

Eugenics, Race and Psychiatry in the Baltic States: A Trans-National Perspective 1900-1945

Veranstalter: Björn Felder, University of Tübingen; Andreas Lawaty, Nordost-Institute Lüneburg; Marius Turda, Oxford Brookes University; Ken Kalling, Estonian University of Life Science

Datum, Ort: 07.05.2009–08.05.2009, Riga

Bericht von: Katharina Kreuder-Sonnen, Tübingen

While eugenics' international scope is an increasingly common research avenue, its impact on the Baltic States has remained largely unexplored territory. This conference convened at the Goethe Institute in Riga, offered a starting point for widening the geographical scope of research on the history of eugenics. The conference's aim was to focus on eugenics and racial anthropology in the region, and to locate them in their European context by illuminating the various means and themes of scientific networking and the transfer of knowledge. The conference was organized by Björn Felder (University of Tübingen) in collaboration with Andreas Lawaty from Nordost-Institute in Lüneburg, Marius Turda from Oxford Brookes University and Ken Kalling from the Estonian University of Life Science. It was generously financed by the Gerda Henkel Stiftung, the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung as well as the Nordost-Institute and Oxford Brookes University.

In his opening key note address PAUL WEINDLING (Oxford) analyzed the development of eugenics and racial anthropology within the context of emerging and evolving nation states. The transformation from imperial dynasties to democracies pursuing the principle of national self determination intensified anthropological research on national populations. During the First World War frequently anthropological traditions turned into biological determinism. Although continuously criticized and challenged, biologized thinking gained great influence; so too in Central, Eastern and South-eastern Europe. Paul Weindling defined one of the conference's key aims as lying with the analysis of the impact biological models of human kind, culture, and so-

cial processes had on different national contexts.

KEN KALLING (Tartu) discussed the application of eugenics in Estonia, and emphasized that the biologization of Estonian national identity in the new born interwar state was the context within which eugenic legislation (including sterilization) was initiated in the 1930s. JURIS SALAKS (Riga) outlined the history of the Latvian National Institute for the Study of Living Strength. The paper contextualized the creation of the short-lived institute (1939-1940) within the wider debates on Latvia's interwar demographic patterns. The institute conducted anthropological research on Latvians and promoted positive eugenics via educational policies and measures such as exhibitions and marriage counseling. Whereas Juris Salaks emphasized the non-racist character of eugenics in Latvia, BJÖRN FELDER (Tübingen), moreover, pointed to the strong influence of German racial hygiene on the Latvian eugenic project. Comparable to the Estonian case, his paper stressed an ethno-nationalist conception of the Latvian nation. As in other newly created nation states in Eastern Europe, Latvian scientists created a racial identity for the Latvian nation after 1918 that was based on contemporary race anthropological paradigms. Concentrating on the case study offered by the Latvian anthropologist and eugenicist Jēkabs Pīmanis, Felder also pointed to the strong ties between eugenics and racial anthropology.

ERKI TAMMISAAR (Tartu) described the impact Karl Ernst von Bear had on the development of Russian anthropological research. Von Bear's concept of „nature's household“ foresaw the extinction of peoples living in the northern part of the globe. He, therefore, advocated the collection of ethnographical and anthropological objects in order to document the history of mankind for future generations. Karl Ernst von Bear initiated such collections as well as anthropological research in Tsarist Russia in the mid-19th century. CHRISTIAN PROMITZER (Graz) examined the role of the Lithuanian Jonas Basanavičius in Bulgarian racial anthropology. Basanavičius was the first to conduct large scale anthropological research projects on the Bulgarian population, and developed the so called Thracian theo-

ry to evidence the Bulgarians' alleged non-Slavic roots, which he subsequently used to construct a biological link between Lithuanians and Bulgarians. LEIU HEAPOST (Tallin) outlined the development of anthropological research on Estonians from the beginning of the 19th century into the present. She focused on the changing amount of Mongolian influence that scientists ascribed to the anthropological composition of Estonians.

VLADIMIR KUZNECOVS (Riga) in contrast to Björn Felder, Kuznecovs stressed the differences between Latvian and German eugenics. Analyzing the Latvian Health Law of 1937, which included eugenic legislation, the paper pointed to the voluntary nature of abortion and sterilization in Latvia. The paper also revealed parallels in the eugenic and psychiatric paradigms used by Latvian and German scientists. The development of „Lithuanian Psychiatry from 1918 to 1940“ was explored by ARUNAS GERMANAVICIUS (Vilnius), who is the very first to study this topic and was motivated by the conference's call for papers. Germanavicius presented two Lithuanian schools of psychiatry; one, dominated by clinical psychiatry, based at the University of Vilnius and, second, the focus on social psychiatry advocated by the University of Kaunas. The paper undertook a demythologization of the University of Kaunas' prominent psychiatrist Juozas Blažys. It discussed both his skepticism towards biological determinism on the grounds of genetic research as well as his promotion of sterilization in order to prevent social degeneration. OCTAVIAN BUDA (Bucharest) shed new light on the figure of Emil Kreapelin by placing him within the German racial discourse of his time and analyzing his contribution to the construction of German national superiority.

MAIJA RUNCIS (Södertörn) looked at Swedish eugenics between 1935 and 1976 from a gender perspective. Stating that the majority of those sterilized were women, her paper analyzed the discourse on motherhood that singled out those women who failed to correspond to constructed moral and social standards - and who were sterilized on these grounds. Since the Swedish law prohibited forced sterilization, persons concerned signed their own applications. Yet, the paper poin-

ted out that there were techniques of indirect coercion. INETA LIPŠA (Riga) addressed public debates on contraception and abortion in interwar Latvia. Her paper investigated the left-wing women movements' attempts to popularize contraceptives and promote legal abortion opposed by pro-natalist nationalists warning of the Latvian nation's extinction. The second half of the 1930s saw a shift towards the restrictive and pro-natalist regulation of the issue. KATRIN STEFFEN (Lüneburg) examined the debate on public health, hygiene, reproduction, and anthropology within the Polish Jewish society that created a „Jewish biological identity“. While eugenics was positively viewed as a way to improve the Jewish population, the paper also stressed the plurality within „Jewish eugenics“ that ranged from the belief in Jewish superiority to the fear of a Jewish population degenerating in the ghettos - and which had to be fought with both positive and negative eugenic measures.

VOLKER ROELCKE (Gießen) focused the influence German racial hygiene had on post-war genetics in the USA, Britain and Germany. Roelcke stressed the continuity of eugenic thinking after 1945 by focusing on genetics as its crucial discipline. Volker Roelcke illustrated the international scientific authority of research programs that were motivated by eugenic ideas. He showed the international prevalence of Ernst Rüdin's psychiatric genetics through scientists like Eliot Slater, Franz Kallmann and Erik Essen-Möller - all of whom contributed to eugenic policies in their various national contexts while continuing their genetic research well into the 1960s. This reveals that the strong link between science and politics cannot be limited to (German) eugenics before 1945. VSEVOLOD BASHKUEV (Ulan-Ude) examined the eradication of syphilis in Buryat-Mongolia from 1923-1928 as an element of the frontier region's social modernization. A Russian anti-syphilis campaign tried to fight the disease by repelling traditional social and cultural practices. In 1928 Russian physicians cooperated with a German research group in Mongolia to advance clinical research into the disease. A lively discussion followed Vsevolod Bashkuev's positive assessment of such soci-

al modernization on the Mongolian periphery. Björn Felder emphasized the aspects of ethnic suppression and coercion, the belief in Soviet superiority, and the alleged inferiority of indigenous people guiding the acting physicians and politicians and the possible attempt to destroy the Buriat culture by „fighting“ syphilis. In contrast, Vsevolod Bashkuev stressed the historical reality of the eradication of syphilis among Buryat-Mongols. Bashkuev's classification of the anti-syphilis campaign as non racist was also questioned by Volker Roelcke who pointed to the necessity of historicizing syphilis. It would allow analyzing if and how this disease was connected to the Buryat-Mongols as an ethnic group or not.

ANNE COTTEBRUNE (Gießen) investigated Eliot Slater, who had popularized psychiatric genetics in Great Britain after studying at Ernst Rüdin's institute in Munich. The paper questioned Slater's reputation as a clear opponent to Nazi eugenics by showing that he did not distance himself from National Socialist racial hygiene. Cottebrune highlighted the fact that this did not constrain his career in Great Britain and the successful international transfer of psychiatric genetics, even after the Second World War. MACIEJ GÓRNY (Berlin) offered interesting insights into the „First World War and National Characterology in East-Central Europe“. The paper depicted how physicians and anthropologists in France, Germany, Russia and Poland defined their nation's supposed character by using racial and psychological categories. CORINA PALASAN (University of Bucharest) examined research on juvenile delinquency in Romania from 1919-1947. The paper described how criminality was explained by supposedly heredity features. In order to prevent criminality, the therapeutic and educational measures were recommended for mentally ill persons as well as eugenic regulations such as segregation and sterilization.

KAMILA UZARCYK (Wrocław) challenged dominant views on Polish eugenics in her paper. It emphasized the importance of neolamarckist thinking in Poland, and characterized the Polish eugenic movement of the 1920s as social rather than racial hygiene. Without denying a growing impact of German racial hygiene, and studying the Polish eugenic law

of the late 1930s, the paper concluded that German influences on Polish eugenics had been overestimated. FLORIAN MILDENBERGER (Frankfurt an der Oder) showed by the example of Jakob von Uexküll that racism and anti-Semitism are not exclusively linked to Darwinism, but can be found in Uexküll's neo-vitalist „state biology“. MICHAL SIMUNEK (Prague) caught the audience's attention with a 1944 Nazi propaganda movie on Gregor Mendel and using his theory to propagate biological determinism.

In his concluding remarks PAUL WEINDLING traced future research avenues into the history of eugenics in the Baltic States. He proposed further studies into the international interaction of Baltic eugenicists, and enhanced systematic comparisons of eugenic movements in the Baltics with other European countries. Furthermore, he emphasized that the transfer of eugenic ideas should not only be looked at from a West-East perspective, but that the reverse might also be found. Complementing this view, MARIUS TURDA advocated the study of eugenics' interdisciplinary aspects and highlighted the conceptual difficulties surrounding the international variety of eugenic discourses. He also proposed that one must look at both continuities and discontinuities between the pre- and post 1945 periods. Moreover, eugenics should be placed within wider the intellectual history of ideas in order to consider their appropriate cultural and political contexts. With regards to research on the Baltic States, Marius Turda proposed a shift in focus from individual agents to larger communities of scientists. BJÖRN FELDER insisted on the importance of the Baltic states for the history of eugenics. He pointed out that research should study the question of eugenics and minorities and go beyond the 1945 watershed as well as include Soviet science.

The wide variety of papers presented at this conference evidences the conformity of scientific *Denkstile* concerning racial anthropology and eugenics. Interpretations might differ, but the basic paradigms of racial anthropology and eugenics were themselves not questioned. Furthermore, racial discourses were influencing the national debates. Obviously every Eastern European nation to achieve

statehood after 1918 longed for a racial identity following the contemporary anthropological paradigms.

The conference presented a first chance to bring together the newest research on the history of eugenics, race and psychiatry in the Baltic States, and hoped to encourage further work in this still little known field of study. The need to move the focus away from Western Europe and the US as well as the promising insights of an international comparative perspective became clear. Exploring the history of persons and institutions involved in eugenics, anthropology or psychiatry in the Baltic States is a first and necessary step for the study of these issues in the region. Developments in methodological and theoretical frameworks used to contextualize these developments within their political, social and cultural national and international environments will substantially enhance our understanding of the history of eugenics, race and psychiatry in general.

Conference overview:

Opening Speech Paul Weindling (Oxford Brookes University)

Panel 1 - Eugenics in the Baltic States

Chair: Marius Turda (Oxford Brookes University)

Ken Kalling (University of Tartu)

The Application of Eugenics in Estonia

Rita Gravere & Juris Salaks (Museum for the History of Medicine, Riga)

The National Living Power Research Institute in Latvia and its Problems

Björn Felder (University of Tübingen):

Eugenics and Racial Identity in Latvia: Scientific Transfer and European Zeitgeist

Panel 2 - Racial Anthropology in the Baltics

Chair: Ken Kalling (University of Tartu)

Erki Tammissaar (University of Tartu)

The role of K. E. v. Baer in the birth of Anthropological Scholarship in Russia

Christian Promitzer (University of Graz)

A Lithuanian in the Balkans: Jonas Basanavičius (1851-1927) and Bulgarian Racial Anthropology

Leiu Heapost (University of Tallinn)

The Mongoloid-issue in the Racial Studies of Estonians

Panel 3 - Psychiatry in the Baltics

Chair: Volker Roelcke (University of Gießen)

Vladimirs Kuznecovs (University of Latvia, Riga)

Latvian Psychiatry and Medical legislation of the 1930s and the German Eugenic Law of 1933

Arunas Germanavicius (University of Vilnius)
Development of Lithuanian Psychiatry 1918 - 1940

Octavian Buda (National Institute of Legal Medicine Bucharest)

From Psychiatry to Eugenics: The late works of Emil Kraepelin and the Eugenic Debates in Interwar Romania

Panel 4 - Eugenics, Gender and Minorities in Northeastern Europe

Chair: Sevasti Trubeta (Freie Universität Berlin)

Maija Runcis (Södertörns högskola)

The Swedish Sterilisation Politics from a Gender Perspective

Ineta Lipša (University of Latvia, Riga)

Attitude towards Contraception and Abortion in Latvia, 1918-1940

Katrin Steffen (Nordost-Institute Lüneburg)

Jewish Body and Gender politics: the Polish example

Panel 5 - Eugenics and Transfer: International Perspectives

Chair: Björn Felder (University of Tübingen)

Volker Roelcke (University of Gießen)

The Establishment of Psychiatric Genetics in Germany, Britain, the USA, and Scandinavia ca. 1910-1960: on the inseparable History of Eugenics and medical Genetics

William deJong-Lambert (City University of New York)

Out of the Night: Hermann J. Muller and Eugenics in the Soviet Union

Vsevolod Bashkuev (Institute of Mongolian, Buddhist and Tibetan studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences - Siberian division))

Soviet Eugenics for National Minorities: Eradication of Syphilis in Buryat-Mongolia as an Element of Social Modernization of a Frontier Region, 1923-1928

Panel 6 - Eugenics and Transfer: European Perspectives

Chair: Andreas Lawaty (Nordost-Institute Lüneburg)

Anne Cottebrune (University of Gießen)
Eliot Slater (1904-1983) and the Roots of Psychiatric Genetics in Great Britain: Transfer of German Scientific Concepts in the Context of British Eugenics

Maciej Gorny (Polish Acad. of Sciences, Centre of Historical Research Berlin)
First World War and National Characterology in East-Central Europe

Corina Palasan (University of Bucharest)
Eugenics and Psychology in Interwar Romania. The case of the 'Experimental, Compared, and Applied Psychology Institute' of the Ferdinand I University of Cluj (Romania), 1919 – 1947

Panel 7 – Eugenics, Racism and Racial Biology

Chair: Katrin Steffen (Nordost-Institute Lüneburg)

Kamila Uzarczyk & Wanda Wojtkiewicz-Rok (University of Wrocław)
'Germania docet': Polish Eugenics between Social and Racial Hygiene.

Florian Mildenerger (Viadrina-University, Frankfurt/Oder)
The Last of the Dorpat-school: Neo-vitalism, Racism, anti-Semitism and Biology in the Work of Jakob v. Uexküll (1864-1944)

Michal Simunek (University of Prague)
Mendel's Heritage? The Instrumentalization of Personality of J. G. Mendel in Bohemia and Moravia during the Nazi Era (1939-1945) &Movie: „J.G.Mendel , 1944“.

Conclusive Comments: Paul Weindling, Marius Turda, Björn Felder

Tagungsbericht *Eugenics, Race and Psychiatry in the Baltic States: A Trans-National Perspective 1900-1945*. 07.05.2009–08.05.2009, Riga, in: H-Soz-Kult 14.10.2009.