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Review of Promitzer et al. (eds), Health, Hygiene and Eugenics in Southeastern Europe to 1945

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ism. Within this framework, this new kind of universal morality implies more penetrating and dynamic power–knowledge nexuses for the control, monitoring and management of individuals and their bodies, according to political, ideological, cultural and economic necessities. From this perspective, in our endeavour to fully appreciate the implications of the contemporary “politics of life itself”, our task should actually be “to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body”.²

In conclusion, this book is without doubt a valuable tool for the understanding and analysis of contemporary biopolitics, which fulfils its main purpose; that is, to motivate scholars and “help make judgment possible” (259).

NOTES

- 1 Alan Petersen, “Risk, governance and the new public health”, in Alan Petersen & Robin Bunton (eds.), *Foucault, Health and Medicine*, London; New York: Routledge, 1997, 198.
- 2 Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, genealogy, history”, in Michel Foucault, *Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984: Vol. II; Aesthetics*, London: Penguin, 1998, 376.

Christian Promitzer, Sevasti Trubeta and Marius Turda (eds)

Health, Hygiene and Eugenics in Southeastern Europe to 1945

Budapest: Central European UP, 2011. 440 pp.

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Biopolitics, nationalism and the Balkans are the explosive ingredients of *Health, Hygiene and Eugenics in Southeastern Europe to 1945*. Focusing on hygiene – namely the discipline aiming at the prevention of disease and the promotion of health – and eugenics, which centred on the breeding of healthy children, this volume testifies to the recent expansion of the historiography of southeastern Europe to the fields of health discourses and policies. Its editors, as well as a number of the authors, have met at workshops – in 2004 in Budapest, in 2007 in Berlin, in 2008 in London and in 2010 in Athens. Apart from their personal publications on the history of health, hygiene and eugenics, they have contributed to another edited volume, published in 2007, entitled “*Blood and Homeland Blood*”: *Eugenics and Racial Nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900–1940*, while Marius Turda is the founder of the Working Group in the History of Race and Eugenics, which is based at Oxford Brookes University.

In the first part of *Health, Hygiene and Eugenics*, Paul Weindling offers an overview of interwar German eugenics beyond Germany, showing that scientific and social discourses were not contained within national borders. All the other contributions, though, with the exception of the historiographical last chapter, focus on national case studies. Brigitte Fuchs

describes Austro–Hungarian hygiene policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1874–1914) and the biased Austro–Hungarian anthropological and medical discourses on the nature of the Bosnian population. The practice of assigning specific diseases, as well as physical and mental characteristics, to particular ethnic groups was not, however, unique to imperial administrators. National authorities did the same regarding the ethnic minorities in their territories, as Christian Promitzer demonstrates in the case of the typhus epidemics in Bulgaria (1912–1944), which were associated with the Muslim populations. Infectious diseases provide the context for further explorations of public health policies, this time in Greece: Katerina Gardikas demonstrates how, in the early twentieth century, malaria played a part in the development of medical practice and the public health system, while Leda Papastefanaki focuses on tuberculosis to explore the history of occupational health in the first four decades of the same century.

The gradual establishment of the public health system in Greece, which is also described by Vassiliki Theodorou and Despina Karakatsani, was representative of a wider trend in southeastern Europe during the interwar period and was fuelled to a great extent by concerns about infectious diseases, high infant mortality, national and racial degeneration and demographic collapse. Željko Dugac takes into consideration both infectious diseases and childhood in his account of the public health initiatives in interwar Yugoslavia, where hygiene was paired with social medicine, while Kristina Popova and Theodorou and Karakatsani focus on childhood protection in Bulgaria and Greece, respectively. Although quite similar in both countries, the discourses and measures are analysed by Popova in the context of welfare, while by Theodorou and Karakatsani in the context of eugenics. Within this frame-

work, the health of the offspring was linked to the health of the parents, as exemplified in the discussions about prenuptial health certification in Bulgaria and Greece, as analysed by Gergana Mircheva and Sevasti Trubeta, respectively. Other key issues of the eugenic discourses, highlighted by the chapters in Part Three, were those of the birth rate, sterilisation and education. Marius Turda and Tudor Georgescu examine the Romanian and Saxon eugenic movements in Romania, demonstrating that different eugenic movements could exist in the same country, while Rory Yeomans provides an exciting account of natalism in the Independent State of Croatia (1941–1945), where eugenics blended with fascism and Catholicism. Finally, Maria Bucur, in part four, surveys the current trends in the historiography of southeastern Europe and reviews the contributions of the present volume, highlighting their strong points, potential and weaknesses.

Apart from offering abundant information on state health policies, legislation, professional discourses and institutions in Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Independent State of Croatia, the authors provide a fresh insight into nation-state building and modernisation in southeastern Europe, demonstrating how public health, hygiene and eugenics served as vehicles of nationalism and modernisation. As illustrated by Brigitte Fuchs, Christian Promitzer and Kristina Popova, hygienic and eugenic discourses equated modernity with the western lifestyle and gender relations and had strong Orientalist connotations, rejecting to a great extent the “backward” Ottoman legacies and traditional practices relating to illness and childrearing. Eugenics, specifically, is considered by most of the authors as a modern movement, irrespective of its representatives’ political or religious persuasion, on account of its modern scientific basis. However, as shown by Mirche-

va and Yeomans, the eugenic discourse sometimes stigmatised modernity as dangerous for the health of the nation and idealised tradition, peasant life and religion. The ambivalence of eugenics towards modernity is aptly summarised by Mircheva, who notices that eugenics was a “critic of modernisation, but in modern terms” (265). In order to interpret this ambivalence, we should think of “multiple modernities” (*ibid.*), but also of “multiple eugenics”. Indeed, the varied, often contrasting facets of eugenics, the broad political spectrum of their supporters, the interaction of health policies and discourses with specific political, social and cultural contexts stand out throughout the volume. The nature of discourses and policies was determined by gender, age, class, religion and ethnicity, with different policies being discussed and implemented for women, children, ethnic minorities, the lower classes and refugees.

Inspired by the theoretical framework of biopolitics, most authors analyse eugenics and hygiene as discipline discourses that reflected and created power relationships, and consider the role of science in the emergence of new ways to reach wider publics. However, the reactions and experiences of these publics are often missing from the analysis. Since nonofficial sources are scarce or nonexistent, the authors generally draw on official sources, which generally reflect the state policies and the medical discourses. Only in few cases do some aspects of “the other side of the story” appear. Papastefanaki, for example, attempts to shed some light on workers’ ideas, desires and demands by interpreting their indifference to or rejection of the health and safety measures as an act of “resistance to the ‘civilising’ process imposed from above by social reformers” (184). Yeomans, on the other hand, mentions that women and doctors in Yugoslavia and the Independent State of Croatia found ways to perform abortions, although abortion

was illegal and highly condemned by the Ustasha regime, and concludes that the pronatalism campaigns in the Independent State of Croatia failed not only because of the war-time circumstances, but also because many Croats were against the regime and its racial policies. Finally, Dugac argues that peasants accepted a number of public health programmes in rural Yugoslavia and “evolved from objects to active participants” through community work projects (232). However, he also stresses the problems faced by public health officials, who often encountered unhelpful local authorities and uneducated, poor peasants, who were unwilling to concede to or unable to understand hygienic propaganda and measures.

Even when accounts of the public attitudes are limited and based on the descriptions and interpretations offered by the contemporary authorities and press, they still highlight two important dimensions in the history of public health: on the one hand, the ambivalence of public responses to official policies, and on the other, the discrepancies between theory and practice. Eugenics especially was to a great extent confined to a rhetorical level and to educational and sanitary activities, as shown by Mircheva, Theodorou and Karakatsani, Trubeta, Turda and Georgescu. Apart from specific regional political, scientific and cultural reasons, the limited regulatory effect of eugenics had to do with the fact that scientists, state authorities, the church and the public were ambivalent or had opposing ideas towards eugenics, and consensus was not reached on whether it was the community or the individual that should receive priority. Then, as underlined by Bucur, the impact of eugenics did not lay so much in its direct results, but, in the role of the eugenic debates and discourses in shaping the state’s responsibilities towards citizens and of citizens towards the community.

One of the strong points of the volume is its transnational scope, which allows for an overall understanding of public health developments in southeastern Europe. Nevertheless, generalisations are not easy to make, as different contexts shaped different discourses and policies of modernisation and health. For this reason, the authors should have elucidated further, as Bucur stresses, as to what is meant by a number of common terms, which possibly did not have common meanings in each regional context. What could also be explored further is the relationship of eugenics and hygiene with mental illness and psychiatry. Apart from a limited number of references, mainly by Mircheva and Turda, a series of important issues in the history of hygiene and eugenics are not analysed, such as Bénédict Morel's theory of degeneration, the problem of mental retardation and the development of the mental hygiene movements in the USA and western Europe. A final point deserving of mention is the persistence of eugenics, albeit transformed, after the second world war. As Trubeta notices, in Greece the Eugenics Society was founded in 1953 and parliamentary discussions about prenuptial certification took place not only in the first part of the twentieth century, but also in 1958 and 1962.

All in all, this volume is an excellent example of the potential of the social history of medicine. Based on new types of sources and on the theoretical premise that scientific knowledge and practice are in constant interplay with the social environment, the social history of medicine can generate new and exciting understandings of broader developments in society.

Joachim Radkau

Wood: A History

Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012. 399 pp.

By Vaso Seirinidou

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Joachim Radkau's *Wood: A History* gets us back to basics, to the fundamental materials of human existence and the fundamental concerns of human societies. The book is about the interaction between wood and humans throughout history. It is a "tribute" to a material that, although it has marked human culture from the Stone Age to the early stages of industrialisation, has barely been transformed into a subject of historical narrative. However, the importance of *Wood* lies not mainly in the historical rehabilitation of a neglected material, but rather in the historicisation of the actual global concern about the ways societies deal with limited resources.

The book appeared first in German (in 2007) as the third volume in the *Stoffgeschichten* (Material' histories) series published by the Wissenschaftszentrum Umwelt (Environment Science Centre) of Augsburg University and, as the original German title indicates, it is not primarily a history of wood (as the English translation leads us to assume), but rather a history through wood. Radkau, a professor of history at Bielefeld University and pioneering figure of European environmental history, integrates his early research on German forest history in the eighteenth century and the global approach of his later work *Nature and Power* (first published in German in 2000) into an ambitious "big history" that puts wood, its natural properties and human attitudes towards it at the centre of the understanding of the coevolution of man and nature.