

Fearing for the Nation: Biopolitics in Central and Eastern Europe in the 20th Century

Veranstalter: Imre Kertész Kolleg Jena

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Foucauldian biopolitics, a concept describing a new way to govern citizens by considering individuals as part of populations, has been adopted in social sciences and humanities since the mid-1970s. The organizers of this year's annual conference at the Imre Kertész Kolleg Jena drew on this concept to study the idea of the „endangered nation“ throughout the 20th century. The central theme of the two-day encounter was the concept of biopolitics and its specificities in Central and Eastern Europe. The conference itself brought together approximately 30 leading academic researchers to present and discuss original and unpublished results of their work in the field of the administration of life by targeting individuals, populations, and their environs. Papers addressed such diverse topics as case studies to address the interwar period, legacies of National Socialism, as well as post-war developments relevant to issues of biopolitics.

The first panel of the conference focused family and parenthood. ISABEL HEINEMANN (Münster) pointed out expert debates on contraception, sterilization, and abortion in the Federal Republic of Germany from the 1950s to 1970s. Heinemann illustrated how the concept of motherhood with its biopolitical content shaped during National Socialism continued to influence the perception of reproduction after 1945. She denoted double standards present in discourse when, on the one hand, women were denied legal abortion on demand and individual's right to decide while, on the other hand, experts supported the idea of voluntary sterilizations to prevent the spread of genetic mutations and enhance a healthy population for the sake of the nation. Heinemann thus illustrated biopolitical concepts present at that time using early debates on contraception and sterilization. She stressed the individual's responsibility towards society, women's position as

passive recipients and natural reproducers, as well as ideas of eugenic value and selective pronatalism.

CORINA DOBOȘ's (Bucharest) paper moved the focus to the formation of population expertise knowledge in 1960s Romania, which was related to the decreasing mortality as well as birth rate and the emergence of the nuclear family model. The use of contraceptive methods and the political decision to liberalize abortion on request in 1957 contributed to a noticeable decrease in fertility rates in Romania. In scientific discourse, state intervention was called for, population dynamics were connected to the economic development of the state socialist regime in Romania, and access to abortion without prior expert consultation was criticised. The following paper by HELENE CARLBÄCK (Södertörn) focused on gendered historical narrative and the question of fatherhood in late Soviet Russia. Carlbäck challenged the stereotype of the Soviet man portrayed as a marginalized or absent father and provided a more diversified picture as well as an east-west comparison of fatherhood. According to an analysis of informants' testimonies, the author stressed that the father in 1960s-1970s Soviet Russia as of a man in control of his emotions, who was to a more significant extent present at home and who did a more substantial proportion of housework in comparison to the urban Western European man. Carlbäck argued that the concept of the absent father was rather a cultural construction.

The second panel was devoted to biopolitics and the discourse on sexuality. It focused on a discussion of pronatalism on a national and global level. AGATA IGNACIUK (Warsaw) analyzed the expert discourse on abortion in post-war Poland in popular medical literature. Abortion was continuously liberalized in Poland since the 1930s, and from 1959 it was also executable on the basis of the definition of „difficult life circumstances“. Since then was abortion exercised and classified rather as social than medical, which would require proper medical examination and report. Ignaciuk remarked that a medical journal on gynecology continuously referred to medicalized abortion as a danger-

ous, „harmful surgery“ with negative consequences for women. Ignaciuk underlined the transition from the liberal approach followed by abortion restrictions and anti-abortion law in 1993, which omitted the definition of „difficult life circumstances“ when referring to the transition period of Poland at the beginning of the 1990s. Abortion then became a crucial topic in the positioning and ideological self-determination of political parties. WANNES DUPONT (Yale) referred to the issue of birth control from the perspective of global Catholicism in the years 1945-1965. He demonstrated how the development of global population issues during the 1940s and 1950s intensified the church's interest in sexual matters, a process that culminated in the encyclical *Humanae vitae* in 1968 regarding marriage, responsible parenthood, and the rejection of artificial contraception. CHRISTIANNE BRENNER (München) took a closer look at pronatalism and sexuality in socialist Czechoslovakia in the work of the Sexological Institute. As her analysis made clear, the 1960s and 1970s saw a strong family-oriented conservatism and a discourse of moral crisis preoccupied with teenage sex, early marriages and high abortion as well as divorce rates. This conservatism was reflected in education about marriage and parenthood as well as in classes for bridal couples or counseling centers for couples. Only sexuality which led to reproduction in the traditional family was considered legitimate. Nevertheless, access to abortion was viewed as a family- or marriage-stabilizing measure and thus supported. Moreover, establishing abortion commissions represented an instrument of state control of fertility and, therefore, of women's bodies.

The conference's keynote speaker, BARBARA KLICH-KLUCZEWSKA (Krakow), presented her speech in a more general scope of thoughts about the ambiguous concept of biopolitics. She referred to Foucault's description of biopolitics as a form of exercising power, a system in which natural sciences, humanities, and the normative concepts determine political goals. She highlighted the difference between biopolitics practiced under democratic and authoritarian conditions. Klich-Kluczewska consequently emphasized

the neutral notion of Foucault's concept of power and shifted to participative biopolitics, i.e. soft policy. In contrast to the repressive system (which imposed restrictions), soft policy suggested specific solutions (i.e. access to birth control and thus regulating one's fertility). The authority operating within this framework produced positive effects rather than negative repression. At the same time, she pointed out persuasion versus coercion, echos of eugenic policy, optimization of resources, disciplining, body controlling, and translation of specialized knowledge roofed with a category of biopolitics.

MARIUS TURDA's (Oxford) introduction of the third panel moved the conference thematically to eugenics. According to Turda, eugenics amounted to a broader conception of public welfare, health care, social hygiene, etc. The first panelist of the 3rd section on eugenics and the politics of reproduction, HERWIG CZECH (Vienna), presented specificities of eugenics and race hygiene in interwar Austria. His presentation addressed eugenic thoughts that were present in Austria across the entire political spectrum, ranging from open racism and anti-Semitism, to population and catholic concepts of family, and to socialist welfare-state conception. He especially referred to the experiment in Red Vienna, or thoughts about the management of population as human capital. Moreover, he questioned the existence of one unitary eugenic movement, and therefore he preferred to deal with several different movements present in interwar Austria. RADKA ŠUSTROVÁ (Prague) focused on a post-war neo-eugenic era in Czechoslovakia and conceptualized eugenics from the social-historical point of view. She identified a shift from eugenics to the „quality of the population“ and referred to marriage and genetic counseling offices as a tool of family and population planning policy. According to her, a closer look revealed the continuity of eugenics in Czechoslovakia during the 20th century, though neo-eugenics rather concerned themselves with perceived cultural and social defects, i.e. poverty, criminality, alcoholism, etc. ATTILA MELEGH's (Budapest) talk offered a historical analysis of anti-migrant demographic nationalism in current Hungary.

He explained it as a combination of selective anti-immigration discourses and regulations with selective, state-sponsored pronatalism supporting high-quality parents. The background of these policies stood for a dramatic fertility drop.

ŁUKASZ MIESZKOWSKI (Warsaw) launched the fourth panel devoted to the question of epidemics and the politics of hygiene. He offered an overview and interpretation of the Polish struggle against a sanitary and epidemiological crisis in the aftermath of the Great War in the years 1919–1922. He focused on the theory and practice of disinfection and bathing trains, which caused sometimes counterproductive effects. A disinfector car used to remove lice and their eggs from clothes was an essential part of this train. In accordance with his primary research question, Mieszkowski concluded that the actual effect of disinfection and bathing trains could be seen as a demonstration of one of the plague features, i.e. an exaggeration.

MALTE THIEßEN (Münster) traced the development of compulsory vaccination throughout 20th century Germany, thus looking closer at five different political systems: imperial Germany, Weimar Republic, Third Reich, Federal Republic of Germany and German Democratic Republic. In the outcome, he argued that compulsory vaccination should not be viewed only as a public health measure, but also as a specific social norm establishing social order. He pointed out similarities of both German states during the Cold War. EWELINA SZPAK (Warsaw) provided an overview of the specific health policy development regarding infectious disease epidemics that became a serious social issue in post-World War II Poland. Detailed enumeration of state introduced prophylaxis measures included disease registration, its statistics, the creation of rural healthcare centers and delivery rooms, the hospitalization of childbirth, granted medical service, and above all obligatory vaccination. The focus on rural areas manifested specific problems like a lack of peasant's trust regarding new state institutions but also fear, ignorance, and resistance to prescribed obligatory hospitalizations and other measures.

The last panel brought together papers on the topic of childhood and poverty. FRIEDERIKE KIND-KOVÁCS (Regensburg) followed the interpretation of humanitarian intervention as a form of biopolitics and presented her research on the starving children of Budapest who became recipients of a transatlantic humanitarian relief in the aftermath of World War I. She exposed how quantitative measures and standardized tools were used to compile data on children's bodies and intervene in the body, thus arguing that techniques of power were being applied to malnourished children. She demonstrated Foucauldian children's medical examinations, their social sorting, seizing power over them, and surveilling them. MELANIE ARNDT (Regensburg) continued in revealing the biopolitical nature of aid on the example of the so-called Chernobyl children. Her presentation emphasized how blurry the category of Chernobyl children was. Arndt stressed that Chernobyl children represented a reference point to the disaster and never lost its relations to assumed poorness.

The conference's final closing remarks were delivered by MELISSA FEINBERG (Rutgers), MANUELA BOATCĂ (Freiburg) and JOACHIN VON PUTTKAMER (Jena). The panellists made general observations on presented papers, named deficiencies and raised further questions concerning biopolitics. The discussion emphasized continuities or, as Melissa Feinberg remarked, „the more things changed, the more things stayed,” and eugenic echoes in the 21st century. These are visible in a current panic on migration, contemporary populist pronatalism, ethnic nationalism, and recent attacks on gender theory or the desire of the state to control bodies. They emphasized the role of the state with its monopoly of structural violence, how state and society are managing the biopolitical policies, and their connection to race and gender. Besides the state, the role of the nation as an imagined community to reproduce was highlighted. Finally, they pointed out many similarities between east and west, authoritarian state solution versus liberal solutions. However, what stayed partially unanswered was the answer to the question of how individuals navigated themselves? Resistance to biopol-

itics was highlighted only in the case of vaccination, thus leaving a space for further inquiry of people's actions, their possibilities, and choices.

Conference overview:

Welcome and Introduction
Michal Kopeček (Jena)

Panel I: Family and Planned Parenthood
Chair: Paweł Machcewicz (Jena)

Isabel Heinemann (Münster): The Fallout of Nazi Reproductive Policies: Family, Motherhood and Nation during and after World War II

Corina Dobos (Bucharest): Reproductive Behavior Research in 1960s Romania: Coping with Socialist Realities

Helene Carlbäck (Södertörn): What Makes a Good Father? Ideals, Attitudes and Lived Experiences in Late Soviet Russia, 1955-1985

Discussant: Peter Hallama (Bern)

Panel II: Biopolitics and Discourses on Sexuality
Chair: Joshua Sanborn (Jena)

Agata Ignaciuk (Warsaw): Beyond „Harmful Surgery”: Medical Debates about Abortion in Poland, 1927-1993

Wannes Dupont (Yale): On Blind Faith and Divine Providence: Global Catholicism and the „Population Bomb” (1945-1965)

Christiane Brenner (München): Doing It the Right Way: Pronatalism and Sexuality in Socialist Czechoslovakia

Discussant: Eszter Varsa (Regensburg)

Keynote
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Barbara Klich-Kluczevska (Krakow): Biopolitics in Post-war Poland and East Central Europe

Panel III: Eugenics and the Politics of Reproduction
Chair: Agnieszka Jagodzińska (Jena)

Herwig Czech (Vienna): Regenerating the Nation: Eugenics and Race Hygiene in Post-WWI Austria

Radka Šustrová (Prague): A Second Chapter: Eugenics in Czechoslovakia beyond 1945

Attila Melegh (Budapest): The Fear of Population Replacement: From Socialist Modernisation to Biopolitical Panic

Discussant: Marius Turda (Oxford)

Pannel IV: Epidemics and the Politics of Hygiene
Chair: Paul Hanebrink (Jena)

Łukasz Mieszkowski (Warsaw): Trains of Disinfection: Fighting Lice on Polish railroads, 1919-1922

Malte Thießen (Münster): Fearing for the Nation and Fearing the Nation: Compulsory Vaccination in 20th century Germany

Ewelina Szpak (Warsaw): Epidemics and Disease Control in Poland

Discussant: Paul Weindling (Oxford)

Panel V Childhood and Poverty

Friederike Kind-Kovács (Regensburg): The Biopolitics of Hunger: Managing Children's Starving Bodies after the Great War

Till Kössler (Halle): The Spanish Discourse on Child Poverty during the 1930s

Melanie Arndt (Regensburg): Genuine Chernobyl Child? Perceptions of Victimhood

Discussant: Anca Cretu (Florence)

Final Closing Remarks

Melissa Feinberg (Rutgers) / Manuela Boatcă (Freiburg) / Joachim von Puttkamer (Jena)

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