

**Eugenics: The building of society and the nation in *fin de siècle* and
interwar Hungary**

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Abstract

My thesis discusses the development of Hungarian eugenic movement in fin de siècle and the reflections to some eugenic measures published in leading daily newspapers during the 1930. I will draw the intellectual background of eugenic which was the intersection of racial thinking, Social Darwinism and local nationalism. I will show how the early Hungarian eugenicists conceptualized their social reforms in a racial framework and what were the main elements of their racial hygienic programs. I will show that in their argumentation society and nation have the same kind of biological connotations since both entity were seen as a biological organism which development can be altered by state-controlled medical interventions. Then I will examine the long term effect of fin de siècle eugenics in a short discourse analysis on the reflections to proposed eugenic measures published in Hungarian newspapers. I will argue that apart from some radically anti-Semitic utterances most of the leading Hungarian doctors and psychiatrist were at least hesitant in overtly backing eugenic measures (namely sterilization).

Introduction

In the late 19th century social sciences became heavily influenced by the rapid improvement of evolutionary biology. This meant a completely new approach in grasping social phenomena and in tackling with different social problems and tensions. The biological approach transformed the understanding of both nation and society and this led to the emergence of a very special and controversial scientific theory, called eugenics. The evaluation of this discipline is heavily problematic: on the one hand, the tenets of this scientific movement and its solutions were really popular in almost every region of the world around *fin de siècle*. On the other hand, the whole discipline was entirely compromised because some racial hygienic efforts pursued by the Nazi Germany based on eugenics. There is undoubtedly a risk of falsifying history by reading back into European history, from the stance of the post-Holocaust age, signs of the road to Auschwitz, of a coherent exterminationist logic, where none existed. Our understanding of events before the Second World War can be distorted through the selection of evidence pointing towards a genocidal logic and the failure to recognize countervailing information. Especially in socialist countries the exploration of eugenics movements and their suggested practices to cure the problems of societies were a strictly forbidden area. After the collapse of Communism in 1989 this topic (among other ticklish issues, like anti-Semitism or racism) was resurrected as scholarly areas of interest, but in Hungary it has still remained a rather ignored issue. Apart from some sporadic remarks on the broad existence of a very vivid Hungarian eugenic movement there is no systematic research on the topic. According to my knowledge there has been no broader research done which main purpose

would have been the overall presentment of Hungarian eugenic movement in itself. The main aim of my thesis would be the filling of this lacuna.

Examining the Hungarian eugenics movement in the beginning of the 20th century and during the interwar period requires the unfolding of many areas of social and intellectual history. We have to unravel the scientific origin of this phenomenon as well as the social reasons of its emergence in the late 19th century. We have to sketch its ideological antecedents as well as the wider European scientific background of the Hungarian movement. Moreover, we cannot stop by presenting only the essence of Hungarian eugenic debates. It would be a very autotelic inquiry, a too narrow field from which we could not draw any relevant conclusion. The importance of early Hungarian eugenics is only measurable if we assess both the historical and social reasons of its emergence and its impact on the interwar politics and ideological shifts.

In my thesis I want to demonstrate that Hungarian eugenics was a necessary consequence of three intersecting ideologies and theoretical edifices (namely racial thinking, Social-Darwinism and nationalism) and the deep crises of Hungarian society around *fin de siècle* (Chapter 1). I will try to grasp the eugenics movement in Hungary as a social, political and scientific phenomenon which had crucial effects on the Hungarian political and social scientific discourses, nevertheless it is still a neglected area by scholars. After contextualizing the Hungarian movement I will present in details the programs emerged around *fin de siècle*. First, of all I will show the basic intellectual background of Hungarian efforts and their connections to the social reality of the country and to racial thinking, Social Darwinism and nationalism (Chapter 2). Then I will examine some of the eugenicist's concrete proposals, the controversial nature of their programs and the institutionalization of eugenics during the First World War (Chapter 3). In Chapter 4 I will give an

overview on racial hygienic discourse during the interwar period. In this short discourse analysis I would like to present the reactions of daily newspapers in the 1930s to the possible implementation of some eugenic measures (sterilization and pre-marriage medical examination). My conclusion will be that, in contrast with the assumption of some scholars (namely Marius Turda and László Percz) who emphasized the right-mindedness and radical nationalization of eugenic efforts during the interwar Hungary, we cannot say that the eugenic movement would have been entirely nationalistic, anti-Semitic or exclusionist in this period. Apart from some extreme manifestations, the leading Hungarian doctors, psychiatrists and politicians distanced themselves even from the implementation of negative eugenic programs. It is also obvious from the articles published in daily newspapers in the 1930s that the “eugenic ethic”, did not penetrate into the hearts of all Hungarian people as it had been envisioned by the eugenicists of *fin de siècle*. In other words, the eugenics visions of the experts elaborated in the first years of the 20th century remained unfulfilled, and their ideas had touched neither the Hungarian public nor the leading scientists.

Chapter 1.

The intersection of racial thinking, Social Darwinism and nationalism

1§ The racial-based concept of nation

If we want to examine the Hungarian eugenics movement we have to address at first the three-fold relation racial thinking, Social Darwinism and nationalism in general. These theoretical constructions cannot be considered as homogenous theories, but the brief presentation of the intellectual context which was induced by the intersection and interaction of these ideologies is necessary for the purposes of my research. Most of the existing literature treats these flows of ideas separately, however, the Hungarian eugenic programs appeared exactly in the intersection of these ideologies. This interconnectedness does not mean that the era of *fin de siècle* would have been defined only on racial or Social Darwinist grounds.¹ Modern nationalism has to be conceived as an extremely flexible ideology which, on the one hand, was able to amalgamate and blend with many different ideologies and social theories and, on the other, hand it had very diversified intellectual roots. Social Darwinism showed similar flexibility: the conception of struggle for survival was applied to society and its terminology was used for the legitimation of different political and social systems (Hawkins 1997, 7-8).

¹ Trencsényi gives a detailed account of nationalist theories around the end of the 19th century and he stresses that most the thinkers stressed that the Hungarian nation/race was a historical configuration (cf. Trencsényi 2011, 350 ff.)

The case of racial thinking is somehow different. The thinkers of the era conceived race in other terms than we do it nowadays. The definition of the race was not clear or consistent at all, nevertheless the concept of it became an almost universal and standardized key for the interpretation of the human history, as well as for the understanding of contemporary society and its future evolution. Race was conceptualized as an organic community which was determined by the laws of biology and was circumscribed by the common descent, the similarity of physical and mental traits and the heritability of these shared attributes. Race was seen as a spiritual unit which merged the members of the community in a common historical narrative. It is important to note that on a certain level the biological and historical emphasizes on the notion of race can exclude each other.² In my thesis I will rely on the biological definition of the race, and I will treat it as a sharp anthropological theory which first of all attributes biological features to the human communities, and which anthropological theory was enriched by the local nationalisms of the end of the 19th century. George L. Mosse straightforwardly argued that without local nationalisms and national/ethnic tensions the influence of racial thinking would have been far less relevant (Mosse 2004, 1384). Many European nation-building efforts found important legitimizing factor in the racial definition of their own national communities, although these definitions were adjusted to the needs of local nationalisms. While the colonizing Western states used the concept of racial hierarchy to legitimize their imperialism, the nationalists of *fin de siècle* Hungary tried to justify

² This tension is very obvious in the analysis of Mihály Réz's conception on race proposed by Trencsényi and Turda. Trencsényi emphasizes that Réz saw the Hungarian race as a historical construction, while Turda stresses that the Hungarian nationalist also gave a biological definition of the nation: "The nation itself is a biological race, a participant in the perpetual struggle for life." (cf. Trencsényi 2011, 351, Turda 2004, 134-135).

their supremacy over the ethnic minorities of the Carpathian Basin on racial grounds (Turda 2002, 62).

We can observe many factors that provided particularly powerful impetus towards a modern form of racism. First of all, we can see the strengthening general tendency of an overall anti-liberal shift in politics and public opinion at the end of the 19th century. This turn was accompanied by a deep cultural pessimism and growing social tensions in most of the European states. On the other hand, militaristic and xenophobic nationalisms appeared throughout the continent which partly led to the reshaping and reformulation of the discourses over the assimilation of ethnic minority groups (especially in the case of Jews). Finally, new forms of mass political organizations emerged, and (quasi)scientific theories and aggressive ideologies circulated throughout Europe thanks to growing literacy and the constant revolutions in mass communication technologies (MacMaster 2001, 20). If we want to know that how the notions of race were used by the nationalists of *fin de siècle* we have to clarify how the social and political theories of the era conceptualized and reflected the similarities and differences between human communities, what kind of connotations were attributed to the notions of equality, hierarchy, culture and humanity (Malik 1996, 39). Regarding to this, racial-based separation could be manifested in different physical traits (as it happened in the case of the colonizing Western European nations), or in various levels of cultural and social development among nations (this was the case of the Hungarian racial nationalism which argued for the superiority of the Magyars on the base of their higher level of cultural development). The racial-based definition of the nation simultaneously meant a constant reflection to the biological roots and genealogy of the community and a radical separation from other organic communities which also had their own biologically determined traits. According to Mosse, racial thinking can be treated as a proper ideology which stands on massive anthropological, biological and physiological

grounds (Mosse 2004, 1382). The concept of nation based on racial bases meant a human community which members was connected to each other via measurable biological similarities, and these (hereditary) biological traits also determines the level of the cultural, political and social development of the given nation.

In this sense, the combination of the Hungarian *fin de siècle* nationalism and racism is particularly interesting. Since in the Carpathian Basin making distinctions among local ethnic groups based on physical traits was impossible, the boundaries were determined by the different levels of social and cultural development (Turda 2003, 17; Turda 2002, 16). The method of the Hungarian nationalist can be easily followed: at the first step they diagnosed the underdeveloped political and social systems of the other ethnic groups, and then they explained this backwardness with the racial superiority of the Magyars (or, in other words, with the racial inferiority of the minorities). Gusztáv Beksics (1847-1906), a lawyer and literateur for example, writing about the “Romanian question”, treated Romanians consequently as an inferior race which was not able to achieve a more complex structure of social system (Beksics, 1895, 159). The reasons of this difference lied in the different historical development of the two races. As such, they constitute individual nations and they struggle for existence. According to Beksics, Hungarians, however, are in an advanced position, since as the most advanced *race* they are actually a *nation*, whilst the Romanians, like the Serbs and especially the Slovaks and the Ruthenes, are just *races*. He argued that the assimilation of “inferior races” to the Hungarian nation was a natural development since Romanians were on a lower level of the evolutionary ladder (Turda 2003, 19). For the liberal nationalists of *fin de siècle* the high assimilative potential of the Hungarian nation, and the survival of the main “Hungarian characteristics” were the infallible signs of the excellent racial qualities of their nation. Zsolt Beöthy, Gusztáv Beksics, Győző Concha, Jenő Rákosi unanimously emphasized

the importance of assimilation which was the basic interests both of the minorities and the Hungarian majority. They argued that social modernization could only be successful if the state facilitates the assimilation of the ethnic groups living in the territory of Hungary since they were not seen being capable to initiate social reforms (Trencsényi 2011, 343-344).

Since the biological and cultural factors became relevant for the racial-based concept of the nation (the biological supremacy ensured the commanding cultural achievements, whilst the latter was the evidence of the biological excellence of the nation), it was not a surprise that the nationalists of the era set up hierarchies between the nations. In this hierarchical system of races the cultural or political achievements of a given nation meant automatically its biological superiority meanwhile whole ethnic groups were determined to live under the domination of the allegedly more developed nations. The way in which the nationalists of the Habsburg Empire (Beksics, Ernő Baloghy, Mihály Réz, Aurel C. Popovici) and later the Hungarian eugenicists (József Madzsar, István Apáthy, Zsigmond Fülöp, Jenő Vámos) used the notion of the race bears all the features which was attributed by Audrey Smedley to racial-based ideologies. According to her theory, race can be conceptualized as the ground of a worldview which converges from the simple, non-reflected populist stereotypes to a scientific category (Smedley 1993, 27). As Neil MacMaster puts it:

It was rarely the case that thinkers and scientists discovered biological truths about race that then simply spread into the society, but rather there was an inverse relationship in which scientific racism tended to reflect the general beliefs and values of the wider society and the changes it was undergoing” (MacMaster 2001, 16).

In this scientific and later political discourse the races were shown as biologically limited entities which stood different levels of social and cultural development. Another important feature was the

assumption that the biological and physiological traits of the communities determined their cultural, intellectual and political achievements, and these traits were heritable. It is crucial to notice that the biological concept of race foreshadowed the emergence of eugenic theories. If we presuppose that biological traits play a crucial role in the cultural, political and social evolution of the national community, and if we suppose that these traits are heritable then the door is open for the state-controlled attempts of racial-hygienic measures.

This notion of race transformed into two directions in *fin de siècle* Hungary. On the one hand, it was used by nationalists and later by eugenicists to legitimate the leading position of Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin. These thinkers unanimously argued that the ethnic minorities should assimilate into the Hungarian nation since only a homogenous society can be the ground of political and cultural modernization. Győző Concha (1846-1933), a lawyer thought that the “Hungarian race” was able to spread Christian civilization in the region because its political organizing ability and cultural creativity. Meanwhile, he describes the other ethnic groups of the historical Hungary as primitive communities which were still in the beginning of nation-building process in the end of the 19th century (Concha 2005, 107). In his concept of national superiority, in Hungary the Magyars were the only ethnic group capable of creating a state. Concha explained that superior nations, such as the Magyars or the Germans, owing to “their strong cultural and political individuality,” could naturally rule over the other peoples living on their territory (Concha 1928, 538). According to *A magyar irodalom kis tükre*, Zsolt Beöthy’s (1848-1922) influential work, the main question of the era was whether the Hungarian nation is capable to assimilate the different nationalities into one organic (Hungarian-led) nation-state. In his project of seeking the legitimation of assimilation he developed a very distinct national characterology of the Hungarian race. The salient aspects of this theory were the assumption that the Magyars were the first

conquerors of the land, that they were nomads, naturally warrior-like, brave and free who wanted to discover the great unknown, whilst the conquered races of the Carpathian Basin were coward and slavish communities. The horseman originating from the Volga was hailed as an iconic ancestor of the Magyar race, which was in stark contrast with the weak nationalities of the Hungarian territory conquered easily by the Magyars (cf. Beöthy 1896, 15-16). Beöthy transformed the nomadic features of the ancient Magyars into a complex “Turanic worldview”. He argued that “Turanic” racial and cultural particularities were decisive in determining the Magyar national character. He suggested that the Magyars had continually assimilating other races but, because of their strong “Turanic” racial qualities, they managed to maintain their traditional characteristics. The assimilating nationalities always had to adjust themselves to the spiritual and heroic Hungarian type and normally the end of the process was the abandonment of their lower racial qualities (Trencsényi 2011, 347-48; Turda 2004, 109). This also meant that Hungarian nationalists, even if they were tolerant towards the nascent political and cultural organization of the minorities, treated the Magyar nation as a very exclusive community, and they were totally indifferent and neutral towards the intellectual achievement of the nationalities (cf. Mosse 2004, 1386).

Ernő Baloghy (1866-1943), a liberal politician and lawyer also emphasized the European mission of the Magyars in assimilating the underdeveloped nationalities in a culturally homogenous unit: “Hungary faces a new cultural evolution, not only because she must finally integrate into the grand European cultural unity, but also because she is obliged to include all nationalities that exist in Hungary into her national culture” (Baloghy Ernő 1908, 3). He asserted that the non-Magyars were nationally and culturally inferior and did not possess the intellectual fortitude to create complex political systems, let alone states. The main reason of the successes of Hungarians was their biological superiority which causally determined the cultural and political achievements of the

Magyar race. Gusztáv Beksics was also concluded that only the Magyar race can pursuit supremacy in the Carpathian Basin since they were biologically the most developed race in the region.³ The nations, like individuals, transmit those biological traits which are necessary to achieve higher levels of development. It follows logically from this that the racial superiority of Hungarians manifested itself in a historical narrative: the Magyars, according to their social advancement, had been dominating legitimately over the ethnic minorities of the Carpathian Basin. Beksics found the evidence for this hypothesis in the successful project of assimilating the nationalities in the territory of Hungary. He reckoned as a biological law that the superior nations assimilate the inferior ones, and the latter do not lose their authentic national characters (Beksics 1895, 139).

On the other hand, some other nationalists and later eugenicists of the Habsburg Empire perceived assimilation as a threat of losing the original national character (and with it the biological strength of the nation as well). In this battle, paradoxically enough, many of the Hungarian eugenicists who were worrying about the “purity” of their nation (Mihály Vitéz, István Apáthy, Jenő Vámos, Géza Hoffmann, Count Pál Teleki, Lajos Méhely) took the same side with some nationalists of the minorities who were fighting against the powerful assimilatory efforts of the Hungarian elite (such as Aurel C. Popovici) since both sides criticized the strengthening tendency of (often forced) magyarization (Turda 2004, 119). At the beginning of the 20th century the ethnicization of the discourse of assimilation was becoming obvious. The process of sketching out the “pure Hungarian national character” shortly led to fears about losing the essential core of the

³ Beksics’s usage of the term “race” was very inconsequent. It has a two-fold meaning: one is political and the other is cultural. Race is, primarily, a preliminary stage in the long process of becoming a nation. Secondly, it represents a primitive human group. As such it simply equates what 19th century cultural anthropology describes as racial group, i.e. a group or category of persons connected by common origin (cf. Turda 2003, 19).

Hungarian nation. The worrying voices about the disappearing “Hungarian racial purity” grounded very directly the eugenic movement during the first decades of the 20th century. It was only a matter of time when the searching for the pure Hungarian characteristics (initiated by Zsolt Beöthy, Otto Hermann, Pál Hunfalvy or Ármin Vámbéry) got biological overtones. The historical, linguistic or anthropological researches on the national characters rapidly led to biological and medical researches aimed at excavating the true biological traits of the Hungarian race. The “pure national character” explicitly appeared in the past and determined the faith of the nation (Trencsényi 2011, 348). But because of the growing foreign influences during the course of history these traits were waning gradually. This effort of seeking purism includes two aspects. First of all, it is necessary to find those features in the national history which had been attributable only to the given nation, which made this community unique and special. In *fin de siècle* nationalism this pure, ancient state was manifested in the dubious conception of the Turanian roots of Hungarians developed in details by Ármin Vámbéry (1832-1913). “Turan” was an ancient Iranian name for a somewhat mythical area of North-East of Persia, a territory of steppe beyond the river Amu Darya. In the 19th century Turcology was especially cultivated by many Hungarian intellectuals who were worrying from Pan-Slavism (Turda 2004, 102). It was not accidental that István Apáthy (1863-1922), a zoologist and leading eugenicist argued that the final aim of the Hungarian eugenic programs must be the (re)creation of the “neo-hungarian turanian man”. His normative concept was that in the process of creating the new type of man every nation should go back to its authentic, ancient characteristics (Apáthy 1918, 98). After unfolding the authentic national character, racial thinkers and eugenicists have to measure the quantity and quality of foreign influences on the national history, and these “contamination” has to be eliminated from the body of the nation (cf. Balibar 1991, 59). In the long run this attitude led to the blurring of certain social and racial/ethnic

belongings: every segment of the society became biologically determined, hence the door was opened to label entire ethnic groups as noxious elements which should be eliminated from the nation.

2§ The intersection of racial thinking and Social Darwinism: towards eugenics

It is quite a difficult task to unfold those relations which interlocked evolutionary biology to social sciences. It is a commonplace to say that social sciences were heavily influenced by natural sciences, particularly by biology and medical science which showed an extremely rapid development in the end of the 19th century. At this point we have to answer to many questions. First of all we have to clarify that on what level could Darwinism be “generalized” in order to explain the course of social and cultural development (cf. Dawkins 1983, 405). Is it legitimate to use the basic tenets of Darwinism (such as natural selection, struggle for existence, the role of hereditary) in social scientific explanations? This is still a heated debate in the literature, but regardless from the question whether Charles Darwin himself thought his theories applicable on the field of social sciences it is also a fact that Darwinian ideas were extremely popular in political, social and cultural theories around *fin de siècle*. Oszkár Jászi (1875-1957), one of the most influential Hungarian political thinkers in the first decades of the 20th century, labels Darwinism as the organic continuation of the work of Copernicus and Newton. Jászi warns that Darwin was not an isolated thinker with his unorthodox theories: Jean-Baptiste Lamarck or Herbert Spencer formed

similar ideas in the same time, or even a bit earlier. “Darwin’s world-historical role was that the new theory about the formation of species could not be defeated anymore by philosophical debates” (Jászi 1973, 263). His ideas triggered the efforts to conceptualize the society as an entity which also works under the laws of the nature, and the evolutionary theory became the main explanative scheme for social phenomena (Jászi 1973, 264).⁴

The clarification of the relations between Darwinism and Social Darwinism is extremely problematic. In the common sense knowledge, Social Darwinism is regarded as the blunt application of Darwinian theories to social realities. This opinion suggests that Darwinism chronologically, logically and methodically precedes Social Darwinism. However, the idea of (often violent) struggle among different social actors had been popular before Darwin. Herbert Spencer, the English philosopher, in *Social Statics* (1851) wrote about the struggle for survival amongst the individuals of every society, and it is not easy to trace the subtle ideological connections that linked Spencer’s evolutionism and individualism with Darwin’s biological determinism. Spencer proposed a new social philosophy that extolled competition and the power of the strongest and the most adaptable as well as a struggle for existence as the only significant mechanism for regulating the social transformations (Turda 2002, 55; Bowler 2009, 269). Spencer’s analogies between human history and organic evolution, his stress on the action of heredity were appealing both for Hungarian nationalists (see later) who were worrying about the strengthening of ethnic minorities, and for liberals and radicals such as Jászi, who praised him as the “apostle of evolution” who had torn down the religious and metaphysical mystifications of the

⁴ Marius Turda applies some arguments from the field of sociology of scientific knowledge in order to demonstrate the social relevance of Darwin’s theories. It is likely that the social scientist of the era would not have appreciated so much the Darwinian ideas if they had not found any relevance in them for their disciplines (Turda 2002, 49). Moreover, Douglas A. Lorimer points out that Darwinian tenets played a crucial role in the creation of modern European identity in contrast with the colonized parts of the world (Lorimer 1997, 214; Young 1985, 637).

formation of human life (Jászi 1973, 363). His analogies between biological organisms and the human society had a vast influence on the Hungarian eugenic movements. The essential similarity between the biological organism and the human society is that both are determined by the struggle of survival, both are governed by the laws of nature, hence the stake of both biological evolution and human history is the survival and expansion of certain races at the expenses of the others. This cruel competition inevitably ends in the vanishing of the weaker individuals and races, and the results are determined by biological stock of the races (Turda 2002, 55). MacMaster points out that Social Darwinist in general were less concerned with the consequences of evolutionary theory for the individual than with the survival of the fittest in the contest between race-nation. Spencer reckoned that biological traits significantly influence the result of the struggle for survival, and this assumption almost directly leads to the appearance of racial-hygienic and eugenic programs which wanted to manipulate the struggle throughout state-controlled medical interventions (MacMaster 2001, 37).

It was without question that Social Darwinism, which preached the violent struggle of human communities, and the racial-based nationalisms will find each other somehow. These are theoretical constructions which have many overlapping notions and explanatory methods. If racial-based nationalism holds that there is a biological core of every nation, and racial qualities determine the achievements of the community then the Social Darwinist notion of struggle completely fits both to its ideological narrative and to the historical realities of the era. On the other hand, the Social Darwinist struggles manifested themselves explicitly in the conflicts between “races” with different levels of cultural and political development. The Social Darwinist notion of struggle was exploited the proponents of racial nationalism since they could interpret the conflicts between nations or nations and nationalities as a struggle for the survival. For nationalists Social Darwinism offered a

very effective explanation of conquering other nations: according the unchangeable laws of biology, nations with better biological stock necessarily defeat the weaker ones. It is quite obvious how much this concept came in handy to the Austrian and Hungarian nationalist who wanted to assured the territorial integrity of their dualistic empire.

There are many reasons for the rapidly growing popularity of Social Darwinist theories. This philosophy can be seen as a peculiar mixture of many different natural and social scientific theories which common denominator was the fear of “degeneration” and the survival of the fittest race in the struggle for existence. The notion of “struggle” was an especially important term of the era. Since it was one of the central concepts of evolutionary biology every social scientific theory which somehow applied this term earned biological legitimation (Biddis 1978, 112). Any political party or movement could only win more supporters if it used Social Darwinist rhetoric for framing its programs and aims. The Social Darwinist, racist and nationalist discourses of the period interactively and mutually motivated each other throughout Europe and since local nationalisms were ideologies with significant real-political demands these movements often used the rhetorical framework of the latters. Besides the trends of cultural pessimism, fears of social degeneration and the increasing influence of biology there was another important factor which facilitated the popularity of Social Darwinism. This lied in some special characteristics of *fin de siècle* scientific life. In this period there were no clear-cut boundaries between proper scientific and quasi-scientific organs. Even for a highly-educated social scientist it was hard to distinguish between the primary sources and the critics, reviews, articles about them and to measure the authenticity and adequacy of the rampant secondary literature. It was not necessary that an intellectual who was amazed by the tenets of Social Darwinism had actually read the works of Spencer or Darwin. In many cases these intellectuals (especially in Central-Eastern Europe) picked up their knowledge on the issue

only from superficial secondary literatures. The important thing was not the number of scientific elaboration of Social Darwinist or racist theories in a given country, rather the fact that the basic ideas of these ideologies were popular in contemporary Europe (Biddis 1978, 116).

The ideas of racism and Social Darwinism was not uniformly affected every countries' intellectuals. In Hungary, the special characteristics of local nationalism (above all the fermenting minority question and the attempt to preserve Hungarian superiority in the Carpathian Basin) inevitably led to the concept of fierce Social Darwinist struggle between the Hungarians and the nationalities. While Győző Concha for example did not aim to prove the inferiority of the non-Magyars (he was satisfied with explaining the superiority of the Magyars), Ernő Balogh, Gusztáv Beksics or Mihály Réz declared openly the alleged biological inferiority of the minorities. According to Balogh, the pace of cultural and social evolution reinforced noticeable cultural and social differences between the "civilized" Magyars and the "primitive" non-Magyars (Balogh 1908, 210). He blended Social Darwinist terminology with traditional Hungarian self-perceptions in order to formulate a conceptual link between the non-Magyars and "primitive peoples". Gusztáv Beksics put his thoughts about the "Romanian question" into an openly Social Darwinist frame. His assimilationist theories were heavily influenced by neo-Malthusianism, Social Darwinism and the new ideas propagated by German biologists and eugenicists. He saw the racial struggle between the Magyars and the Romanians as an intense fight for supremacy in the region. The whole struggle was predetermined by the biological mastery of the Hungarians. Beksics cited the standard growth of Hungarian population both in "national strength" and wealth which will facilitate the complete assimilation of the Romanians. To achieve this end, the Magyars should take care about their growth both in quantity *and quality*. The necessity of maintaining a large and vigorous population became one of the basic foundations of Social Darwinism. Besides facilitating assimilation, the

quantitative and qualitative strength of the Hungarian nation helped to preserve the traditional “Magyar spirit” (Beksics, 1895, 194). In his theory of racial struggle Beksics used Social Darwinist framework “borrowed” from Western Europe, but the content of this framework was filled with local problems. His racial narrative combined official Hungarian rhetoric on the question of nationalities and national character discourses with Western European theories of race, Social Darwinism and hereditary. He combined the Weismannian theory of hereditary (which denied that external influences could affect an individual’s hereditary substance) with the Lamarckian idea (which maintained that acquired characteristics could be inherited). On the one hand, he thought that racial development was possible through the activity of the principle of heredity. On the other, he argued that the Magyar race was the most adaptable to external circumstances, hence its racial inheritance thus preserved at the expenses of other races.

Chapter 2.

Eugenics in *fin de siècle* Hungary

1§ Intellectual background

If we want to examine the early period of the Hungarian eugenic movement first of all we have to sketch the intellectual milieu and ideological context which appeared in the intersection of racial thinking Social Darwinism and local nationalism in Hungary. These three factors do not belong to the same category from one important aspect: racial thinking and Social Darwinism are theories which were heavily altered by the claims of local nationalisms. This transformation was very obvious in the Hungarian case. On the one hand, the elements of racial thinking and Social Darwinism appeared in the works of many Hungarian nationalists (Beksics, Vitéz, Baloghy) and later on in the programs of right-wind eugenicists (István Apáthy, Lajos Méhely, Count Pál Teleki). On the other hand, racial thinking and Social Darwinism were present in the ideas of radical and socialist eugenicists and social scientists who also grasped the society as a biological organism but without nationalist overtones (Oszkár Jászi, József Madzsar, Zsigmond Fülöp).

All in all, the main fear of both right-minded and leftist-progressive eugenicist was the observable *degeneration* of the society and the nation. The tangible trend of social and cultural degeneration was a common issue of Western thinkers. The term was used to refer to a whole range of social pathologies that threatened the biological substance of the race from criminality, alcoholism, tuberculosis and the appearance of slums to a lack of physical training, cretinism, venereal diseases and sexual perversion. The growing anxiety that European states were confronted

with these inner crises, a true sign of biological decay, was to receive its most sophisticated analysis and resolution in Social Darwinism and the science of racial hygiene and eugenics (MacMaster 2001, 36). In the period, criminality was often seen as an inherited feature: Cesare Lambroso, and Italian physician and criminologist described *the criminal* as “an atavistic being who reproduces in his person the ferocious instincts of primitive humanity and inferior animals” (Pick 1993, 122). The central idea of Social Darwinism and eugenics was that the further modern societies developed, the more they created welfare systems that interfered with the laws of natural selection. While the pre-industrial mankind was smitten with famines, diseases, wars which remorselessly weeded out sickly individuals or entire non-adaptive groups, modern economy had created dire conditions (overcrowded filthy, airless slums with violence, alcoholism and high fertility) for human beings. But instead of dying out, these pale and wretched elements of the society were able to survive through the growing intervention of charitable organizations and local or governmental grants. During the second part of the 19th century almost all European states engaged in nascent welfare programs that attempted to alleviate the conditions of the urban poor, from housing regulations, health inspections and sewerage disposal to establishing public hospitals and soup kitchens. The concern of eugenicists was that societies artificially keeping alive those sickly individuals who would, according to the “laws of natural selection” have died out (Pick 1993, 41). What was particularly disturbing for these radical reformers was the growing demographic imbalance of developed societies, for while the improvident poor continued to breed without restraint, producing large numbers of enfeebled children, the educated elites were beginning to have smaller and smaller numbers of offspring, owing the late marriage, family planning and the use of birth control. In this sense, Social Darwinism and eugenics in Western Europe often translated the bourgeois fears of being outnumbered by the deteriorated masses

(MacMaster 2001, 37). Western eugenicists tended to ghettoize the urban poor: the stereotyped working class carried all the inherited stigma of the savage race, such as sexual potency, high fertility, low intelligence, moral corruption, violence and raw animality. In Western Europe the degenerating working class and urban poor were characterized as the “genetically unfit race” while the higher echelons and the élites of the society constituted a kind of “hereditary gene-pool” in which the highest racial qualities of intelligence, moral strength and physical beauty was preserved (MacMaster 2001, 37, 44).

The fears from degeneration and the ideas of eugenics as a radical form of social betterment were omnipresent throughout European higher culture in the late 19th century. In the period from 1900 onwards, a dense work of eugenic scholarship spread across Europe. Highly influential teams of scientists, working on the statistics of heredity and biometrics (such as Karl Pearson), Mendelian genetics, physical anthropologists, zoologists, psychiatrists, serologists, medical doctors, sociologists, veterinarians were in constant communication through a network of correspondence, the exchange of papers, articles and conferences. The growth of a pervasive biological discourse of race and society can be linked to the tremendous growth and influence of medical science and biology. Right across Europe, there was a rapid expansion in the numbers of trained doctors of medicine and biologists, who became increasingly influential through their involvement in major areas of public policy and decision making (MacMaster 2001, 49). In respect of the early Hungarian eugenics movement, Count Pál Teleki emphasized the importance of applying biological and medical methods in the field of social sciences: “With the growth of our knowledge and insights on the field natural sciences [*he meant first of all biology. FT*] we have to examine every phenomena of human life, including the political and social life of humans.” (Teleki 1904, 318)

Michel Foucault saw this whole process as the emergence of bio-power, during which the modern states tried to develop political and medical technologies for the regulation of the life processes of their population. Bio-power was indispensable to the development of capitalism and modern state, the optimization of disciplined bodies and of healthy populations for the functioning of the economy, armies or police forces. Strategies for the maximization of the power of the populations were inherently racial projects:

[State] Power would no longer dealing with legal subjects [...] but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself; it was the taking charge life, more than the threat of death, that gave power its access even to the body [...] What might be called a society's "threshold of modernity" has been reached when the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies (Foucault 1990a, 144).

Foucault's analysis suggests that racism was an integral component of modernity, of capitalism and growing state power, and bio-politics, eugenic attempts, state-controlled biological engineering were unavoidable consequences of these trends. These processes were intensified by a growing anti-liberal attitude in *fin de siècle* which provided more and more popular and political support to eugenic programs in Western Europe. A tangible disillusionment was observable with the earlier phase of social reform that had failed to make any impact on criminality and other visibly forms of "degeneration". The advocates of eugenics in Western countries were real propagandists and avid publicist who took advantage on the zeitgeist of decadence. They lectured with almost religious zeal at philosophical or sociological associations and conferences, university and public debates and international conferences. They reached a broader public through publications in non-technical language, the messages of the new discipline were diffused through popular plays and novels (MacMaster 2001, 54).

The period of *fin de siècle* saw an unprecedented number of scientific theories and medical practices to ensure the biological fitness of a community. The wider movements to improve national efficiency and the economic, military and imperial strength of the race, such as public health, natalism, urban hygiene found acceptance in most of the countries across the whole political spectrum. The eugenic language of “fitness”, at all levels of the society, did reinforce racist assumptions about the superiority of some national cultures above others. In Hungary, eugenic ideas imported from Western Europe were especially resonant in the first years of the 20th century. It is very important to note that the early Hungarian eugenicists used the terms “nation”, “race” and “society” more or less as synonyms. For progressive liberals and socialists, the Hungarian nation-building efforts were equal with a radical social reforms implemented through state-controlled medical interventions. As I will demonstrate, we cannot evaluate the Hungarian eugenic movement as an entirely nationalist or entirely socialist-progressive phenomenon. The Hungarian experts held that both the “nation” and the “society” is a biological organism which development is determined by hereditary traits and the whole “body” of it can be altered by state-controlled medical interventions (cf. Percz 2005, 204). In the Hungarian eugenic discourse the state were seen as the guardian of the nation governed by biological laws.

The eugenic movement absorbed the biological concept of nation developed by racial nationalism; since the prosperity, fitness and survival of the nation depend on the hereditary traits the state has the right and the obligation to regulate the transmission of biological feature (Turda and Weindling 2007, 8).⁵ However, only a few Hungarian eugenicists saw heredity as the only factor which explains the level of development or degeneration of a given society. The influence of

⁵ Zygmunt Bauman warns that from many aspects the Central Eastern European radical intellectuals were the most consequent heirs of the Enlightenment since they treated the rationalist state as their main ally in the radical social reforms proposed by them (Bauman 1991, 37).

the neo-Lamarckian evolutionary theory, which maintained that acquired characteristics could be inherited, was quite strong among the Hungarian eugenicists. This idea lent itself readily to a more progressive environmentalism: social reform could have an impact on both the living as well as on the future generations (MacMaster 2001, 52). In Hungary, the attempt of reforming the external circumstances (which determines the biological traits of the individual on a very significant way) was an integral part of most eugenic programs. As Zsigmond Fülöp (1882-1948), a naturalist and the editor of Darwin's work in Hungary puts it:

If we get married Hercules with Juno and Apollo with Venus but we put them into a stinking passage then both themselves and their offspring would be useless for the race. But put the dwellers of the passages to favorable conditions, and it is sure that their favorable latent traits will prevail in two or three generations (Fülöp 1911, 312)

According to the Hungarian eugenicists who insisted on social modernization, not only the infrastructural, economic and institutional renewal of the state was necessary but a radical reform in its healthcare system seemed also unavoidable (Turda and Weidling 2007, 7). For radical intellectuals eugenics seemed to offer a chance of creating a healthy society and a strong nation-state which community will succeed in the struggle for survival among the nations. It can be said that because their overall reform conceptions, the eugenic movements of different countries exceeded the frameworks of a scientific discipline in the narrow sense. This was especially true for the Hungarian case where eugenics was institutionalized till the mid-1910s, and it was seen by its proponents as an overall solution to almost every problem and tension of the Hungarian society. As Jenő Vámos wrote in 1911:

[O]ne cannot understand the name ‘eugenics’ only as hygiene mixed with a bit of social policy (which is already a common belief in Hungary), but it has to be understood as new science which unites every positive piece of knowledge aimed at the purposeful improvement of human species” (Vámos 1911, 571).

The Hungarian eugenicists were not only academics and scientists but social and political reformers as well, who did their best to apply the abstract principles and solutions of eugenics to the reality of their era (Turda 2006a, 306).

2§ Diagnosing social deviances

Since the emergence of eugenics was a reaction to obvious social, demographic and economic tensions we have to review what were exactly these problems in Hungary and what were the solutions offered by Hungarian experts. As I have already mentioned the general experience of *fin de siècle* intellectuals was an overall trend of “degeneration” throughout Europe which manifested itself in the distressingly high fertility of the urban poor (Turda 2006a, 311). The Hungarian eugenic movement was not an exception, its experts also tried to explain the phenomenon of social/racial decline. The most general level of these explanations was a somewhat romantic criticism of the economically, culturally too much developed industrial society. Emil Ernő Moravcsik (1858-1924), a psychiatrist, blames the excessive strains brought by industrialized modernity as the main reason of physical and intellectual degeneration (Moravcsik 1900, 4-5). He gives a detailed account of different types of neurotic damages which are the results of individual degeneration. The socialist Imre Káldor warned in his lecture on the “Eugenic debate” held in

1911, that in the circumstances of modern capitalist societies, because of the growing industrialization, less and less people have any kind of proper job which will inevitably lead to the degeneration of the race (Káldor, 1911, 157). This critique of too developed societies shows the slightly schizophrenic attitude of eugenicist towards scientific knowledge and the role of modern state. On the one hand, it was obvious that the basic precondition of implementing any kind of eugenic program was a very high level of scientific knowledge (especially on the field of biology and medicine) and state-controlled interventions to the everyday life of the population. But on the other hand, and this was the opinion of virtually all of the eugenicists throughout Europe, the modern state institutions and welfare politics were the results of a derailed historical progress, and these policies did more social harm than good. Most of the eugenicists saw the nascent programs of social reform, public health care, the emergence of charitable organizations as the signs of a dysgenic path of racial development since not only could they not improve the genetic quality of the sick and degenerate, but they also ensured their “unnatural” survival (MacMaster 2001, 42). Zsigmond Fülöp criticized vehemently the almighty role of economic and financial aspects in the life of modern societies. If the people’s choices in the case of marriage, child-bearing, involvement in a profession are not determined by biological necessities but only by financial concerns and profitability then the degeneration of the race is unavoidable. To worsen these tendencies, Fülöp notes, there is the tangible tendency of declining birthrates in those social classes which produce the real “cultural and intellectual capital” The main aim of a eugenic policy has to be “to put the individuals to [professional] paths which are the mostly in accordance with their ability, where they can produce the biggest value for the community” (Fülöp 1910, 172).

The role of the economic and political conditions in the process of racial degeneration leads to a crucial question in which there was no accord among the eugenicists. There were serious debates around *find de siècle* that whether hereditary or the external circumstances determine primarily the features, abilities and the personal character of an individual. Francis Galton, the father of eugenics, and the biometrist Karl Pearson emphasized the decisive role of hereditary in the development of individual abilities. In the Hungarian movement, probably József Madzsar (1870-1940) was the only expert who thought that only hereditary determines the attributes of a person. Madzsar is one of the most controversial and interesting figure amongst the Hungarian eugenicists. He was a socialist (he was the member of the Social Democratic Party, and later the illegal communist party) since he found capitalism inherently inconsistent. On the other hand, his main effort was the overall reform of the Hungarian health care system to improve the racial quality of the society. This intention was in stark tension with his conviction about the primacy of hereditary over the social conditions in influencing the basic characters of an individual (Turda 2006a, 308).

And since we will see that the individuals are actually determined far less by external conditions than the influence of inborn attribute, it is natural that *ceteris paribus* the situation of a person is determined by hereditary than the circumstances (Madzsar 1913, 147)

Intelligence, temperament, consciousness, handwriting are all heritable traits. It is also without doubts that the good and bad physical condition, the propensity to diseases or immunity are heritably just as the mental traits (Madzsar 1910, 115)

But most of the Hungarian eugenicists rather endorsed the neo-Lamarckian view which emphasized the crucial role of the external conditions in the formation of personal features; this stance was in line with the claim for radical reform of the Hungarian society advocated by every eugenicist in the

country (Turda 2007, 190). Diagnosing social deviances was not a very difficult task for the Hungarian eugenicists. Both in Budapest, which became a European metropolis in the second half of the 19th century and in the lagging countryside there were many symptoms of “degeneration” which caused anxiety among sociologists and doctors who unanimously urged serious healthcare reforms. The ghettoized slums in Budapest and in some industrial city of the countryside, the overcrowded, unhealthy working-class districts which were the hotbeds of alcoholism, crime, venereal diseases and prostitution, the high fertility and infant mortality rates of the poor, the growing numbers of neurotics and lunatics were all the returning elements of the Hungarian eugenic literature. Zsigmond Fülöp added to this list two serious demographical problems which especially characterized *fin de siècle* Hungary, namely the popular tradition of “only-childism” which aim was to preclude the crumbling away of land or money in wealthier families, and the growing tide of emigration which culminated in the first years of the 20th century (Fülöp 1910, 170-171).

Pointing out the main aspects of this diagnosis we can define the main fears of eugenicists concerning the future of the society and the nation and then we can examine their solutions to the problem of degeneration. The experts predicted a future society which will be the result of the negative demographic tendencies observed in their era. They (often implicitly) depicted the dystopic picture of the future nation; in the past of this community the fertility of the lower strata (which members were on a lower level of intellectual and physical fitness) exceeded the fertility of the middle-class and the élites which tendency will lead to the inevitable decline and annihilation of the nation (Madzsar 1913, 145, Apáthy 1911, 265). In this spiral of decadence, the dire external circumstances and the weak genetic inheritance enhance each other. The bigger the number of families who raise their children in awful conditions, the poorer the biological heritage is being

transformed through generations. And since the cultural and intellectual achievements were seen to be determined by the biological heritage, the degeneration of the future society was unavoidable.

Every eugenicist agreed that the most active facilitator of the racial degeneration is the Hungarian state with its hypocrite and pseudo-humanistic social policies and welfare programs. The attitude of racial hygienists towards the state-controlled current social and healthcare politics is one of the most interesting questions of the Hungarian eugenic programs. Regardless the fact that they preferred the Weismannian or the neo-Lamarckian position, every expert emphasized that the actual state policies facilitates the degeneration of the racial quality of Hungarian nation since neither they support the reproduction of the “biological élites” nor they prevent the reproduction of the “undesirable” elements:

Charity, in its current form, is a real danger since in most of the cases it impedes the extinction of the most dangerous elements to the society, moreover, it facilitates their proliferation (Madzar 1910, 116).

We must obliterate the religious- and freemasonic-based pseudo-humanism which practices philanthropy and charity towards the individuals, and does not think that with these activities it facilitates (even it does not directly trigger) the biological shipwreck of the race (Fülöp 1910, 176).

Their criticism was the same about the state-controlled treatment of social deviances. The eugenicists saw the role of prisons and psychiatry as institutions which detain the deviant elements only for a given period and then they simply release their patients back to the society: “The patients can be cured in sanatoriums, the criminals can be “improved” in prisons, but all of this cannot impede them from transforming their diseases and bad aptitudes to their children” (Magyar 1910, 116). Fülöp compared the Hungarian reality with the American situation where after a patients or a prisoner had been released from the hospital or from the prison, he/she was examined by a medical

committee which task was to decide whether the individual was “burdened by heritable degeneration or propensity for crime” and if it was necessary it instructed the sterilization of the person (Fülöp 1911, 317). By contrast, the current Hungarian practices were extremely harmful both on the short run (the uncured lunatics or criminals could harm anybody or anything) and on the long run (without sterilization they were able to transfer their genetic degenerations to further generations).

This attitude of the Hungarian experts towards the lunatics and criminals seems very inhuman and barbarous so we have to make some complementary remarks here. First of all, we can see that the categories of mental deficiency and criminality were totally blurred with each other. But not only the Hungarian eugenicist ignored the differences between the social effects of these two categories. It was a general paradigm of the era that both the lunatics and criminals were seen as elements which can cause serious disturbances in the life of human communities hence the interactions between them and the “normal” segment of the society should be minimized. The sterilization act passed in Indiana in 1907 (later the law was extended to many other states of the US) commanded the forced sterilization of both criminals and lunatics⁶ (Sandel 2007, 65). The other clarification pertains to the eugenicists’ hostility towards psychiatry and prison. They saw these institutions as state-financed facilities which after a short period of detention simply release their patients back to the society. They cared neither with the educating, and reintegrative aspects of these institutions, nor with their monitoring and controlling functions stressed by Michel Foucault (Foucault 1990b). Moreover, as Gusztáv Oláh (1857-1944), a leading psychiatrist of the

⁶ It is really interesting to compare this stance about the sterilization of both criminals and lunatics with the opinion of Lajos Zilahy (1891-1974), a writer and publicist, who was a consequent advocate of eugenic measures in the 1930s. He warns that in the beginning the eugenic measures were too hard since in the US both lunatics and criminals were sterilized, even though, he argues, only the feeble-minded people should have been the subjects of this intervention (Zilahy 1933, 7).

era writes in his memoir, there was a general hostility towards psychiatry even in the field of medical sciences; psychiatrists were called “lunatic-doctors” (“bolonddoktorok”), and their cures were thought useless since they wanted to cure “incurable” diseases (*Gusztáv Oláh’s Memoir*). The eugenicists treated psychiatric institutions and their practices as the manifestation of fake philanthropy promoted by the modern state which policies lead to the degeneration of the race. Since the eugenicists, who advocated the racial concept of the nation and the society, presumed direct relations between the biological health of the community and its social, cultural and political development, they urged totally new forms of social politics and state interventions based on a new kind of “national”, “social” or “eugenic” ethics. This “eugenic” ethic should abandon the corrosive sentimentalism which wants to help on the individuals who do not fit into the society (Turda 2006a, 309). The elaboration of this brand new moral system which is based on the collective interests of the future generations and which have to grounded the concrete eugenic measures was one of the biggest challenges of the Hungarian movement, and I will detail this problem in the next chapters of my thesis.

Chapter 3.

Eugenics as the new religion: the administrators of future generations

1§ The practical solutions of the Hungarian eugenicists

The first era of the Hungarian eugenic movements lasts from the very first reflections to the new discipline till the outbreak of the First World War (cf. Turda 2007). The basis of this periodization is the *direction* of the proposed programs. In this period the main aims of the programs elaborated by different authors were directed to the Hungarian society in itself: the main aim was the radical reform of the Hungarian society which can solve its serious crises. The society and the nation were seen as a biological organism which viability can be improved by state-controlled medical interventions. But the impacts of Social Darwinism which projected a permanent competition into the relationships of the nations were obvious even in this early period. In this sense, actually the surviving of the national community was at stake. This attitude was constantly strengthening during the First World War when the preservation of the purity of the Hungarian race-nation and its supremacy in the Carpathian Basin became the central issue of the eugenic discourse.

The leftist eugenicists (first of all Madzar) wanted to (re)integrate somehow the marginalizing segments of the Hungarian society. Madzsar, the main disseminator of the “eugenic gospel” (Kovács 1994, 33) was one of the leading figure of the combat against alcoholism (which was seen by him as a factor facilitating the heredity of bad genetic traits rife amongst the poor), and later he was the most active participant of the infant and mother care programs which begun with the outbreak of the First World War. The realization of this program was the task of the state, and

he argued for the introduction of compulsory medical examination before marriage (Madzsar 1915, 6). He emphasized that these family protecting programs have nothing to do with the traditional notion of charity. (Kárpáti 1967, 17, 42). The right-minded eugenicists put more and more emphasis on the importance of national purity (Count Teleki, Lajos Méhely, Mihály Lenhossék, Jenő Vámos, János Bársony, Géza Hoffmann). Some of them worried about the demographic catastrophe caused by the bloodshed of the war (Bársony), while others (Count Teleki, Méhely, Hoffmann) saw the conflict as the final combat among the European nations for the crucial resources (Turda 2006b 113ff). But, as I have already mentioned, distinguishing between clearly “left-minded” and “right-minded” eugenicist is not an easy, if not impossible, task, since their terminology was very vague and inconsequent and many of the crucial terms used in their works overlapped with each other. István Apáthy’s (1863-1922) efforts to synthesize the controversial eugenic programs can be seen as a paradigmatic phenomenon. He emphasized at the same time the importance of health care programs for the marginalizing segments of the society and the preservation or recreation of the pure Hungarian racial traits:

Public healthcare concerns with the improvement of the living conditions from the aspect of health. Racial hygiene concerns with preventing those diseases which endanger the survival of not just the individuals but of the whole race. Their efforts meet in many cases, moreover, the improvement of public healthcare is one of the methods of racial hygiene [...] Both attempts is directed to the improvement of the human material (Apáthy 1911, 265).

His markedly collectivist point of view emphasizes the preservation of the health and the purity of the Hungarian race. Racial hygiene has to dedicate its efforts to the dangers which imperil the development of the nation. He offered the deep examination of social and medical background of

the individuals for preventing deviances and diseases transmitted to the next generations (Turda 2006b, 112).

Going back to the beginnings of the Hungarian eugenic movements, its programs were widely publicized in leading papers such as *Társadalomtudományi Szemle* or *Huszádik Század*, edited by Oszkár Jászi. The declared purpose of these papers was to stir up the Hungarian public thinking and to give an explanation of the interactions between scientific, political and social tendencies (Turda 2006a, 305). Neil MacMaster and Marius Turda argue that eugenic and Social Darwinist ideas were omnipresent throughout the European higher culture in *fin de siècle* (MacMaster 2001, 48; Turda 2006a, 306). To measure the popularity and actual dissemination of eugenic thoughts in Hungary is a real challenge, and we also have to compare the Hungarian case with other European situations. One exact measurement of the real popularity of such theories is the number of laws or other kind of political measurements which were directly influenced by the eugenics. Before the First World War there was no European country which would have implemented clearly eugenic measures. Before 1914 eugenicists' ideas or legislative proposals in European countries for premarital medical inspections, castration or sterilization of criminals and "feeble-minded", institutional segregation of degenerate segments of the societies were met with opposition despite of the general popularity of these thoughts and the growing anti-liberal milieu of period. It seems likely that the popular notions of hereditary, evolution and external interventions to the transmission of traits were drawn from the much older discourse of animal breeding. This pre-scientific form of understanding is of considerable importance since it has continued to influence popular thoughts on races and biological interventions. The works of European eugenicists were saturated with ideas and analogies drawn from the world of stock breeding (MacMaster 2001, 54), in the Hungarian movement, for example, István Apáthy was a zoologist and Jenő Vámos (1882-

1950) was a veterinarian. Another factor in the measurement of the popularity of eugenics is the number of its propagators and their notoriety in their country. In Hungary we can see around a dozen of eugenicists who were actively published articles, released books or organized conferences and later institutions. In the first decade of the 20th century they were rather a small, loud community than a relevant social factor which could have influenced daily political decisions on its merits. During the First World War this situation started to change, but I will go back later to this issue.

On the other hand, the institutionalization of the new discipline proceeded quite fast. This was seen by the Hungarian experts as the first step towards a state-controlled eugenic health policy. But they also had to realize the fact that the biological and medical erudition of most of the social scientists, let alone politicians, leaves much to be desired.

Social thinkers willingly use analogies borrowed from biology, although most of them do not have the basic knowledge about natural history taught to students, let alone biology. [...] But I cannot accept the lack of knowledge about biology of those people who want to represent themselves as the followers of biological social science (Apáthy 1911, 268, 269).

We are not allowed to think about state intervention, let alone the omnipotence of the state, until the politicians and statesmen who decide about the life and future of the societies are completely illiterate on the field of sociology and biology (Fülöp 1911, 317).

The most urgent problem which all Hungarian eugenicists wanted to solve somehow was the declining birthrates in the upper echelons of the society and the alarmingly high rate of fertility among the lower classes which worries completely fit to the concerns of eugenicists in other European countries. The wide range of possible solutions ranged from the programs of forced or

voluntarily sterilization⁷, marriage- and birth control based on family genealogies, the establishment of mother- and childcare institutions, cracking down on alcoholism, prostitution and venereal diseases to the betterment of medical services in the slums and the breeding of a “biological aristocracy”.⁸

One of the most interesting elements of these programs is the consequent feminism of most of the theories. The role of women in the conservation of the race is a very delicate issue in itself. Even though Gusztáv Beksics was not a champion of emancipation, he emphasized the importance of women in safeguarding the racial qualities of the nation. For him the basic question was the numerical superiority of the Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin: “The Magyar race owes its superiority over other races of Hungary to the growth of the number of birth [...] which is the essential strengths of the race” (Turda 2004, 127). In the eugenic programs, mothers and families also were in a favored position. The reasons of including the protection of women into eugenic theories were widespread. It was held that the child inherits the intellectual abilities of the mother. The main propagator of this idea was Jenő Vámos, a veterinarian who grounded his theories on Francis Galton statistics. Based on the assumption that women have extremely important role in the conservation and transmission of racial qualities he established a direct link between feminism and eugenics:

Only when the women will be totally emancipated in spiritual and economic terms will the goal of eugenics be realized. The goal of feminism is the improvement of women, and the ennoblement of the race has to be

⁷ A telling sign of the often superficial medical knowledge of the Hungarian eugenicists is that Madzsar wanted to sterilize the patients with high-dose X-ray therapy which would have allowed the completion of sterilization without any pain and “any further pestilent consequences” (Madzsar 1913, 159)

⁸ We have to note that the early Hungarian experts did not work out a consistent, comprehensive and detailed eugenic program. In most of the cases they elaborated their concrete suggestions only in keywords, and the debates and discourses mainly contained the diagnosis of the negative social and demographic tendencies. Even István Apáthy’s program, which probably was the most detailed and complex one in the early period of the movement, is very vague and incomplete (cf. Turda 2007, 202).

grounded in the improvement of mothers [...] Because of the more important role of mothers in eugenics it is necessary that the ennoblement of the mothers be in the forefront of the eugenic movement. Feminism is legitimated totally in eugenics. With the triumph of feminism grows the standard of women, and a woman has more chance of getting an eugenic marriage (Vámos 1911, 575)

Others, such as Apáthy, János Bársony or Bekovits René (1882-194?), a neurologist and physician stressed the importance of women in staying together a healthy family or marriage, or simply criticized the oppressed social positions of the women. Berkovits explicitly advocated a state-controlled artificial selection in order to purge out degenerated elements from the pool of possible parents. She hoped that with “discouraging” the degenerated people from having children the state could prevent the proliferation of inherited diseases. What was needed, Berkovits concluded, was to establish “a commission of eugenics to research the specific matters and come up with an evident recommendation for the legislation” (Berkovits 1911, 44).

Another extremely interesting element of the Hungarian eugenic movement was the creation (or rather the breeding) of a “biological aristocracy”. The idea was coined up by Galton and in the Hungarian reception it was propagated mainly by Madzsar and Vámos. The overall aim of this effort is very vague but it seems likely that it would have divided up the society for two, biologically very different segments. According to the experts committed to this idea, it is desirable to forge out – via radical marriage and birth control and trans-generational sterilization programs – an inbred elite with a perfect “gene-pool” in which the highest racial qualities of intelligence, moral strength and physical beauty were preserved (Madzsar 1913, 170; Vámos 1911, 573). This new elite, thanks to the perfect biological capabilities of their members, will be able to perform the real cultural achievements (This theory is in stark contrast with Madzsar’s socialistic attitude). This anti-democratic conception was attacked vehemently from both theoretical and practical reasons by

Zsigmond Fülöp. He argued that with the application of negative eugenic⁹ principles the overall standard of the whole race/society should be improved. Fülöp envisioned a democratic society instead of inbreeding racial elites:

It could not be our aim that we achieve higher standard only in a small portion of the society; the term “racial breeding” rather means that we have to rise the general standard [of the community] with the method of negative selection. It is obvious for the first sight that this idea is far more democratic since it wants to improve the whole race, while Galton and his followers wanted to create a biological aristocracy, a minority with higher standard (Fülöp 1911, 312).

This program of creating a biological aristocracy was criticized by many eugenicists from a socialist ground. They held that the huge inequalities of the Hungarian society and the inhuman economic relations were the main reasons of racial degeneration. These authors (István Apáthy, Imre Káldor, Zoltán Rónai) envisioned a socialist-like utopia. Imre Káldor argued that “the real eugenic movement is the one which strives to eliminate the non-human causes inflicting degeneration” (Káldor, 1911, 158), while Apáthy wrote that one of the main facilitators of racial degeneration is the huge social inequalities (Apáthy 1911, 272).

⁹ Here we have to make a small digression about the two basic types of eugenic methods. One bunch can be called negative eugenicist which is based on the assumptions of the Weismannian theory of evolution and the Mendelian theory of genetics. Negative eugenics proposed the drastic termination of the breeding capacity of individuals or groups that were perceived to carry hereditary traits that would damage of the biological fitness of the race. This side connected to the Weismannian “germ-plasm” theory according to which the genetic characteristics of parents were transmitted to the offspring could not be significantly transformed by the environment. While this line of eugenics tried to impede the reproduction of the “undesired” elements of the society, positive eugenic measures tried to facilitate the reproduction of the biologically desired elements and to reform existing social conditions. The main leverage of the positive programs are the measures of birth and marriage control. In the Hungarian movement we cannot clearly discern the proponents of one or the other type since in most of the cases the experts proposed solutions used both negative and positive measures (Madzsar argued for example both for sterilization and breeding a biological aristocracy). Cf. MacMaster 2001, 42-43, 50.

When the Hungarian eugenicists tried to legitimate their programs they used a very effective, hardly vulnerable argumentation: they pointed to the absurdities of the contemporary social and political practices and they offered their racial hygienic measures instead of the actual state policies. They warned to two controversial policies which existence actually supported their own ideas. One of these policies was the monopoly of state authorities over death penalty, and the other was the restricting laws of religions governing the institution of marriage. The eugenicists asserted that if the state has the right for sentencing anybody to death then the “eugenic state” also should have the right for practicing forced sterilization which serves the interest of the overall community (Madzsar 1910, 116). Similarly, if the churches can forbid any marriages based only on religious dogmas then the eugenicist should have the right for doing the same for the higher interest of the race (Vámos 1911, 577).

2§ Eugenic programs during the First World War

The beginning of the First World War was a milestone in the Hungarian eugenic program. The eugenic discourse heavily intensified right before the eruption of the war: the so-called “Eugenic debate” was organized by the *Társadalomtudományi Társaság* and then published by the *Huszdik Század* in 1911, the *Eugenikai Társaság*, which aim was to popularize the principles of racial hygienic ideas was established in January 1914. The debate in 1911 showed the fragmentation of the Hungarian movement, and the internal tensions can be seen as the clear signs of eugenics becoming an institutionalized discipline. Especially István Apáthy and Géza von Hoffmann made

huge efforts for establishing a “eugenic committee” which president was Count Pál Teleki and Apáthy was its secretary (Turda 2007, 203; Ablonczy 2005, 116). The escalation of the war brought the growing political relevance of eugenics. The efforts of racial hygienists to create a biologically strong nation suddenly gained more actuality. The Austro-Hungarian Empire mobilized around 8 million soldiers during the war, and almost 4 million was Hungarian citizens (Turda 2009). In this situation it became clear what was at stake of the eugenic programs: according to the basic tenets of Social Darwinism, in the explicit competition of nations the weaker ones will be defeated. The social and international changes catalyzed by the war gave a new weight to eugenics, and it started to contain more and more nationalistic overtones. With the ongoing war the questions of Hungarian supremacy and the racial purity of the Hungarian nation received a renewed interest both from eugenic experts and politicians. This shift means that the Hungarian eugenic programs assumed an external orientation. The main aim of the experts during war was to distinguish the Hungarian nation from other nations, to preserve the biological stock of the Hungarian race. The war just strengthened those demographic trends which had been tangible even before the eruption of the armed conflict, but after 1914 the fear of the complete annihilation of the nation also appeared. According to some eugenicists, the wartime efforts of the Hungarian race was hindered from inside by the intrigues of some racially “non-Hungarian elements”. These new elements of the discourse indicate the strengthening of anti-Semitic overtones in the eugenic movement (Turda 2007, 204). But the anti-Semitic edge of eugenics became explicit only in the interwar period, foremost in the works of Lajos Méhely (1862-1953).

It is without question that probably the most influential and important person of the Hungarian eugenic discourse during the war was Count Pál Teleki (1879-1941) who was the corresponding member of the Hungarian Academic of Science since 1913, and he was a member of

parliament several times. He was an advocate of “turanism” which emphasized the nomadic, warlike characteristics of Hungarians. He was strongly influenced by the ideas of Darwinism and early eugenics elaborated by Francis Galton or Alfred Ploetz (Ablonczy 2005, 114-115). During the first years of the war Teleki was preoccupied mainly with the distressing spreading of syphilis among the Hungarian (and the Austrian) population and he demanded political laws controlling the screening of demobilized soldiers (who were the main carriers of the disease). In his parliamentary speeches he pointed to the social crises caused by the growing numbers of veterans which problem had to be controlled by stringent health policies. His suggestions in the case of vets were explicitly motivated by eugenic ideas: he argued that only healthy ex-soldiers should be entitled to lands; those veterans, who do not have any venereal or inherited diseases (Teleki 2000, 44). As the president of *Népesedéspolitikai és Fajegészségügyi Társaság* (its vice president was Apáthy), which worked under the auspice of the Academy of Science, Teleki tried to apply the principles of eugenic in the activity of nursing disabled soldiers. The association sent circulars to hospitals, nursing-homes and private asylums which emphasized the importance of racial hygienic aspects in the process of taking care of ex-service men (Ablonczy 2005, 121).

Next to the problems addressed by Teleki, there was the question about the impacts of wars in general. Most of the Hungarian experts argued against wars since it lead to higher mortality among the cream of the nation’s stock: the possible annihilation of the young, courageous, fit and intelligent segments of the society would damage the racial quality of the nation (cf. MacMaster 2001, 41). Already in 1910, Zsigmond Fülöp labeled wars as the biggest danger to the nations since armed conflicts decimate the healthiest parts of the nations from time to time: “We should abolish conscription which holds back thousands or even millions of young males for years from founding a family. We should abolish the wars even more which destroy tens of thousands of young males or

make them disabled” (Fülöp 1910, 170-171). János Bársony (1860-1926), a prominent gynaecologist was on the same opinion, and he started to plan the eugenic regeneration of the post-war Hungarian society. In his work, titled *Eugenetik nach dem Kriege* he addressed again the fears about the social élites being outnumbered by the lower segments of the society. These worries were strengthened further by the demographic tendencies during the war since the conflict had destroyed “the healthy and strong men of the nation.” In his project of the recovery of the race he urged to increase the birthrate of the healthy segments of the society, he fought against the one-child system (which affected mainly the wealthier echelons), and he advocated protection of mothers. Géza von Hoffmann (1885-1921), the former Austrian vice-consulate in California also wanted to enhance the institution of marriage and he saw the spreading of venereal diseases as the biggest danger to Hungarian nation which was in extreme peril in the bloodshed of the war (Hoffmann 1914, 561; Turda 2006b, 114). During the war, Madzsar turned again his attention to the question of mother- and childcare. In his article, *Anyá- és csecsemővédelem* he writes desperately about the soaring death tolls on the battlefields and the same tendencies in the maternity homes in the home front (Madzsar 1914, 4).

Of course there were some eugenicists who praised the war as the great selector among nations with different racial quality. The biometrist Karl Pearson stressed that wars weed out the unfit individuals and races. Lajos Méhely’s career (1879-1953) as a radically anti-Semitic eugenicist began in 1915 when he wrote his book about the positive effects of wars on human communities. In his lectures and in his first book (*A háború biológiája*), the world-famous zoologist and herpetologist presented wars as the manifestation of the eternal laws of the nature: “Similar to animals, human species, races and nations live in constant competition and strife” (Méhely 1915, 23). Méhely sardonically argues that those who had not believe in the Darwinist

theory of struggle for survival were ultimately refuted by “twenty million heavily armed individuals getting ready to kill each other in all corners of the Earth” (Méhely 1915, 25). According to him, the main reason of the First World War was the unavoidable clash between the economically and culturally extremely developed Germans and the “big trafficker-people” English who manipulated the whole world for serving their imperialist interests. In the Social Darwinist conflict of the races those nations will win which are on the higher level of cultural achievements and which members “have the mentality of patriotism, loyalty, obedience, courage, solidarity towards co-nationals and who are ready for sacrifice themselves for the common good [of the race]” (Méhely 1915, 14). The bloody conflicts among the nations were more effective than any kind of eugenic measures drafted by doctors or politicians; wars purge out from the Earth those nations and races which biological qualities were too weak for survival.

3§ Eugenic moral on national ground

As I have mentioned, the eugenic movement of *fin de siècle* was not rife with concrete racial hygienist programs. One of its reasons was the inherent tensions and inconsistencies of the new discipline. Many contemporary critics emphasized that the principles of eugenics (which were often seen as the motley combination of biology, medical science and a bit social science) were rather shaky: “It is absurd to talk about the degeneration of human species comparing the data of only a few decades: such degeneration could be diagnosed only if we were comparing the bodies of

the Neanderthals and peoples of our present” (Péterfi 1911, 156). The most obvious controversy of eugenics was the inventing of causal relationships where there were no actual causal relations. The eugenicists suspected biological reasons beyond different social deviances (criminality, alcoholism, prostitution) and many individualistic mental problems (feeble-mindedness, infertility, drying up of mother’s milk, physical weakness), even though medical science was far away from the mapping of transmitting neurological diseases (cf. Siró 2003, 1738). Zoltán Rónai (1880-1940), a lawyer exhaustively enumerated the arbitrary hereditary correlations set up by their “colleagues”: they assumed genetic connections between the wealth of the parents and the height of their children or suicidal personality traits (Rónai 1911, 156ff). Concrete eugenic suggestions were also heavily criticized by many intellectuals. According to Leó Libermann (1852-1926), a biochemist, negative eugenic measures think only on the short term since they want to sterilize people who are not in accordance with some local conception of healthiness. His counterexample was the success of the Australian society which was consisted of human materials expelled from Europe for some reasons. Zsigmond Fülöp and Imre Káldor, on the other hand, argued against the positive eugenic proposals since they thought it impossible to designate a desirable set of traits for a whole community (Turda 2006a, 315).

The other reason of the lack of concrete eugenic programs was that the Hungarian experts were preoccupied mostly with establishing the theoretical and scientific background of the new discipline. They agreed that setting out at least the contours of a new collective moral (instead of the individualistic ethical systems) was the basic condition of implementing eugenic measures. The introducing of a completely new morality which focuses on the interests of the yet unborn future generations was the *condition sine qua non* of a successful eugenic program:

“First and foremost we have to achieve the general acceptance of eugenics as hopeful and important science. Then the principles of eugenics should penetrate into the hearts of those nations which will enjoy the effects of these principles” (Fülöp 1910, 171).

We can discern two elements of this change of moral paradigms. Firstly, the Hungarian eugenicists put down the wrong elements of contemporary ethics. The individualistic modern morality was able to create fake tensions between the well-being of the individual and the community. Instead of this ethics they wanted to elaborate a “national”, “racial”, “collectivist” or “social” (all of these names were in circulation in the eugenicists’ works) moral system which abolishes the ostensible dichotomy between the interests of the individual and the community and which adjust its norms to the interests of future generations (Apáthy 1911, 267).

The Hungarian experts adopted Galton’s visions about the new “eugenic religion” which will launched a “crusade” against the political, moral and social practices which hinder the emergence of the fittest races (Galton 1907, 1013). This program had a huge resonance among the Hungarian eugenicists since implementing a radical social reform was a crucial part of their theories. The ideas of a Galtonian “eugenic religion” blended with the reformist efforts of the Hungarian experts. Some of their critics about the moderateness of Galton’s proposals explicitly manifest the radicalism of the Hungarian efforts: they labeled Galton as a moderate idealist who opposed radical state-interventions (Fülöp 1910, 174; Fülöp 1911, 310; Turda 2006a, 313). Paradoxically, the Hungarian movement reversed the Galtonian program. According to him, the first step in working out the new discipline has to be the elaboration of the methodical and theoretical principles of eugenics. Then the scientists have to propose detailed practical programs which can be discussed for decades if it is necessary. And finally, the principles of eugenics have to be introduced to the mentality of nations like a new religion (Turda 2006a, 302). In contrast with this, the Hungarian

experts started with the last step of the Galtonian paradigm: first of all they wanted to work out the basis of new morality which would allow the introduction of eugenic principles. They agreed that there is no perspective for implementing any kind of eugenic programs until a “3000 year old, crumbling religious morality” and other unscientific, individualistic ethical systems reign. As a positive contemporary example for the possibility of “eugenic moral”, Apáthy cited the case of the United States where, with the introduction of sterilization laws, the collective interests of the future generations have overridden the individual rights for reproduction (Apáthy 1918, 691-692). Fülöp also praised the health care politics of the United States which was far ahead of European practices: “It is codified in some states of the North American Union that patients released from the hospital or psychiatry has to be examined by medical committee and this committee can order the sterilization if the individual possesses heritable inclination to criminality” (Fülöp 1911, 317). These medical practices can work only in a society which had somehow surpassed an individualistic ethical system and attained a sense of collective morality. Eugenics gained its legitimation from its dedication for the unborn future generation; as Apáthy put it, the eugenicists of the present have to become the administrators of the future generations (Apáthy 1914, 56).

Chapter 4.

Eugenics in the interwar period: an overview

1§ Anti-Semitism and racial exclusion

In the last chapter of my thesis I would like to assess the long term consequences of the early eugenic movement in interwar Hungarian health politics. This will be only a brief overview rather than a detailed elaboration of the overall intellectual milieu of the era. Instead of presenting eugenic theories of the era in their details, I would like to rely on a short discourse analysis about how eugenic ideas appeared in the Hungarian daily press in the 1930s. This examination will reveal the general popularity of eugenic thoughts and the possible reactions to them came from the wider public. After I briefly address the appearing of anti-Semitic elements in a line of eugenic programs I would like to study the reactions of the leading Hungarian newspapers to some eugenic ideas (first of all sterilization and marriage control) in the 30s. In this decade there was a big pressure on Hungarian health care politics to apply at least some eugenic measures since many Western European states (like England, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, France, some parts of Canada and Switzerland) had already enforced sterilization laws. Leading doctors and psychiatrists had to react somehow to the news that eugenic acts had come into effect in many European countries. I would like to discuss these reactions and I will show that even in the middle of the 1930s – apart from some radical racial hygienists, such as Méhely – most of the Hungarian doctors and psychiatrists distanced themselves both from sterilization and anti-Semitic statements.

As Marius Turda notes, the counter revolution of 1920 and the tragedy of Trianon represented an ideological turning point that markedly contributed to the resurgence of conservatism and racial nationalism within interwar Hungarian eugenics (Turda 2007, 216). On a certain level this statement is true of course. After the defeat and the huge territorial losses, scapegoat-searching was a necessary mechanism of the Hungarian society (Pók 2007, 378). From a eugenic aspect the Jewish question emerged in a way that whether the traditional Jewish racial qualities were compatible with the traditional Hungarian characteristics. While Count Teleki wanted to strengthen the patriotic Christian moral and to curb the Jewish influence in the sphere of economy and culture mainly because of actual-political reasons (Pók 2007, 380), Dezső Szabó (1879-1945), Gyula Sezekfű (1883-1995), Alajos Kovács (1877-1963) or Mihály Réz conceptualized the “Jewish question” from the aspect of national characteology. In their works the assimilation of the Jews were seen as a real danger to the Hungarian racial character. Szabó talked about the “immoral and wild Jewish imperialism” (Pók, 2007, 381), Réz contrasted the organic traditions of the Hungarian peasantry with the foreign urban mentality of the Jews, and Szekfű also portrayed them as a nation which will never be able to complete assimilation (Trencsényi 2011, 358, 368). Alajos Kovács, a leading statistician also argued that the assimilation of the Jews was superficial and deceptive and they were always “indifferent towards the national ideals of the Hungarians” (Kovács 1922). He advocated the popular theory of *Dolstoss* which accused the Jews that they were the fifth columns of the enemy in the front countries. “Historical experiences had revealed that the Jews, because of their religious and racial segregations, traditions and their bodily and mentality building are an indigestible race which could not be assimilated to the other elements of the nation” (Kovács, 1922). The most detailed account of anti-Semitic eugenics was worked out by Lajos Méhely in the 1920s, 1930s. He defined the Magyar race solely on the base of blood, and

he was up to measure the foreign contamination of the original, pure Hungarian blood. His conclusion was that the Jews were the furthest race from the Hungarians in biological sense so their blending led only to racial degeneration. This mixing of different bloods ended up in the radical change of the original Hungarian mentality (Paksy 2011, 126) which was the main cause of the defeat in the world war. Nevertheless, Méhely's theories about the rising and falling periods of races, and the correlation of these tendencies with the assimilation of different races were treated by scientists as merely political rather than scientifically verified ideas. László Bartucz (1885-1966), an anthropologist discredited Méhely's theories as political ones (Paksy 2011, 129), and Count Teleki and Lajos Nékám (1868-1957), a physician and psychiatrist, were also distanced themselves from him ("*Race-researching and racial hygienic society is established: Teleki will be the director and Nékám the president.*" *Hétfői Napló*, 1933, September 11th). Next to Méhely's field trips for searching the "original Hungarian blood", János Bársony also held that the blood of peasants in remote villages preserved the purest genetic stock of the Hungarian nation, and these theories similarly lacked any kind of scientific evidents (Kovács 1994, 67).

2§ Public resonance to sterilization and marriage control: the appearance of eugenic measures in the daily press

In the first years of the 1930s, eugenic discourses started to appear in the daily press more frequently. The reason of this renewed interest can be found in the European trend of national parliaments accepting sterilization laws in this period. The Hungarian press was concerned mainly with two eugenic measures: sterilization (compulsory and forced) and marriage control. It is quite obvious from the articles published in popular daily newspapers that these questions preoccupied a big chunk of the Hungarian society since the introducing of such measures would have affected the everyday life of thousands of people. If we are reviewing the articles published either by medical men or journalists we can find many controversial utterances. On the basic level there was the news from abroad (mainly from England, Germany, sometimes from Italy) reporting the negotiations or implementing of sterilization laws. *Az Est* (1932, June 13th) and the *Új Nemzedék* (1933, July 17th) reported about the negotiation of sterilization law in the British House of Commons. The House of Commons appointed a doctoral committee which task was to work out a bulletin about the most effective manners of sterilization. In its issue on 1933 July 30th *Az Est* reported that the medical committee appointed by the House of Common offered compulsory medical examination before marriage instead of sterilization, since the long term effects on human health of the latter were still unclear. There were more reports on the German developments. *Az Est* (1933 June 15th) cited the “stupendous” suggestion of a certain Dr. Vellguth about the forced-sterilization of lunatics, handicapped people, and those individuals who are prone to commit vicious crimes. But according to the article, the main emphasis in the professor’s program was on the sterilization of alien races (Jews, Blacks and Mongols) since the most important aim was the preservation of the purity of the German race. The *Új Nemzedék* (1933 August 10th) wrote about the establishment of a medical and

judiciary council of hereditary which had to examine the individual cases of sterilization in Germany. The *Esti Kurir* (1934 February 4th) published a short interview with Dr. Voronoff in which the professor labeled sterilization as medically unverified practice which should be applied only in some special individual cases. On June 17 1934 the *Pesti Napló* covered an interview with the Austrian geneticist, Eric Tschermak-Seysenegg who was called by the newspaper as “the true expert of racial science” and who held a lecture on race breeding in Budapest. He was talking about the impossibility of creating the pure German race, since every nation had been mixing with others for hundreds of years and the attempt to distill the pure German blood is just a part of a political program against the Jews.

Naturally, the reactions of Hungarian scientists and professors to the issue of sterilization and marriage control are more interesting to us. In 1932, László Benedek, a medical professor in the University of Debrecen had given a memorandum to then prime minister Gyula Károlyi in which he urged the introduction of eugenic health care policies (see: “*Hungarian doctors are urging sterilization law.*” *Az Est* 1933 August 3th). This triggered many controversial reactions both from scientists and journalists in the course of 1933. In *Pesti Napló* (1933 August 10th) Dr Artúr Radó labeled sterilization as the most effective and safest way of racial ennoblement. He draws on the well-known analogy of animal-breeding: if the development of a species is not influenced by the experts then the decadency of it is unavoidable since in itself the race always tends to mediocrity. But he soothed his readers that the advocates of sterilization do not want to make a vasectomy for everybody walking on the streets: in the first time they want to sterilize only the incorrigible criminals and those lunatics who can transmit their diseases (he stated that scientists mapped almost completely the circle of heritable diseases). He also revived the classic fears about growing fertility of the lower segments of the society: “The crown of the society is in steady decline while

its scum is constantly growing, and this dirt threatens with burying the Übermensch whose aim would be the improvement of the race.” Jenő Wallesz (1871-1943), a publicist, emphasized that sterilization will be effective only with radical social reforms. The state has to take care about the quality of life of the workers who live in overcrowded barracks and eat only potato and bread. Moreover, the real problem with the population of the world is not the too many poor people but the too many geniuses whose revolutionary ideas ruin the nations from time to time (*Újság* 1933 August 6). Károly Schaffer (1864-1939), a neurologist and psychiatrist also attacked Benedek’s proposal for implementing sterilization in the cases of criminals or patients with inheritable diseases. According to the article which quotes his opinion (*Az Est* 1933 August 3th) “modern doctors have been emphasizing for a long time the introduction of compulsory pre-marriage examinations which aim would be preventing the transmission of heritably diseases”. Schaffer’s opinion was that the knowledge on hereditary disease was not on the level of allowing the introduction of sterilization. In another article (“*Practical eugenics: The death penalty of 1,142.857 unborn children.*” *Pesti Napló* 1934 March 1st) he argued that feeble-mindedness does not necessarily affect the intellectual abilities of an individual; many neurotics are important and productive members of the society and their intellectual or artistic contributions often exceed the achievements of the others. Schaffer refused the assumption that sterilizing a few hundred “worthless” individuals would prevent the alleged racial decline of the Hungarian nation. In the issue on August 4th 1933, the *Esti Kurir* tried to clarify the difference between forced-sterilization and pre-marriage medical examinations. The article excluded the option of forced-sterilization, and stated that the only measure which really preoccupied Hungarian doctors was the possibility of pre-marriage examinations done by a medical council which could *propose* only voluntary sterilization to the engaged couple if it was necessary.

The other hotly debated topic of the contemporary articles was the occurrent political connotations of the eugenic measures. On 1933 September 13th *Az Est* published a longer interview with Count Pál Teleki and Lajos Nékám on the issue of the reorganization of the *Magyar Fajegészségtani és Népesedéspolitikai Társaság*. The article treats this reorganizing project as a widely known fact, but it was unclear what will be the concrete program of the society. In the interview Teleki laid down that forced-sterilization will not be the intention of the association: “If the public is so afraid and it buys all kind of hoax, then it really needs to be sterilized”. The other interviewed scientist, the psychiatrist Nékám distanced their ideas and projects from Méhely who produced rather politicized than scientifically proved theories. The article of the *Hétfői Napló* (1933 September 11th) also connected the projects of racial hygiene to Méhely’s thoughts, and it wrote that the main research field of the association would be the practical implications of sterilization. The newspaper stated that many leading scientists refused of joining to the society because they feared from its politicized nature. The *Újság* also worried about the politicization of racial hygienic programs and stated that the eugenic movement had lost its contact with both scientific development and Hungarian reality (“*Racialism as science and as politics.*” 1933 October 1th). Those who were advocated the protection of a given race mostly wanted to exclude only one race, namely the Jews. The article questioned the desirability of totally homogenous nations, and argues that the state should promote the miscegenation of different races instead of trying to separate human communities from each other. On the other hand, it accepted forced-sterilization only in special individual cases since “there are almost accurate index-numbers about heritability of epilepsy, migraine or stutter which can become serious diseases during subsequent generations.” Lajos Zilahy, a writer and advocate of eugenics, also wrote about the certainty of biological statistics, but he refused the forced-sterilization of criminals (Zilahy 1933).

Finally, the reaction of the Catholic Church to eugenics is extremely interesting. As I have mentioned, the Hungarian eugenicists condemned the religious-based restrictions on marriages and they wanted the same rights for the state. The *Nemzeti Újság* published a long article about Pius XI's opinion on eugenic efforts (1934 April 1st). Flóris Kúhár (1893-1943), a highly trained theologian, analyzed the papal encyclical's (*Casti Connubii* which dealt with the institution of marriage) suggestions about eugenics. Kúhár emphasized that the pope had approved the basic aims of eugenics (the improvement of humanity), but he firmly refused any kind of state interventions to the life of individuals or families. His main argument was based on the uncertainty of eugenic examinations, and Kúhár did not miss the chance to connect Pius XI' opinion to Schaffer's skepticism about eugenic knowledge. Paradoxically enough, Kúhár reconstructed the same argumentation as the eugenicists did against the church in *fin de siècle*: only the church has the right of implementing restrictions on marriage and the state should stay away from this blessed institutions. The cited Ádám Bochkor, the founder of *Katolikus Orvosok Szent Lukács Egyesülete* held that the declining birthrate in Hungary (which was one of the main concerns of eugenicist) is the result of neo-Malthusian measures (abortion and contraception) which gained more and more credibility in the society. In his view, abortion and contraception were unacceptable both from medical and religious reasons.

The last issue about eugenics in the 1930s which I want to address is the publication of a short-lived magazine, titled *Szociális Orvostudomány*. The title immediately discloses the main purpose of this magazine: as the editor, Tibor Verebély (1875-1941), a leading surgeon and pathologist, wrote in the first issue there had been notable changes in medical sciences during the last few decades which points from the curing of individual patients towards the health of the whole nation and society. "The future doctors should know the social problems of the nation and in

the solution of these tensions they must undertake the leading position” (Verebély 1934, 1). According to György Gortvay (1892-1966), a social-hygienist, an individual is a vital part of the “social symbiosis” so the new paradigm of medical science should focus on the body of society/nation. Social hygiene involves eugenics since the social and the biological improvement of the community have to go hand in hand (Gortvay 1934, 35). The biological degeneration (which manifests itself in the growing number of lunatics and neurotics) is directly derived from pauperization and dire working/living conditions. Medical interventions are not enough to stop the declining of societies; social circumstances also had to be changed.

We can conclude from these debates and articles that the general Hungarian readers were kind of confused about basic eugenic notions (this can be the reason of the many clarifying attempts on the notion of sterilization and marriage control). It seems that most of the readers did not really know what would have been the consequences of these measures. The general knowledge of the Hungarian public on eugenic issues was pretty moderate in the 1930s since most of the articles had to explain again and again the basic notions of eugenics (and they often define the discipline in itself) to their readers. It is obvious that the solutions offered by the new discipline was not generally accepted neither by the public neither by the leading Hungarian scientists. But it is also clear that the eugenic discourse was on the agenda and the newspapers had to explain again and again the connotations of the basic notion. The controversial assessments about the development of hereditary biology reveal the serious tensions which enmeshed the whole eugenic discourse. Moreover, we can palpate another interesting trend and this was the “spreading” of insanity as the main reason of criminality. The articles and short news from the 1930s which reported about smaller or bigger crimes many times referred to the “feeble-mindedness” of the criminals (whether he/she was a murderer, an assassin, or someone who walked naked in the streets

of Budapest). Since insanity was the result of inherited biological degeneration and many scientists talked about the growing numbers of lunatics throughout Europe, it was not a surprise that eugenic measure were seen as the leverage of stopping this growth. Moreover, it is worth to think about Schaffer's opinion who explicitly stated that criminal statistics did not reveal about the growth of crimes committed by lunatics (Schaffer 1934 March 1st). István Zsakó, who was the director of the *Országos Pszichiátriai és Neurológiai Intézet* between 1936-1945, also declared in an article of the *Újság* (1938 July 24) that the number of lunatics had not been growing in Hungary during the past few years. On the other hand, János Schnell (1893-1973), a doctor and special teacher, used the term "psychopath" in a very wide sense referring to all kinds of deviances which hinder the success of an individual in a society. He called "social disabled" those people who just cannot adjust to the difficulties of life and the requirements of society. He listed into this wide category individuals with sexual deviances, alcoholics, drug addicts, even pathological liars, brawlers, maniacs and neurotics (Schnell 1934, 30). These social pariahs can easily get in conflict with the norms of the society so it is more likely that they will commit a crime. The reason of the increasing number of these (social) psychopaths can be found in the changed quality of life after the world war (Schnell 1934, 31).

Conclusion

After presenting the brief history of the Hungarian eugenics movement since its very beginnings till the mid-1930s, we still have many questions to be answered. First of all, there is the problem of continuity. Since eugenics was in itself a program directed at future generations, and early Hungarian experts had made many allusions to a future society in which eugenic principles will be applied, we have to measure its efficacy. We have to measure that how the solutions offered by *fin de siècle* eugenicists passed the test of time. The experts of this period envisioned a society which organizes itself on the basis of a new “eugenic morality”. They hoped that later generations will internalize a new system of ethics which will compel them for applying eugenic measures. They expected a society whose members will acquire a high level of scientific and biological knowledge about the engineering of racial qualities. It is obvious from the articles of the 1930s that these utopian thoughts of the first generation of eugenicists were not fulfilled. Two or three decades after their proposed solutions to the phenomenon of social and national degeneration, the Hungarian society was still not ready for the implementation of eugenic measures. Moreover, as the studies published in *Szociális Orvostudomány* and the opinions of many Hungarian scientists indicated, the basic social reforms were *still* the main precondition of a successful eugenic program. The *circulus vitiosus* of much-needed social changes and the requirements of implementing eugenic principles were not overcome in the 1930s. Eugenicists who urged radical measures (such as sterilization) were marginalized among the Hungarian medical elite.

The same is true for the anti-Semitic eugenicists (such as Lajos Méhely). And this problem leads us to the question of the radical nationalization of Hungarian eugenics. On the one hand, it is true that an exclusionist trend of eugenics gained some ground in the interwar period, but most of the leading scientists labeled the ideas of this trend as unscientific theories which could not be verified through scientific methods. After 20-30 years of biological development which had been taking place since the elaboration of the first eugenic programs, most of Hungarian doctors treated the proposals of these theories with growing skepticism. On the other hand, it is also true that we should assess the relevance of the Hungarian eugenic movement in the introduction of compulsory medical examination before marriage which came into effect in 1941 as the part of the Third Anti-Jewish Law. The exploration of the political motivations and connotations of eugenics which led to the project of purging out the Jews from the body of the Hungarian nation can be the topic of another dissertation.

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