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## 'New eugenics,' gender and sexuality: a global perspective on reproductive politics and sex education in Cold War Europe

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### ABSTRACT

The article addresses reproductive politics and sex education in Cold War Europe in light of novel historical research. Integrating sex education into reproductive politics it delineates four hitherto little discussed conceptual and topical areas in the field, and points to possibilities for further research. Most importantly, the article places the globalized character of post-World War II reproductive politics at the center of historical investigation. It sheds light on the position of (state socialist) Europe in the global processes that shaped fertility- and sexuality-related discourses, policies and practices during the Cold War, and the role of transnational agencies. Secondly, the article highlights the postwar persistence of eugenic thought in reproductive politics, still largely missing especially from the historiography of state socialist countries. It points to the ways in which "new eugenics" is related to its earlier manifestations in Europe as well as how it adapted to state socialist contexts. Third, the article discusses the important contribution of gender and intersectional scholarship on the history of sex education and reproductive politics in Europe to the social and welfare history of the region. Finally, the article pays specific attention to the role of the Catholic Church in the former "Eastern bloc." It underlines how reproductive issues enabled the Church to affect politics and engage with the state in heterogeneous ways beyond opposition. The article suggests that further historical analysis could importantly contribute to a better understanding of the present rise of populist right-wing discussion focused on the demise of the traditional family and the fall of birth rates.

### KEYWORDS

Reproductive politics; sex education; Cold War; new eugenics

With the rise of nationalist populism in Europe and the Americas population politics and demography have become hotly debated issues often framed in the context of white supremacy, nativism and anti-gender/anti-feminist heteronormativity. A recent manifestation of these controversies in Eastern Europe has been the promotion of the 'traditional family' by various policy programs and government attacks directed at what has been labelled 'gender ideology' (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018; Kováts & Poim, 2015; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017; Szikra, 2019). Ultraconservative actors in alliance with populist right-wing politicians furthermore used the Covid-19 crisis as a political opportunity to push for

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legislation against abortion and gender equality (Korolczuk, 2020).<sup>1</sup> In debates around gender equality and demography, sex education has often been depicted as one of the greatest social threats; right-leaning civil society actors have branded sex education as morally harmful and have been organizing against it locally and globally.<sup>2</sup> While these phenomena might appear to have emerged out of the global economic and health-related crises of the past decade, the articles of this special issue provide rich evidence on the deep-seated historical roots of concerns around fertility and sexual behavior related to public health and welfare, as well as social and political action taken to control these processes. Bringing together case studies from Northern, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe, this collection of original scholarship gives a comparative, intersectional, and critical account of discourses, policies and practices in the field of reproductive politics with specific attention to sex education<sup>3</sup> in the formative years of the Cold War.

The post-World War II period deserves special attention in the history of reproductive politics and sex education. On the one hand, this was the time of the building of European welfare states East and West of the Iron Curtain. In this endeavor efforts to influence reproductive behavior and fertility became increasingly intertwined with novel social policy programs to promote the welfare of families with children that gradually merged under the umbrella term of ‘family policy’ (Kammerman & Kahn, 1978). On the other hand, the postwar period not only reinvigorated population politics but through transnational transfers it also brought about an increased globalization in related ideas and policies. The rational planning of future populations that formed an integral part of the politics of modern nation and imperial states in Europe and across the Atlantic, especially following the end of World War I, has over the next century grown to become an internationally and globally debated topic. The Cold War played a significant role both in intensifying welfare efforts (Obinger & Schmitt, 2011; Petersen, 2013), including the shaping of sexuality and reproduction related social policies in postwar Europe, and in catalyzing the globalization of population politics (Robinson & Ross, 2007). Despite their interrelated nature, however, these fields of study rarely intersect.

## **1. Critical approaches to the history of reproductive politics and sex education**

Historical scholarship on reproductive politics and gender has explored several aspects of the link between fertility regulation and colonial and postcolonial politics in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. During the formation of nation states in Western Europe population growth was often seen as a precondition of economic progress ‘on which people’s health and happiness depended’ (Quine, 1996, p. 1). Research has underlined the centrality of ‘intimate relations’ in reproducing empires, in the shaping of relations between the (post) colonial center and periphery, and in creating categories of social and racial classification (Briggs, 2002; Stoler, 2002). Concerning the postwar period, the rise of world population programs fostered by the United States and the United Nations, and their efforts toward birth control targeting ‘third world women’ have been critically analyzed (Bashford, 2018; Ginsburg & Rapp, 1995). In comparison, relatively little is known about the global dimensions of reproductive politics in Europe and in particular the position of the ‘second world,’ East of the Iron Curtain (Melegh, 2011; Solinger & Nakachi, 2016).

Feminist historical analysis has meanwhile problematized how power relations and ideologies, including those on gender and race/ethnicity have shaped reproductive discourses and practices and how, conversely, political debates and discourses about reproduction have contributed to state-making in both Western and Eastern Europe (Gal & Kligman, 2000; Yuval-Davis, 1997). Still, much of the analysis remained within national or regional borders, and genuine comparative projects form an exception (Hilevych & Rusterholz, 2018; Hoffmann, 2000; Olszynko-Grin & Rusterholz, 2019; Quine, 1996; Winkler, 2015). Reproductive discourses and policy-making in state socialist Europe have for a long time been assessed one-sidedly, as mostly affected by their Soviet-type dictatorial regimes. In this discussion the negative effects of restrictive population control tools, such as the ban of abortion on the lives of women, have been particularly highlighted (Kligman, 1995; Pető, 2002).

More recently, however, scholars of the region have increasingly applied a long-term historical perspective and reflected on changes in state socialist reproductive politics by comparing them to parallel international developments. These studies have called in question a linear representation of developments from Stalinist repression to the liberalization of abortion and the gradual increase in the equality of women culminating in the systemic changes of 1989–1991 (Jarska, 2019; Kościańska, 2016; Lišková, 2016, 2018). Authors have underlined the ‘radical changes’ that occurred in the early 1950s in comparison to ‘precommunist gender hierarchies’ (Fidelis, 2010, pp. 171–72). Others have argued that the history of sex education and reproductive politics in fact shows that in some countries the 1960s brought about a conservative turn in comparison to the gender equality discourses of the early 1950s, when public discussion and policy making expressed a (re) turn to women’s roles as mothers and care providers (Fidelis, 2010; Haney, 2002; Klich-Kluczewska, 2017; Kościańska, 2016; Lišková, 2016, 2018). Researchers have also pointed to the ‘liberating experiences’ women had in terms of their reproductive rights as opposed to the more restrictive measures of the post-1989–1991 era (Misthal, 2009, p. 147). Analysis has furthermore explored ways in which the politics of state socialist countries was *on par* with international developments or at times even ‘more progressive’ than that of their Western European neighbors (Kościańska, 2021; Lišková, 2018). Like in other fields of social historical research concerning the Cold War, the exchange and transfer of ideas, practices and experts across the Iron Curtain has by now become a rich field of study in relation to fertility, birth control and contraceptives (Doboş, 2018a, 2018b; Ignaciuk, 2014, 2019; Kuźma-Markowska & Ignaciuk, 2020; Lišková, 2016, 2018).

The articles in this special issue amend this scholarship by integrating sex education into the larger field of reproductive politics. In this understanding demography and population-related concerns are not only intertwined with the social control of sexuality, marginalized sexualities and related policies as earlier studies in the history of sex education have highlighted (Sauerteig & Davidson, 2009), but also foster novel programs of sex education related to public health and reproduction. The special issue also goes beyond national and regional borders by bringing together case studies on sex education and reproductive politics from different parts of Cold War Europe. The articles, some of which are country comparisons, provide a broad range of examples from East and West of the Iron Curtain, including Sweden, Finland, Austria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania. Overcoming the still existing analytical divides between East, West, North and South the texts highlight the emergence of strikingly similar ideas, policies and practices

in different parts of Europe during the formative postwar decades. They also show that demographic concerns and debates around sex education were not limited and exclusive to certain political systems and social institutions.

This special issue sheds light on the hitherto missing details of the interrelated history of policy making in the fields of demography, sex education, reproductive health, including the issues of fertility, birth control, and family planning, and welfare policy centered on the family in Eastern Europe under the Cold War. A rarely problematized but central driving force behind the transnational and trans-systemic exchange and dissemination of ideas and expertise in these fields was the acceleration in the globalization of population politics during the Cold War. The special issue places this globalized character of reproductive politics and sex education at the center of historical investigation. Reproductive politics and sex education in this understanding were determined by the political and economic inequalities and competition that characterized the Cold War. We contend, furthermore, that local discourses and policy-making in the state socialist countries of Europe were formulated in interaction with and affected by transnational actors and discourses East and West of the Iron Curtain.

A second key contribution of this collection of scholarly works is the critical examination of historical continuities and alterations in biopolitical ideas that have guided the formation of sex education and reproductive policies in Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of the most influential of these ideas was eugenics and its different varieties that shaped policy-making from the beginning of the century. While in some European contexts the postwar persistence of eugenic thought has already been addressed, from the historiography of state socialist countries this discussion is still largely missing. Authors in this special issue contribute to filling this gap by highlighting ways in which 'new eugenics' related to its earlier manifestations in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe before and during World War II as well as how eugenics could be adapted to state socialist contexts.

The articles furthermore supplement scholarly discussion on the gendered nature of birth control, family planning and sex education programs, and draw attention through intersectional analysis to ethnic and social differentiation in the ways policies were applied with regard to women. Finally, authors also examine the role various actors and experts played in shaping discourses and policies. Besides different organizations, teachers, medical professionals and demographers, specific attention is given to representatives of the Catholic Church and their active role in affecting politics through sex education and reproductive issues in the former 'Eastern bloc.' Novel to this discussion is the presentation of the Church as comprising of a heterogeneity of positions and its engagement with state authorities and actors in diverse ways beyond opposition.

## **2. The global Cold War context of reproductive politics and sex education**

The contributions to this special issue address the variety of competing discourses in and the state management of sex education and reproduction as being affected not only by national or regional politics but by broader, global trends and ideas in Cold War population politics. Central to the formation of these ideas was the Cold War political divide. In this geo-political setting US- and UN-funded experts and policy-makers were acting along the principles of the so-called demographic transition as formulated in the mid-1940s by

two key American researchers, Frank W. Notenstein and Kingsley Davis. The theory of demographic transition divided the world into three qualitatively different groups according to their stage of industrialization, modernization and accompanying decline in fertility and population size. In the industrialized or developed countries of the 'first world' the demographic transition was complete and fertility rates were already low as a result of full-scale industrialization and modernization. In countries at an earlier stage of development and an earlier phase of the transition in the so-called 'second world' to which state socialist countries belonged, 'the forces of modernization had not yet extended their full effect' resulting in low mortality but still high fertility rates (Robinson & Ross, 2007; Szreter, 1993, p. 662). In the final group of the 'third world,' the transition had hardly begun but industrialization and modernization were expected to lead to a lowering of mortality rates.

Based on these ideas UN-experts created transnational institutions for the control of global population growth through the design and implementation of family planning policies and programs. Instead of promoting long-time economic investment to affect modernization and change in 'third world' countries, researchers advocated family planning 'as an urgent priority' (Szreter, 1993, p. 668). These scholars and policy-makers predicted that the time necessary for the full demographic transition in these countries would be too long, and warned about a potential population explosion coming from the 'third world.' The threatening idea of a 'population bomb' coming from the global South that originated in the fear of non-white populations intruding the global North, set in motion a whole 'family planning industry' (Szreter, 1993, p. 659, referring to the terminology as Paul Demeny's) that accompanied development programs implemented in 'third world' countries in the 1960s. The Cold War with the Soviet Union's expanding sphere of influence in former colonial countries and the rise of communism in China gave special urgency to the US and UN funding of such projects (Szreter, 1993). Next to the leading financial role of the largest US corporations, such as the Milbank Memorial Fund, the Carnegie Corporation and the Rockefeller Foundation, transnational organizations, such as the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the Population Council supported and implemented family planning programs. Some of these organizations, like the Rockefeller Foundation had an important role in funding eugenic projects and related public health policy development in interwar Europe, and successfully transferred this knowledge and expertise to the postwar period (Barona, 2015; Petersen, 2013; Turda, 2015).

The US- and UN-driven population control agenda aiming to limit fertility rates along neo-Malthusian principles influenced developments in the UK and other, typically protestant countries in the Cold War 'West. Meanwhile' anti-Malthusian thought, with strong historical roots dominated in Catholic countries like France and Italy (Bashford, 2018; Quine, 1996). Similar pronatalist ideas prevailed also among state socialist countries East of the Iron Curtain (Doboş, 2018a; Melegh, 2006, 2011). There, experts and authorities opposed the solutions offered to the 'world's poor' in Western democracies arguing that overpopulation was a problem created by capitalism due to the unequal distribution of wealth, which would never affect socialist countries (Melegh, 2011; Solinger & Nakachi, 2016, p. 2). At the same time, the global economic crisis of the 1970s that also hit Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe forced countries to reconsider issues of economic investment. In some state socialist countries this led to the introduction of capitalist

elements to their economic system, the tightening of budgets spent on welfare, and the restructuring of their welfare system along more liberal economic lines (Haney, 2002; Meleg, 2011; Szikra & Tomka, 2009).

While the 1960s were marked by the global reemergence of population politics the 1970s brought about the reinvention of 'the family' and the delineation of a new terrain of the welfare state focusing on families all over the 'developed' world. When Kamerman and Kahn (1978) issued the first-ever comparative handbook on family policy in the 1970s they incorporated countries from both sides of the Iron Curtain. The authors found striking similarities in the increased attention to the family in European states and beyond, fostering state policies that were directed not at the individual but at the family as a unit. In strong connection with the emergence of the family as a central institution in modern societies, new concepts like 'family planning' and 'sex education' also (re) appeared. Together, these developments signaled a new phase of postwar welfare politics in which sexual and reproductive issues, including the idea of the 'healthy family' gained special importance to states and to various stakeholders, like trade unions, churches and lay groups. Renewed discourse on demography, birth rates, fertility, and improving population 'quality' through selective pronatalism were characteristic to this new era, when old debates around (anti)Malthusianism, just like eugenic ideas familiar from the social and health care politics of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, re-emerged and took on new meanings.

The articles of the special issue shed light on the so far underexplored role of the 'second world' in the discussion of global transformations in sex education and reproductive politics. The authors explore ways in which actors East and West of the Iron Curtain were not only affected by but also shaped ideas coming from both sides of the Cold War divide. Varša (2020) in her comparative analysis of sex education in postwar Austria and Hungary shows how professionals positioned themselves and formulated their arguments and concerns about local and national questions of population decrease in relation to larger global reproductive political issues, such as the UN population control agenda. Parallel discourses in the East and the West suggest the trans-systemic dissemination of ideas around demography and sex education via professional exchanges and international actors. Lišková et al. (2019) underline this point by showing that conferences and exchanges between Polish, Czechoslovakian and Hungarian sex education experts promoted the cross-national spread of ideas related to sex education. They present how UN-organized seminars in Finland and Czechoslovakia in the early 1970s fostered ideas such as a greater tolerance for non-procreative sexual behavior and the need for family planning, including birth control, in order to prepare young adults for marital and parental responsibility. Kuźma-Markowska's paper (2019), focusing on state socialist Poland, indicates that not only transnational organizations, such as the International Planned Parenthood Federation but also transnational institutions like the Catholic Church assured that sex education and reproduction-related ideas were formulated, debated and applied cross-nationally, despite the East-West divide. Finally, as discussed by Doboş (2020) in this volume, opposing viewpoints on population politics represented by countries on the two sides of the Iron Curtain not only clashed at UN-population conferences, like the one in Bucharest in 1974, but local actors found ways to turn them to their own professional advantage. Local research channeled into global intellectual

networks helped institutionalize demography as an important scientific discipline in socialist Romania.

### 3. 'New eugenics:' continuities and changes in eugenic thought in postwar Europe

A critical reflection on continuities in biopolitical ideas across the pre- and post-World War II decades in Europe and across the systemic divide is one of the central focus areas of the special issue. The articles presented here are among the first to discuss the resurfacing of eugenics in the postwar period in the field of sex education and reproductive politics in Europe. Existing research on eugenics in the region has so far primarily focused on the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Bucur, 2002; Kund, 2016; Turda, 2007, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2015; Turda & Weindling, 2007). Quine (1996) has revealed how eugenic ideas were interlinked with health, education and welfare measures in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in France and Italy, where eugenicists proved to be receptive to environmentalist arguments on 'modify[ing] nature' through changes in social conditions (p. 67). Relying on Foucault's notions of biopolitics and governmentality (Foucault, 1979), researchers have shown that since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century individual and collective sexual and reproductive practices as well as health and productivity have turned into key elements of nation and state building processes in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe too (Karge et al., 2017, p. 3; Promitzer et al., 2011). Scholars have drawn attention to the fact that battles about sexual and reproductive matters among the representatives of various state institutions, and social and religious movements have intensified in periods of political and economic change (Gal & Kligman, 2000, p. 21). The establishment of nation states after World War I in the region increased anxieties concerning population quantity and 'quality' (Bucur, 2002; Kund, 2016; Turda, 2007, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2015; Turda & Weindling, 2007). Eugenic thought intertwined increasingly with nationalist and also racist and anti-Semitic ideas from the 1920s onwards, resulting in selective and forced pro- and anti-natalist practices that affected different groups of women and men differently (Kund, 2016; Szikra, 2009; Turda, 2007, 2009, 2013; Turda & Weindling, 2007). Furthermore, fears of the 'degeneration' of the nation called upon the regulation of sexuality and affected debates around the purposes of sex education (Bernstein, 2007; Szegedi, 2012).

Most eugenics-focused research on reproductive politics concerning Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe stops, however, with World War II, and only marginally refers to continuities in professionals and discourses from the second half of the 1940s onwards (Promitzer et al., 2011; Szegedi, 2012; Turda, 2013; Turda & Weindling, 2007). Also, while there is a rapidly growing body of scholarship on the state socialist history of sex education and reproductive politics, only recently have scholars revealed the (re)surfacing of eugenics following the end of World War II (Demény, 2018; Hahn, 2009; Kuře, 2018; Kuźma-Markowska, 2011; Lišková, 2018; Melegh, 2011; Prajerova, 2019; Shmidt, 2019; Šustrová, 2019; Szamosi, 2018; Szegedi, 2014; Varsa, 2017; Žok & Baum, 2018).

The relative lack of attention to this important issue is surprising in the light of the substantial amount of research covering the continuity of eugenic thought in reproductive discourses, policies and practices in postwar United States, South America and Northern and Western Europe (Bashford, 2010, 2014, 2018; Ekberg, 2013; Hahn, 2009; Herzog, 2011, 2018; Kline, 2001; Koch, 2009; Miranda, 2018; Stern, 2005; Tydén, 2010; Wolf,



2008 to name only a fraction of the publications). This research not only establishes that eugenics survived into the postwar period but lays emphasis on the fact that it was not identical to its prewar predecessor. Scholars underline that eugenics demonstrates a 'continuous history of transformation in policy, science, technology, and politics' (Bashford, 2010, p. 542). It is also important to note that there were many strands in eugenics since its beginnings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Wecker, 2012; Weindling, 1993), which resulted in a variety of alterations and different 'connections over time' that characterized its postwar appearance (Bashford, 2010, p. 540, 552; Miranda, 2018).

The term 'new eugenics' manifests the variety of positions on eugenic continuity. It was originally coined in the late 1960s in genetic engineering to demonstrate that the principles and objectives of research in the field were very similar to those in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Bashford, 2010, p. 540). At the same time 'new eugenics' has most often been used to criticize exclusionary trends in reproductive politics, especially in the areas of new reproductive technologies and medical genetics (Bashford, 2010). While some of its critics remark that the term 'new eugenics' implies that eugenics disappeared and returned following World War II, we use it in this special issue to account for its altered character in the different contexts of postwar reproductive politics.

Existing research that focuses on postwar eugenics in the United States, in various South American countries, and in Europe on Britain, Germany, Austria and more recently the Scandinavian countries and Switzerland shows different patterns of continuity and change in 'old' and 'new' forms of eugenics. An important strand of research demonstrates how eugenics survived the end of World War II through continuity in legislative frameworks and professionals, who received positions after 1945, and the renewed publication of texts written in the interwar period or during the war (Lišková, 2018; Wolf, 2008). This was true even in Austria and Germany, where racial hygienic reproductive laws and practices contributed to the suffering and death of millions of Jews, Sinti and Roma during the Holocaust. Based on arguments about its scientific validity, and the international practice of sterilization as a population and health political measure, the German sterilization law passed in July 1933 (*Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses* [Law for the prevention of hereditarily diseased offspring]), for example, was not abolished in postwar West Germany. Forced sterilization practices ended, however, since the courts deciding about hereditary disease were not reopened after 1945 (Hahn, 2009, p. 262). While together with all National Socialist measures the 1933 law was abolished in East Germany, in neither of the two countries did sterilization victims receive a compensation until 1989 (Hahn, 2009; Herzog, 2018).

Previous studies have also pointed out that professionals, mostly representatives of different eugenic trends of the interwar and World War II periods, including former racial hygienists, attempted to rehabilitate eugenics by trying to free it from its political connotations and misuse (Bashford, 2010; Weindling, 1993). They aimed to distinguish between its 'Nazi perversion' and an otherwise reputable 'humane science of eugenics, which was consistent with democracy' (Weindling, 1993, p. 643). A typical example was the German Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics (1927–1945) in Berlin where euthanasia programs were carried out during the war. Its former director Otmar von Verschuer (1896–1969) became founder of the Institute of Human Genetics in Münster in 1945 and played an important role in the development of the field in Germany (Weindling, 1993). To the contrary, some associations, like The *The*

*Eugenics Society* in Britain retained the use of eugenics in their name after 1945 exactly in order to emphasize their distance from racial science (Bashford, 2010, p. 542). In both the United States and in Europe debates about 'good' and 'bad,' or 'old' 'Nazi eugenics' (Stern, 2005) were going on until the 1970s (Bashford, 2010, p. 543; Herzog, 2018).

In South American countries, like Argentina, Peru, and Bolivia, Latin eugenics strengthened or got first formulated in the postwar period (Miranda, 2018). Latin eugenics which was a strand of eugenic thought that was strongly interwoven with the Catholic Church and Catholic moral teachings, emerged in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Italy. Its postwar manifestation in South America, termed 'late eugenics,' was the result of the fact that these countries distanced themselves from the 'pseudo-science of racial improvement' during the Holocaust and emphasized the role of environmental factors in improving population 'quality' instead. The strong influence of the Catholic Church in South American societies and its support of right-wing dictatorships in the region between the 1950s and the 1970s also played an important role in the rise of 'late eugenics.' (Miranda, 2018, p. 3).

Scholars have furthermore identified key turning points in eugenic argumentation that ensured its long-term survival. Concerning its history in the United States, Wendy Kline (2001) argued that a shift in the 1930s from negative eugenics, excluding the 'unfit' from reproduction, to positive eugenics, encouraging the 'fit' to reproduce, secured the adaptation of eugenics to the American pronatalism of the 1950s.<sup>4</sup> Women as mothers were to play a crucial part in the 'breeding of a stronger race' at the birth of Australia as a nation state too, and this idea was translated into policies excluding Aboriginal mothers from early family benefits (Lake, 1993, pp. 379–380). A further continuity in the history of eugenics in the United States relates to the 'penalization' of black women's fertility and childbearing (Davis, 2003; Roberts, 1997). Reproduction is a field where racism targeting African-Americans has affected women's bodies from the times of slavery up to the present (Davis, 2003; Roberts, 1997). In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the American birth control movement used eugenics to argue for 'voluntary motherhood' and women's reproductive rights but eugenics also served as a tool to fight against 'racial suicide' in aiming to put a halt on the 'proliferation' of the 'unfit' poor, immigrant and black families (Davis, 2003). Sterilization laws that remained active from the 1930s throughout the 1970s have been one of the main means of restricting births among families perceived to be 'defective,' including women of African-American-, native American and Mexican-origin (Davis, 2003; Gutiérrez, 2008; Roberts, 1997). Furthermore, medical genetic services and new reproductive technologies also promote racist difference implying that intelligence and talent are hereditary and connected to whiteness (Roberts, 1997, p. xviii).

Most recent scholarship has also addressed the role of eugenics in the reproductive policy-making of the Scandinavian countries as well as Switzerland, known for its political neutrality during World War II. Research has underlined that the 1945-divide typical of Austria and Germany was absent from the history of eugenics in these countries. (Wecker, 2012). Eugenic sterilization laws introduced in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Scandinavia and Switzerland were not annulled or changed until well into the 1960s and the 1970s. In both cases eugenicists' distance from German racial hygiene and the National Socialist dictatorship in the 1930s ensured the continuity of eugenics after the war (Wecker, 2012). Racial hygiene was not only condemned but was also contrasted with 'good' and 'clean' eugenics, which enabled eugenics to become a central part of the building of the postwar Scandinavian welfare states (Koch, 2009; Tydén, 2010).

Importantly, however, while policies introduced in the 1930s could in this way remain intact, patterns in practices and discourses around them nevertheless changed over the decades (Tydén, 2010; Wecker, 2012).

As Bergenheim and Klockar Linder (2020) in this special issue present, the distancing of National Socialist politics also ensured the postwar centrality of pronatalism in the Swedish democratic welfare state in the form of 'family-friendly' welfare measures, instead of direct pronatalist propaganda. Their article furthermore highlights the major geopolitical impact of World War II on postwar pronatalist thinking and related welfare policy-making in the building of the Nordic welfare states. The Soviet geopolitical threat in the 1940s, for example, intensified debates and legitimated pronatalist policies in Finland, and positioned Finnish pronatalism against that of the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, it was the fear of homogenization that fostered pronatalist activism among the Swedish minority in the country, showing the inter-ethnic complexities of building the new, postwar Finnish welfare state, and the role of pronatalist civil society organizations in this endeavor.

Besides an ideological change that meant the distancing of earlier racist and racial hygienic thought after the end of World War II, research identified new fields in postwar reproductive and population politics where 'clear eugenic legacies' could be detected (Bashford, 2010; Herzog, 2018; Wolf, 2008). These were family planning, including birth control, and related welfare measures as well as new reproductive technologies and human genetics, in specific genetic counseling (Barmpouti, 2019; Bashford, 2010, p. 545; Herzog, 2018; Stern, 2005; Wolf, 2008). Bashford (2010) has emphasized, for example, that the liberalization of abortion laws just like the justification given for sterilization policies, family planning programs, and prenatal diagnosis in the Anglo-American context were designed on eugenic grounds aiming to terminate fetuses 'likely to be born defect' (p. 546). On the other hand, sterility and infertility treatments could be characterized as positive eugenic measures aiming to encourage the birth of 'wanted' and 'healthy' children (Bashford, 2010). Herzog (2018) has underlined the survival of eugenic thought in Western Europe from the perspective of disability and sexuality. She has argued that eugenic thinking defined healthy birth central to desirable reproduction and sexuality since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This in turn resulted in the conflation of ill-health and disability with undesirable forms of sex. Herzog has drawn attention among others to how arguments for the liberalization of abortion in the 1960s and 1970s, while not invoking explicitly eugenic arguments, still utilized references to disability.

Concerning the scope of postwar eugenics several researchers have pointed out that instead of arguments about the need for individuals to abandon their personal preferences for the collective benefit that characterized interwar eugenics, 'new eugenics' used more individual choice-focused and human rights-based arguments. This shift from a collective to a more individual based argumentation was especially characteristic in the field of human genetics and genetic counseling (Stern, 2005; Szamosi, 2018). Bashford (2010, p. 551) and Koch (2009, p. 50) contend that arguments connected to the individual and the collective do not substitute one another but rather coexist, and manifest themselves in different configurations on a 20<sup>th</sup> century continuum.

Concerning state socialist countries in Europe as well as countries further away from the Western European center, such as Greece, research on postwar eugenics has just begun (Barmpouti, 2019; Trubeta, 2013). Studies point to a number of similarities with

Western trends in 'new eugenics' especially in human genetics, genetic counseling and family planning-related measures and practices (Barmpouti, 2019; Demény, 2018; Hahn, 2009; Kuře, 2018; Kuźma-Markowska, 2011; Melegh, 2011; Prajerova, 2019; Schmidt, 2019; Šustrová, 2019; Szamosi, 2018; Szegedi, 2014; Varsa, 2017; Žok & Baum, 2018).

The articles of this special issue have a lot to say about 'new eugenics' in postwar Europe. Varsa (2020) explains how eugenic concepts of 'quality' and 'healthy' birth were revived during the Cold War in family planning policies and related demographic discourses in Austria and Hungary. While positive eugenic ideas fostered the promotion of childbirth among the educated social classes in both countries alike, Austrian authorities strove to control the fertility of immigrants from the global South, and Hungarian authorities aimed to decrease fertility among Roma. On a similar note, Hašková and Dudová (2020) present in detail how the legalization of abortion in the mid-1950s in Czechoslovakia together with the newly established fields of prenatal screening and assisted reproductive technologies embedded eugenic arguments. Novel policies in the postwar period that provided state-controlled means for the promotion of the fertility of 'deserving' mothers while limiting that of others, were historically linked to eugenics. Although ethnicity was not explicitly mentioned in state socialist policy texts, the cases of forced sterilization in Czechoslovakia show that the terms 'undeserving' and 'degenerate' often referred to Romani families (Sokolová, 2008; Donert, 2017). Another, often overlooked manifestation of 'new eugenics' was the presentation of abortion as a 'benefit,' ensuring that only those children, who would be properly cared for were born. Concerning the American context Bashford (2010) has contented how this aspect of the otherwise much discussed debate around abortion has been under-researched. Scholarship on the history of reproductive politics in state socialist Europe has already directed attention to arguments around the legalization of abortion that were about ensuring the health of women and healthy birth (Hilevych & Sato, 2018; Ignaciuk, 2014, 2019). Building on earlier research (Prajerova, 2019) Hašková and Dudová (2020) amend this analysis by identifying such arguments around the legalization of abortion as a eugenic legacy.

Existing research has also pointed to two further ways that ensured continuities in eugenic arguments in state socialist countries that were similar to those in Western democracies. Like their American, Western and Northern European colleagues, professionals in Poland and Czechoslovakia also presented the distortion that National Socialism brought to the otherwise useful scientific field of eugenics as a way to ensure its postwar survival (Kuře, 2018; Kuźma-Markowska, 2011; Žok & Baum, 2018). Furthermore, Demény (2018) has noted how in the Hungarian context prewar terminology recalling 'the contested notion of eugenics' and its negative associations was abandoned.

A second factor that ensured the survival of eugenics in some state socialist contexts was the continued existence of organizations and the employment of professionals from the interwar period, who maintained their earlier eugenic arguments (Kuźma-Markowska, 2011; Lišková, 2018; Szamosi, 2018; Szegedi, 2012, 2014; Turda, 2013). Kuźma-Markowska (2019) discusses in this special issue how Polish antinatalist reproductive politics between the mid-1950s and the 1960s was built on the prewar Polish birth control movement led by the Society of Conscious Motherhood. Modernization efforts in state socialist Poland ensured the continuity of a prewar organization that took on the task of the state-supported promotion of antinatalist family planning based on eugenic ideas.

Besides these similarities, existing research has already established specific ways in which 'new eugenic' trends in reproductive politics differed in state socialist Europe from their western counterparts. The articles in this special issue highlight three points in particular: the replacement of overt racism with covert forms of racial discrimination that in several postwar contexts explicitly targeted Roma; the importance of transnational professional connections ensuring the transfer of eugenic ideas in family planning; and finally, the adaptation of eugenics to Marxist ideology and state socialism.

Hašková and Dudová (2020) and Varsa (2020) discuss how family planning and related welfare measures applied the eugenic concept of 'healthy birth.' This translated into discouraging and hindering fertility among single women, the 'disabled,' and the poor and those seen to be 'asocial' and 'degenerate,' all of whose reproduction has been identified as 'unhealthy' (Kuźma-Markowska, 2011; Shmidt, 2019; Sokolová, 2008; Varsa, 2017). Through the association of these categories of people with Roma specific eugenic regulations, such as the sterilization law introduced in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s allowed for race/ethnicity-based discriminatory practices. The forced sterilization of Romani women in Czechoslovakia between the 1970s and the 1990s (Donert, 2017; Kuře, 2018; Sokolová, 2008) is among the best-known cases of the intersection of 'new eugenics' with racial prejudices in Eastern Europe. Similar practices have also been identified around abortion in the 1960s in Hungary (Varsa, 2017). Additionally, research in the history of human genetics in Hungary has pointed to how racial/ethnic categories were used to delineate population groups whose 'congenital abnormalities' impacted the national health figures negatively (Szamosi, 2018). Genetic research on Roma in state socialist Hungary shows the racialization of medical conditions that contributed to the reinforcement of their social difference (Szamosi, 2018). Comparative research on postwar eugenics thus highlights that antinatalist practices against Roma cannot be categorized as an Eastern European specificity or a 'communist' atrocity, but they rather fit into an international history of eugenic legacies.

A further new aspect about postwar eugenics that has emerged out of research on Central, Eastern and Southeastern European countries has been the importance of transnational connections between various European and transatlantic, global organizations. Regarding the resurgence of eugenics in Greece after World War II Barmpouti (2019) has pointed out, for example, that 'foreign encouragement was decisive for both the establishment of the Hellenic Eugenic Society' in the 1950s and the postwar development of eugenics (p. 11). Kuźma-Markowska (2011) has argued that the idea of sterilization as a contraceptive measure entered Poland through the professional contacts of the Polish birth control organization with international organizations of planned parenthood. Other arguments, related to human rights also reached state socialist countries by the 1980s (Szamosi, 2018). Pointing to Western Europe, where sterilization was a birth control method, Polish actors arguing for the legalization of sterilization on voluntary basis claimed that such a measure would increase reproductive liberty and thus expand civil rights and liberties in Poland (Kuźma-Markowska, 2011, p. 111).

Finally, a specificity of 'new eugenics' in the state socialist context was its adaptation to Marxist ideology, especially following Stalin's death. As Hašková and Dudová (2020) in this special issue point out, eugenics regained popularity in this period. The articles by Hašková and Dudová (2020), Kuźma-Markowska (2019) and Varsa (2020) demonstrate that the politics of promoting 'healthy birth' by hindering the procreation of those

perceived to be a potential burden on the socialist state manifested in a wide variety of policies from the liberalization of abortion to sterilization and the rise of family planning. Earlier research concerning debates about the introduction of sterilization in state socialist Czechoslovakia has drawn attention to how arguments in support of these measures relied on references to 'the common good' in socialist society for which individuals were to surrender their personal reproductive choices (Kuře, 2018, p. 481). In the Polish context, arguments for eugenic and contraceptive (even compulsory) sterilization utilized the new rationale of 'socialist morality' and 'humanitarianism' instead of arguments about race betterment known from the interwar period (Kuźma-Markowska, 2011, pp. 107, 110). Accordingly, childbirth was to be granted only to those who would not be a 'burden' on the socialist economy, while the 'reproduction of the 'biologically defective' and 'socially useless' individuals,' such as alcoholics and 'asocial, criminal elements' was to be prevented (Kuźma-Markowska, 2011, pp. 109–110; Melegh, 2011). These arguments were widely adapted in relation to the necessity of introducing family planning and related selective pronatalist welfare measures in state socialist countries.

#### **4. Gendered and intersectional perspectives on reproductive politics and sex education**

The historiography of reproductive politics and sex education in state socialist Europe has contributed considerably to advancing scholarship on the history of gender, the welfare state, and more broadly, to the social history of the region. Taking into consideration constructions of both gender and racial/ethnic difference has directed attention to previously overlooked aspects of postwar European history (Sokolová, 2008; Varsa, 2018). In combination with researching continuities in eugenic thought, intersectional research has drawn attention to racial differentiation in relation to Roma that resurfaced in several countries after World War II (Shmidt, 2019; Sokolová, 2008; Donert, 2017; Szamosi, 2018; Varsa, 2017, *forthcoming*). Accounting for the ways legal abortion was used to hinder Romani women's fertility alters the meaning of the liberalization of abortion in state socialist countries.

Other, recently explored topics in the gendered history of sex education and reproductive politics have been messages about masculinity and femininity in publications around sex education and reproductive political questions. These studies have underlined the tensions between the ideology of women's emancipation and the realities of women's so-called double burden in state socialist countries, especially from the mid-1960s onwards (Ignaciuk, 2019; Lišková, 2018; Randall, 2011). They have pointed to how in different local contexts, different meanings of masculinity and femininity, as defined by both state and church representatives, have not only shaped reproductive discourses but also influenced birth control and contraceptive practices (Gembries et al., 2018; Hilevych, 2015; Hilevych & Rusterholz, 2018; Ignaciuk, 2019; Kuźma-Markowska & Ignaciuk, 2020; Lišková, 2018).

Hašková and Dudová (2020) in this special issue underline the gendered nature of reproductive politics that mostly targeted women's bodies in relation to fertility rates, birth control and family planning. Focusing on family planning and related welfare policies they underscore the return of traditional gender norms following the mid-1960s in Czechoslovakia. While in the 1950s welfare policies intended to facilitate

women's employment, from the 1960s on their goal was to increase deserving women's fertility. In the field of sex education Lišková et al. (2019) point to a similar change analyzing debates around the introduction of school-based sex education in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. They argue that while in the 1960s discourse emphasized the sameness of men and women, and the importance of providing the same information on sexuality and reproduction to boys and girls, discussion changed following the introduction of sex education in these three countries in the early 1970s. Pedagogical material for teachers and publications by experts in sex education were organized around sex/gender differences between men and women and aimed at a more gender differentiated education towards parenthood.

Kuźma-Markowska (2019) has identified a gendered difference in the description of the advantages of fertility control and family planning by male and female journalists, and competing messages of womanhood propagated by the party state and the Catholic press in the second half of the 1950s and the early 1960s in Poland. The party state press described women as wage workers and emphasized their equality, and thus presented family planning in the interest of women's labor force participation. Meanwhile, the Catholic press viewed women as mothers, whose labor force participation was responsible for low birth rates and deprived them of the joys of motherhood. The latter point is supported by Varša's (2020) discussion of Catholic sex education in Austria that put generally more responsibility on women in premarital sexual restraint and in children's sex education than on men. Meanwhile Catholic sex education materials in Austria also included the acceptance of single and married but childless women.

## 5. Reexamining the role of the church in reproductive politics and sex education

A recently developing new line of research in the historiography of reproductive politics and sex education addresses the role of the church in postwar European social and cultural transformations. For a long time, the presence and influence of religious actors have been either ignored or confined to a 'conservative, oppositional role' in both western and eastern postwar European contexts (Harris, 2018, p. 12). As the latest studies reveal, there were, however, a 'spectrum of Christian responses' to the social changes of the 1960s in the field of sexuality and reproductive matters (Harris, 2018, p. 13). Concerning the state socialist countries, the role of the Catholic Church has already been reexamined in some detail (Heimann & Szegedi, 2018; Jarska, 2019; Kościańska, 2018; Kuhar 2015; Kuźma-Markowska & Ignaciuk, 2020). Two issues, namely responses to the 1968 papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae* on the regulation of birth and the liberalization of abortion in the mid-1950s have mostly been studied in the Polish, Czechoslovakian and Hungarian contexts. Examining discourses in a variety of Catholic publications, authors have pointed to the diversity in positions concerning birth control within the Catholic Church as well as ways in which Church representatives challenged the position of state actors. They have also underlined that these actors engaged in mutual interaction, used each other's arguments to their own advantage as well as influenced each other's positions (Heimann & Szegedi, 2018; Jarska, 2019). Not only the state but also the Church had its own institutions of premarital and marital counseling, and both were engaged in transnational organizations and debates in legitimizing their arguments (Kościańska, 2018;

Kuźma-Markowska & Ignaciuk, 2020). Far from representing a homogenous picture, representatives of the Catholic Church and people of Catholic faith showed multifaced reactions to changing social realities, including those set by the altering political contexts of state socialism. Overall, the Catholic Church as an institution and Catholic individuals were important and active contributors to the shaping of sexuality and reproductive matters in postwar Europe (Harris, 2018).

In her contribution to the special issue Kuźma-Markowska (2019) takes up this line of argument about the Polish Catholic Church and explains how representatives of the Church shaped debates in the antinatalist phase of the country's reproductive politics in the 1950s and 1960s. Their critical stance against abortion and contraceptives that covered a spectrum between hardline and more moderate arguments was informed not only by religious doctrines but also by the power struggle between the Church and the state. Lišková et al. (2019) furthermore highlight that during the 1970s and 1980s the Catholic Church gained considerable power and influence in Poland. They show how Catholic bishops managed to withdraw a progressive sex education school textbook and succeeded in including Catholic sexual morality in the Polish school sex education program. Varsa (2020) supplements this point by reflecting on the professional entanglements between the Catholic Church, the state and the medical profession in postwar Austria. She shows that the Church was also responsible for carrying arguments over from the interwar period to the field of postwar sex education.

## 6. A short summary of the articles and possibilities for future research

The special issue is based on a panel at the 2018 European Social Science History Conference in Belfast that discussed sex education and reproductive politics in 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Contributors drew on and spoke to a variety of thematic fields, with specific focus on postwar eugenics. Panelists discussed discourses, policy-making and practices in reproductive health regarding abortion, birth control, fertility rates, and contraceptives, as well as welfare and in specific family politics from a gender and intersectional perspective.

The six articles in this special issue engage with these topics with attention to the globalized character of Cold War population politics. In their article 'Sexuality and gender in school-based sex education in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland in the 1970s and 1980s' Lišková et al. (2019) provide a unique comparative analysis of sex education in these three neighboring countries. Besides spelling out important differences the authors highlight the way these state socialist countries came to adapt very similar measures related to sex education, and ask the question if these similarities crystallized into a specific model of socialist sex education. Based on pedagogical materials and publications by professionals the authors analyze the importance of expert networks at local (country), regional (socialist camp), and transnational (UN) levels, and argue that the UN seminars on sex education in Czechoslovakia and Finland in the early 1970s can be considered a turning point in the formation of sex education in the three state socialist countries analyzed.

Kuźma-Markowska's (2019) contribution 'Marx or Malthus? Population debates and the reproductive politics of state-socialist Poland in the 1950s and 1960s' is centered around the uneasy connection between Marxist ideology and Malthusian thought under state



socialism. Based on original sources, including journal articles in the Catholic and party-led press, the author analyzes the position of the most important actors related to reproduction, fertility and sexuality, and shows how debates between the party state and the Catholic Church were intertwined with ideas about modernity. Kuźma-Markowska describes how, during the very short anti-natalist period of Polish history, discourse around demography and fertility was not only gendered but also interwoven with class-based assumptions about the child bearing of 'irresponsible' impoverished families.

Doboş' (2020) case study 'Disciplining births: Population research and politics in communist Romania' discusses how the issue of decreasing birth rates was used to promote the (re)institutionalization of demography in Romania during the 1960s. This article helps us understand how, through experts in population research, fertility and demography became central issues to postwar Romanian politics. Based on original documents Doboş gives a detailed account of the fertility-related research conducted by demographers and doctors that was channeled into the main decision-making forum of the party elite. Still, as the author points out, the demographic policies adopted by the regime did not reflect the nuanced recommendations of experts and produced the most stringent abortion legislation in state socialist Europe that inflicted strong control over the female body. These policies, at the same time, were admired by supranational institutions like the UN, thus placing Romania at the center of global demography-related debates.

Hašková and Dudová's (2020) contribution 'Selective pronatalism in childcare and reproductive health policies in Czechoslovakia' underpinned by rich policy-related evidence ranging from paid leaves to infertility treatment and forced sterilization, powerfully presents the ways in which party politicians and policy makers delineated social groups whose procreation was desirable and those whose was not. Through the detailed analysis of the framing of policy discourses the authors show that women's interest was represented as being in line with the selective pronatalist aims of the state. Responsible for reproducing the nation, women's interests were reduced to their maternal obligations and this legitimated their exclusion from important rights, such as control over their body and sexuality.

Varsa's (2020) comparative analysis 'Sex advice East and West: Sex education and family planning in Cold War Austria and Hungary' shows how demographic and sexuality-related concerns and policies were affected by and negotiated through the Cold War divide in global population politics. While the discourses in both Austria and Hungary were in dialogue with the UN population control agenda and shared some important similarities, the article highlights major differences between the two countries. The neo-Malthusian idea of 'population preservation' in Austria can be contrasted with the anti-Malthusian pronatalism prevailing in Hungary. A strong point made by the author is that eugenic reproductive politics survived into the postwar decades not least through a continuity in professionals practicing before and after the war. The idea of 'quality' and 'healthy' birth intertwined with racial thought in sexuality- and reproduction-related discourses and policies with reference to the 'third world' and immigrants in Austria and concerning Roma in Hungary.

Bergenheim and Klockar Linder's (2020) comparative article 'Pursuing pronatalism: Non-governmental organizations and population and family policy in Sweden and Finland, 1940s-1950s' presents the role of non-governmental organizations in the

promotion of pronatalism in Northern Europe. The chosen time-frame allows the authors to reflect upon the impact of World War II, and provide a comparative analysis about changes and continuities in the selected countries. Their critical discussion of organizations that were closely linked to state institutions, sheds light on how pre- and post-war population policies and discourses were intertwined with ideas of racial hygiene, and ethnicity- and class-based differentiation. Of particular interest is their account of the Finland-Swedish reproductive policy central to which was the perceived threat of the shrinking Swedish-speaking population and related efforts to prevent their mixing with the Finnish majority. As other authors in this special issue, Bergenheim and Klockar Linder also point to the UN as an important player in shaping population programs and demographic discourses in both Northern European countries.

Through their critical gender and intersectional perspective, the authors of this special issue thus contribute to scholarship on the global context of postwar reproductive politics and sex education, including the emergence of 'new eugenics.' More than that, the articles also suggest possibilities for future East-West comparative analysis. A new stream of research that is worth further exploration is the active role of the church in shaping transformations in sex education and reproductive politics in state socialist Europe. The interaction of the church and religious actors with medical professionals and representatives of various institutions at different levels of the state, as well as the role of denominations, such as the Orthodox churches or those of Islam in Southeastern Europe, for example, deserve further scrutiny. The forms and uses of eugenic thought and its intersections with prejudices concerning different ethnic minority populations in Europe could be another area to examine in more detail. The role of actors from the state socialist countries of Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe in shaping discourses, policies and practices in sex education and reproduction in 'third world' contexts, and their involvement in affecting global discourses and policies are also yet under-researched fields. Scholars could also explore the uses of media, including visual sources, like films and other art work, in presenting and discussing demography- and sexual education related themes. Overall, further analysis of demographic fears and the regulation of sexual behavior in the past could largely contribute to our understanding of the present rise of populist right-wing concerns about the demise of the traditional family and the fall of birth rates, all allegedly linked to uncontrolled sexuality and 'inappropriate' female behavior.

## Notes

1. For example, in six US states abortion was prohibited during the pandemic. In mid-April the Polish government discussed a proposal to further tighten abortion regulations and another one that targeted the restriction of school sex education (Korolczuk, 2020). In October 2020, the Polish Constitutional Tribunal declared the already previously very strict law authorising abortions only for malformed fetuses to be unconstitutional, thereby effectively banning abortion. Earlier, in the course of May 2020 the Hungarian parliament rejected the ratification of the Istanbul Convention targeting action against violence against women and domestic violence, and issued legislation to end the legal recognition of trans-people. On Hungary, see <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/02/hungary-to-end-legal-recognition-of-trans-people-amid-covid-19-crisis>; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/05/hungarys-parliament-blocks-domestic-violence-treaty> (Accessed 18 July 2020).

2. For example, Family Watch, a pro-life non-governmental organization with consultative status at the United Nations is lobbying globally against sex education programs seeing them as a 'war on children,' <https://familywatch.org/programs-and-projects/protect-child-health/#.XxMFwp4zabp> (Accessed 10 July 2020).
3. As presented in detail in the course of this article, we treat sex education as an integral part of demographic and population-related ideas, discourses and policies.
4. The difference between positive and negative eugenics was made by the Norwegian eugenicist Jon Alfred Mjøen in 1908 (Turda, 2010, p. 32).

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