

to synthesize a rich bibliography in an attempt to offer a complex perspective and a well-documented monograph. However, a future edition would greatly benefit from a deeper analysis that not only presents information, but also correlates it with the historical realities. Despite of all these aspects, due to the rich documentary material offered, to the photographs and to other elements presented therein, the work is an important presence in the contemporary historiographic landscape and should be taken into consideration by researchers.



IULIU-MARIUS MORARIU

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**MARIUS TURDA**

**“Războiul sfânt al rasei”: Eugenia și protecția națiunii în Ungaria 1900–1919**

(“The holy war of race”: Eugenics and the protection of the nation in Hungary 1900–1919)

Foreword by ZSUSZA BOKOR

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**M**ARIUS TURDA is an established scholar, with seminal contributions to the social history of medicine and race in Central and Eastern Europe. He is based at Oxford Brookes University in the UK, where he teaches a course on biomedicine in Central and Eastern Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; he is also director of the Center for Medical Humanities at the same university. His books and articles are seminal works for the

study of eugenics, in both a European and a wider global context. In Romania, Marius Turda is involved in a number of projects at the Center for the History of Eugenics and Racism at George Barițiu Institute of the Romanian Academy in Cluj-Napoca.

As is well known, the eugenics movement aimed, on the one hand, to encourage fertility and reproduction among people considered to be in good health and morally sound, and on the other hand, to limit the reproduction of those individuals considered to be “unfit” (with serious diseases, disabilities, vices, character flaws etc.). Eugenics has been seen as a biological theory of human enhancement based mainly on the idea of the superiority of particular races and social classes.

This book (first published in English in 2014 under the title *Eugenics and Nation in Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Hungary*) focuses on several objectives. On the one hand, it aims to highlight the work of the most important Hungarian eugenicists in the cultural and social context of the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; the author also analyses the phenomenon of eugenics in Hungary as part of a wider European movement in which science was closely intertwined with politics. The links between eugenics and nationalism are then explored, as well as the way in which concepts of hygiene and health were formulated and disseminated from a eugenic perspective. The period referred to in this book was a troubled and complicated one for Hungary, plagued by governmental crises, difficult relations with Austria and interethnic tensions caused by friction and frustration between the many ethnic groups that made up the population (Hungarians, Romanians, Slovaks, Germans, Jews, etc.). The first three chapters of the book are devoted

to the main actors involved in the eugenics movement in Hungary and the ways in which their ideas and concepts were disseminated among the general population. The individuals who embraced these principles came from a wide range of professional backgrounds, not only doctors but also sociologists, economists, anthropologists etc. They believed that the modernization of society brought the danger of the degeneration of the individual in terms of health and morality, which could lead to the decline of society as a whole. The eugenics movement was seen as providing “scientific” solutions to these dangers. The author investigates the two main directions followed from this perspective: limiting social “degeneration” by restricting the fertility and reproduction of the individuals considered to be the agents of this degeneration, and supporting fertility among the “proper” population (often associated with a particular ethnic group), together with social and educational reforms. The elite conveyed these ideas mainly through conferences and magazines. The author highlights the involvement of Hungarian specialists in the international eugenics movement through their participation in conferences and similar events abroad. Domestically, these ideas were disseminated to the general public through lectures, articles in the mainstream press, exhibitions etc. The focus was on what was seen as an imperative to build a biologically and socially better nation. The author explores in depth how conceptions associated with nationalism merged with evolutionary biological theories, how explanatory paradigms evolved from society to nation, and from environmental influences to heredity.

The following chapters present the institutionalization of the eugenics movement, its organization around a coherent

program supported by the state authorities. The First World War exacerbated the fears about the fate and survival of the nation, making concerns about the biological and moral health of society prevalent even at government level. The author points out that due to the social and biological protection measures taken by the state, Hungary can be considered as the only European country where eugenics as an ideology had a dominant position in the political agenda of the time. The main eugenic theories formulated during the war and the concrete measures implemented in society are presented in detail. Some of them survived the profound social and political changes of the postwar period, evolving into radical forms in the interwar period and after the Second World War.

Apart from being a controversial topic, the eugenics movement has sparked intense debates about the role of the state in a modern society, its responsibilities to the welfare of the social body, the purpose of education, healthcare, and what it means to be a nation and its “worthy” members. These discussions had a strong interdisciplinary character, involving an elite of politicians, doctors, economists, anthropologists and sociologists who sought to implement programs ultimately aimed at developing education and healthcare.

Marius Turda’s book thus makes valuable contributions to a better understanding of the ideological and political landscape that defined Hungary in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time, this work is a call for the further investigation of constantly changing concepts, such as those related to the vitality and functionality of a society, a nation, their values, and their perpetuation.

