced the international politics of the human body in the early twentieth century. Eugenics emerged in the context of an increasing emphasis on progressivism, scientism, nationalism and racism. Its advocates believed that eugenics could guide social progress and national development, and serve to increase economic, military and governmental efficiency. In the economic and political tumult of the early twentieth century, many nation states adhere to eugenics to aid in their survival.

The origins of eugenics can be traced back to the Spartans, who feared the social implications of a declining birth rate among the noble class and the proliferation of the underclass and the slaves.² To protect the quality of the population, Spartans prevented emigration, penalised celibacy and rewarded fertility. The Spartans were among the first to systematically regulate marriage (celibacy, late marriages, and ‘bad’ marriages were punished) and they encouraged the infanticide of mentally defective, diseased, and unfit babies. The Spartans believed that the health of the pregnant woman and the quality of childcare influenced the fitness of the child. Inspired by Sparta’s example, Plato formulated an early theory of eugenics. Although its intellectual foundations go back to the ancient Greeks, modern eugenics was primarily influenced by the late nineteenth century scientific developments in Europe such as Darwinism and the revival of the Mendelian and the Lamarckian theories of heredity.

The emergence of modern eugenics owes much to Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, Herbert Spencer’s theory of the survival of the fittest, and Social Darwinism. ‘Social Darwinist’ was a loose label, which was applied to anybody who believed that Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution and natural selection had implications for society. Social Darwinists believed that human beings, just as animals and plants in the wild, are engaged in a struggle for their existence and that the ‘fittest’ will thrive. Francis Galton, a nineteenth-century polymath and a cousin of Darwin, argued that talents and virtues of character were inherited along with physical features and offered a hereditary advantage in the struggle for existence.³ According to Galton, society brings on its own ruin by allowing the less intelligent to out-reproduce the more intelligent. To prevent this he believed in selective breeding, i.e. that the state should encourage the rich

and healthy to have many children and prevent others from doing so. Galton employed the name 'eugenics', derived from Greek, to describe the science of improving the human race. Although Galton was credited as the father of modern eugenics, similar ideas also emerged in late nineteenth century France, North America and Germany.⁴ For instance, in 1850 the French scientist Prosper Lucas studied genealogically the moral and mental characteristics of criminals and concluded that the French government should discourage the perpetuation of their lineages.⁵

In the 1890s, further scientific support for eugenics came from the German biologist August Weismann (1834–1914), who argued that a part of a cell, the germ-plasm, maintained the organic continuity from one generation to the next and was independent of the environment. Moreover, the rediscovery of Gregor Johann Mendel's work by 1900, 30 years after its original publication, provided further scientific support. Mendel's work on genetically crossed plants showed that genetic elements were inherited and unchanged through many generations. A logical conclusion of Mendel's work was that his genetic principles would be equally true for humans as they were for peas. Mendel's work challenged the prevalent theory espousing the inheritance of acquired characteristics, which was associated with French naturalist, Jean de Lamarck (1744–1829). In the social context, Weismann's and Mendel's theories were interpreted to mean that neither environment nor education could help to alter the genetic composition of successive generations and buttressed state-control of human reproduction against moral objections.

Scientific developments did not naturally lead to the emergence of eugenics as a uniform international movement. Rather, eugenics was more of a social and political programme than a scientific one. A comparison of eugenics in different countries indicates that the production and application of scientific knowledge is highly dependent on political, institutional and cultural factors. Despite its claim on universality, scientific knowledge is open to interpretation. For instance, depending on the context, Mendelian theory could be interpreted to indicate that either: irrespective of social class and status, all humans could have good genes; or that those who were at the top of society had good genes. Furthermore, in many countries such as France, Mexico, Romania and Brazil, eugenics movements followed the Lamarckian theory of heredity notwithstanding its scientific decline.⁶ As I will elaborate below, eugenic ideas were selected from a pool of scientific knowledge in accordance with the current political and cultural context, which, in turn, came to be influenced by eugenic policies.

The early historiography of modern eugenics usually emphasised an Anglo-Saxon origin and the widespread application in Germany and the US. In the 1990s, new studies revealed that eugenics was a far more pervasive movement, which permeated many countries. The underlying, shared motive of eugenics in different geographies was the desire to protect a nation's population from degeneration. The definition of degenerative influences, and the remedies suggested, varied according to the social texture, political history, and economic conditions of each country. In some states such as Mexico, Brazil, Romania, Japan and

Turkey, eugenic policies designed to promote the nation's health accompanied efforts to define and create a national identity and modern society.⁷ Whatever form it took, by the end of the First World War eugenics was influential in many countries, including France, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Russia.⁸ In spite of their disagreements with regard to policy, all advocates of eugenics believed that national concerns should guide human reproductive decisions.

Unfortunately, an improved nation meant death or a worse life for some of its citizens: thousands of people in North America, Germany, Scandinavia and Switzerland were sterilised against their will; millions were exterminated in the Holocaust. After its association with the Nazis, eugenics fell out of political favour even though forced sterilisation was continued in Scandinavia and America until the 1960s. In the 1990s, debates on issues such as reproductive rights and euthanasia, as well as the human genome project, led to a revival of eugenics in a more individual form.

In this chapter, I will explore the eugenic discourse in Turkey, a country that was at the margins of European scientific developments, but which viewed Europe as a model of development. During 1920s and 1930s, Turkey underwent a tremendous change from an empire of multi-religious communities to a national republic with a unified national identity and culture. The modernising elite wanted to create a society with a modern secular identity and to measure up to the level of European countries in terms of wealth, military power and culture. In this context of modernisation, eugenic ideas influenced the Republican elite. Eugenic discourse in Turkey influenced the regulation of health, hygiene, marriage, reproduction and childcare. The Republican state passed laws to improve hygiene, to promote population growth and to regulate marriage and reproduction. They attacked the traditional and religious practices regarding health, marriage, reproduction and childcare. The Turkish eugenicists, who were often medical doctors, entangled Western eugenics with the agenda of Turkish modernisation and the political ambitions of the Republican regime. Eugenic discourse contributed to the physical and moral reproduction of the nation, that is, the creation of a healthy, populated and durable nation, and the reformulation of the state/individual relationship.

Here, my aim is not to write a brief history of eugenics in Turkey, but instead to describe the character of eugenic discourse and the role it had in the definition of the state/individual relationship in the production of a Turkish national identity. In this chapter, I will analyse eugenics from the point of view of the state elites, and examine the state's approach to public health, reproduction and childcare through an analysis of the primary literature of the 1930s. Before embarking on a study of Turkish eugenics, I will briefly discuss the general characteristics of the eugenic movements in Britain, France and Germany, which greatly influenced Turkish eugenicists.

The turn of the nineteenth century in Europe was marked by a belief in science, progress and nationalism. At this juncture in time, the nation state emerged as the predominate power for the realisation of social, economic, and cultural

aspirations of a people. An increasingly scientific worldview, espoused in bio-medical terms, provided the nation state with a justification for controlling an individual's body. Michel Foucault explained the state's control of the human body in terms of its growing 'bio-power'.⁹ According to Foucault, beginning with the late eighteenth century, a person's reproductive capacity and its measurement were seen as fundamental in determining a state's bio-power. Nicholas Rose identifies two state sponsored biopolitical strategies that were employed in early twentieth century Europe and North America, which sought to maximise the fitness of the population.¹⁰ The first strategy was to protect the health of the population by improving hygiene through better town planning, sewage systems, medical inspection, education and moral training. The second strategy was to regulate reproduction in order to free the population from the social and economic burden of its inefficient, unhealthy, degenerated parts. Control over birth and death, sexuality and reproduction, health, family, childcare, and the quality and quantity of population became vital to the power of the state. To achieve their military, economic and political goals, the authorities undertook the management of processes fundamental to a human life. These developments were facilitated by the development of human sciences, clinical medicine and statistics, which brought many matters previously considered private under state surveillance.

Eugenics addressed both of these biopolitical strategies of the twentieth century, however its primary focus was on reproduction. Eugenics involved positive and negative measures. On the one hand, positive eugenics aimed to promote the proliferation of healthy elements in the society by promoting reproduction, marriage and childcare among the healthy groups in the society. Positive eugenics employed education, moral inculcation and material benefits such as family allowances, tax discounts and 'fitter family' competitions.¹¹ On the other hand, negative eugenics was based on systematic constraints and coercion, whose goal was to decrease reproduction in families having inferior hereditary qualities. Negative eugenic methods included premarital medical examinations, birth control, prenatal screening, abortion, sterilisation, and immigration restrictions. Insanity, disability, criminality, anti-social behaviour, and alcoholism were some of the targets of negative eugenics. In some cases, social 'unworthiness' was associated with ethnic minorities and immigrant populations, such as Eastern Europeans and Blacks in North America, Jews in Germany and Roma in Sweden. In the pursuit of national progress, order and efficiency, modern states employed forced sterilisation and abortion, segregation and death camps. From its milder to most violent versions, eugenics was the product of modern science and politics. The Holocaust was not a calamitous exception in the history of modernity, but as Zygmunt Bauman argued it was the product of the very project of modernity that intrinsically involved the control of the biological components of the population and the elimination of foreign ones.¹²

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the *zeitgeist* in Europe was one of decline and degeneration. Wars, declining birth rates, and poor urban living conditions generated a fear of moral and biological decline, which fed eugenics

movements in Germany, Britain and France. For instance in Germany, the birth rate nearly halved between 1880 and 1925, while the decline in France was even more severe. In Germany, a deepening economic depression and increasing social unrest was coupled with political crisis, which resulted in the repeated dissolutions of the Reichstag, to deepen the feeling of national degeneration. In France, the defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871 and the fear of depopulation stimulated a massive literature on the causes and effects of decline and their possible solutions.¹³ Industrial cities with inadequate infrastructure and an increasing number of urban poor contributed to the perception of degeneration in Europe. In pre-industrial England, for instance, more than three-quarters of the population lived in small villages, however, by the mid-nineteenth century over half of the population had moved to crowded industrial cities where disease and crime were rampant. The relatively higher birth rates among the urban poor, who were increasingly seen as the source of social diseases, generated a panic and cultural pessimism among the educated classes. The rising demands of organised labour and women in the early twentieth century further fuelled conservative reactions.

Eugenics articulated the panic and aspirations of the middle classes. More broadly, eugenics fitted well with the ambitions of a wide range of political ideologies, including liberals, socialists and conservatives. In spite of eugenics' links to early twentieth century progressivism, it also served conservatives. Whereas progressives believed that hereditary improvement was an important part of social progress, conservatives believed that the economic burden of paupers, unfits and inferior races should be reduced. Both poles of the political spectrum shared the common belief that many social diseases such as crime, alcoholism and immorality were inherited.¹⁴

Eugenics in Britain emerged from the professional class (such as clergymen, statisticians, and physicians), who feared being outnumbered by the urban poor, whom they believed to be a degenerate subspecies distinguished by low social worth, low intelligence and high fertility.¹⁵ If the high fertility of the pauper class was left uncontrolled, pauperism, and its undesirable characteristics such as alcoholism, venereal diseases and ignorance, would increase and the direction of human evolution would reverse. Although class-based concerns were central to British eugenics, it was not its only motivation. The idea of preserving the position of the Empire, of protecting the English race from degeneration from immigration and miscegenation, and of defending the existing order against the demands of feminism and organised labour was also integral to British eugenics.¹⁶ In Britain, conservative middle class professionals were not the only supporters of eugenics. Leftist social reformers, such as the Fabians, made a distinction within the poor between worthy workers and unworthy residuum, which they considered pestiferous. Despite broad political support, the British state's role in eugenics remained minimal and the proposals to legalise sterilisation between the First and Second World Wars were dismissed because of strong opposition from the church, the working class, and public health institutions. Consequently, eugenics in Britain remained limited to the activities of the

British Eugenics Society (founded in 1907) to promote public awareness of eugenic issues.

The eugenic discourse in Britain and the US during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century influenced eugenics in Germany.¹⁷ However, Alfred Ploetz, a German social Darwinist and physician, had already formulated the German version of eugenics, 'racial hygiene', by 1895. Ploetz founded the German Society for Racial Hygiene in Society in 1905, which was earlier than its counterparts in Britain, the US and France. The notion of the purity and supremacy of the German *Volk* was central to the eugenics discourse in Germany and later to the Nazi movement. According to the Nazis, the decline of the nation and prevailing pessimism was caused by the 'illness' of the Aryan race. In 1933, a few months after seizing power, the Nazi government mandated a series of measures to increase the quality and the quantity of the German *Volk*: they prohibited the sale of contraceptives and granted interest-free loans to newly married couples with good hereditary qualities. The Ministry of Propaganda emphasised the role of women as mothers and housewives and the Nazi government limited work opportunities for married women. An ideal woman gave birth to four children or more. To encourage such behaviour, the state converted the couple's loans to grants. Also in 1933, the 'Law for the Prevention of Progeny with Hereditary Diseases' was passed to enforce sterilisation of all persons suffering from 'hereditary' defects, such as congenital feeble-mindedness, mental illness (schizophrenia and manic depression), physical deformity, epilepsy, congenital blindness and deafness, and severe alcoholism. The government charged all physicians with reporting anyone falling in the sterilisation category to the 'Hereditary Health Courts' (a judicial body composed of a judge and two health officers). Although sterilisation laws were passed in 30 states in the US, in parts of Canada, Switzerland and Denmark as early as 1907, Nazi sterilisations were the most comprehensive. In Germany by 1937 the number of sterilised people (225,000) had nearly reached ten times the number in the US in the previous three decades.¹⁸ Finally, German eugenics espoused the elimination of non-Aryan populations, mostly Jews and Gypsies, and the Aryan 'unfits' including homosexuals and those deemed by a Nazi doctor to have mental and genetic deficiencies.

In France, eugenics emerged from a consensus for increasing the population and was closely related to the social hygiene movement. French eugenicists were primarily concerned with declining birth rates, venereal diseases, alcoholism, tuberculosis, infant mortality, poor diet and poor living conditions. In contrast to Britain and Germany, the Lamarckian theory of heredity and its emphasis on the heredity of acquired characteristics dominated French eugenics. Hence, most French eugenicists believed that if one could improve living conditions, the next generation would be better off. The Lamarckian understanding of heredity provided French eugenics with a common ground for collaboration with the natalist and social hygiene movements. Adolphe Pinard, a professor of obstetrics and the president of the French Eugenic Society, believed in the importance of the environment from the moment of conception.¹⁹ French

eugenics emphasised puericulture: the importance of a mother's health during pregnancy, breastfeeding and maternal care. Although the early work of the French Eugenic Society, established 1912, was centred on positive eugenics, by the mid 1920s the Society was campaigning for a law on premarital examination, a negative eugenic reform. However, the few attempts to introduce premarital examinations were defeated by the opposition who saw premarital examinations as a threat against individual rights and freedoms, as well as religion. Moreover, the increasing association of eugenics with racism and the repressive measures taken in the US and Germany, even if these were also evident in some French eugenicists' ideas, curtailed the support for eugenics in France.²⁰ However, the French Eugenic Society's proposed law mandating premarital examinations was passed by the Vichy government in 1942 and not revoked until after the Vichy government's collapse.

Although every country where eugenics emerged had its own peculiar social and political characteristics, it is still possible to talk about shared approaches of eugenic movements. First, eugenics was an elitist endeavour carried out by middle class and upper class professionals. Eugenicists had an autocratic approach, and believed that they knew what was the best for society. Although the elitism of eugenics was certainly remarkable, eugenic discourse everywhere, from the social reformist eugenics of Scandinavia (1935–1975) to today's China, adopted a collectivist discourse and required the subordination of individual rights for the greater good of the society, nation, race and so on.²¹ Eugenicists, like other social Darwinists, saw society as an organism whose survival depended on the health of its parts. The dysgenic elements not only caused economic and social burdens, presumably, but also moral and racial degeneration. Another commonality of eugenic movements was racial thinking, which was integral to the political debate in the beginning of the twentieth century. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century witnessed the increasing organisation of knowledge and world affairs on the basis of racial categories. In 1881, Charles Darwin, for instance, referring to the Ottoman Russian War that ended with the defeat of Ottomans (1877–1878), observed in a letter that 'the more civilized so-called Caucasian races have beaten the Turkish hollow in the struggle for existence'.²² Physical anthropology and anthropometric studies further strengthened the influence of race hierarchies in politics and justified the status of the powerful nations, while causing resentment in 'lower' ranked nations and peoples. Lower ranked nations, such as Japan and Turkey, also pursued eugenics with an equally race-oriented perspective. Lastly, eugenics concerned not only the physical fitness of the human body, but also its moral fitness. Eugenicists associated prostitution, crime, alcoholism and venereal diseases with congenital immorality and often attributed them to impoverished men and women whose reproduction should be curbed.

Eugenics in Turkey: the physical and moral reproduction of the nation

Turkish eugenicists' understanding of heredity was more in line with the Lamarckian theory, in spite of British and German influence. Turkish eugenicists neither critically reflected on the differences between Mendelian and Lamarckian eugenics in Europe nor explicitly affiliated themselves with French eugenics and Lamarckian theory. Instead, Turkish eugenicists pragmatically employed arguments and data from both eugenic traditions to support Republican modernisation during the 1930s. The modernisation agenda in Turkey involved a double discourse: Westernisation and nationalism. On the one hand, the Republican elite took Western Europe as a model for Turkish development; on the other hand, they advocated nationalism as a key to Turkey's political independence and cultural unity. As part of their struggle to establish an independent industrialised country with a secular-national identity, the Republican regime aspired to create a nation of 'civilised' citizens, which relinquished traditional dispositions, internalised Republican ideals and adopted modern manners, taste and daily practices.

The motto 'order and progress' defined the character of the Ottoman reformation at the turn of the nineteenth century, which influenced the spirit of the later Republican modernisation. The continuity between the Ottoman and Republican reformers was reflected not only in terms of ideas but also in terms of people. The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), the political party of the Ottoman reformers ruling between 1908 and 1918, was founded at the Royal Medical Academy in Istanbul. The CUP combined a belief in biological materialism and evolution with the politics of social reform. For example, Abdullah Cevdet, a founding member, advocated women's emancipation by arguing that children born to enslaved women would cause racial degeneration.²³ In addition to biological materialism and scientism, reformers of both periods shared many ideological positions such as anti-clericalism, authoritarianism, intellectual elitism and nationalism. Despite overlapping ideological positions, the Republican discourse of modernisation viewed the new Republic as a clear break from the Ottoman Empire. The Republicans desired a Turkish nation of rational and secular individuals, who were loyal to the state and free from the religious loyalties and traditional practices that defined Ottoman society.

The continuous wars that brought down the Ottoman Empire and led to the emergence of the Turkish Republic caused a severe fall in Turkey's population. Epidemics, forced migration and high infant mortality multiplied the population loss in Anatolia. After the Turkish Republic was proclaimed in 1923, the Republican elite saw population growth as vital to development as well as economic and military strength. In the 1930s, natalist policies and eugenic concerns influenced the population politics, which aimed to promote rapid population growth. Guided by the Western European and North American debates, Turkish eugenicists stated that a quantitative increase in population without qualitative control would be detrimental to economic development and social order. As in France,

eugenics in Turkey went hand in hand with social hygiene, natalist and childcare policies.

Atatürk, the leader of the Republican modernisation movement never mentioned eugenics as such; nevertheless, in the eyes of the eugenicists some of his famous remarks such as ‘strong and sturdy generations are the essence of Turkey’ and ‘the nation should be protected from degenerative perils’ were the basis of Turkish eugenic discourse.²⁴ ‘Degenerative perils’ referred to both biological and moral dangers and were expressed in terms of the illness of the Ottoman regime, the ignorance of the masses and the irrational health practices. Republicans drew upon science’s moral authority to fight against traditional beliefs and loyalties, attacking the use of the traditional healer’s methods, such as amulets, Koranic verses and ritual prescriptions.²⁵ In doing so, the new regime aspired to alter traditional perceptions of hygiene and to acquire a moral authority over society by employing modern scientific discourse.

One of the first institutions of the new regime, the Ministry of Health, was established in 1920, when it began to expand the state’s medical infrastructure into the towns and villages of Anatolia. In order to increase the population, the Turkish Criminal Law of 1926 banned abortion and the Public Hygiene Law of 1930 (*Umumi Hıfzıssıhha Kanunu*) made the importation, manufacture and sale of contraceptives illegal.²⁶ No ban was put on condoms because the public hygiene regulations also aspired to curtail the spread of venereal diseases.²⁷

Furthermore, the new health policies advocated preventive measures to address infant mortality and diseases such as syphilis, malaria and tuberculosis. Articles 122, 123 and 124 of the Hygiene Law mandated the premarital examination of couples: those with mental illnesses and also those with syphilis, gonorrhoea and leprosy were prohibited from marriage; and those with tuberculosis were prohibited from marriage for six months. The law also regulated wet nurses by requiring health reports for their employment and prohibiting those who had venereal diseases, leprosy or tuberculosis from breastfeeding.

The Republicans emphasised the importance of childcare and established birth and childcare clinics and the Child Protection Society, which sheltered orphans and poor children.²⁸ Sturdy Child Competitions were organised in the cities of Anatolia in order to promote good childcare practices. Through public education and propaganda, the Republican regime sought to teach girls rational childcare methods, i.e. that the baby should be on a strict schedule of sleeping, eating and playing. Physical fitness was also on the agenda and in 1938 the Body Discipline Law (*Beden Terbiyesi Kanunu*) was passed to regulate gymnastics and sporting activities in order to promote the development of the citizens’ physical and moral abilities.²⁹ Article 3 of the same law mandated a youth to enrol in sports clubs and body discipline programmes in their spare time. The same article regulated a citizen’s sports activities in accordance with age and season.

The primary spokesmen of eugenic discourse in Turkey were a group of medical doctors who had similar educations and political careers. The doctors had all studied in Europe and were highly influenced by the European debates

and developments. The influential eugenicists were also political figures who had power over public policies regarding hygiene, childcare, city administration, and other matters. The eugenicists, like other Republicans, were critical of the ignorance of traditional society and of the Ottoman regime with regard to scientific developments concerning health, hygiene, reproduction and child breeding. By combining political power with modern medical discourse, the eugenicists defined eligibility for parenting, the bodily and social virtues of 'normal' women, the inappropriate days of conception, and the scientific methods of child breeding.

In 'Milli Nüfus Siyasetinde "Eugenique" Meselesinin Mahiyeti' (The Essence of 'Eugenique' in National Population Policy), Fahrettin Kerim Gökay, a professor of psychiatry at Istanbul University, pointed out the significance of eugenics for development. Gökay spelled eugenics in French, but defined it, as the Germans did, along the lines of 'racial hygiene'. Gökay asserted that the protection of high racial qualities from degeneration and the creation of a mentally and physically healthy national population ought to be one of the principles of the Turkish State. In many parts of the world, he observed, eugenics became the nation state's primary concern because the issue of public health was so important that it could no longer be left to individuals. He emphasised that individuals are the most profitable capital of the state; therefore, they should be protected and managed as a matter of national economics and wealth. He supported his arguments with economic data from France, Germany and Switzerland, which depicted the burden of insane and retarded people on the state. In addition to being an economic burden, according to Gökay, these 'inferior' people were detrimental to morality and order in the society. Gökay singled out four issues as harmful to racial hygiene: mental illnesses, alcoholism, the negative impacts of modern life on the human mental condition and racial intermingling. Gökay believed that racial intermingling would bring about a schizophrenic personality that possesses two different characteristics in a single body. He argued that hybridity causes various sorts of deficiencies that were evident in the mixture of blacks and whites in Central and South America. Referring to Galton, Gökay claimed that hereditary weaknesses could not be cured but could only be avoided by controlling reproduction effectively.

In his book *Öjenizm* (1938), the medical professor Server Kamil Tokgöz, repeated Galton's concern that the increasing number of 'abnormal' people would eventually reverse evolution.³⁰ He divided society into three categories: the superiors, distinguished by their physical ability and morality; the mediocre, the majority of the population; and the cacogenics, the people with bad hereditary traits including lunatics, epileptics, the mute, the blind, the deaf, criminals, vagabonds, alcohol addicts, the immoral and the insane. It was the cacogenics, he claimed, who caused anxiety in society because of their abnormal characteristics and the economic and social burden they placed on the rest. Tokgöz envied the methods of dealing with cacogenics used in Western Europe and the US. He argued that all infantile defects were either hereditary or related to bad childcare and his approach to eugenics centred on childcare. Unlike Gökay, Tokgöz

emphasised the social class dimension of eugenics. He argued that the material deprivation prevalent in the lower classes produces a damaging environment for the foetus or child. The upper classes, on the other hand, have the material wealth to provide proper conditions for good childcare. Therefore, Tokgöz stated, the national goal should be to increase the population in the higher classes while decreasing it in the lower ones.

Eugenicists believed children to be the most profitable capital of the state. Professor Besim Ömer Akalın, the founder of modern obstetrics and paediatrics in Turkey and author of *Türk Çocuğunu Nasıl Yaşatmalı?* (How should one make the Turkish child live?) argued that the first step towards racial improvement should be puericulture. Following the improvement of prenatal and maternal health, the state should also improve physical training, social hygiene and medical treatment. Akalın was critical of Turkish mothers' fatalism and ignorance of modern childcare and celebrated the establishment of the Department of Puericulture at Istanbul University to fight the traditional ignorance.

In 1940, the regime organised a conference series addressing eugenic concerns. Sadi B. Irmak, a professor of physiology at Istanbul University who later became a minister in the 1940s and then prime minister in the 1970s, emphasised the primary role of heredity in determining a person's ability and intelligence as well as his/her proclivity for crime and prostitution.³¹ In line with Lamarckian heredity theory, he emphasised the environment's role in shaping physical and mental traits. According to Irmak, modern life had a major degenerative impact on the human race because civilised sheltering (such as apartments), the mechanisation of production, and the modern division of labour spoiled physical and mental abilities. Rural to urban migration in particular, he mentioned, paved the way to degeneration. He claimed that although migrants brought new and healthy elements into cities and improved the quality of the urban population, their good hereditary qualities would soon be spoiled by the unhealthy urban living conditions. Also, their fertility would decrease as they integrated into modern life. Moreover, Irmak argued, the modern urban life generated emotional depression, moral corruption and new social diseases such as alcoholism, which spoils good hereditary characteristics.

Although Turkish eugenicists often employed the racial language of eugenics, their use of the term 'race' was imprecise and in most of their writings, 'race', 'nation' and 'generation' were used interchangeably. The collectivist discourse during the nation-building process, which portrayed Turkey as a nation of unified, classless people sharing the same history, culture and language, was not compatible with the identification of racial or ethnic differences within the society. Accordingly, following the Kemalist³² discourse on national unity, eugenic discourse avoided discussion of Turkey's ethnic minorities or its neighbouring populations as inferior races, focussing instead on the racial 'inferiority' of Blacks – a virtually non-existent group in Turkey.

The state's defensive racism – itself a reaction to predominant racial hierarchies of the period which placed the Turks below other European races – and the eugenics concerns were also evident in the national curriculum. As the

following extract from a biology textbook shows, the Republican modernisation agenda entailed the creation of a proud, dutiful and fit nation:

The Turkish race of which we are proud to belong has a distinguished place amongst the best, strongest, most intelligent and most competent races in the world. Our duty is to preserve the essential qualities and virtues of the Turkish race and to confirm that we deserve to be members of this race. For that reason, one of our primary national duties is to adhere to the principle of leading physically and spiritually worthwhile lives by protecting ourselves from the perils of ill health, and by applying the knowledge of biology to our lives. The future of our Turkey will depend on the breeding of high valued Turkish progeny in the families that today's youth will form in the future.³³

Eugenics contributed to the reformulation of the state/individual relationship, in which an individual's body and choices became subsumed to the collective good. The definition of collective good was made by the Republican state, which obliged individuals to pursue physically and morally worthwhile lives. Eugenic discourse combined hygiene with morality. A part of the moral agenda addressed the relationship between the sexes as relationships out of wedlock were seen immoral and non-hygienic. Like his colleagues, Yalın (1940) saw immorality as the predominate cause of venereal diseases and advocated intense sexual and moral training to stop degeneration.³⁴ In line with the regime's goal of shaping a modern secular nation, eugenicists defined morality on the basis of national duty and patriotism. In the Turkish eugenics texts morality never refers to religion or tradition. Eugenics' moral framework firstly introduced the idea that breeding is more of a national duty than an individual choice; and secondly redefined with whom and under what conditions one may reproduce.

Gökay argued that contemporary motives such as love or material interest did not produce healthy marriages nor positive consequences for racial hygiene. The primary purpose of marriage should be to breed healthy generations for the sake of the nation. According to Gökay, a proper marriage is a union between a man and a woman, both in possession of good hereditary qualities, and both the woman and the man should investigate the mental and physical health of their partners to ensure a proper marriage. Likewise, Akalın believed that families should keep health records of their three past generations and use them to choose suitable marriage partners. Furthermore, Akalın argued that the state should have a significant role in promoting and regulating marriages and admired the measures taken by Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy such as denying state jobs to single men, and discouraging women from working outside the home. Akalın believed these policies were compatible with the Turkish state's agenda.

Akalın was concerned about the deleterious effects of modern life on women. He observed that increased opportunities for women in education and work made them less inclined to form families, claiming additionally that images of

luxury in modern novels and films raised women's material expectations from marriage, spoiled their natural characteristics as mothers and also discouraged men from getting married. Both Akalın and Gökay thought that marriage without children was a waste of a healthy man's reproductive capacity. Both disapproved of working women who are married but have no children, and claimed that those women occupy jobs that could otherwise be filled by men who had children to look after. In their eyes, a woman's natural place was in the home as mothers and housewives. However, Gökay mentioned that in Turkey working women should also get married and breed because the country urgently required a population boom.

Although the Turkish eugenicists' conservatism regarding women can be attributed to the relative emancipation of women in urban Turkey, much of the discussion echoes the German eugenic policies. In fact, their view on the nature of women was partially in conflict with the modernisation reforms. In the Republican period, the state introduced comprehensive reforms to legally and socially alter women's secondary position in society. These reforms abolished polygyny; mandated education for girls; and encouraged the participation of women in the labour market. The reforms gave many women an opportunity to pursue their interests. Nevertheless, the majority of women were still expected to contribute to modernisation by being good mothers and housewives.³⁵ In line with this expectation, the Ministry of Education established the Girl's Institutes in order to accustom the Republic's future mothers to more rational and 'civilised' ways. The eugenicists' discourse on women supported the modernisation agenda of creating 'enlightened' mothers in Turkey.

Although the German state's approach to gender and sexuality was well received by the Turkish eugenicists, they were hesitant to advocate for the implementation of some of the more extreme German policies such as sterilisation. In a 1934 article, Fahrettin Kerim Gökay argued that although the German's state's sterilisation policy was effective, its application in Turkey would have negative results because of technological insufficiency. In 1938, after he came back from the European Congress on Mental Health in Germany, Gökay became distant to sterilisation. A strong critique of the misapplications of German sterilisation law, such as the sterilisation of people with trivial mental disorders, at the conference influenced Gökay. He concluded that premarital examinations were proving sufficient for Turkey, 'where the number of insane and alcoholics was significantly lower than in European nations'.³⁶ Akalın, like Gökay, also criticised sterilisation, arguing that although sterilisation prevented degenerates from reproducing, it could not prevent poor economic and social conditions from producing new 'evils'. Turkish eugenicists believed that premarital examinations and education about degenerative factors were sufficient eugenic measures for Turkey.

In the 1930s, economic hardship, political rivalry, and the difficult task of embracing the rural majority challenged the nascent Republican regime and led it to become more authoritarian. The state aspired to create a healthy populous society in which individuals act and feel as a part of the Turkish nation. In this

context, eugenics was used to aid in the physical and moral reproduction of the nation. Even if the discussion of eugenics per se remained limited to a circle of medical doctors, eugenics contributed to the reformers' definition of an individual's national duty and encouraged the state to influence areas previously left to individuals such as health, fitness, marriage, reproduction and childcare. However, in a society where the majority of people believed that deformity and disability came from the God, the spread of eugenic ideas was difficult. Yet, there is not much evidence of direct opposition to eugenics from within the medical field, nor from politicians. This can be attributed to the fact that the medicine had always been central to the influential modernising discourse and the fact that eugenic proposals in Turkey never went so far as to support forced sterilisation or abortion, which would undermine the beliefs and values of the Muslim society. Unlike in Britain, Germany and France, eugenics in Turkey did not become an organised movement and had limited popular appeal. Nevertheless, it was a component in the modernisation agenda. In conclusion, eugenic discourse dovetailed with the early Republican state's authoritarianism and collectivism, as summarised by a leading Turkish eugenicist's expression: 'one for all, all for one'.³⁷

Notes

- 1 I discuss some of the themes of this chapter further in my 'Politics of the Body and Eugenic Discourse in Early Republican Turkey', *Body and Society*, 11:3, 2005, 61–77.
- 2 For eugenics in the ancient world, see A. G. Roper 'Ancient eugenics', *Mankind Quarterly*, 32, 1992, 383.
- 3 F. Galton, *The Hereditary Genius*, Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1972 (originally published 1869).
- 4 See W. H. Schneider's *Quality and Quantity: The Quest for Biological Regeneration in Twentieth-Century France*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; D. J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity*, New York: Knopf, 1985; and S. Kühl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- 5 N. L. Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991, p. 32.
- 6 For Latin America see Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics* and A. M. Stern, 'Responsible Mothers and Normal Children; Eugenics, Nationalism and Welfare in Post-revolutionary Mexico, 1920–1940', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 12:4, 1999, 369–97; for Romania see M. Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002.
- 7 For eugenics in Japan see J. Robertson, 'Japan's First Cyborg? Miss Nippon, Eugenics and Wartime Technologies of Beauty, Body and Blood', *Body and Society*, 7:1, 2001, 1–34.
- 8 See G. Broberg and N. Roll-Hansen, *Eugenics and the Welfare State: Sterilization Policy in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland*, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1996 and Mark B. Adams (ed.), *The Wellborn Science: Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil, and Russia*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- 9 M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. R. Hurley, London: Allen Lane, 1979.

- 10 N. Rose, 'The Politics of Life Itself', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 18:6, 2001, 3.
- 11 'Fitter family' competitions began in Kansas in 1920. Families competed in small, medium and large categories and the judgement was based on family history, physical and psychological evaluations.
- 12 Z. Bauman, *Modernity and Holocaust*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989.
- 13 W. H. Schneider, 'Toward the Improvement of the Human Race: The History of Eugenics in France', *The Journal of Modern History*, 54:2, 1982, 268–91.
- 14 D. Kevles, 'Eugenics and Human Rights', *British Medical Journal*, 319, 1999, 435–8.
- 15 P. M. H. Mazumdar, *Eugenics, Human Genetics and Human Failings: The Eugenics Society, its Sources and its Critics in Britain*, New York and London: Routledge, 1992.
- 16 D. Stone, 'Race in British Eugenics', *European History Quarterly*, 31:3, 2001, 397–425.
- 17 H. P. David, J. Fleischhacker and C. Höhn, 'Abortion and Eugenics in Nazi Germany', *Population and Development Review*, 14:1, 1988, 81–112.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 92.
- 19 W. H. Schneider, 'Towards the Improvement of the Human Race', 272.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 286–91.
- 21 F. Dikötter, 'Race Culture: Recent Perspectives on the History of Eugenics', *American Historical Review*, 103:2, 1998, 467–78.
- 22 F. Darwin (ed.), *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1905, 2 vols., I, p. 286.
- 23 D. Kandiyoti, 'The End of the Empire: Islam, Nationalism and Women in Turkey,' in D. Kandiyoti (ed.), *Women, Islam and the State*, London: Macmillan, 1991, pp. 22–47.
- 24 See F. K. Gökay, 'Milli Nüfus Siyasetinde (Eugenique) Meselesinin Mahiyeti' (The Essence of Eugenics in National Population Politics), *Ülkü*, 3, 1934, 206–13 and B. Ö. Akalın, *Türk Çocuğunu Nasıl Yaşatmalı?* (How Should One Make the Turkish Child Live?) İstanbul: Ahmet İhsan, 1939.
- 25 C. Dole, 'In the Shadows of Medicine and Modernity: Medical Integration and Secular Histories of Religious Healing in Turkey', *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 28, 2004, 255–80.
- 26 Public Hygiene Law (*Umumi Hıfzıssıhha Kanunu*) *Resmi Gazete* (Official Gazette) 1489, 6 May 1930.
- 27 F. C. Shorter, 'Turkish Population in Great Depression', *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 23, 2000, 103–24.
- 28 The first national Child Protection Society was established in İstanbul in 1917. The emblem of the Society was a green crescent surrounded by a triangle of three words: health, morals and knowledge. The mission of the Society involved protecting children emotionally and physically, establishing institutes for correction of young delinquents and building playing grounds for physical activity. Between 1917–1920 the Child Protection Society opened branches in many cities. In 1921, the Republican regime opened its own Child Protection Society in Ankara by Atatürk's initiative, which remained the central organisation after the dissolution of the İstanbul society.
- 29 Body Discipline Law (Beden Terbiyesi Kanunu) *TBMM Zabıt Ceridesi*, 2:29 June 1938, 487.
- 30 S. K. Tokgöz, *Öjenizm: Irk Islahı* (Eugenics: racial correction), Ankara: Sümer Basımevi, 1938.
- 31 S. B. İrmak, 'Milletlerin 'Tereddi' ve 'İstifa'sı' (Progress and Degeneration of Nations) *CHP Konferanslar Dizisi*, 12, 1940, 20–35.
- 32 Kemalism is an ideology that established the basic principles and values of the Turkish Republic. It is named after Mustafa Kemal – the military commander of the Independence War, the leader of the Republican People's Party and the first president of the Turkish Republic.

- 33 *Biyoloji ve İnsan Hayatı II* (Biology and the Human Life II), İstanbul: Devlet Matbaası, 1934, 321.
- 34 Z. R. Yalım, 'Firengi, Belsoğukluğu ve Alkolizmin Nesiller Üzerinde Yaptığı Tahribat' (The Damage of Syphilis, Gonorrhoea and Alcoholism on Generations), *CHP Konferanslar Dizisi*, 12, 1940, 57–69.
- 35 Y. Arat, 'The Project of Modernity and Women in Turkey', in S. Bozdağın R. and Kasaba (eds) *Rethinking Modernity and Rational Identity in Turkey*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997, pp. 95–112.
- 36 F. K. Gökay, *Kısırlaştırmanın Rolü* (The role of sterilization), İstanbul: Kader, 1938.
- 37 Gökay, 'Milli Nüfus Siyasetinde'.