

Book Reviews

Marius Turda and Paul J Weindling (eds), *Blood and homeland: eugenics and racial nationalism in Central and Southeast Europe, 1900–1940*, Budapest and New York, Central European University Press, 2007, pp. ix, 467, £13.95 (paperback 978-963-7326-81-3).

Too little attention has been paid to the fact that the birth of scientific racism is contemporaneous with two other theories to which it is closely related: totemism and hysteria. All three follow the same themes and the same evolution. Hysteria moves man (woman in this case) closer to animality, in exactly the same way as totemism does. Racism dwells on external or internal accidents of fate (mental retardation, heredity, alcoholism) supposedly responsible for significant differences between social groups. As with hysteria, racism makes use of sexual determinism and, as with totemism, it is interested in physiological paternity.

It is this metaphor for nature, or this “*parti de la nature*”, as Claude Lévi-Strauss calls it, a veritable “touchstone enabling the segregation of the savage from the civilized within culture itself”, which is addressed by some twenty contributions to this pioneering volume, half emanating from Central and Eastern European researchers. The little-understood contribution of local eugenicists, their concept of the nation and their role as experts, are explored by these writers through the history of the sciences, medicine, the social sciences and through cultural and political history. And more importantly, they examine the particular way in which German, British or French eugenics, not to mention Italian biotypology, were “redesigned” in order to adapt them to new contexts.

The editors tell us that in Central and Eastern Europe, eugenics and national racism were the cornerstones used in building the

nation and the state. Far from giving in to the siren call of the forces of reaction, this “*parti de la nature*” brought together two modern and highly toxic substances: eugenics and ultra nationalism. And doubtless the rise, in the wake of a Nazified Germany, of racist nationalisms during the 1930s in Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania, and the racist rantings of certain Croatian ideologues also broadcast the familiar and sinister message. But was this radicalism in speech really useful as ideological cement for the State? Herein lies one of the important issues addressed by this book. In Estonia for example, the ideological mountain inspired by Germany gave birth in fact to a mouse “in the Scandinavian model”. Everywhere, people were getting carried away: sterilization! legal castration! eugenic abortion! And what next? In Hungary before Horthy (1920), eugenics was merely a chapter in social medicine; in Bulgaria, where eugenicist extremism was inspired by the exterminating lunacy of a Binet-Sanglé, the State adopted a marriage law of Nazi inspiration but with only the prenuptial certificate surviving; in Poland, where eugenicists took over the Ministry of Health created in 1918 (abolished six years later), the church and indifference on the part of politicians aborted the adoption of the medical examination prior to marriage; again in Poland, the same Jewish physicians who were infatuated with social Darwinism (under the pretext that eugenics would have secured an excellent defense against assimilation) nevertheless lined up behind a proposal for a very moderate programme of preventive and positive eugenics. The conclusion is unavoidable: radical views produce modest achievements. The stilted method of examining countries individually runs the risk of simply finding repetitions. Yet, in this case, some good comes out of this shortcoming. Indeed, it is clear that everywhere and in each

case, “eugenics has been characterized by a discrepancy between the utopian character of its ambitions and the actual possibilities for the realization of its projects”.

Everywhere, except in Vienna. Of course, Vienna is Catholic; the Vienna of the *Ständestaat* could not have gone beyond the prenuptial certificate, “modest instrument for the relatively pain-free integration of eugenics in the ‘Catholic milieu’”. And neither could socialist Vienna, which would never have gone over to the other side of the mirror. Still, long ready for the worst, thanks in particular to its university chair in anthropology, Nazi Vienna would not have such scruples following the *Anschluss*. From 1938, the innovative creation of a Department for Policy on Heredity and Race marked the beginning of the large-scale implementation of Austrian racial policy. This included the register of heredity, bringing together 767,000 files in March 1944, 6000 sterilizations (an estimation) between 1940 and 1945, 3200 people transported and euthanized at the *Steinhof* (the largest psychiatric hospital in the city) in the summer of 1940, 1850 children incarcerated at the *Spielgelgrund*, 789 of whom were killed by poison, lack of care, hunger or infection. Nothing escaped the Viennese.

Bertrand Russell believed that “what stands in the way (of introducing eugenic measures) is democracy”. The author of *Marriage and morals* (1920) certainly did not know that in 1919, opposed to German racial hygiene, a democratic and progressive eugenics became the “official doctrine” of the newly formed Czechoslovakian Republic. And it was in Prague, starting in 1933, that the opposition of German-speaking biologists to Hitlerian racism was organized.

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Leslie J Reagan, Nancy Tomes, and Paula A Treichler (eds), *Medicine's moving pictures: medicine, health, and bodies in*

American film and television, Rochester Series in Medical History, University of Rochester Press, 2007, pp. ix, 343, £50.00, \$85.00 (hardback 978-1-58046-234-1).

Somewhere between the journal issue with diverse contents and the specialist monograph lies the essay collection, usually born in a welter of enthusiasm that the concerns of a coterie of researchers are coming of age. Scholars often take the opportunity to develop interesting lines of research at the periphery of their principal concerns, or to publish an excerpt from a longer line of investigation. Both can individually be valuable. But such volumes often implicitly pose a question: do the contributions together denote a common concern, or is the volume's title a flag of convenience? The editors' argument for the unity of this particular volume is that medical films and television can and should be considered as a distinct genre.

Martin Pernick, who did so much to open the eyes of medical historians to the value of studying films with *The black stork* (1996), elegantly opens the volume with his reflections on the interrelations of these two subjects in the early twentieth century. This impressively compact contribution illustrates the ways in which medical films were products of their age, exemplifying “a highly technological romanticism”. Two further contributions focus on health education films. John Parascandola's essay is about the tension between moral and medical discourse in US Public Health Service VD films, ostensibly from the Second World War, though ranging back to the Great War. This account, structured around extended summaries of half a dozen films, nicely illustrates the universal features of health education film production, and also what is specific to VD. Leslie Reagan's contribution is an entirely successful fusion of medical and film history, built around a case study of *Breast self-examination*, a 1950 health education film, compared with a film for physicians, *Breast cancer, the problem of early diagnosis* (1949), both made by the American Cancer Society.